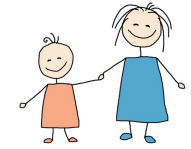




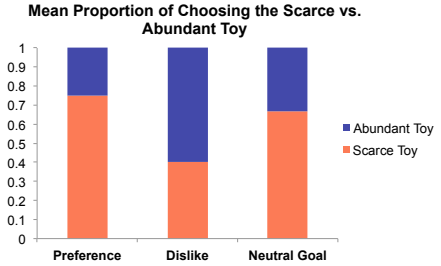
The Effect of Scarcity on Young Children's Preference Attribution



Madeline Montoya, Maria Ilieff, Lili Ma
Department of Psychology, Ryerson University



Early Childhood Cognition Lab

Introduction	
<p>Scarcity has a profound impact on judgment and decision-making (Brock, 1968).</p> <p>Previous studies have shown that adults judge scarce objects as more desirable and valuable than abundant ones (e.g., Verhallen, 1982). This tendency is known as the scarcity effect that has long been employed by marketers and advertisers.</p> <p>However, past studies have not examined this scarcity effect on children, its developmental origins, or the influence of different social contexts on how children interpret another person's selection of scarce objects.</p> <p>The current study aims to explore how 3-year-olds make meaningful interpretations of scarcity across the social contexts of preferences, dislikes, and neutral goals.</p>	<p>Procedure</p> <p>Before the test, the researcher (E) initiated a short sharing game with the child where she would hold out her hand and ask, "Can I have a toy to play with?" This is to ensure that the child understood the hand gesture as a request for a toy.</p> <p>On each of 4 test trials:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> E picked only toy Bs , the scarce objects in the jar. Before this event, E indicated the social context of her selection by stating: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Preference condition: "I like to have some toys to play with." – Dislike condition: "I want to play but I don't like some of the toys here." – Neutral-Goal condition: "It is time to clean up." The child was asked to choose which toy E liked better.
Method	 <p>① Nonrandom sampling event</p>  <p>② Inference about E's preference</p>
<p>Participants</p> <p>Older 3-year-olds ($N = 53$, mean age = 43 months 15 days)</p> <p>Research Paradigm</p> <p>Choice task: Behavioral choice between two equally interesting toys as an indication of a preference</p> <p>Between-Subjects Design</p> <p>Each child was randomly assigned to a Preference, Dislike or Neutral-Goal condition ($n = 19, 20, 14$, respectively).</p> <p>There were 4 test trials in each condition. Each trial involved a jar containing toy As and toy Bs in a 54:6 ratio (i.e., abundant vs. scarce).</p>	<p style="background-color: #00A69A; color: white; text-align: center; padding: 5px;">Results</p> <p>The dependent variable is the proportion of trials on which children chose the sampled, scarce toy when judging E's preference.</p> <p>The effect of condition was significant, $F(2,53) = 10.33, p < .001$.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children in the Preference ($M = .75$) and the Neutral-Goal condition ($M = .67$) chose the scarce toy significantly more often than children in the Dislike condition ($M = .40$), $t(37) = 4.37, p < .001$, and $t(32) = -3.21, p = .003$, respectively. Children's responses in the Preference and Neutral-Goal condition did not differ significantly, $t(31) = .87, p = .39$. <p>In the Preference and the Neutral-Goal condition, children chose the scarce toy significantly more often than would be expected by chance, $t(18) = 4.16, p = .001$ and $t(13) = 2.68, p = .019$, respectively.</p> <p>In the Dislike condition, children's performance did not differ from chance, $t(19) = -1.79, p = 0.88$.</p>
	
Discussion	
<p>The present findings indicate that social contexts influence 3-year-olds' interpretations of scarcity.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> In situations of preference, children attributed greater desirability to scarce objects, which is consistent with previous findings with adults (e.g., Verhallen, 1982). In the context of dislike, the scarcity effect diminished and children were less likely to select the scarce objects as more desirable. In the neutral-goal context, children interpreted the scarce objects as desirable, but to a lesser degree than when preference for those objects was clearly implied. <p>Our data provide the first evidence that 3-year-olds take the social context into consideration when making judgment about the desirability of scarce objects.</p>	
Acknowledgements	
<p>We are very grateful to the staff at the Ontario Science Centre (KidSpark) for their contribution to this project.</p> <p>We would also like to thank the parents and children whose participation made this research possible.</p>	
