

Do romantic partners impose greater financial costs than other social partners?

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Introduction: Social bonds may have evolved to promote cooperation among groups or partnerships who depend on one another for fitness-related benefits, and this behaviour may vary according to contextual costs and benefits of cooperation¹. In light of this, we investigated whether financial donations to trustees varied according to perceived need and the type of partnership, using an imagination priming paradigm²⁻⁴.

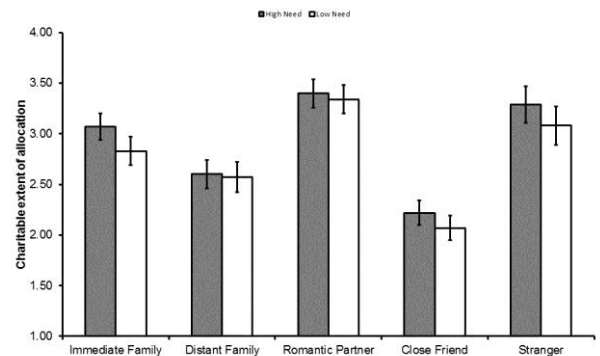
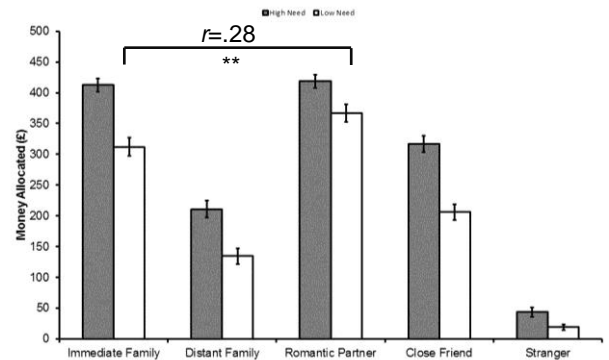
Method

141 participants (57 men, $M_{\text{age}}=38.62$ years, $SD_{\text{age}}=13.70$ years) were presented with 10 randomized scenarios online (Imagine one of 5 people requesting money for i) rent or ii) a holiday). In each scenario, participants could allocate up to £500 of disposable income and had to indicate the extent to which they demanded payback, using a 1 ('No. I consider this a donation and do not expect it back') to 5 ('Yes. In a full and timely fashion') scale. We reverse-coded this latter response to measure willingness to waive payback to the trustee.

Results

We observed a significant interaction between *relationship type* and *perceived need* on money allocated to trustees [$F(3.56, 480.24)=8.47$; $p<.001$ $\eta_p^2=.06$]. When in high need, money allocated to romantic partners and immediate family was equivalent [$p=.55$], but participants allocated more to romantic partners than immediate family when both were in low perceived need of funds [$t(140)=3.47$; $p=.001$, $r=.28$]. Men were relatively more willing than women to waive payback in seven of our ten scenarios [all $t>2.28$; all $p<.03$, $.20<r<.26$].

Results



Preliminary evidence (with under-powered group sizes) also suggests that the tendency to waive payback more so in high than low need is significantly stronger among partnered than single women.

Conclusions: Our findings suggest flexibility in the contexts in which humans allocate money and waive payback to different social partners. We appear to incur greater financial costs for romantic partners than relatives, and the tendency for men to waive payback more so than women may be consistent with recent proposals on the underlying function of benevolence as a signal of desirable male qualities⁵.

References: [1] Brown & Brown (2006). *Psych Inq*, 17: 1-29. [2] Chen et al. (1996). *JPSP*, 71: 262-75. [3] Fitzsimmons & Bargh (2003). *JPSP*, 84: 148-64. [4] Maner et al. (2009). *JPSP*, 97: 74-87. [5] Griskevicius et al. (2007). *JPSP*, 93: 85-102.

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