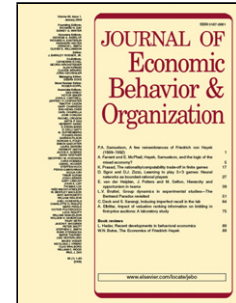


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Learned Generosity? An Artefactual Field Experiment with Parents and their Children

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Highlights

- We study transmission of social preferences from parents to 3-5 year-old children.
- In our artefactual field experiment, parents and children play a series of dictator games.
- We find inter-generational transfer of social preferences for the oldest children.
- Fathers and parents of generous children model behavior to their children.
- Initially less generous children share more when they see a parent or other adult share.

Abstract

An active area of research within the social sciences concerns the underlying motivation for sharing scarce resources and engaging in other pro-social actions. In this paper we ask: do parents model social preference behavior to children, and do children emulate this behavior? We develop a theoretical framework to examine this question, and conduct an experiment with 147 3 to 5 year-old children and their parents, using dictator games to measure generosity. We find (1) evidence of parental teaching/modeling in the case of fathers and in that of parents of relatively generous children, and (2) an emulation effect such that children who initially share less than half of their endowment subsequently share more the more they see a parent or other adult share. We find little correlation between baseline sharing of children and the parents, with the possible exception of the oldest children.

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