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Authoritative Parenting and Beliefs in Agency Impact Children's Views on Fairness and Inequality

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Abstract

By the preschool age, children develop a strong understanding of norms, fairness, and inequality. However, little is known about the social mechanisms underlying these developments; a gap we hope to bridge. We explored how parenting styles and beliefs in agency affect children's beliefs about inequality. Four-to-eight-year-old children (n=45; target n=80) were exposed to two trials in which they watched a character be disadvantaged either due to poor performance (merit) or a bad decision (self-chosen) and were asked to make a fairness judgment and resource reallocation. We also assessed parenting style and children's beliefs in free choice/agency. We found that children with authoritative parents gave more stickers to disadvantaged characters and were more likely to think of both inequalities as fair. Additionally, greater belief in free choice correlated with belief in the fairness of both inequalities. Results show how parenting and beliefs in choice impact children's social cognition.