

N-Equality in Allocations: More Recipients, Less (Concern for) Equality?

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Abstract

This research examines individuals' preferences for equality in the distribution of resources in organizations and beyond. We focused on a ubiquitous factor that affects inequality concerns in resource allocations—namely, the number of recipients—and tested the *N-Equality* hypothesis that third-party allocators become less concerned about inequality as the number of recipients increases. We expected decision makers facing a tradeoff between equality and other distribution norms, such as efficiency or equity, increasingly to prefer these other norms to equality as the number of recipients grows. Studies 1a-c provide experimental evidence for the effect in equality-efficiency tradeoffs, while Study 2 demonstrates it in an equality-equity tradeoff using a large cross-national sample. Study 3 shows social comparison mediates the effect, and Studies 4a-b examine some potential boundary conditions. Finally, Studies 5a-b highlight manifestations of the effect in naturally-occurring datasets. We conclude by discussing implications for organizations and the study of inequality more generally.

Keywords: social comparison, allocations, inequality, efficiency, equity