Compulsory Equality: Young Children Think Resources Must be Divided Equally

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Introduction

- Communities develop norms for sharing limited resources and punish individuals who take more than the norm, but do not punish those who take less.
- Young children expect limited resources to be split equally (Shaw & Olson, 2012). But they have two competencies that would be necessary to understand that inequality that occurs by choice is acceptable, including an understanding that people can desire different things (Repacholi & Gopnik, 1997) and an ability to detect when actions are freely carried out (Kushnir et al., 2015).

Study 1: Do 6-year-olds, 8-year-olds, and adults (N=48) think inequality is okay when one individual chooses to take fewer than his fair share and a second takes more?

Study 2: Do 6-year-olds and 8-year-olds (N=32) think inequality is okay when one individual chooses to take less than his fair share and the other individual takes only his fair share?

References


Acknowledgments

Thanks to the children and parents who participated in this research, and the research assistants in the Jaswal Lab who helped collect the data.

Method

Study 1

I only want one.

Hmmm.

Study 2

I only want one.

Hmmm.

Test Question: Is it okay or not okay that this boy got one and this boy got three? × 4

Results

Study 1

Ave # of trials “not okay”

6-year-olds 8-year-olds Adults

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Study 2

Ave # of trials “not okay”

6-year-olds 8-year-olds

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Conclusion

- 6-year-olds expect resources to be divided equally regardless of desire and continued access to half the resources. 8-year-olds are more likely to evaluate inequality as okay if the person who wants less still has access to his fair share of the items.

- 6-year-olds were more likely than adults to object to inequality where one individual chose to take fewer than his fair share and the other took more. 8-year-olds, as a group, were ambivalent.

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