

Children Weigh Need and Level of Disloyalty When Evaluating Disloyal In-group Members

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Introduction

This study investigated children's evaluations of disloyal in-group members in low to high-need situations.

Do children think loyalty to one's group is a moral obligation? Past research shows children disapprove of disloyal in-group members who support the out-group (Abrams & Rutland, 2008), while other research indicates out-group helping is tolerated when the out-group needs help. Little is known about the tipping point from intolerance to tolerance of disloyal acts. The current study examines whether children think loyalty to one's group is a moral obligation, by evaluating their perceptions of varying levels of disloyalty (low-high) to the in-group in low to high need situations.

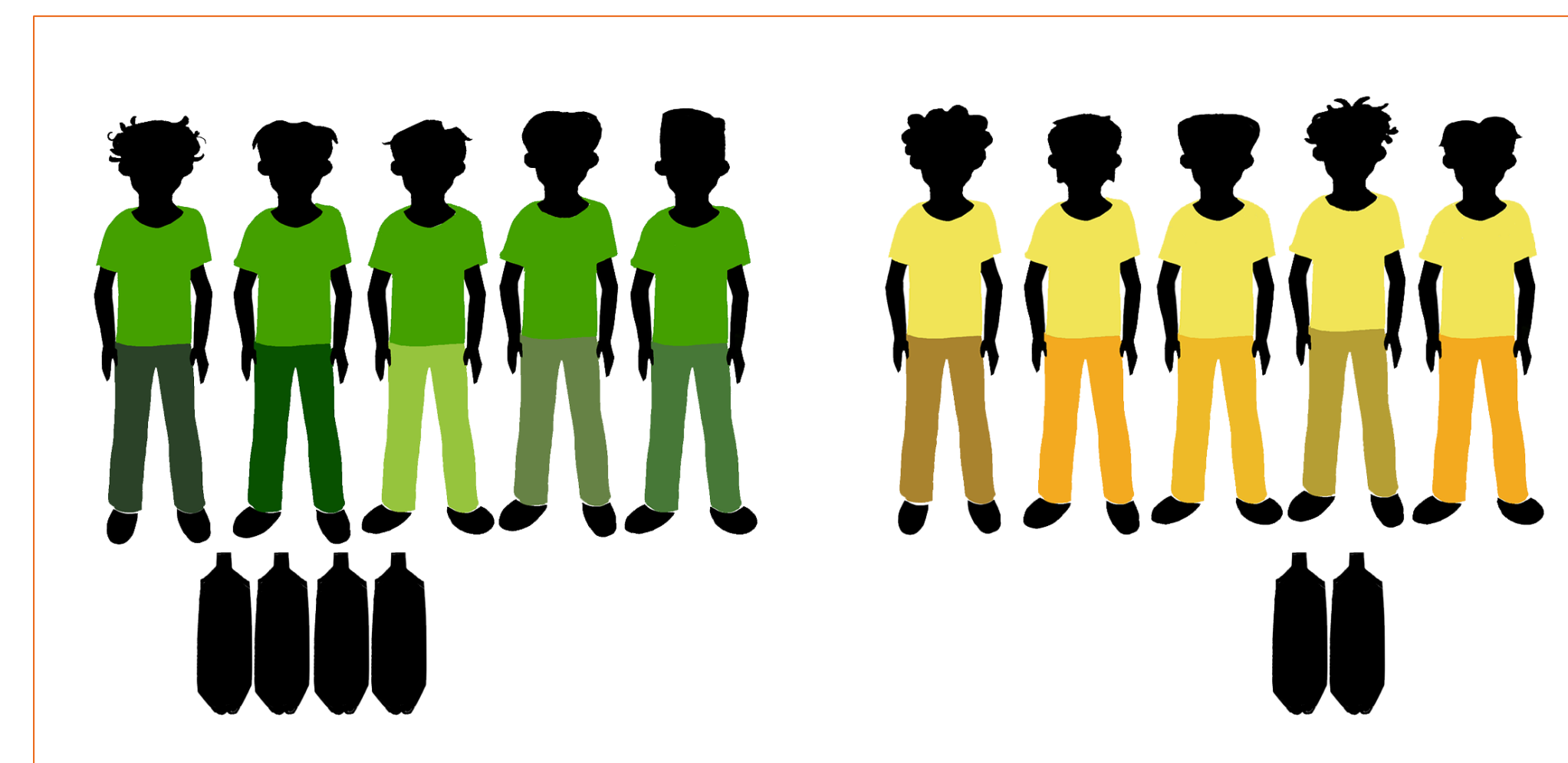
Method

- 53 4th and 8th graders
- (64% Female, $M_{AGE} = 12.77$)
- Children and adolescents read and responded to hypothetical stories about peer groups that varied in their need for a resource (water) and the disloyalty of an in-group member.

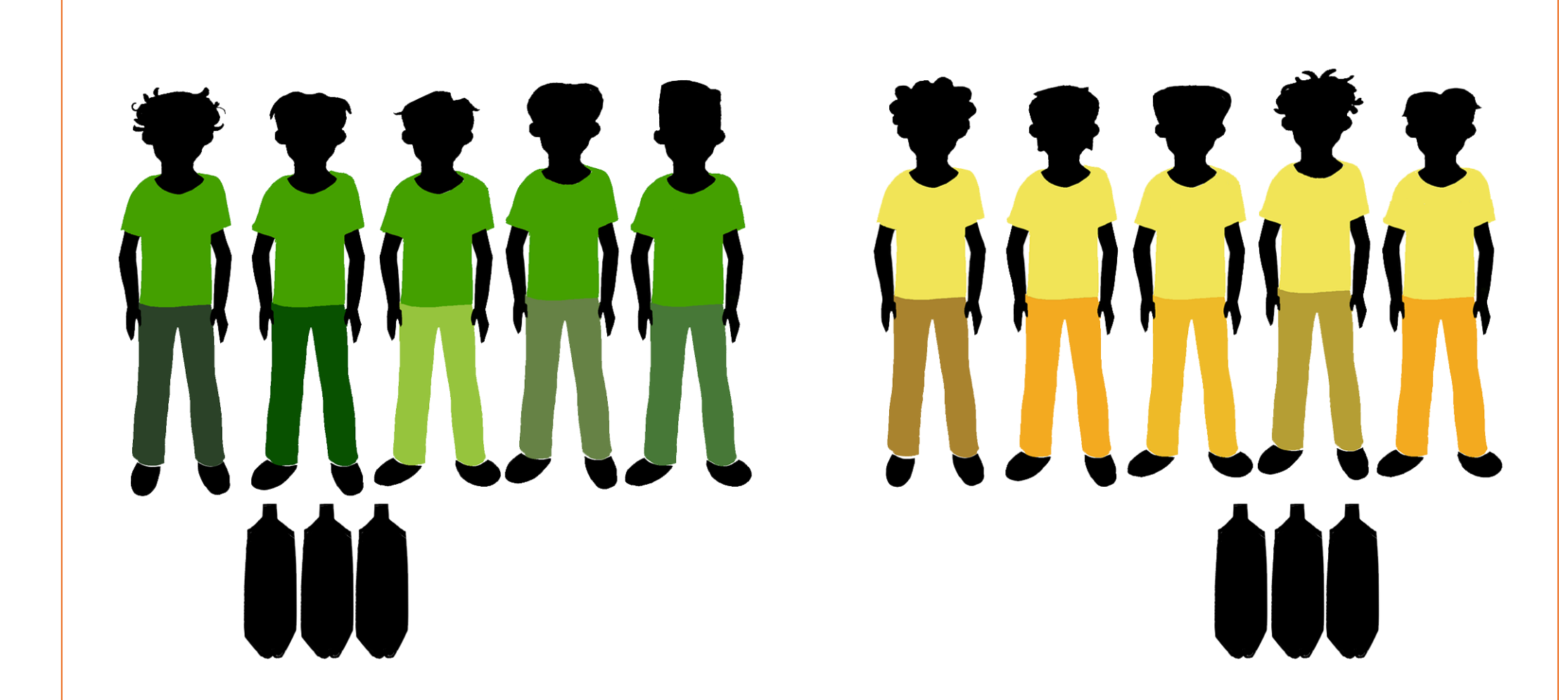
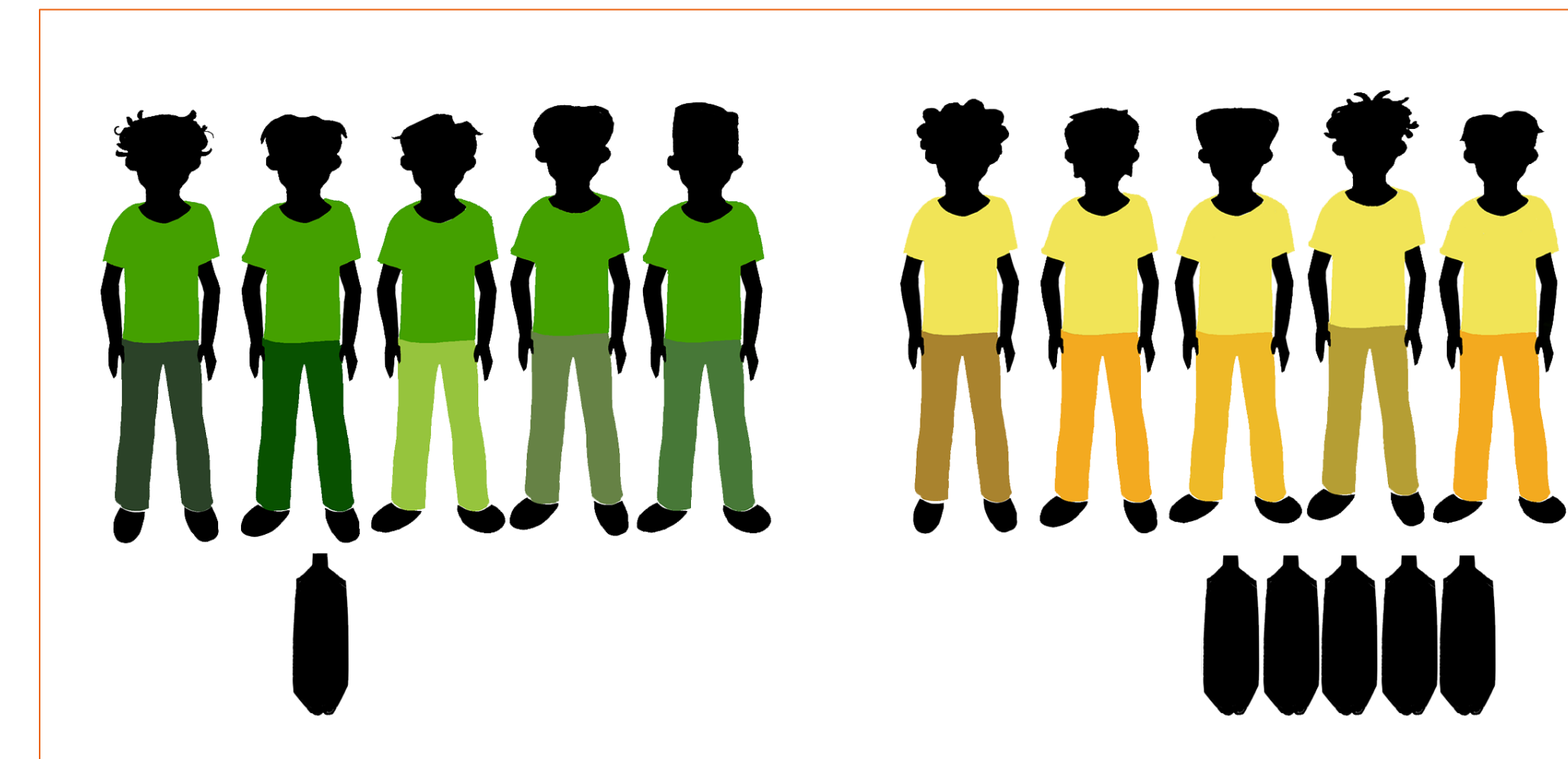
Measures

Participants responded to three stories about two groups that need water: 1) in-group and out-group have equal need for water, 2) in-group needs more water than the out-group, 3) out-group needs more water than the in-group. In these stories, children responded to a disloyal member who gave a little water to the out-group (2 of 6 bottles), a lot of water to the out-group (5 of 6 bottles), or distributed the water equally (3 of 6 bottles). Participants evaluated the disloyal act and evaluated the importance of helping the in-group and out-group.

How okay/not okay was it for Jeremy to do what he did? 1=Really not Okay, to 6 = Really Okay



How important is it that Jeremy give water to in-group/out-group? 1 = Very not important, to 6 = Very important



Results

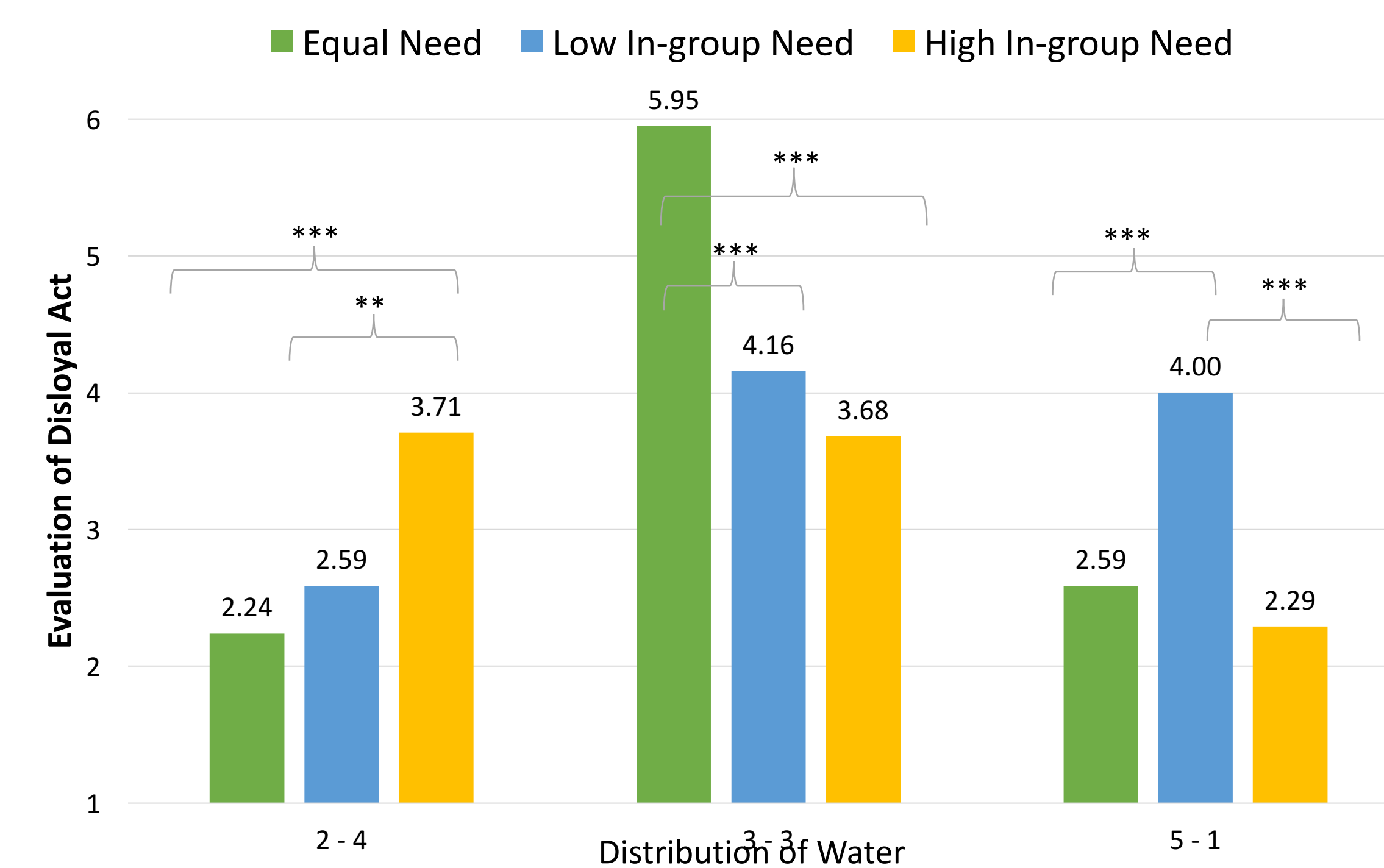


Figure 1. Evaluation of the act, 1 = Really not Okay, to 6 = Really Okay

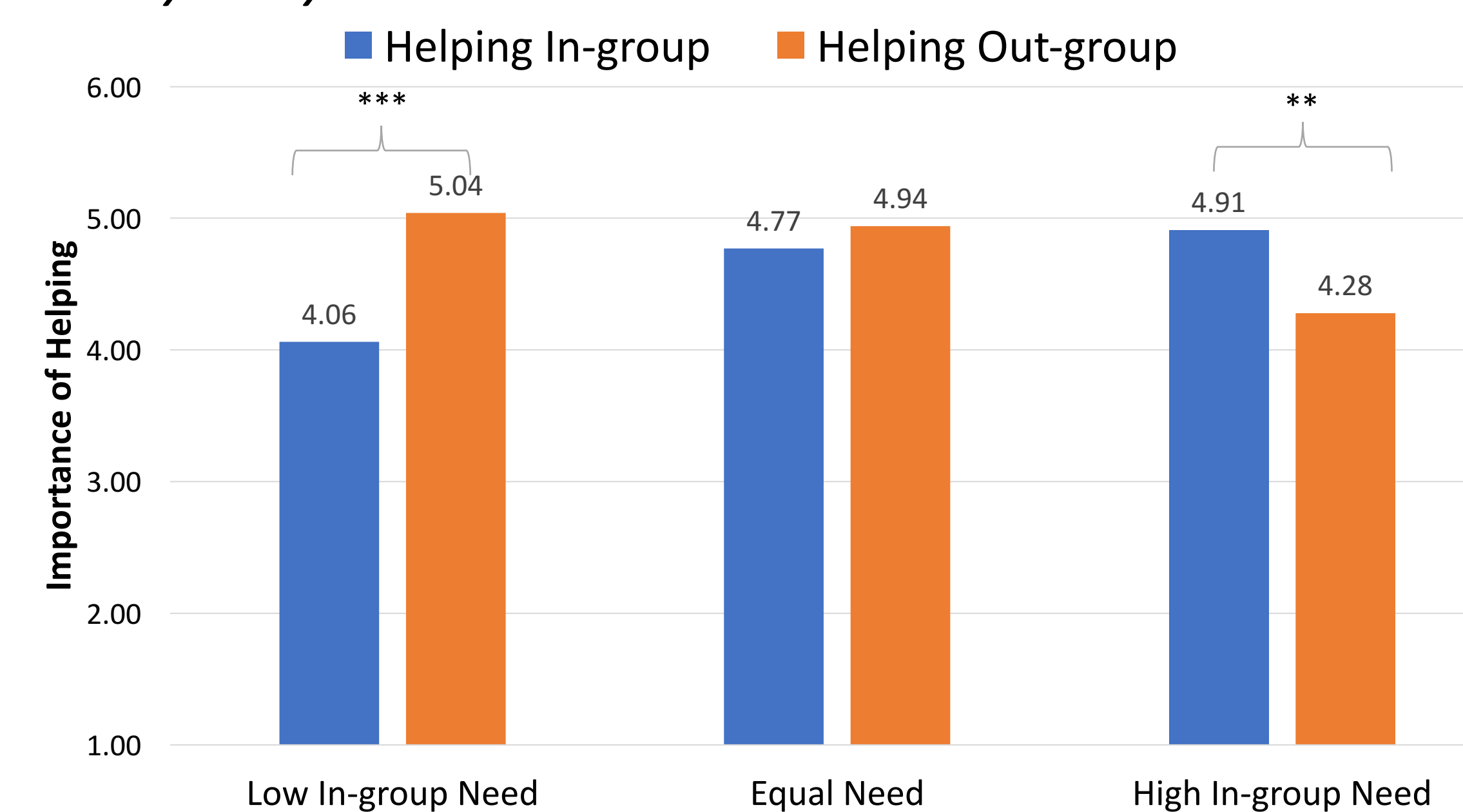


Figure 2. Importance of helping the in-group and out-group, 1 = Very not important to 6 = Very important

- 1) When evaluating the disloyal act, there was a Need X Distribution interaction effect, ($F(4, 100) = 21.556$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .463$). When the in-group had high need, participants tolerated a low level of disloyalty (2 bottles to the out-group). The mid- and high- disloyalty situations (3:3 and 5:1 distributions) were least tolerated when the in-group had high need. The high disloyalty situation (5 bottles to the out-group) was most tolerated when the in-group had low need (out-group had high need).
- 2) A repeated measures ANOVA indicated significant differences between levels of need for: 1) evaluating the importance of helping the in-group, ($F(2, 100) = 15.112$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .232$), and 2) evaluating the importance of helping the outgroup ($F(2, 100) = 13.028$ $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .207$).
- 3) Paired t-tests indicated that helping the out group ($M = 5.038$, $SD = 1.143$) was more important than helping the in-group ($M = 4.057$, $SD = 1.447$) when the in-group had low need ($t(52) = -4.68$, $p < .001$), the opposite was also true for when the in-group had high need.

Discussion

Children think loyalty to one's group is not obligatory. Helping the out-group is sometimes a moral necessity, if it comes at a low cost to one's in-group. Children also view disloyalty as more acceptable if the out-group has high need. Future research should explore other factors which may influence the moral obligation of group loyalty, such as loyalty to one's family.

Abrams, D., Rutland, A., Ferrell, J. M., & Pelletier, J. (2008). Children's judgments of disloyal and immoral peer behavior: Subjective group dynamics in minimal intergroup contexts. *Child Development*, 79(2), 444-461. doi:10.1111/j.1467-8624.2007.01135.x

Sierksma, J., Thijs, J., & Verkuyten, M. (2014). Children's intergroup helping: The role of empathy and peer group norms. *Journal Of Experimental Child Psychology*, 126369-383. doi:10.1016/j.jecp.2014.06.002

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