Supplementary Material for:

Wealth or generosity? People choose partners based on whichever is more variable

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Instructions to Participants

*Imagine that you will choose a partner to work together on a task. In this task, your chosen partner will be asked to share some of their money with you. You will choose one partner from a group of people.*

*For your reference, you can review how wealthy some of the people in this group are (i.e., how much endowment they have; e.g., $100) and how generous they have been in the past (i.e., how much of their endowment they shared with a previous partner) from next page.*

Power Analysis for Study 2

To estimate required sample size, we treated the proportion of participants who sought generosity information among those who failed the manipulation check in Study 1 (73.0%) as the reference value for the Control condition, because these participants did not perceive the variability we manipulated in the partner pool, and thus they functioned as a de facto control group. For the Unequal Generosity condition, we used the corresponding proportion among those who passed the manipulation check (90.4%). Entering the two proportions (90.4% vs. 73.0%) into G\*Power (Faul et al., 2007) indicated that we would need 188 participants per condition to detect an effect with α = .05 with 95% power.

Manipulation Check Study 1

As a manipulation check, we conducted a two (inequality: unequal generosity vs. unequal wealth) by two (question type: generosity vs. wealth) mixed design analysis of variance (ANOVA) on the perceptions of variance in generosity and wealth. There were no main effects of inequality (*F*(1, 348) = 0.66, *p* = .418, < .01) or question type (*F*(1, 348) = 0.30, *p* = .587, < .01) were not significant. However, as predicted, the interaction effect was highly significant (*F*(1, 348) = 181.01, *p* < .001, = .34, (Fig. S1). Participants in the unequal generosity condition were more likely to agree with the statement “generosity may vary in the group (*M* = 6.22, *SD* = 1.00)” than with the statement “wealth may vary in the group (*M* = 4.66, *SD* = 2.07; *F*(1, 174) = 80.45, *p* < .001, = .32).” In contrast, participants in the unequal wealth condition were more likely to agree with the statement “wealth may vary in the group (*M* = 6.19, *SD* = 1.09)” than with the statement “generosity may vary in the group (*M* = 4.50, *SD* = 1.99; *F*(1, 174) = 101.61, *p* < .001, = .37).” Thus, our manipulation check was successful in Study 1.

Fig. S1. Mean ratings (*SE*s) of the perception of variance in each condition in Study 1.

A graph of different types of wealth

Description automatically generated

Manipulation Check Study 2

Our manipulation check was successful in Study 2: we conducted a three (inequality: Unequal Generosity, Unequal Wealth, or Control) by two (question type: generosity vs. wealth) mixed design ANOVA on the perceptions of variance in generosity and wealth (Fig. S2), and the interaction was significant (*F*(2, 597) = 165.82, *p* < .001, = .36). Participants in the Unequal Generosity condition were more likely to agree that generosity rather than wealth varied within the group (generosity varies: *M* = 6.35, *SD* = 0.97; wealth varies: *M* = 4.77, *SD* = 1.94; *F*(1, 201) = 102.98, *p* < .001, = .34), whereas participants in the Unequal Wealth condition were more likely to agree that wealth rather than generosity varied within the group (wealth varies: *M* = 6.02, *SD* = 1.11; generosity varies: *M* = 4.15, *SD* = 1.89; *F*(1, 200) = 152.08, *p* < .001, = .43). There was no “correct” answer in the Control condition because participants were given no information about the variation, so there was similar agreement about whether wealth and generosity varied within the group (wealth varies: *M* = 6.08, *SD* = 1.07; generosity varies: *M* = 6.12, *SD* = 1.05; *F*(1, 196) = 0.25, *p* = .621, < .01). Thus, the inequality manipulation was successful.

Fig. S2. Mean ratings (*SE*s) of the perception of variance in each condition in Study 2A graph of a bar chart

Description automatically generated with medium confidence

Analysis of Participants who Passed vs. Failed the Manipulation Check (Study 1)

Why was there no preference for wealth information in the Unequal Wealth condition? After seeing those data in Study 1, we hypothesized that people have a default concern for the generosity of others (see also Eisenbruch & Krasnow, 2022). To test this, we did an exploratory split of participants into those for who passed the manipulation check (i.e., they reported more variation in wealth in Unequal Wealth or more variation in generosity in Unequal Generosity) and those who failed it.

Among participants who failed the manipulation check, preferences for generosity information were similar in the Unequal Generosity condition and Unequal Wealth condition (68/92 (73.9%) vs. 48/67 (71.6%), respectively, odds ratio = 1.12 [0.52, 2.41], *p* = .857); this seems to be the default concern for generosity. By contrast, among participants who passed the manipulation check, participants in the Unequal Generosity condition were much more likely to prefer generosity information than participants in the Unequal Wealth condition (75/83 (90.4%) vs. 48/108 (44.4%), respectively, odds ratio = 11.56 [4.94, 30.50], *p* < .001). If we examine these data another way, passing (versus failing) the manipulation check made participants more likely to seek generosity information in the Unequal Generosity condition (90.4% vs. 73.9%, odds ratio = 3.29 [1.32, 9.05], *p* = .006) but less likely to seek it in the Unequal Wealth condition (44.4% vs. 71.6%, odds ratio = 0.32 [0.16, 0.64], *p* < .001). In other words, our effects are stronger if we limit our analysis to participants who passed the manipulation check.

We should note that these were exploratory analyses, in response to what was originally a puzzling result. However, we pre-registered them for Study 2, and found very similar results (see next section).

Analysis of Participants who Passed vs. Failed the Manipulation Check (Study 2)

As per our preregistration, we separated participants who passed the manipulation check from those who failed it, and compared the conditions with Fisher’s Exact Tests. Our main effects were even stronger among participants who passed the manipulation check: these participants preferred generosity information more often in the Unequal Generosity condition than in the Unequal Wealth and Control conditions (Unequal Generosity vs. Unequal Wealth: 105/111 (94.6%) vs. 71/131 (54.2%), respectively, odds ratio = 14.64 [5.91, 43.70], *p* < .001; Unequal Generosity vs. Control: 105/111 (94.6%) vs. 171/197 (86.8%), respectively, odds ratio = 2.65 [1.02, 8.15], *p* = .033); generosity preferences were higher in the Control condition than in the Unequal Wealth condition (171/97 (86.8%) vs. 71/131 (54.20%), respectively, odds ratio = 5.52 [3.15, 9.91], *p* < .001). By contrast, among participants who failed the manipulation check, generosity preferences were only marginally significantly higher in Unequal Generosity than in Unequal Wealth (77/91 (84.6%) vs. 51/70 (72.9%), respectively, odds ratio = 2.04 [0.88, 4.83], *p* = .078); generosity preferences were higher in the Control condition than in the Unequal Wealth condition (171/197 (86.8%) vs. 51/70 (72.9%), respectively, odds ratio = 2.44 [1.18, 5.02], *p* = .015) and were similar to the Unequal Generosity condition (171/197 (86.8%) vs. 77/91 (84.6%), respectively, odds ratio = 1.20 [0.55, 2.53], *p* = .714).

To analyze those data another way, passing (versus failing) the manipulation check made participants more likely to seek generosity information in the Unequal Generosity condition (105/111 (94.6% ) vs. 77/91 (84.6%), respectively, odds ratio 3.16 [1.08, 10.52], *p* = .031), but less likely to seek it in the Unequal Wealth condition (71/131 (54.2%) vs. (51/70 (72.9%), respectively, odds ratio = 0.44 [0.22, 0.86], *p* = .010). In other words, our effects are stronger if we limit our analysis to participants who passed the manipulation check. This supports the idea that people have a default to prefer generosity information over wealth information, which they resort to when they don’t realize that there’s more variation in one than other. However, when they realize that one trait has more variation, they prefer information on that trait.