

Brief article

Costly rejection of wrongdoers by infants and children



Arber Tasimi*, Karen Wynn

Yale University, United States

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 17 June 2015

Revised 13 November 2015

Accepted 8 March 2016

Available online 17 March 2016

Keywords:

Social cognition

Cognitive development

Cooperation

ABSTRACT

How unappealing are individuals who behave badly towards others? We show here that children and even infants, although motivated by material rewards, are nonetheless willing to incur costs to avoid “doing business” with a wrongdoer. When given the choice to accept a smaller offering from a do-gooder or a larger offering from a wrongdoer, children and infants chose to accept the smaller offering. It was only when the difference between the offerings was very large that their aversion to the wrongdoer was overcome by personal incentives. These findings show that a willingness to forgo self-interests when faced with wrongdoers is a fundamental aspect of human nature.

© 2016 Elsevier B.V. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

From infancy to adulthood, humans exhibit an aversion to individuals who treat others poorly. Even in the first months of life, infants reject agents who behave badly (Hamlin & Wynn, 2011; Hamlin, Wynn, & Bloom, 2007, 2010), and before their first birthday, not only avoid wrongdoers themselves, but expect others to do so as well (Kuhlmeier, Wynn, & Bloom, 2003). Such an aversion towards wrongdoers persists across development. For example, young children share less with wrongdoers (Kenward & Dahl, 2011), and are less likely to help them, too (Dahl, Schuck, & Campos, 2013; Vaish, Carpenter, & Tomasello, 2010). Among adults, there is an equally strong dislike of those who engage in negative behaviors (Cosmides, 1989; Hardy & Van Vugt, 2006; Kurzban & Leary, 2001). Here we ask about the strength of this aversion: Is it sufficiently powerful to lead people to resist one of the most alluring aspects of everyday life: profit?

In recent years, theorists have posited that wrongdoers may suffer decreased desirability as partners in social exchanges (Baumard, André, & Sperber, 2013; Bull & Rice, 1991; Raihani, Thornton, & Bshary, 2012); this may be an effective mechanism for promoting cooperation. Research has demonstrated numerous ways in which humans engage in selective partner choice (Barclay & Willer, 2007; Pradel, Euler, & Fetchenhauer, 2008; Sylwester & Roberts, 2010); however, studies have not examined whether people continue to avoid wrongdoers who afford them gain. The desire to optimize profit is a hallmark of human behavior

(Camerer, Loewenstein, & Rabin, 2003); do people willingly avoid wrongdoers even at personal costs?

In the current study, we examined children's and infants' partner choices, investigating the conditions under which they do and do not choose to deal with wrongdoers who afford them profit. Across two experiments, we investigated with whom children and infants choose to engage in a social exchange following previous work demonstrating that social partner preferences can be documented on the basis of whom young subjects accept an offering from (Buon et al., 2014; Herrmann, Keupp, Hare, Vaish, & Tomasello, 2013; Kinzler, Dupoux, & Spelke, 2007).

2. Experiment 1

In Experiment 1, we asked whether 5- to 8- year-olds sacrifice their self-interests when given the opportunity to profit from a wrongdoer. Previous research has shown that in their resource allocations, children 7 years of age and older prioritize moral considerations over personal incentives (Fehr, Bernhard, & Rockenbach, 2008; Sheskin, Bloom, & Wynn, 2014), while younger children prioritize their own material interests, suggesting a developmental change at age 7 in how heavily children weight their own benefits relative to the benefits of others. We therefore chose to examine children on both sides of this developmental shift to ask if children of these ages forego personal gains to avoid a wrongdoer, and, if so, whether such a tendency develops in tandem with their increase in moral concern (in which case we should observe it only in the older children in our sample), or, instead, reflects a cost–benefit analysis of children's own individual gains and risks (in which case we might expect to see it in all ages).

* Corresponding author at: Department of Psychology, Yale University, 2 Hillhouse Avenue, New Haven, CT 06520, United States.

E-mail address: arber.tasimi@yale.edu (A. Tasimi).

2.1. Methods

2.1.1. Participants

One hundred sixty children (73 girls; mean age = 6.94 years; range = 5.12–8.52 years) were recruited from the greater New Haven, Connecticut area and were tested individually in a quiet room at their elementary school. The Human Subjects Committee at Yale University approved all study procedures. Parents gave written informed consent; children provided oral assent. All sessions were audio-recorded.

2.1.2. Procedure

Children were randomly assigned to a Baseline or a Character-Information condition. In the Baseline condition, an experimenter showed children photographs of two fictitious characters and asked whose stickers they wanted to accept (e.g., “This is Max. Max has one sticker and he wants to give you his one sticker. This is Craig. Craig has two stickers and he wants to give you his two stickers. Whose do you want?”). The experimenter looked at the child—not the photos—in order to avoid biasing the subject’s choice. Children were randomly assigned to one of the following four contrasts ($N = 20$ per contrast) in which they were encouraged to choose between: (A) one and two stickers; (B) one and four stickers; (C) one and eight stickers; (D) one and sixteen stickers. The following were counterbalanced across children: (1) name of character offering the larger amount (Craig or Max); (2) order of larger offering (first or second).

The procedure for the Character-Information condition was the same as the Baseline condition with one exception: Here, the character offering the larger amount was described as mean, whereas the character offering the smaller amount was described as nice (e.g., “This is Craig. Craig is always mean. The other day, he hit someone on the playground. This is Max. Max is always nice. The other day, he hugged someone on the playground. Craig has two stickers and he wants to give you his two stickers. Max has one sticker and he wants to give you his one sticker. Whose do you want?”). Again, the experimenter looked at the child—not the photos—in order to avoid biasing the subject’s choice. Children were assigned to the same four contrasts as the Baseline condition ($N = 20$ per contrast), and the following were counterbalanced across children: (1) name of mean character (Craig or Max); (2) order of mean fact (first or second).

Responses were audio recorded and the experimenter’s judgments were the ones used in all analyses. An independent coder blind to the experiment’s predictions coded a random 50% of subjects; the experimenter and independent coder reached 100% agreement on choice.

2.2. Results

As shown in Fig. 1, children reliably chose the larger offering in the Baseline condition (71 of 80 children, binomial probability, $p < .001$); the strength of this preference did not vary by contrast (Fisher’s exact, $p = .610$). However, in the Character-Information condition, choices differed among the contrasts (Fisher’s exact, $p = .045$). Children robustly accepted one sticker from the do-gooder rather than two from the wrongdoer (only 4 of 20 children took the larger offering, binomial probability, $p = .012$; this differed significantly from Baseline, Fisher’s exact, $p < .001$). Children showed no preference in the 1:4 or 1:8 contrasts (8 of 20 children in each took the larger offering, binomial probability, $p = .503$); these patterns differed significantly from Baseline (Fisher’s exact, $p = .002$ [1 vs. 4] and $p < .001$ [1 vs. 8]). Children showed an intermediate pattern when presented with the 1:16 contrast, tending toward choosing the larger number, albeit non-significantly (13

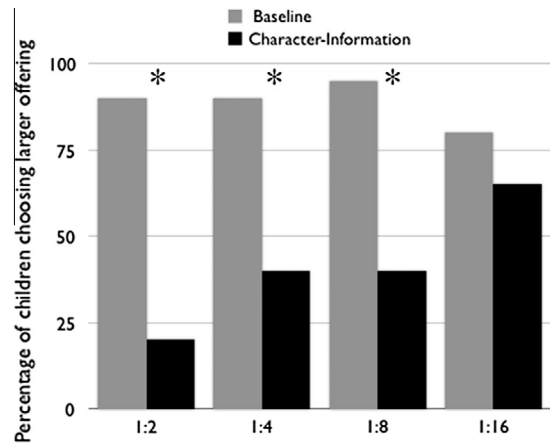


Fig. 1. Children’s choices in the Baseline and Character-Information conditions.

of 20 children, binomial probability, $p = .263$; this did not differ from Baseline, Fisher’s exact, $p = .480$).

Interestingly, there were no age differences in children’s tendency to reject the wrongdoer’s larger offering. In the three contrasts (1:2, 1:4, and 1:8) in which children’s choices in the Character-Information condition differed from Baseline, 5- and 6-year-olds rejected the wrongdoer’s offering ($M = 69\%$) just as often as the 7- and 8-year-olds ($M = 65\%$), Fisher’s exact, $p = .79$. In the 1:16 contrast, both age groups were equally likely to accept the wrongdoer’s offering (younger, 60%; older, 67%, Fisher’s exact, $p = 1$).

Taken together, these findings indicate that when the stakes are modest, children show a strong tendency to go against their baseline desire to optimize gain to avoid “doing business” with a wrongdoer; however, when the stakes are high, children show more willingness to “deal with the devil.”

3. Experiment 2

Why would children sacrifice self-interests when given the opportunity to profit from a wrongdoer? One explanation is that they wanted to impress the experimenter; children may not have wanted to appear as though they prioritized self-interests over moral considerations. Recent studies suggest that reputational concerns emerge between three to five years of age (Fu & Lee, 2007; Leimgruber, Shaw, Santos, & Olson, 2012). Accordingly, we tested infants on a task analogous to the one we gave children, as they are well below the ages at which children start to engage in reputation management.

3.1. Methods

3.1.1. Participants

Sixty-four 12- to 13-month-old infants (34 girls; mean age = 12 months, 25 days; range = 12 months, 1 day to 13 months, 30 days) were recruited from the greater New Haven, Connecticut area and were tested individually in a quiet laboratory room. Sixteen additional infants were tested but excluded from the final sample due to procedural error (one), fussiness (two), and failure to make a choice (13).

3.1.2. Procedure

Infants were randomly assigned to a Baseline or a Character-Information condition. In the Baseline condition, infants sat on their parents’ lap before a table, approximately 107 cm away from an experimenter. Parents sat quietly with their eyes closed

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/926416>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/926416>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)