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ABSTRACT

Previous equity research indicates that females more often than males prefer to divide rewards equally when their own work inputs are greater than that of their partner. In the present study, males and females divided rewards either between themselves and another person, or between two hypothetical members of a work dyad. Results showed that when dividing rewards between two other persons, females ignored members' differential inputs and rewarded each member equally. Males allocated more reward to the member with higher input. However, when subjects divided rewards between themselves and another person, both males and females with superior inputs retained the greater share of reward for themselves. Theoretical implications for understanding sex differences in equity behavior are discussed. It was suggested that females may normally prefer equality distributions because of sex-role expectations, but are willing to violate the stereotype when a sufficient incentive is provided. (Author)

EFFECTS OF SEX AND SELF-INTEREST UPON EQUITY BEHAVIOR

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SUMMARY

Previous equity research indicates that females more often than males prefer to divide rewards equally when their own work inputs are greater than that of their partner. In the present study, males and females divided rewards either between themselves and another person, or between two hypothetical members of a work dyad. Results showed that when dividing rewards between two other persons, females ignored members' differential inputs and rewarded each member equally. Males allocated more reward to the member with high input. However, when subjects divided rewards between themselves and another person, both males and females with superior inputs retained the greater share of reward for themselves. Theoretical implications for understanding sex differences in equity behavior are discussed. It was suggested that females may normally prefer equality distributions because of sex-role expectations, but are willing to violate the stereotype when a sufficient incentive is provided.

A. INTRODUCTION

Adams' (1) equity theory provides a model of social exchange which allows one to predict the manner in which a joint reward will be divided, namely, that members will be most satisfied with a division which is proportional to the relative input of the contributing members. Several recent investigations of equity behavior (3, 7, 8) have suggested that females are more likely than males to deviate from equity, prefering to divide rewards equally without regard to members' level of input. A study by Leventhal and Lane (8) is representative of studies reporting this difference between males and females. In this experiment, college students worked on a task with an absent partner, provided feedback regarding their level of performance relative to that of their partner, then given a sum of money to divide however they wished between themselves and their partner. Males who were told they had performed superior to their partner kept the greater part of the reward for themselves. Females, by contrast, took only about half of the joint reward when their performance was superior. This tendency for females to under-reward themselves relative to males has also been reported by Benton (3), Leventhal and Anderson (7) and Messé and Lichtman (10).

In an attempt to explain this sex difference, Leventhal and Anderson (7) proposed that males may have greater motivation for self-reward and, hence, be more willing than females to exploit their partner by keeping most of the joint reward for themselves. This explanation emphasizes the importance of immediate self-gratification, or

self-interest. A recent study by Leventhall, Popp, and Sawyer (9) was designed to eliminate the possible influence of immediate self-interest by having preschool children divide a reward between two other members of a dyad, which would prevent subjects themselves from profiting by the allocation. It was found that preschool children generally followed an equity norm by giving more rewards to the better performer, but this tendency was significantly stronger among males than females. Thus, at least among preschool children, the tendency to give more reward to the superior performer appears to be stronger among males than females even when subjects making the allocation are unable to profit by it.

Leventhal (6) has recently proposed an alternative explanation for females' greater reluctance to allocate rewards differentially on the basis of input. This hypothesis suggests that females may be predisposed to equality by being more concerned about maintaining warm, cooperative interpersonal relationship than competitive achievement. This hypothesis is compatible with the previous research indicating that females tend to be less achievement oriented and more nurturant than males (5) as well as the stereotypic belief that females are less competitive and agressive and more empathtic than males (2). Furthermore, a recent study (4) found that female college students themselves generally accept this sex-role stereotype.

The present study attempted to test the relative merit of these two alternative hypotheses by having males and females distribute rewards either between two fictitious workers, (Supervison condition) or between themselves and another worker (Partner condition). Leven-

thal and Anderson's (7) proposal would predict that when dividing rewards between themselves and another, males with superior performance would keep most of the joint reward, but females would be expected to share equally with partner. However, when subjects divide rewards between two other persons, no sex differences should be expected by this hypothesis, since the crucial element of self-interest is eliminated by this procedure. On the other hand, the alternative hypothesis (6) would predict significant sex differences in both Supervisor and Partner conditions, with males rewarding on the basis of members' performance and females distributing rewards equally without regard to relative inputs.

B. METHOD

1. Subjects

Subjects were 63 male and 63 female introduction psychology students at Western Illinois University. Subjects received extra course credit for their participation.

2. Procedure

Subjects were tested in small groups of 8 - 10. The senior author served as the experimenter. Upon entering the experimental room, subjects were asked to perform a simple proof-reading task and were told that to maintain anonymity all materials would be assigned a code number. Also, subjects were informed that they were competing with another student and would later be able to compare how well they did to the performance of their partner. After five minutes, all papers were collected by three experimental assistants who left the

room for the ostensible purpose of scoring the proof-reading tasks. The bogus explanation offered by the experimenter was that the study was designed to observe the effect of peer pressure on competitive behavior. Approximately 10 minutes later, subjects in the Supervisor condition were given information regarding the relative performance of two other individuals on the same task, 12 lottery tickets (for a subsequent $20 cash drawing) and two envelopes marked "Person X" and "Person Y", respectively. Subjects were asked to recommend an appropriate division of the 12 lottery tickets between "Person X", who found 60% of the errors, and "Person Y", who found 40% of the errors.

Instructions to subjects in the Partner conditions were identical to those above except that subjects were given ostensible feedback regarding their own performance relative to their partner's and asked to divide the 12 tickets between his partner and himself. Half the subjects were led to believe that they had found 60% of the errors, while the other half believed they had found only 40%.

C. RESULTS

The number of tickets allocated to the high input worker constituted the dependent variable. These scores were subjected to a 2 (sex of subject) X 3 (self-interest: 40% input, 60% input or Supervisor) analysis of variance. See Table 1.

Insert Table 1 about here

The self-interest variable was highly significant ($F = 22.15$, $df = 2/120$, $p < .001$). A Duncan's multiple range test revealed that

subjects in the 60% Partner condition gave the high input worker (i.e., himself) significantly more tickets ($p < .01$) than subjects in the 60% Supervisor condition, and likewise, the latter group of subjects gave away significantly more tickets ($p < .05$) than subjects in the 40% Partner condition. The main effect for Sex and the Sex X Self-Interest interaction failed to reach significance.

T-tests were then used to compare the cell means of the above interaction to a perfect equality division (50%). See Table 2. Again,

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Insert Table 2 about here

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no significant sex differences were reported in the Partner condition with both males and females who found 40% of the errors followed an equality division, and all subjects who found 60% of the errors divided the rewards equitably. However, a significant sex difference was reported in the way subjects responded in the Supervisor condition. Males in the Supervisor condition followed an equity norm of distribution while females divided rewards equally.

D. DISCUSSION

The present study was designed to investigate the relative efficacy of two previously proposed hypotheses for explaining sex differences in reward allocations. Leventhal and Anderson's (7) proposal would predict no sex differences when subjects themselves were not personally affected by the reward allocation, since the crucial element of self-interest was not present in the situation. When dividing rewards between themselves and a partner, on the other hand, males would be expected to take significantly more reward than females. Results of the

present study were directly contrary to both predictions of the Leventhal and Anderson (7) proposal. That is, sex differences were observed only when the element of self-interest was removed. When dividing rewards between two others, females ignored individual inputs and split rewards equally, while males rewarded in accordance with each member's input. When subjects were asked to divide a joint reward between themselves and another person, both males and females with superior performance retained most of the reward for themselves.

This pattern of outcomes provides at least partial support for Leventhal's (6) alternative that females favor an equality distribution because it is more consistent with their sex-role identity. It may be that their tendency to favor cooperative interactions becomes manifested only in the absence of a salient counter-incentive to maximize self-reward. In the Supervisor condition, no such incentive was present, and females disregarded members' inputs and rewarded equally, consistent with their presumed motivation for cooperative behavior (2, 4, 5, 6). Males' tendency to make rewards commensurate with performance is also consistent with their presumed concern for competitive achievement (4, 5, 6). In the Partner condition, subjects had a possibility of winning $20.00. On the basis of casual observations by the experimenter, most subjects perceived this to be a highly valued reward. It may be that females' motivation to behave cooperatively was effectively subordinated by the presence of this relatively salient reward. In most previous studies (7, 8, 9, 12) in which females have shown equality behavior at the expense of personal gain, the maximum amount of reward each subject could earn was less than two dollars, which may not have

been a sufficient incentive for females to violate perceived sex-role demands for cooperation in favor of maximizing self-reward. Shapiro (12) has previously suggested that subjects, male and female, may be more likely to divide rewards equally when they stand to sacrifice only relatively small amounts of money.

The present findings suggest that females may be culturally conditioned to favor an accommodative or cooperative strategy of distributive justice, as Leventhal (6) proposes, in which rewards are divided equally without regard to relative performance. However, when the magnitude of the reward becomes sufficiently salient, females are apparently willing to abandon the more cooperative strategy in favor of increasing self-reward.

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TABLE 1

SUMMARY OF ANOVA ON THE NUMBER OF TICKETS GIVEN TO THE HIGH INPUT WORKER

Source of Variance	df	SS	MS	F
Sex (A)	1	1.55	1.55	<1
Self-Interest (B)	2	164.39	82.19	22.15*
A x B	2	4.41	2.21	<1
Ss/A x B	120	445.14	3.71	

*p <.001

TABLE 2

MEAN NUMBER OF TICKETS GIVEN

TO THE HIGH INPUT WORKER

	MALES			FEMALES		
	Partner Conditions		Supervisor	Partner Conditions		Supervisor
Subject's Input	40%	60%	No Input	40%	60%	No Input
Means	5.52	8.48*	7.14*	5.71	8.33*	6.43

*Denotes significant (p .01) deviation from an equality division.