

Sticker study shows children value fairness—but still often favor their friends when sharing

October 22 2021, by Caitlyn MacQueen



Children from two different countries — Canada and Iran — were involved in the study to show whether different cultures influenced behaviour. Credit: Dalhousie University

Evidence has shown that children develop a concern for fairness at a

young age and will gladly share their belongings. But new research out of Dal's Faculty of Science suggests they may be more inclined to share with peers they perceive to be part of their social group.

A new paper published by Chris Moore (shown left), a professor in the Department of Psychology and Neuroscience, examined the decisions [children](#) make about sharing their resources. In this case, stickers.

Dr. Moore and his team were interested in exploring children's tendency to share differently depending on whether the potential recipient was a member of the same or a different group and whether that recipient was rich or poor in stickers.

"The children, age five and six, were randomly assigned to groups differentiated only by the color of their team," says Dr. Moore. "The same exercises were done with boys and girls in Halifax and the other study site, Tehran, Iran. We chose Iran because we wanted to be able to compare the responses of children growing up in different cultures."

Across cultures

The researchers found the children in both cultures tended to [show](#) in-group favoritism by sharing more stickers with members of their group and did not seem to differentiate based on need. Children were more likely to give up a personal advantage and allocate resources equally with in-group recipients.

"These results show that from quite a young age, children are sensitive to group characteristics and show bias towards their in-group. This bias occurs even though the groups are completely arbitrary. When recipients were distinguished by [group membership](#), the children appeared not to be concerned with need," he says.

Dr. Moore notes that the cross-cultural component to this research demonstrates that children show these effects quite generally (i.e. across two different cultures), and so may not be learned through socialization as may have been previously thought. The findings reveal convergence across diverse societies in the influence of in-group bias on children's resource-allocation decisions.

"The cross-cultural component allowed us to investigate and show that the effects are somewhat independent of [culture](#)," says Dr. Moore. "In terms of the practice of science, the collaboration also allowed us to support an emerging female scholar, Fatemeh Keshvari, from a country where it is much more difficult to gain entry into the world of science."

Although not yet fully determined, Dr. Moore says he will likely use these results to continue to investigate the effects of group membership on decisions.

More information: Fatemeh Keshvari et al, Group over need: Convergence in the influence of recipient characteristics on children's sharing in Iran and Canada, *Social Development* (2021). [DOI: 10.1111/sode.12557](#)

Provided by Dalhousie University

Citation: Sticker study shows children value fairness—but still often favor their friends when sharing (2021, October 22) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2021-10-sticker-children-fairnessbut-favor-friends.html>

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