

# Study shows babies expect fairness in resource sharing

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A team of researchers with Stanford University and the University of Illinois has conducted a study based on testing fairness in babies and has found that they expect fairness in resource sharing, except when resources are scarce. In their paper published *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, the group outlines their experiments and describe their results.

Most people have some feelings of fairness, both for themselves and others. If a group is presented with a resource, most expect it to be shared equally. Dividing a pie, for example, into small enough slices so that everyone gets a piece, is standard behavior. But is the feeling of fairness in our genes or is it something we learn? To learn more, the researchers enlisted the assistance of 120 babies (and parents) between the ages of 18 to 30 months—each was positioned to watch a very short puppet show.

The puppet shows all started off with two puppets; one a giraffe, the other a monkey. Then, another monkey [puppet](#) entered the scene bearing a tray which held cookies. In some scenarios, there were

two cookies on the tray and in others there were three. The monkey with the tray doled out the cookies as he saw fit. As the cookies were doled out, the researchers watched the faces of the baby volunteers—prior research has shown that they tend to stare longer when watching something that doesn't correspond with how they feel something should be.

In studying their data, the researchers found that when there were three cookies, the babies stared longer if the monkey doled the cookies out unfairly, such as eating all the cookies himself or if he only shared with one of the puppets. But, things changed when the monkey only brought two cookies. This time, the babies stared longer if one of the cookies was given to the giraffe, instead of the other monkey, suggesting that [fairness](#) in this case meant sharing only with those that are like you when resources are scarce.

The researchers report that their results were not a surprise to them—prior research has hinted at changes in behavior in [babies](#) when unequal resources are at stake.

**More information:** Lin Bian et al. Infants expect ingroup support to override fairness when resources are limited, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* (2018). [DOI: 10.1073/pnas.1719445115](#)

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