Introduction

In today's multicultural, globalized world, it is more important than ever before to be able to interact favorably with those who are different from ourselves.

• Children's ability to feel empathy is one of the most salient indicators of their ability to engage in prosocial behavior\(^1\).
• Empathy aids in the formation of healthy relationships, increases helping behavior, and persuades children to have favorable attitudes toward others.
• Children operate through a lens of essentialism, an early cognitive bias that promotes categorization\(^2,3\).
  o Essentialist thought promotes group biases and may mediate how, when, or if children show empathy to those different from themselves.
• Preschool children (ages 3-6) make generalizations about how groups constrain social behavior\(^4\).
  o They predict between-group harm and within-group helping behavior.
• Children distribute fewer resources to out-group members and choose to play with those who have similar preferences or physical appearances\(^5,6\).
• Perspective taking and living in diverse communities can minimize group bias, but only in adults\(^7,8\).

How do we promote more favorable interactions between different groups?

Research Questions

Can emphasizing similarities with out-group members override group bias?

Even though children tend to be biased against members of an “out-group,” are they still able to show empathy toward out-group members if they know they are sad?

How do cooperation and competition influence group bias and empathy?

Method

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>Measures of Interest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No Competition</td>
<td>No Competition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Similarity + Competition</td>
<td>Baseline + No Competition</td>
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<tr>
<td>Similarity + No Competition</td>
<td>Baseline + Competition</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Participants

88 children: 53 girls, 47 boys

- White
- Biracial/Mixed Race
- Hispanic
- Asian
- Black

Results

• Children in the Similarity conditions chose out-group members more than children in the Baseline conditions did.
• More children in the No-competition conditions vs the Competition conditions chose to distribute resources to the out-group after learning they were sad.
• Older children were more likely to give resources to the out-group than younger children.
• Girls were more likely than boys to choose to play with out-group members.

Discussion

• With no information about individuals, children chose in-group members over out-group members. When children learned about similarities with out-group members, they chose them more often.
  o Effects of similarity appeared to override effects of group-belonging.
• Similar preferences seem to influence liking more strongly than physical appearance.
• Competition seems to inhibit or minimize empathetic response.
• Emphasizing similarity and minimizing competition may be valuable tools for effectively promoting positive interactions between different children and building empathy across demographics.

References