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"Life Isn't Fair": Children Know What's Fair, but Expect Groups to Behave Unfairly

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BACKGROUND

- Children show an early sensitivity to social groups. They prefer individuals who share their food preferences, accents, and languages (Dunham, Baron, & Banaji, 2008; Woodward & Kinzler, 2017; Mahajan & Wynn, 2012).
- Despite their preference for group members, children also have a very strong sense of equity (Rizzo & Killen 2016), and even absorb some cost to themselves to ensure that their interactions with others are fair (Corbit, McAuliffe, Callaghan, Blake & Warneken, 2017).
- However, children expect individuals to favor their own groups when distributing resources, even if they think the distribution is unfair (DeJesus, Rhodes & Kinzler, 2013; Fehr, Bernhard, & Rockenbach, 2008).
- In the current study, we explore children’s intuitions about a more abstract kind of resource: opportunity.

CENTRAL RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- Do children think about “opportunity” in a manner similar to resource distribution when thinking about equality?
- Are there developmental differences?

METHODS

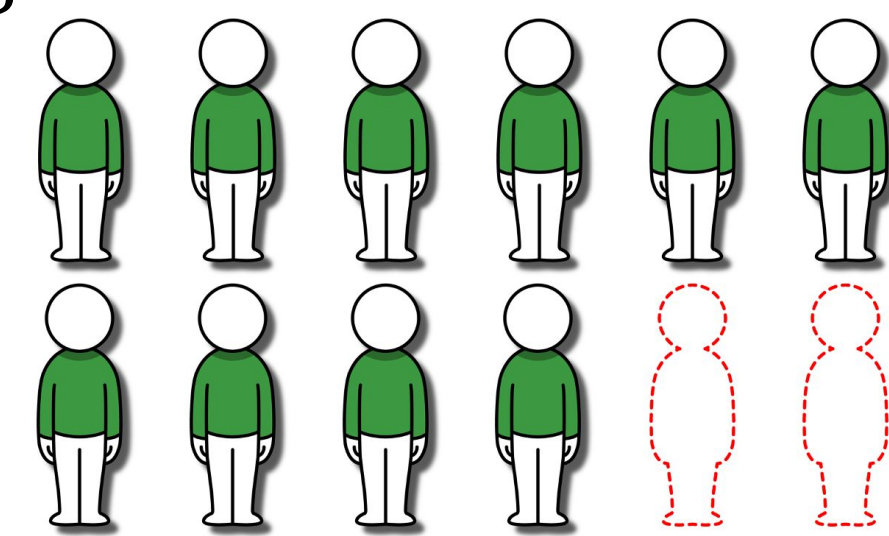
Participants:

16 6-7 year olds ($M=6.96, SD=.680$), 6 female, 10 male
15 8-9 year olds ($M=9.15, SD=.578$), 10 female, 5 male

Procedure:

Children were introduced to two groups of people who attended the same school.

They were then told: “At their school, there is a club called the Fun Club. The fun club is a very special opportunity, and everyone wants to join. Both Merks and Blards can join the Fun Club as long as they’re chosen by the current members. There are currently only two openings in the club. The Fun Club members want to choose two new people from their school to join.”



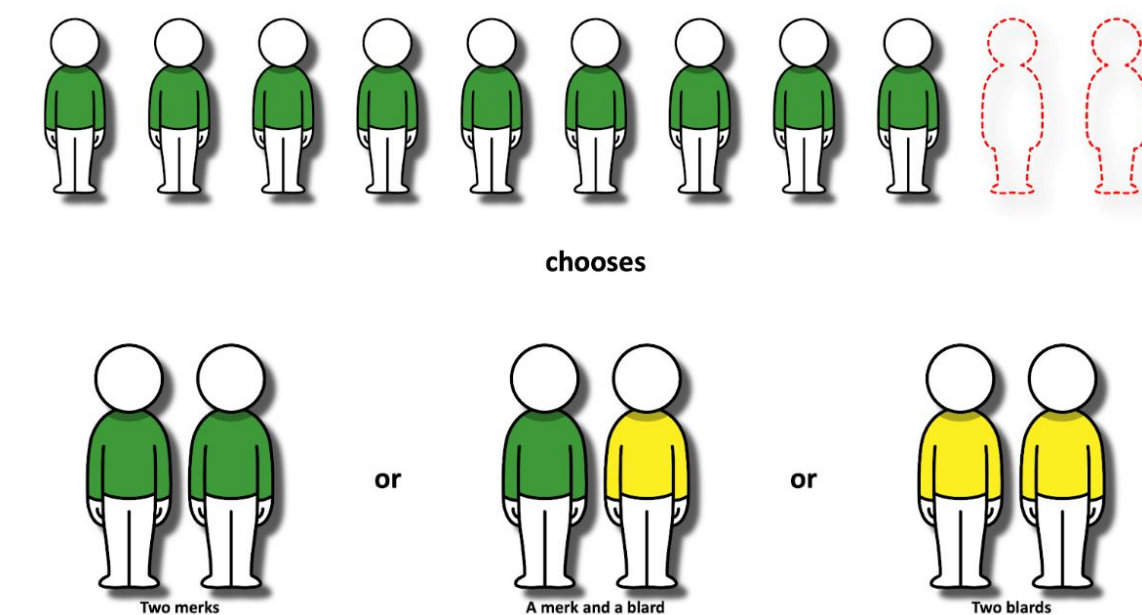
METHODS (continued)

Test Trials:

Children completed 1 test trial to evaluate expectation and 3 pairwise test trials to evaluate fairness in opportunity distribution.

Expectation:

“Which two people do you think they will choose?”



Fairness:

“Between these two, which one is more fair for the club to choose?”



RESULTS (continued)

Expectation Vs. Fairness

Children expected groups to allow majority members into the club but thought it was more fair for the club to admit both majority and minority members, $F(1, 29) = 6.996, p = .013$

Age Group:

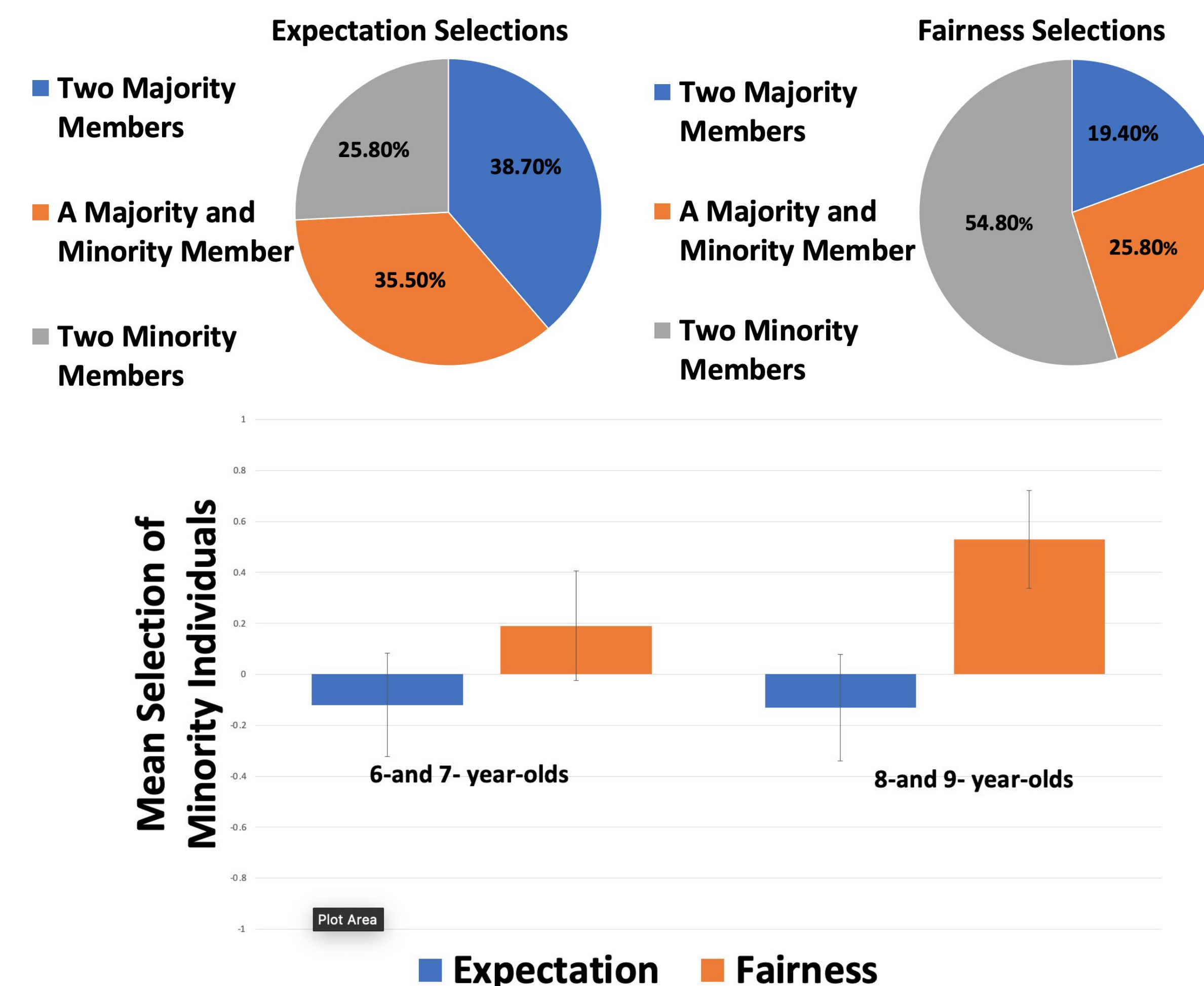
Younger and older children did not select minority members at statistically different rates between expectations and fairness, $F(1, 29) = .915, p = .347$.

DISCUSSION

- We found that children expected groups to choose majority members more frequently than minority members.
- Children thought it was more fair to choose minority members.
- There is a discrepancy between what children expect of intergroup opportunity distribution and what they view as fair.
- Children’s understanding of opportunity distribution does not change with age.
- Early on, children develop a strong sense of equity but also a clear understanding of real-world opportunity distribution in majority and minority groups.
- Future directions could look at older age groups and whether or not it matters if the participant belongs to one of the groups in the study.

RESULTS

Expectation and Fairness Selections:



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