**Introduction**

Early in life, children prefer agents who help to those who hinder another’s goals. These evaluations incorporate both the intent of the agent and the outcome of its actions\(^1\). But other factors, such as the strength of an individual’s motivation to help, are also relevant to moral evaluation and partner selection.

Adults are less trusting of people who deliberate for a long time before deciding whether to help others\(^2\). And 3- to 8-year-old children prefer people who do not experience inner conflict before deciding to do good\(^3\).

Thus, young children may also view a person’s hesitation to help others as evidence that they are not strongly motivated to act prosocially—even if the person’s helpful actions reflect a positive intention and ultimately produce a good outcome.

- Do preschool-age children evaluate a hesitating helper more negatively than an immediate helper?

**Method**

**Do children think immediate helpers are nicer than hesitating helpers?**

**Results**

- Yes, by 6 years
- Combining Onscreen/Offscreen: \(b = 1.37, t = 2.08, p = 0.03\)

**Future Directions**

Expectations of prosocial support vary with the severity of need and one’s relationships to others. Would children younger than 6 be more sensitive to a person’s hesitation to comfort their close friend? Because adults prefer uncritical collaborators, people hesitate less when they can be observed. Do children do the same?

**References**

5. Beier, Terrizzi, Woodward, & Ventimiglia. What you should have done: Children’s moral judgments incorporate representations of unhelpful inaction. (in prep.)
Young children and adults associate social power with indifference to others’ needs

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Background

Hierarchical societies distribute social power unevenly across their populations¹. Children quickly pick up on this structure. Infants’ initial sensitivity to physical dominance² soon expands; by preschool, children also associate power with social roles that grant normative authority³.

Knowing who is in charge means knowing who will get their way⁴. But what other social expectations do children have about people with social power? Preschool-age children recognize that certain affiliative relationships are partially constituted by the selective provision of prosocial support: They expect friends, kin, and group members to share resources and comfort one another. In some contexts, people with high power feel obliged to look after those with less power⁵. In other contexts, people with high power feel that prosocial norms do not apply to them⁶.

However, no research has investigated whether children, or even adults, hold intuitions about powerful people who are unresponsive to others’ needs. Presented at ICIS Fiddick, et al. A Cross-Cultural Study of Noblesse Oblige in Economic Decision-Making. (2016).

Method & Results

4- to 5-year-olds (n = 32, M = 4.92 years, SD = .57), 17 girls
6- to 7-year-olds (n = 32, M = 6.98 years, SD = .59), 13 girls
Adults (n = 32, M = 20.91, SD = 2.45), 24 women

Participants were asked about relative authority and niceness for each condition. Condition order and both the identity and left/right location of the helpful/unhelpful character were counterbalanced across participants.

Social Power as Normative Authority

When someone is “in charge” they get to make all of the rules and tell others what to do.

Helpful Condition

Display of Need

Character Response

Character Introductions

Test Questions

Who’s in charge?

Who’s nicer?

Unhelpful Condition

14-second video sequence

Who’s nicer?

Who’s in charge?

Selecting the unhelpful / helpful character over the needy one

Questions

Do children associate social power with helpful action? With unhelpful inaction?

Having indicated which person within a dyad is “in charge”, do children negatively evaluate authorities who are unresponsive to others’ needs? Or does social power license indifference?

Do these intuitions about social power and relative authority change across childhood and into adulthood?

References


Conclusions

Both children and adults associate social power with indifference to others’ low-power instrumental needs.

But being seen as “in charge” did not exonerate unhelpful people. Consistent with our prior research¹⁰, all participants viewed unhelpful people as “not nice”.

In contrast, helping may be viewed as so common that it provides little evidence about relative power or niceness.

Only 6- to 7-year-olds viewed the helper as nicer than a character in need.

The overall pattern across age groups suggests that the experiences occurring between early childhood and adulthood do not substantially alter intuitions about social power, helpful action, and unhelpful inaction.

Future Directions

This study documented inferences about relative power from displays of prosocial unresponsiveness. Given evidence about a specific hierarchical relationship, would children actually expect powerful people to be unresponsive?

How might these intuitions vary across different demonstrations of need (e.g., comforting) or other aspects of hierarchy (e.g., prestige)?

Even 4-year-olds’ intuitions were consistent with adults’. At what age do these intuitions arise, and how?

Selecting the unhelpful / helpful character over the needy one

Helpful Condition

Unhelpful Condition

Proportion

0.0 0.1 0.2 0.3 0.4 0.5 0.6 0.7 0.8 0.9 1.0

4 to 5 years
6 to 7 years
Adults

4 to 5 years
6 to 7 years
Adults

Helpful Condition

Unhelpful Condition

* p < 0.05
** p < 0.01
*** p < 0.001

Children’s Prosocial Facilitation of Others’ Communicative Goals

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Introduction
From early in life, children help others1. Research has primarily focused on the development of children’s support for others’ physical goals, such as picking up a dropped object.

Social goals—i.e., goals directed toward people, their mental experiences, and states of the social world—are ubiquitous and central to social life. By 3 years, children help others achieve their social goals2,3. They helpfully assist an actor influence another person’s attentional state, but only if the actor’s goal is specific to the target, the actor requires the child’s assistance, and the target has not expressed disinterest in the actor’s goal.

Here we investigate children’s support for a different type of social goal: communication.

• Do 5-year-old children spontaneously support one person’s goal of influencing another’s epistemic state?

• If so, is their motivation to help the communicator or inform the recipient of something she may wish to know?

• And is support for a third-party communicative goal regulated by the success or failure of the initial communication?

Method
(two trials per study, counterbalanced)

Children play a hiding game with two researchers. One player places an object in one of 3 containers; another guesses where it is. On test trial game rounds, the child watches the researchers play.

Communication event: During the hiding, while one researcher (the Receiver) is turned away, the other (the Communicator) decides to tell her where the object will be. She shares this intent with the child and then points to a container, saying, “It’s here!”

Study 1: The Receiver does not see the Communicator’s point
Truthful intent: The Communicator points to the object location
Deceitful intent: The Communicator points to a false location

Study 2: The Communicator is always deceitful, but:
Incomplete communication: The Receiver does not see her point.
Complete communication: The Receiver sees her point.

Opportunity to Help
The Communicator is called away. The Receiver turns around and play the game.

Study 1
24 five-year-olds (12 girls)

Do children complete another person’s communicative goal?

Yes!

Do children repeat the Communicator’s message to help the Communicator or benefit the Receiver?

Children’s responses matched the Communicator’s intent, even if that meant deceiving the Receiver.

Study 2
26 five-year-olds (14 girls)

Laity to Help (seconds)

Incomplete Communication
Complete Communication
Child indicated:
True location
False location
Truthful intent
19
5
Deceitful intent
1
23

were children more likely to help the Communicator when her message did not go through?

Yes! McNemar’s, one-tailed, p < .05

were children quicker to help the Communicator when her message did not go through?

Yes! Wilcoxon signed ranks, one-tailed, p < .0005

Note: In Study 1, the Receiver said to herself, “Now where is it...” after turning around. Study 2 removed this prompt; hence, the non-responses.

Conclusions
In Study 1, children spontaneously repaired a third party’s failed communication, even when doing so conflicted with another person’s interest in being truthfully informed.

In Study 2, this social helping behavior was guided by:

• children’s awareness of the Communicator’s intent
• children’s evaluation of whether the Communicator had successfully influenced the Receiver’s beliefs.

Early prosocial behavior includes support for one person’s communicative goal toward another person’s epistemic state.

Broader Questions
Children help people achieve both physical and social goals. How does this insight change our characterization of the developmental trajectory of helping?

What other forms of social behavior might be recognized as helping? We have recently documented 6-year-olds’ protests against unwarranted blame to a third party4. Is maintaining a good reputation a social goal, and can others help us achieve it?

Do children appreciate the commonalities among forms of helping that appear vastly different on the surface? If so, do experiences that promote or inhibit one form of helping generalize to other forms?

Acknowledgements
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References
Six-Year-Olds Protect Others’ Reputations Against Unwarranted Blame
Amanda Mae Woodward, Suzanne Woller, & Jonathan S. Beier
University of Maryland, College Park

Introduction
Maintaining a positive reputation is vital to an individual’s well-being, ensuring access to good social partners. By 5 years, children monitor and manipulate how others see them, and they report the reputations of others through social gossip (Engelmann et al., 2012, 2016; Fu et al., 2015).

Young children may also recognize that other people wish to have a good reputation. Do they prosocially defend the reputation of a third party?

We have recently advocated for a more expanded view of helping than research on early prosocial behavior often assumes. People do not just help each other accomplish physical tasks; they support each other’s social goals as well (Beier et al., 2014, 2017; Duong et al., SRCD 2019). Maintaining a good reputation is a paradigmatic social goal: An individual may want others’ beliefs about them to support a positive evaluation.

- Do 6-year-olds protest a character’s unwarranted blame toward a third party? (Study 1)
- If so, is this different from correcting a character’s mistaken beliefs about a non-social event? (Study 2)

Study 1
Incidental damage
Set-up
Blame phase
Purposeful damage
Study 2
Incidental damage
Set-up
Blame: Social
Rating Scale

Methods
Characters:
Accuser’s drawing is destroyed; blames Target
Social Target: Another puppet (absent during blame)
Non-social Target: A fallen streetlamp

Study 1
Water spills on Accuser’s drawing
Incidental condition: There is no clear cause
Purposeful condition: There is no clear cause
Accuser wrongly blames a Target
Social Target condition: Social Target
Non-social Target condition: Non-social Target

Study 2
Incidental damage
Set-up
Blame: Non-social
Rating Scale

Results
Coding maximal richness of spontaneous responses
1 point Affirmation or Protest “Yeah”, “Whu-uh”
2 points Explanation of what happened, not mentioning Target “The water spilled.”
3 points Explanation of the event that affirms/denies the Target’s involvement “Baba didn’t do it!”

Study 1: Spontaneous responses
Study 2: Spontaneous responses

Counts of maximal richness scores:

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<td>5</td>
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Conclusions
Children protested more richly against unwarranted versus justified blame to a third party (Study 1).

There was mixed evidence as to whether children’s protests against unwarranted blame were driven by concern for the Social Target’s reputation (Study 2).

- Whether the Accuser blamed another character (Social Target) or the streetlamp (Non-social Target) did not influence the quality of children’s protests/affirmations. The protests against unwarranted blame in Study 1 may have been motivated by a desire to correct the Accuser’s false belief.
- However, children did indicate that it is worse to spread a false accusation about another character than about a streetlamp.

Overall, these preliminary results indicate that children act in ways that repair unwarranted damage to the reputations of third parties, and this may be motivated by prosocial concerns.

Current and Future Directions
*Data collection for both studies is ongoing*

We are coding additional aspects of children’s protests, such as their latency and frequency. Although children’s protests of unwarranted blame to the Social and Non-social Targets were similarly rich, perhaps children were more insistent in the Social Target condition.

Another way to assess children’s motivation to protect the Social Target’s reputation would be to manipulate their affiliation with the Target, via assignment to the same or different social groups.

Acknowledgments
We thank Ummiya Gabbani, Kate Hedges, Megan McClure, and Lauren Kinzie for their substantial contributions to coding and data collection.

References
A6552431
Do Different Choice Contexts Shape Children’s Expectations for Selective Comforting Among Friends?

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Introduction

Social relationships shape children’s expectations for selective prosocial behavior. By middle childhood, children’s reasoning about prosocial obligations between friends versus strangers varies according to the type and severity of need involved (Miller et al., 1990).

Around 4 years, children expect friends to favor one another when dividing resources (Liberman & Shaw, 2017; Olson & Spelke, 2008). But expectations about other prosocial behaviors—such as comforting, which differs in type and severity—may have a different trajectory.

Children’s expectations of partiality may also depend on how a scenario is framed. Friends and non-friends alike may be expected to aid an injured person, even if children assume that people usually choose to favor aiding friends over a non-friend.

- Do children expect friends to selectively comfort one another?
- If so, do these expectations vary across decision contexts?

Methods

Study 1: 72 4- to 6-year-olds
Study 2: 63 4- to 6-year-olds (72 planned)

Practice Trials:
Children twice practiced showing how a single, unpaired character comforts a hurt protagonist

Test Trials:
6 trials, each featuring unique characters and introduction/comforting scenes

Protagonist Introduction

Friendly Interaction: The Protagonist has a friendly, familiar interaction with the Friend, instead of sitting alone

No interaction: The Protagonist engages a fun solo activity, instead of joining the Non-friend

Test Phase: Children indicate who will comfort the protagonist (Study 1) or whom the protagonist will comfort (Study 2)

Results

Do children expect friendly characters to selectively comfort one another?

Yes, by 6 years.

Do children’s expectations vary across decision contexts?

No.

Experiment:
- Experiment x Age: 
  \[ b = -0.02, \ z = -0.91, p = 0.36 \]

Discussion

In both studies, children’s choices reveal expectations for selective comforting between friends by 6 years.

- This is notably later than expectations for selective resource division. Might the greater severity of need have attenuated younger children’s expectation of partiality?

Children’s choices appear similar across decision contexts:

- Counter to our prediction, expectations of partiality did not emerge earlier when reflecting on a Protagonist’s relative concern for each of two injured characters (Study 2), compared to reflecting on the relative concern that different characters would have for an injured Protagonist (Study 1).
- Data collection is ongoing for Study 2’s 6-year-olds, so the overall comparison between decision contexts remains preliminary.

Future Directions

To explore the possibility that younger children had expectations of partiality, we are now coding further details of their responses, such as latency and how they act out comforting with the dolls.

Our relationship manipulation was based on a single behavioral demonstration of affiliation — we did not explicitly label the affiliated characters as “friends.”

This term means different things to children of different ages (Furman & Bierman, 1983). For what ages might verbal labels enhance expectations of partiality in comforting behavior?

References


INTRODUCTION

Humans are exceptionally prosocial. Prosociality is beneficial in many circumstances but, when indiscriminate, it can lead to exploitation by free-riders. Free-riders are individuals who benefit from others’ prosocial acts without ever bearing the costs. Reciprocity is a solution to the problem of prosociality because the costs incurred by helping another are later compensated. Previous research suggests that children engage in reciprocity (e.g., selective helping) from very early in development; however, the mechanisms that support this selectivity are poorly understood.

Two potential mechanisms have been proposed based on the specificity with which the observing individual evaluates the actor’s action. One possibility is that children are making very general, valenced evaluations and ‘reciprocate’ by matching the valence of previous evaluations with future interactions (i.e., Global Evaluations). Another possibility is that children are making specific evaluations of another’s prosociality and reciprocating based on expectations regarding another’s likelihood of acting prosocially in a future interaction (i.e., Dispositional Attributions).

By presenting participants with individuals who vary on a variety of positively valenced characteristics that range from previous prosociality to attractiveness, and having the participants make selections about who they prefer to interact with across a variety of scenarios, we hope to gain better insight into the specificity of the evaluations that underlie selective prosocial behavior.

METHOD

ADULTS: 381 psychology undergraduates, enrolled at the University of Maryland, read vignettes describing two individuals.
- One individual demonstrated a prosocial quality (e.g., helpfulness), and the alternative individual reflected either a positive social quality (i.e., helpfulness) or a generally desirable quality (i.e., attractiveness). There were 72 fully crossed pairings.
- For each pair, participants selected an outcome for one of the individuals, in one of three scenarios: prosocial (who to help), social (who to sit next to on the bus), or general (who would be likely to win the lottery).

CHILDREN: 28 6-year-olds, living in Montreal, Canada, viewed drawings and heard stories about pairs of individuals.
- The individuals varied on the same characteristics as above (i.e., prosocial, positive social, generally desirable).
- For each pair, children selected an outcome for one of the individuals: who they wanted to help with a puzzle, play with, or give a valued resource to.

RESULTS

Selecting the prosocial individual was considered a hit, whereas selecting the alternative (either social or generally desirable) indicated a miss. To compare the relative hit rate when contrasting a prosocial individual against either a social or generally desirable alternative, we conducted a GLMM (with binomial responses of hit rate). Subject and items were included as random effects to control for the non-independence of these variables. Type of alternative within vignette (either social or general) was included as a fixed effect. Follow up analyses also considered scenario type (i.e., adults: social/general/prosocial; children: play/help) as a fixed effect in this decision-making process. An interaction effect was found for adults ($\chi^2(2) = 14.21, p < .001$) but not children ($\chi^2(2) = 0.19, p = .909$).

DISCUSSION

This research explores the evaluative mechanisms that support reciprocity. If global evaluations are used, we expect to see little variability in participants’ preferences across characteristics or scenarios. In contrast, if dispositional attributions are used, we should see a specific preference to benefit a previously prosocial individual.

Based on the present results, adults engage in more dispositional attributions than children:
- Adults showed both a preference for the prosocial individual over the positive alternatives (Fig. 1), and a specific preference to help the prosocial individual (as compared to sitting nearby them or selecting their name from a lottery, Fig. 2).
- 6-year-olds did not show a preference for the prosocial individual over either positive alternative (Fig. 3). They also did not specifically wish to help the prosocial individual; however, they did select her to receive a high value reward (i.e., a cookie, Fig 4).

Taken together, these findings suggest a developmental trajectory whereby individuals transition from reciprocating based on global valence, to monitoring others’ specific prosocial intent.

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REFERENCES


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