

# Epistemic vs. Counterfactual Fairness in Allocation of Resources

HADI HOSSEINI, Pennsylvania State University, United States

JOSHUA KAVNER, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, United States

SUJOY SIKDAR, Binghamton University, United States

ROHIT VAISH, Indian Institute of Technology Delhi, India

LIRONG XIA, Rutgers University, United States

Resource allocation is fundamental to a variety of societal decision-making settings, ranging from the distribution of charitable donations to assigning limited public housing among interested families. A central challenge in this context is ensuring fair outcomes, which often requires balancing conflicting preferences of various stakeholders. While extensive research has been conducted on theoretical and algorithmic solutions within the fair division framework, much of this work neglects the subjective perception of fairness by individuals. This study focuses on the fairness notion of envy-freeness (EF), which ensures that no agent prefers the allocation of another agent according to their own preferences. While the existence of exact EF allocations may not always be feasible, various approximate relaxations, such as counterfactual and epistemic EF, have been proposed. Through a series of experiments with human participants, we compare perceptions of fairness between three widely studied counterfactual and epistemic relaxations of EF. Our findings indicate that allocations based on epistemic EF are perceived as fairer than those based on counterfactual relaxations. Additionally, we examine a variety of factors, including scale, balance of outcomes, and cognitive effort involved in evaluating fairness and their role in the complexity of reasoning across treatments.

Additional Key Words and Phrases: Distributive Justice, Fair Division, Resource Allocation, Human-Centered Fairness, Experimentation

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

Resource allocation is a pivotal concern in societal decision-making, attracting significant interest from disciplines as diverse as philosophy, economics, mathematics, and computer science. It captures a wide range of application domains including distributing charitable donations to home shelters [3], assigning limited public housing to families and refugees [2, 5], splitting rent among renters [25] and job scheduling across distributed computing clusters [31]. A critical challenge in the allocation of resources among multiple stakeholders is ensuring *fair* outcomes, necessitating the consideration of (often conflicting) preferences of participating entities (aka *agents*). While these problems have

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Authors' addresses: Hadi Hosseini, Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA, United States, [hadi@psu.edu](mailto:hadi@psu.edu); Joshua Kavner, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, Troy, NY, United States, [joshuakavner@gmail.com](mailto:joshuakavner@gmail.com); Sujoy Sikdar, Binghamton University, Binghamton, NY, United States, [ssikdar@binghamton.edu](mailto:ssikdar@binghamton.edu); Rohit Vaish, Indian Institute of Technology Delhi, New Delhi, India, [rvaish@iitd.ac.in](mailto:rvaish@iitd.ac.in); Lirong Xia, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ, United States, [lirong.xia@rutgers.edu](mailto:lirong.xia@rutgers.edu).

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been extensively studied under the framework of *fair division* in recent years, much of the focus has been on theoretical and algorithmic approaches (see e.g., Aziz et al. [6], Moulin [43], and Amanatidis et al. [4] for surveys concerning recent progress in this field). However, such approaches frequently neglect individuals’ *subjective* perception of fairness, which may diverge from their theoretical guarantees.<sup>1</sup>

Our focus is on the fairness notion of *envy-freeness* (EF), which requires that no agent prefers the bundle assigned to another agent when evaluated according to their own preferences [22]. Among several plausible fairness notions—for example, those ensuring that each agent receives a fair share—envy-freeness is particularly compelling due to its reliance on pairwise *intrapersonal* utility comparisons, eliminating the need for interpersonal comparisons. In other words, envy-freeness does not require identifying which agent derives the most benefit from a bundle of resources. In addition, a substantial body of experimental studies in economics underscores its pivotal role as a fairness criterion in resource allocation [28, 29].

When dealing with scarce indivisible resources, EF allocations do not always exist. For instance, if two passengers both want the last available seat on a fully booked flight, any allocation will leave one of them envious, so no EF solution is possible. Furthermore, determining whether a resource allocation problem admits an EF solution is known to be computationally intractable [41]. These negative results have inspired a significant body of research aimed at developing approximate relaxations of envy-freeness.

The design of approximate fairness notions has given rise to two prominent schools of thought: epistemic and counterfactual envy-freeness. The *epistemic* approach focuses on the limited information that agents may possess about the overall allocation. In particular, *envy-freeness up to  $k$  hidden goods* (HEF $k$ ) assumes agents have common information about how (and to whom) the goods are distributed except for a small subset of  $k$  goods [30]. Thus, agents have no envy given the information that is available to them. In contrast, the *counterfactual* approach centers on ‘hypothetical scenarios’ which evaluate fairness based on allocations determined under different circumstances. Specifically, a well-studied relaxation of envy-freeness is *envy-freeness up to one good* (EF1). This notion is based on the *counterfactual* thinking that any pairwise envy can be eliminated by the hypothetical removal of a *single* good from the envied agent’s bundle [41].<sup>2</sup> Despite their theoretical foundations, it remains unclear which approach is perceived as more desirable by humans. This leads to the following research question:

*How do individuals perceive epistemic approximation of fairness compared to counterfactual approximations in allocation of resources?*

## 1.1 Our Contributions

We study the perceived fairness of two variants of counterfactual envy-freeness (namely, EF1 and *strong envy-freeness up to one good* (sEF1) [16]) compared to the epistemic notion of HEF through a series of experiments with human subjects. We conduct a study with 120 participants recruited through Amazon’s Mechanical Turk platform. At a high level, our work is aligned with a large body of work in *distributive justice* concerning fair outcomes (in contrast to *procedural justice*, which concerns fair processes for determining outcomes).<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>The perception of fairness has been recently studied in the context of loan decisions and within machine learning [49, 50]. These problems are fundamentally different from the current study as they are primarily concerned with bias in the data or prediction models.

<sup>2</sup>In the past decade, a myriad of counterfactual approximations have been proposed in the fair division literature. EF1 stands out because of its algorithmic simplicity and its clear implementation [10, 41].

<sup>3</sup>We refer the reader to literature in social justice theory, e.g., Adams [1] and Rawls [47]. See Tyler and Lind [52], Rawls [47], and Lee et al. [40] on procedural justice.

**Framework and Fairness Measure.** We develop a novel empirical framework and a new approach for *implicit* measurement of perceived fairness. Each participant is presented with a series of scenarios in which they take on the *perspective* of an agent in a resource allocation instance with an initial allocation that satisfies one of three fairness properties: sEF1, EF1, or HEFk (defined in Section 2). Participants may either keep their given bundle or *swap* it with the bundle of an agent of their choice. Our approach measures perceptions of fairness by evaluating whether an agent is envious of another’s bundle. If an agent is envious, then it is likely the agent would be willing to swap her bundle should she get the opportunity to do so. This indicates the individual’s perceived envy (but not the degree of envy). Participants’ responses are aggregated into a single *swap rate*, the percentage of scenarios where a swap was chosen, measuring aggregate perceived fairness under each treatment.

**Epistemic vs. Counterfactual Envy.** Our results show that HEFk allocations are perceived to be fairer than in the sEF1 and EF1 treatments. In particular, we show that there is a statistically significant difference between swap rates of HEFk and both sEF1 and EF1 treatments ( $p < 0.001$ ). Participants under the HEFk treatment displayed the lowest swap rate, followed by sEF1 and then EF1 (Section 4.1). We subsequently control for the effect of variables such as instance size, allocation balance (defined in Section 3.1), and scenarios for which it is optimal to swap, and find that the qualitative results still hold.

Additionally, we study *cognitive effort*, as measured by response time and self-reports of scenario difficulty, to understand how treatment affects participants’ reasoning. We find that there is a significant difference in the cognitive effort exercised by participants, measured by response time and self-reports of difficulty, between the HEFk and both sEF1 and EF1 treatments ( $p < 0.001$ ) (Section 4.2). Hence, perceived fairness appears correlated with the cost of increased task complexity.

**Human Subject Dataset.** To conduct our analysis we generated a novel data set of 166 scenarios, each consisting of a fair division instance, allocation that satisfies one of the investigated fairness properties, and anonymized choices made by participants. The number of scenarios satisfying each instance size, allocation balance, and allocation fairness property may be found in Table 3 in the appendix. This data set is the first of its kind, to the best of our knowledge. <sup>4</sup>

## 1.2 Related Work

Our work is in line with research empirically validating fairness notions and theories of distributional preferences. While it is evident people trade off self-interest for fairness [32], it is still not clear to what extent and which theories of fairness are the most valid. Prior experiments have employed several methods to evaluate perceived fairness of allocations, often asking participants which they prefer. For instance, Herreiner and Puppe [29] empirically investigated EF in a free-form bargaining experiment. In their setting, participants had subjective preferences over goods and collaborated with another participant to choose the allocation (see also Herreiner and Puppe [28]). The authors subsequently analyzed the fairness and efficiency of the chosen allocations. This work is most similar to ours, except that we measure the envy experienced by participants and focus on the relative fairness of relaxations of EF.

Herreiner and Puppe [29]’s work follows a tradition of questionnaire methodology for evaluating distributive justice, popularized by Yaari and Bar-Hillel [53] and Konow [36], who asked whether participants perceive given allocations as just or not (see also Gärtner [23, Chapter 9]). Herreiner and Puppe [27] also asked participants to choose which of a set of allocations was the most fair. While these studies provide some evidence in favor of certain fairness notions,

<sup>4</sup>[https://github.com/kajoshua/Fair\\_Division\\_MTurk\\_HEF](https://github.com/kajoshua/Fair_Division_MTurk_HEF)

payoffs were identical, so intrapersonal theories like EF could not be tested. In this vein, Engelmann and Strobel [20] ran an experiment where participants would, with some probability, receive the allocation of money they chose. Their aim was to compare the explanatory power of distributional preferences models by Fehr and Schmidt [21], Bolton and Ockenfels [8], and Charness and Rabin [13].

A separate line of work by Lee and colleagues focused on perceived fairness of algorithmic decision-making. Participants in Lee and Baykal [39]’s study perceived allocations prescribed by Spliddit<sup>5</sup> to be less fair than those chosen in group discussions one third of the time. The authors explain this distinction as the algorithms excluding the effects of individual participation, interpersonal power, and altruism on fairness. Lee [38] suggested that perceived fairness depends on task characteristic, which helps motivate our current study on cognitive effort. Lee’s participants recognized that algorithms produce less fair decisions on tasks requiring human skills, such as those requiring subjective judgement, but equally fair on mechanical tasks, such as processing data. Lee et al. [40] measured the effect of transparency and outcome control (i.e., the ability to manually adjust prescribed outcomes) on perceived fairness of EF1 allocations prescribed by Spliddit. They showed that perceived fairness increased after participants were given an opportunity to modify the allocation, either individually or through group discussions. These studies substantially differ from ours in that there is an impact of personal image and social pressure in bargaining and collective decision-making, which may provide a justification for inequality aversion. Furthermore, there is a sense of agency within discussions or ability to modify the outcome, which may result in higher satisfaction via the *IKEA Effect*.<sup>6</sup>

Other empirical research includes Kyropoulou et al. [37], who tested the effect of participants’ strategic behavior in choosing allocations of divisible resources on total envy. Separately, König et al. [35] measured the suitability of two well-adopted matching mechanisms, the Boston mechanism and assortative matching, under the *veil of ignorance* [47] assumption. They concluded that which procedure participants prefer depends on how much autonomy they have to report their preferences. The empirical validity of fairness axioms in the ultimatum game [26], cooperative games [14, 19] and machine learning [12, 18, 24] has also been studied.

## 2 MODEL AND SOLUTION CONCEPTS

*Model.* For any  $k \in \mathbb{N}$ , we define  $[k] := \{1, \dots, k\}$ . An instance of the fair division problem is a tuple  $\mathcal{I} = \langle N, M, V \rangle$ , where  $N := [n]$  is a set of  $n$  agents,  $M := [m]$  is a set of  $m$  goods, and  $V := \{v_1, \dots, v_n\}$  is a *valuation profile* that specifies for each agent  $i \in N$  her preferences over the set of all possible *bundles*  $2^M$ . This *valuation function*  $v_i : 2^M \rightarrow \mathbb{N} \cup \{0\}$  maps each bundle to a non-negative integer. We write  $v_{i,j}$  instead of  $v_i(\{j\})$  for a single good  $j \in M$ . We assume that the valuation functions are *additive* so that for any  $i \in N$  and  $S \subseteq M$ ,  $v_i(S) := \sum_{j \in S} v_{i,j}$ , where  $v_i(\emptyset) = 0$ .

*Allocation.* An allocation  $A := (A_1, \dots, A_n)$  is a (complete)  $n$ -partition of the set of goods  $M$ , where  $A_i \subseteq M$  is the bundle allocated to agent  $i \in N$ .

**Definition 1** (Envy-freeness). An allocation  $A$  is: (i) *envy-free* (EF) if for every pair of agents  $h, i \in N$ ,  $v_i(A_i) \geq v_i(A_h)$  [22], (ii) *strongly envy-free up to one good* (sEF1) if for each agent  $h \in N$  such that  $A_h \neq \emptyset$ , there exists a good  $g_h \in A_h$  such that for every  $i \in N$ ,  $v_i(A_i) \geq v_i(A_h \setminus \{g_h\})$  [16], and (iii) *envy-free up to one good* (EF1) if for each pair of agents  $h, i \in N$ , there exists a good  $g_h \in A_h$  such that  $v_i(A_i) \geq v_i(A_h \setminus \{g_h\})$  [10, 41].

**Definition 2** (Envy-freeness with hidden goods). An allocation  $A$  is *envy-free up to  $k$  hidden goods* (HEFk) if  $\exists S \subseteq M$ ,  $|S| \leq k$ , such that for every pair of agents  $h, i \in N$ , we have that  $v_i(A_i) \geq v_i(A_h \setminus S)$  [30].

<sup>5</sup><http://www.spliddit.org/>

<sup>6</sup>The IKEA effect is a cognitive bias in which people tend to value on products they helped to create highly [44].

	$g_1$	$g_2$	$g_3$	$g_4$	$g_5$	$g_6$		$g_1$	$g_2$	$g_3$	$g_4$	$g_5$	$g_6$		$g_1$	$g_2$	$g_3$	$g_4$	$g_5$	$g_6$
$v_1$	2	<u>2</u>	4	1	1	4	$v_1$	<u>2</u>	2	4	1	<u>1</u>	4	$v_1$	2	2	4	<u>1</u>	1	4
$v_2$	1	4	<u>1</u>	1	4	1	$v_2$	1	4	<u>1</u>	1	4	1	$v_2$	1	4	1	1	4	1
$v_3$	4	1	3	3	<u>2</u>	2	$v_3$	4	<u>1</u>	3	3	2	<u>2</u>	$v_3$	4	1	<u>3</u>	3	2	2

(a) sEF1                      (b) EF1                      (c) HEF $k$

Fig. 1. Allocations satisfying (a) sEF1, (b) EF1 and (c) HEF $k$  for a fair division problem instance. Elements marked by a circle, rectangle, and diamond must be hidden or counterfactually removed to eliminate the envy from agents 1, 2, and 3 respectively.

By the above definitions, EF implies sEF1, which implies EF1 and subsequently HEF $k$  for some  $k \leq m$ . Moreover, an allocation is EF if and only if it is HEF0, and for all  $k \geq 0$ , HEF $k$  implies HEF( $k + 1$ ) [30]. To disambiguate these classes and reduce confusion, we impose the following technical qualifications throughout this paper. First, we recognize two variants of envy-freeness up to one good by discerning allocations that are EF1 but not sEF1. Through an abuse of notation, we henceforth label this *weak* variant “EF1.” Both variants (weak and strong) correspond to the *counterfactual* removal of goods when agents have full information about the entire allocation. Second, for any HEF $k$  allocation with hidden set  $S$ , each agent  $i$  knows their own bundle  $A_i$  but only has partial information about the goods in the bundle of any other agent  $h$ . Then,  $i$  has no envy among the observable (partial) allocation (i.e.,  $v_i(A_i) \geq v_i(A_h \setminus S)$ ). Furthermore, we assert that  $|S| = k$  and that  $A$  is not HEF $k'$  with respect to any strict subset  $S' \subset S$ , where  $|S'| = k' < k$ .

**Example 1.** Figure 1 demonstrates three allocations for the same instance with three agents 1, 2, 3 and six goods  $g_1, \dots, g_6$ . These are demonstrated by the underlined elements in subfigures (a), (b), and (c), satisfying sEF1, EF1, and HEF $k$  respectively, where  $k = 1$ . Elements outlined by a circle, rectangle, and diamond must be counterfactually removed (for sEF1 and EF1) or hidden (for HEF $k$ ) to eliminate the envy of agents 1, 2, and 3 respectively.

Consider the EF1 allocation  $A$  where  $A_1 = \{g_1, g_5\}$ ,  $A_2 = \{g_3, g_4\}$ , and  $A_3 = \{g_2, g_6\}$ . Although agent 1 is envious of agents 2 and 3, we have  $v_1(A_1) \geq v_1(A_2 \setminus \{g_3\})$  and  $v_1(A_1) \geq v_1(A_3 \setminus \{g_6\})$ . For the HEF $k$  allocation, rather, agent 1 is not envious of agent 3 because they only observe a partial allocation:  $v_1(A_1) \geq v_1(A_3 \setminus S)$  where  $S = \{g_3\}$ . Agent 3 is not envious of agent 1 because they observe the entire allocation and  $v_3(A_3) \geq v_3(A_1)$ .

Notice that at most a single good is outlined in each agent’s bundle in the sEF1 allocation, whereas multiple goods may be outlined in each bundle in the EF1 allocation.

### 3 EXPERIMENTAL DESIGN

We conducted an empirical study to compare the perceived fairness of multiple relaxations of envy-freeness – sEF1, EF1, and HEF $k$  – using a gamified pirate scenario (see Figure 2). Participants were split into three treatments and given twelve scenarios. In each scenario, the participant was assigned the role of one member of a crew of pirates (agents) whose captain (a central authority) wished to divide goods, the spoils of a recent adventure, among the crew. Each scenario consisted of a number of goods, presented in a *marketplace*, and the bundles of (revealed) goods for each pirate in an allocation determined by the captain. Participants’ *subjective* values for each bundle were determined by the given instance and the perspective of the participant. For instance, a participant could be offered the instance and allocation demonstrated by Figure 1(a) from the perspective of agent 1 and would value their bundle at  $v_1(A_1) = 2 + 2 = 4$ . Alternatively, their value for  $A_1$  from the perspective of agent 3 would be  $v_3(A_1) = 4 + 1 = 5$ .

Given this information, participants were asked whether they wanted to swap their bundle with that of another pirate of their choice, in its entirety, or keep their initial bundle. Participants had a stake in the outcome of their choices: they

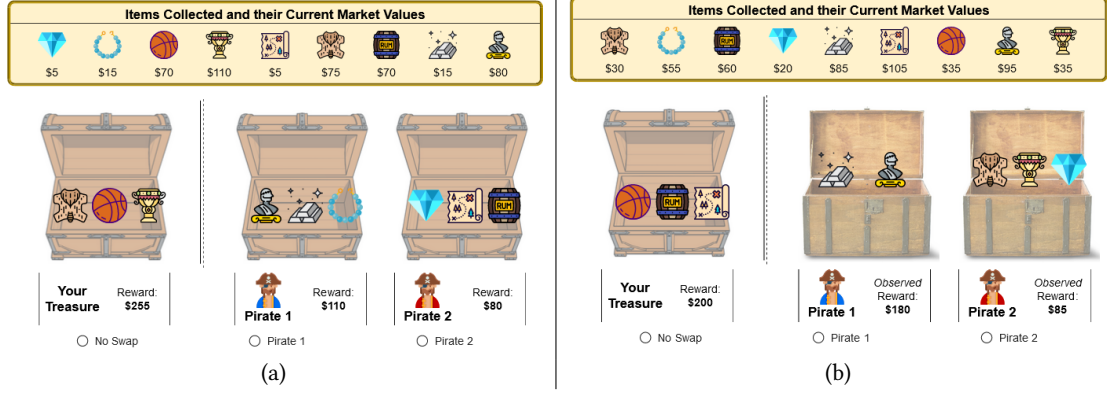


Fig. 2. Sample scenarios from the (a) EF1 and sEF1 treatments and (b) HEFk treatment. In the EF1 and sEF1 treatments, participants have a ‘birds-eye view’ of all goods in all bundles. In the HEFk treatment, participants observe only the revealed goods from other pirates’ ‘upright’ boxes. All HEFk treatment participants complete a training tutorial emphasizing this point.

received a bonus payment if the total value of goods they collected surpassed a threshold. Therefore, choosing to swap bundles indicates the participant’s envy and perceived unfairness. We measured participants’ *swap rate*, the percentage of scenarios where a swap was chosen, and compared treatments using the Chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) [42] and Fisher’s exact tests [34]. We then compared treatments upon segmenting our data by (i) the number of agents and goods (instance size), (ii) the distribution of goods across agents (allocation balance), and (iii) whether it is optimal for participants to swap or not, including the value of hidden goods (optimal choice).

*Treatment details.* Each participant was subjected to exactly one of three treatments – sEF1, EF1, and HEFk – corresponding with the fairness property satisfied by their allocations. Across treatments, participants were shown their subjective values of the visible portions of the bundles of each agent. Participants in the sEF1 and EF1 treatments had full information about the allocations (see Figure 2(a)). Participants assigned the HEFk treatment were shown their own bundles but only the visible portions of other agents’ bundles (recall Definition 2; see Figure 2(b)). We explained through a tutorial that the visible allocation was incomplete by detailing the possibilities of the missing information: some goods may be allocated to and hidden by other pirates or discarded altogether. Participants could therefore enumerate the possible values of the other agents’ bundles.

Our study employed 120 mutually exclusive participants for each of three Human Intelligence Tasks (HITs), corresponding to the three treatments, in Amazon’s Mechanical Turk platform, totaling 360 participants. Our study was single-blind; participants were not aware of their treatment.

*Perceived fairness.* We measured perceptions of one aspect of fairness, envy, via swaps. Specifically, given an allocation  $A$ , we say that agent  $i$  *swaps* her bundle  $A_i$  with agent  $h$  if the agents exchange all goods within their bundles (including hidden goods). An agent choosing to swap bundles indicates that they are envious of another agent and thus does not perceive their bundle  $A_i$  as fair. We call the proportion of participants that swap under  $A$  its empirical *swap rate*, representing the aggregate perceived fairness of the scenario.

*Incentives.* In order to realize the assigned in-game valuations as real-world *value*, participants were incentivized to accumulate high-value bundles throughout the survey. Specifically, each participant was eligible to receive two



payments: (1) a *base* payment of \$0.50 for completing the survey in its entirety, and (2) a *bonus* payment of \$0.50 for accumulating at least \$2000 worth of goods through all scenarios as measured by participants' assigned subjective valuations. Hence, we are able to emulate a real-world setting through our experiment with fictional pirate-related goods.

Note that within the HEFk treatment, participants accumulate the values of any hidden goods of their chosen bundle as well. The bonus threshold was also chosen to encourage participants to pay greater attention to the study and not choose randomly for each scenario. We determined the threshold by computing the minimum and maximum total value any participant could obtain on any survey using our data set. We then chose \$2000 which falls between 71% and 84% for these ranges.

*Response qualifications.* In order to obtain high quality responses, participation in our study was restricted to Mechanical Turk workers who (a) had at least an 80% approval rate on previous tasks, (b) had completed at least 100 tasks, (c) were located in either the United States or Canada<sup>7</sup>, (d) had a Master's qualification<sup>8</sup> on the Mechanical Turk platform, and (e) had not attempted or taken the survey before. Through the experiment we adjusted the minimum HIT approval rate (%) and minimum number of HITs approved that were necessary in order to attract Mechanical Turk Workers to participate; see Table 4 in the appendix.

### 3.1 Data Set

The scenarios were sampled from a novel data set of 166 scenarios, each consisting of a fair division instance, an allocation partitioning the goods, and an assignment of the participant to one of the agent's perspectives.

*Instances.* We generated twenty-eight instances involving nine or ten goods: twenty-one small instances with three agents and seven large instances with five agents. Each valuation  $v_{i,j}$  for  $i \in N$  and  $j \in M$  was sampled uniformly at random from  $\{5, 10, \dots, 120\}$  for small instances and  $\{0, 10, \dots, 150\}$  for large instances.

*Allocations.* For each instance, we computed three allocations satisfying sEF1, EF1, and HEFk for a pre-specified  $k \in 0, 1, 2$  corresponding to the treatments. Allocations were generated by randomly shuffling goods among agents until an allocation with the desired property was found. Following the established hierarchy of fairness notions (where stronger notions imply weaker ones), allocations satisfying stronger notions were excluded when testing weaker ones. This ensures that, for example, allocations labeled as EF1 satisfy EF1 but not sEF1 or EF. As demonstrated in Example 1, EF1 allocations can sometimes require the counterfactual removal of more goods than sEF1 allocations. To highlight this distinction in our experiments, we selected EF1 allocations that require at least  $n + 2$  goods to be counterfactually removed to eliminate envy among agents.

There were two levels of *balance* for allocations. A balanced allocation gives every agent a bundle of equal size, three (respectively, two) goods to each agent in a small (respectively, large) instance. In an unbalanced allocation, agents may have bundles consisting of different number of goods, with bundle sizes (2, 4, 4) for small instances and either (4, 2, 2, 1, 1) or (3, 2, 2, 2, 1) for large instances.

*Perspective.* Participants were randomly assigned to assume the role of either the first or last (i.e., third or fifth) agent in the instance. Providing two perspectives expanded our data set and enabled participants to have different

<sup>7</sup>We restricted location to ensure language proficiency and prevent any potential issues due to linguistic barriers.

<sup>8</sup>Workers with Master's qualification, determined by Mechanical Turk, are those who "have consistently demonstrated a high degree of success in performing a wide range of HITs across a large number of Requesters." See <https://www.mturk.com/worker/help>.

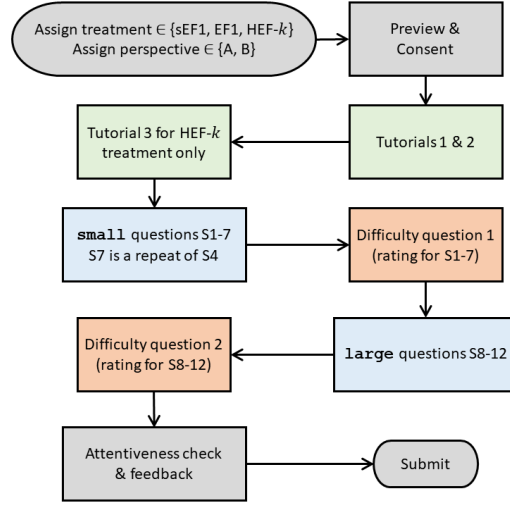


Fig. 3. The workflow of a participant.

goods in their bundles for the same instances. This did not bias our results as valuations were randomly generated and allocations did not depend on agents' identities.

*Scenario properties.* Our 166 scenarios were made with the following combinations: 63 allocations were affiliated with small instances, of which 45 were balanced and 18 were unbalanced, while 20 allocations were affiliated with large instances, of which 14 were balanced and 6 were unbalanced. Table 3 in the appendix presents the number of allocations in each treatment succinctly. Each of these 83 allocations provided two scenarios to the data set, corresponding to two perspectives we offered participants, yielding the 166 total scenarios.

### 3.2 Survey Outline

Participants undertook the following workflow (see Figure 3). First, participants gave their consent to partake in our IRB-approved study after being informed of the study description, benefits, risks, rights, and project manager contact information. After being assigned a treatment and a randomly determined perspective, they subsequently answered twelve scenario questions, two questions soliciting scenario difficulty, and two attentiveness check questions. The scenarios were organized into four sections, each consisting of scenarios of different instance size and allocation balance that were selected uniformly at random from the appropriate data set, and then randomly permuted within the section. A complete survey therefore consisted of:

- Section 1 (S1–3): 3 small-balanced scenarios. If the treatment is HEF $k$ , then  $k \in \{0, 1, 2\}$  respectively.
- Section 2 (S4–7): 3 small-unbalanced scenarios followed by S7 which is a repeat of S4. If the treatment is HEF $k$ , then  $k \in \{0, 1, 2\}$  respectively for (S4–S6).
- Difficulty: self-reported rating for small scenarios.
- Section 3 (S8–10): 3 large-balanced scenarios. If the treatment is HEF $k$ , then  $k \in \{0, 1, 2\}$  respectively.
- Section 4 (S11–12): 2 large-unbalanced scenarios. If the treatment is HEF $k$ , then  $k = 1$ .
- Difficulty: self-reported rating for large scenarios.



Table 1.  $p$ -values of the test statistic for testing the independence of swap rates and treatments under different pairs of treatments and adjusting for different variables. The  $\chi^2$  test is used except when the  $p$ -value is annotated with a “†”, in which it is the result of the Fisher’s exact test. “p: ns” denotes non-significance.

Variable	value	Pairs of Treatments					
		HEF <i>k</i> , sEF1	HEF <i>k</i> , EF1	sEF1, EF1	HEF0, sEF1	HEF1, sEF1	HEF2, sEF1
All scenarios		$p < 0.001$	$p < 0.001$	$p < 0.001$	$p < 0.001$	$p < 0.001$	$p < 0.001$
Optimal Choice	stay-is-opt	$p < 0.001$	$p : \text{ns}$	$\dagger p < 0.01$	$p < 0.001$	$p < 0.001$	$p : \text{ns}$
	swap-is-opt	$p < 0.001$	$p < 0.001$	$p < 0.05$	N/A	$p < 0.001$	$p < 0.001$
Instance Size	small	$p < 0.001$	$p < 0.001$	$p < 0.001$	$p < 0.001$	$p < 0.001$	$p < 0.001$
	large	$p < 0.001$	$p < 0.001$	$p < 0.001$	$p < 0.001$	$p < 0.001$	$p < 0.001$
Balance	balanced	$p < 0.001$	$p < 0.001$	$p < 0.001$	$p < 0.001$	$p < 0.001$	$p < 0.001$
	unbalanced	$p < 0.001$	$p < 0.001$	$p < 0.001$	$p < 0.001$	$p < 0.001$	$p < 0.001$
Repeated scenario (S7)		$p < 0.001$	$p < 0.001$	$p < 0.001$	$p < 0.001$	$p < 0.01$	$p < 0.001$

*Tutorials.* All participants were required to correctly answer a few tutorial questions prior to the scenarios.

The first tutorial taught participants that the value of a bundle was equal to the sum of values of the goods inside that bundle. Participants were presented with a bundle consisting of three goods, which were highlighted in the marketplace, and were asked to compute the bundle’s value.

The second tutorial taught participants that whether they received a monetary bonus upon completing the survey is dependent on the total value they collect throughout its course. The participants were presented with three bundles, similar to Figure 2(a), and were asked if they wanted to keep their bundle (left) or swap it with either Pirate 1’s bundle (middle) or Pirate 2’s bundle (right). The bundle with the highest value was enforced as the correct choice.

HEFk treatment participants were provided a third tutorial designed to teach them about goods in the marketplace that were not visibly allocated. Participants were presented with three bundles, similar to Figure 2(b), and were told that the missing goods may be either allocated to and hidden by the other pirates or discarded altogether. Participants were asked about the maximum number of goods that could be found in any one pirate’s bundle, thus requiring them to reason about the location of missing goods.

*Self-reported difficulty.* The groups of seven small and five large scenarios were each succeeded by a question asking participants to rate the difficulty of the scenarios on a 5-point Likert scale from Very Easy (1) to Very Hard (5).

*Attentiveness check questions.* We incorporated many checks to ensure high quality responses from attentive human participants and dissuade fraud, which is a known problem for Mechanical Turk [33]. Prior to the tutorial, participants answered a simple arithmetic problem to ensure they were not bots. On the final page, they answered (1) their favorite good and (2) final comments or questions. We presumed that we could identify inattentive participants giving poor quality data, as they would not be able to answer these prompts appropriately. We did not find any participants’ responses to be of poor quality by these measures, so we did not discard any responses.

## 4 EXPERIMENTAL RESULTS

We test the empirical swap rate of each treatment as a measure for perceived fairness across all scenarios and while controlling for several variables. We further partition the HEFk treatment into sub-treatments—HEF0, HEF1, and HEF2—and compare their swap rates with sEF1, with a focus on whether increasing the number of hidden goods affects perceived fairness. Separately, we compare the effect of treatment and size of instance on participants’ cognitive effort, as measured by response time and self-reports of difficulty, for answering the scenarios.

Table 2.  $p$ -values of the test statistic for testing the independence of swap rates and optimal choice under different treatments. The  $\chi^2$  test is used except when the  $p$ -value is annotated with a “†”, in which it is the result of the Fisher’s exact test.

Treatment	sEF1	HEFk	EF1	HEF0	HEF1	HEF2
swap-is-opt / stay-is-opt	$p < 0.001$	$p < 0.001$	† $p < 0.001$	N/A	$p < 0.001$	$p < 0.001$

We are particularly interested in whether swap rates differ between treatments when a participant’s *optimal* (i.e., value-maximizing) choice is to either *stay* or *swap* bundles. This is because participants may be biased to accept their default bundle and maintain the status quo rather than make adjustments [48]. Moreover, HEFk differs from the other treatments in that participants may not have enough information to distinguish which bundle is optimal, despite it being apparently optimal. Our work is the first to study whether perceived fairness, as measured by swap rates, differ depending on optimal choice.

#### 4.1 Perceived Fairness

We formalize our research questions as follows:

*Research Questions:* For any two treatments  $X, Y \in \{\text{sEF1}, \text{EF1}, \text{HEFk}\}$  or  $\{\text{sEF1}, \text{HEF0}, \text{HEF1}, \text{HEF2}\}$ , do swap rates differ between  $X$  and  $Y$  overall and when adjusted independently for the variables: (i) *instance size*: small or large, (ii) *allocation balance*: balanced or unbalanced, and (iii) *optimal choice*: whether the value-maximizing choice is to keep the participant’s initial bundle (stay-is-opt) or to swap bundles (swap-is-opt)?

*Null Hypothesis:* Swap rate is independent of treatment.

*Alternate Hypothesis:* Swap rate depends on treatment.

Our experiments provide statistically significant evidence for rejecting the null hypothesis that swap rate is independent of treatment. We draw this conclusion using the Chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) test with  $p < 0.05$  for all combinations of pairs of treatments and values for the different confounding variables in our study,

Table 1 summarizes our findings. In the appendix we present Tables 5 and 10 which include more specific information about the  $p$ -values of the  $\chi^2$  and Fisher’s exact test statistics and *effect size*, as measured by Cramer’s V [34], about the tests. Our main finding is that (1) the perceived envy of HEFk is significantly lower than that of either sEF1 and EF1, and (2) sEF1 allocations are less likely to be perceived as unfair than EF1 allocations, as we show in Figure 4. This holds true upon adjusting for instance size (small or large) and the allocation balance (balanced or unbalanced), and among scenarios where swap-is-opt. Thus, our main takeaway message is:

*Allocations that are visibly envy-free through hiding goods are perceived to be fairer than allocations that are counterfactually envy-free via removing goods.*

*Segmented Data.* Upon realizing this conclusion, we segment our data to draw additional insights. In particular, among HEFk allocations, swap rate increases as the number of hidden goods increases (Table 7 in the appendix): HEF0 allocations induce less envy among the participants than either HEF1 or HEF2. This is perhaps because as more goods are hidden, participants are more cautious, more uncertain about the allocation’s fairness, and spend more time on average to choose bundles (see Figure 8 in the appendix). Further studies may be necessary to explain these results.

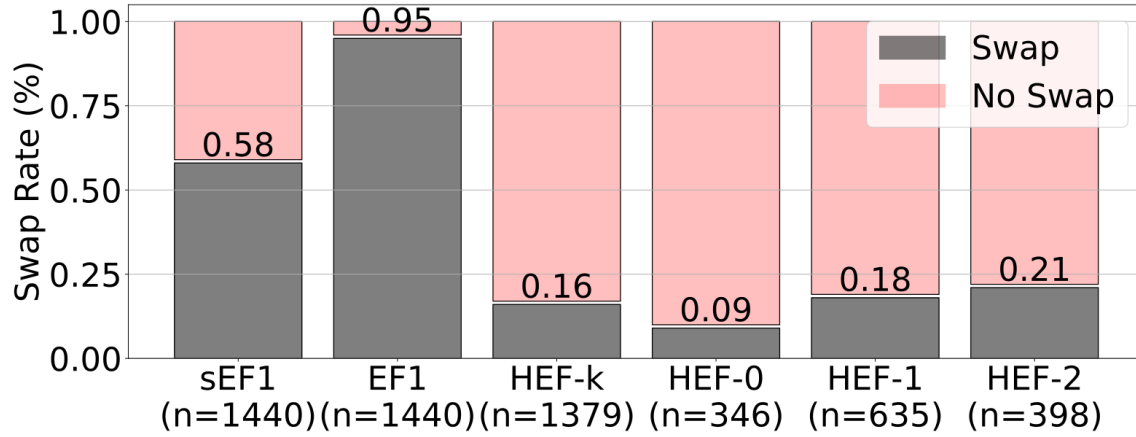


Fig. 4. Swap rates per treatment, all scenarios. Here,  $n$  is the number of scenarios per treatment.

*Optimal Choice.* We find that participants' perceived fairness is indeed affected by their optimal choice. Specifically, for each treatment (except HEF0), participants' swap rates are statistically different between swap-is-opt and stay-is-opt scenarios (Table 2).

Among stay-is-opt scenarios (Figure 5), we observe that sEF1 allocations are perceived with significantly lower envy than HEFk allocations, and in turn EF1 allocations. Participants of the sEF1 treatment could verify with certainty that their bundles have the highest value since all goods were visible. It may not be possible to make such determinations under the HEF1 and HEF2 treatments, where goods may be hidden. Indeed, the hidden goods may all be allocated to another pirate, hypothetically raising the value of that pirate's bundle to be the highest, justifying a swap. Surprisingly, HEF0 and EF1 induce higher envy than sEF1 allocations, despite it being equally possible to verify that the participant's bundle has the highest value. This may be due to *framing effect* biases by which participants may not have incorrectly assumed that goods were missing [51]. However, further tests are needed to confirm this conjecture. Swap rates between either HEFk and EF1, and HEF2 and sEF1, are not statistically significant in this case.

When swap-is-opt (Figure 7 in the appendix), participants swap their bundles significantly less under the HEFk treatment than the sEF1 and EF1 treatments. This supports our overall conclusion that participants desire allocations that are not visibly unfair. Since all goods are visible under the sEF1 and EF1 treatments, the participant has clear evidence that her allocated bundle has a lower value than that of another pirate. Under the HEFk treatment, rather, where the allocation of some goods is hidden, participants perceive significantly lower envy even when they are allocated a lower-valued bundle. Recall that HEF0 is equivalent to EF, so there are no such scenarios when swap-is-opt.

*Controlling for the choice of goods.* Our scenarios presented goods related to a pirate's adventure, such as a map, rum, and a diamond. This gamified scenario stands in for a wider variety of fair division problems, such as inheritance division [9], allocating medical resources [46], and course allocation [11]. To control for any preferential bias toward these goods, we repeated a scenario and replaced the goods with identically-shaped gems of different colors. The repeated scenario (S7) was identical to the original (S4), which is small-unbalanced but with varying numbers of hidden goods  $k$  for the HEFk treatment. Additionally, the pictures representing the goods were randomly permuted for every scenario.

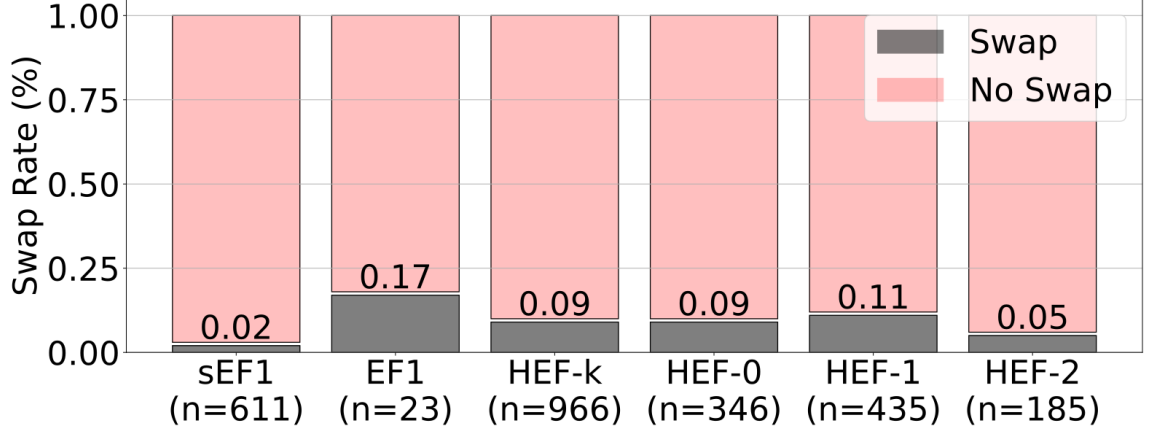


Fig. 5. Swap rates per treatment, stay-is-opt. Here,  $n$  is the number of questions per treatment.

We find that every null hypothesis that was rejected by comparing responses on all scenarios is also rejected when the test is performed only on the repeated scenario (see row labeled “Repeated scenario (S7)” in Table 1). Furthermore, the ratio of swap rates for each pair of treatments remains similar as well. Therefore, our results do not appear to be impacted by the choice of goods.

#### 4.2 Cognitive Effort

In addition to our tests of perceived fairness, we investigate the extent to which cognitive effort varies by treatment. Specifically, we measure:

- *response time*, the time elapsed between each scenario page being made available to the participant and the participant submitting her choice, and
- *scenario difficulty*, using the self-reports of scenario difficulty solicited immediately after the small and then the large scenarios.

We check whether the mean response time or reported difficulty on a five-point Likert scale is different between pairs of treatments, while adjusting for different variables such as optimal choice and instance size.

*Null Hypothesis:* Cognitive effort (by response time or reported difficulty) is independent of treatment.

*Alternate Hypothesis:* Cognitive effort differs between treatments.

Our experiments provide sufficient evidence to reject the null hypothesis that cognitive effort for HEFk is the same as either sEF1 or sEF1, using a two-sided Welch t-test ( $p < 0.001$ ). Tables 8 and 9 in the appendix summarize our findings for response times per scenario and reported feedback. Figure 6 (left) illustrates that the average sEF1 response time is lowest and HEFk is highest, while EF1 splits the two. Similarly, in Figure 6 (right), participants report that sEF1 scenarios are easiest while HEFk is the most difficult and EF1 lies in between. These observations hold for either instance size and demonstrate that HEFk instances cause higher cognitive burden on participants.

Note that the blue line in the middle of the box of the figures indicate the median value. The upper and lower boundaries of box show the 25th and 75th percentile respectively, and the upper and lower whiskers show the range of recorded values. The mean is indicated by a blue diamond. Outliers beyond the whiskers are excluded. Effect size for these statistical tests, as measured by Cohen’s D [15], is reported in Tables 13 and 14 in the appendix.

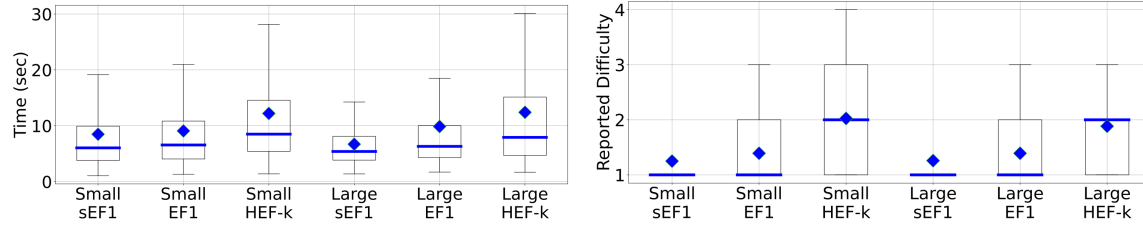


Fig. 6. Box-plots of (left) time spent per scenario and (right) reported difficulty (higher scores indicate higher difficulty) by treatment. Outliers excluded.

### 4.3 Descriptive Comments from Participants

We identify the participants anonymously as *S*, *E*, or *H* corresponding to their treatment sEF1, EF1, or HEFk, respectively.

Participants in the EF1 treatment consistently noted that other pirates' bundles "*were usually more valuable*" (E22), so they should "*swap with the highest yielding chest*" (E17, E8, E15). In contrast, HEFk participants noted "*it seemed a no brainer to just never swap*" (H8, H28), either because it was the "*safest bet*" (H49) or the "*greatest statistical chance of getting higher reward*" (H59). These comments are consistent with our data that swap rates were significantly lower for HEFk, suggesting that uncertainty about hidden goods limited participants' ability to perceive or act on envy. Moreover, as demonstrated in Table 2, participants across treatments were generally able to distinguish when swapping was advantageous or not, consistent with H59's comment about weighing statistical chances in their decisions.

A few participants explicitly addressed concerns about fairness. Participant S57 suggested "*it didn't seem like a fair split*" while S63 declared they wouldn't swap in real life "*because it would be unfair to the other person.*" Despite this hesitation, participant E96 reasoned that because "*there was no defining reason why anyone would get more than others*" due to differing effort, they should still select the most valuable treasure. These comments resemble Herreiner and Puppe [29]'s findings that people care more about inequality aversion than EF to ensure fairness. Still, it is unclear to what extent participants' choices are affected by strategic interaction with other humans, as in Herreiner and Puppe [29], as opposed to inanimate agents, as in our work. We leave this question for future work.

## 5 LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE WORK

Our experiment was limited in scope by several structural characteristics of the fair division instances we tested. First, we evaluated scenarios using a cross-section of the number of goods ( $m$ ), agents ( $n$ ), and hidden goods ( $k$ ), aiming to balance informativeness with cognitive load for participants. Since our focus was on differences in perceived fairness across theoretical fairness notions, we provided participants with additive, monetarily equivalent valuation functions over their bundles. While this assumption simplifies participant reasoning and is standard in fair division, it limits generalizability to settings involving more complex preferences, such as superadditive or subadditive valuations. Nonetheless, our findings offer empirical support for the perceived fairness of epistemic notions like HEFk. Future work could investigate how sensitive these perceptions are to changes in valuation structure or instance complexity.

Second, we controlled for the effects of pirate-themed goods on participant decision-making by randomly permuting item images and repeating one scenario with identical multi-colored gems. Still, we may not have accounted for all confounding variables or framing effects. For example, although valuations were in fact *subjective*, participants may have inferred that values were *objective* based on the structured appearance of the scenarios. Similarly, the HEFk treatment tutorial conveyed to participants that hidden goods might not be allocated, a framing consistent with its

definition [30], even though all goods were ultimately allocated. It is possible that these design choices introduced perceived uncertainty, leading participants to select lower swap rates in the HEF $k$  treatment. Since this treatment also required greater cognitive effort, participants may have been overwhelmed by the complexity of their value function [7, 45]. As a result, perceived fairness may depend on both the information available and the uncertainty about others' bundles. This is not the only way to implement an information scheme, as exemplified by Herreiner and Puppe [29], who provided full information about all agents' subjective values. Further work may be necessary to determine the sensitivity of our results to framing effects and the specific informational assumptions embedded in the design.

Our experiments provide an initial empirical comparison between two intrapersonal envy-based fairness concepts: EF1, which requires counterfactual reasoning about others' bundles, and HEF $k$ , which limits such comparisons by epistemically hiding certain goods. Both definitions presume a bundle is fair if it does not provoke envy, so we measured perceived envy through participants' swap behavior according to this standard. Our results suggest that people experience less envy under HEF $k$ , where they epistemically do not perceive envy. Future work could extend our approach by exploring alternative measures of perceived fairness, such as degrees of envy rather than binary envy perceptions, and by comparing envy-based definitions to other fairness notions like proportionality, maximin share [10], or inequality aversion. Additional directions include examining attitudes toward procedural versus distributive fairness, and whether fairness judgments shift depending on whether participants are direct stakeholders or outside observers.

## ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS STATEMENT

We note three ethical considerations regarding our study. First, the study was IRB-approved and conducted in a single-blind setting. Participants were informed of the study description, benefits, risks, rights, and project manager contact information prior to participating, as described in Section 3.2. Second, participants received a base payment of \$0.50, with an additional \$0.50 contingent on their in-game choices. While differential payments are standard in economic experiments, the relationship between payment size, attentiveness, and data quality remains an open methodological question.

Third, our findings suggest that participants perceived allocations satisfying HEF $k$  as fairer than those satisfying EF1. While one might interpret this as a recommendation to adopt HEF $k$  in practice, our intention is more limited. HEF $k$  reduces perceived envy by restricting agents' knowledge of others' bundles, but it also reduces transparency—an ethically significant trade-off in many real-world applications. In this work,  $k$  is best understood as a measure of distance from envy-freeness, rather than a design parameter to manipulate perceptions of fairness. Our conclusion is therefore interpretive: participants reported less envy under incomplete information, but this does not imply that restricting transparency generally promotes fairness.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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## APPENDIX

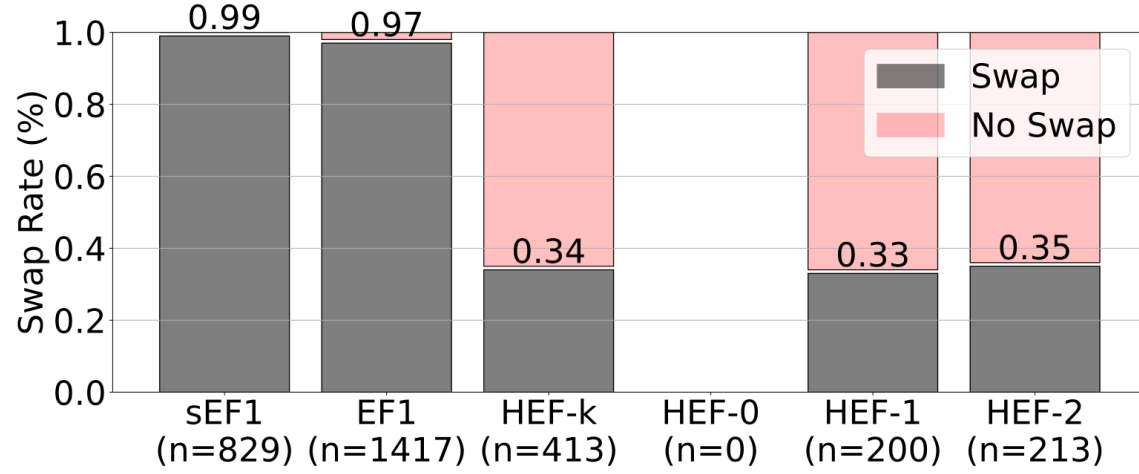
Fig. 7. Swap rates per treatment, swap-is-opt. Here,  $n$  is the number of questions per treatment.

Table 3. Number of scenarios per treatment and perspective, given instance size and allocation balance (number of goods per each agent in parentheses).

Instance Size	Allocation Balance	Treatment				
		sEF1	EF1	HEF0	HEF1	HEF2
small	balanced (3, 3, 3)	15	15	5	5	5
	unbalanced (2, 2, 4)	6	6	2	2	2
large	balanced (2, 2, 2, 2, 2)	5	5	1	2	1
	unbalanced (4, 2, 2, 1, 1)	1	1	0	0	0
	unbalanced (3, 2, 2, 2, 1)	1	1	0	2	0

Table 4. Number of participants satisfying each qualification range, per treatment, as measured by minimum approval rate and minimum approval range (not mutually exclusive).

Treatment	Minimum Approval Rate	Minimum Number Approved	Count
sEF1	95%	1000	120
EF1	95%	1000	20
	80%	100	120
HEFk	95%	1000	20
	90%	1000	62
	80%	1000	76
	90%	500	83
	90%	100	92
	80%	100	120

Table 5. Ratio of the swap rates and  $p$ -values of the test statistic for testing the independence of swap rates and treatments under different pairs of treatments, and adjusting for different variables. The  $\chi^2$  test is used except when the  $p$ -value is annotated with a “†”, in which case, it is the result of the Fisher’s exact test. The  $p$ -value of the test statistic is represented as follows: a cell labeled ns (not significant) implies that  $p > 0.05$ , ★ for  $p \in (0.01, 0.05]$ , ★★ for  $p \in (0.001, 0.01]$ , and ★★★ for  $p < 0.001$ .

Variable	value	Pairs of Treatments					
		HEFk, sEF1	HEFk, EF1	sEF1, EF1	HEF0, sEF1	HEF1, sEF1	HEF2, sEF1
All scenarios		0.286	0.173	0.604	0.150	0.306	0.371
		$p : \star \star \star$	$p : \star \star \star$	$p : \star \star \star$	$p : \star \star \star$	$p : \star \star \star$	$p : \star \star \star$
Optimal Choice	stay-is-opt	4.533	0.512	0.113	4.415	5.384	2.752
		$p : \star \star \star$	$p : ns$	$†p : \star \star$	$p : \star \star \star$	$p : \star \star \star$	$p : ns$
	swap-is-opt	0.346	0.353	1.021	N/A	0.334	0.357
		$p : \star \star \star$	$p : \star \star \star$	$p : \star$		$p : \star \star \star$	$p : \star \star \star$
Instance Size	small	0.294	0.186	0.634	0.114	0.380	0.394
		$p : \star \star \star$	$p : \star \star \star$	$p : \star \star \star$	$p : \star \star \star$	$p : \star \star \star$	$p : \star \star \star$
	large	0.268	0.150	0.561	0.322	0.253	0.285
		$p : \star \star \star$	$p : \star \star \star$	$p : \star \star \star$	$p : \star \star \star$	$p : \star \star \star$	$p : \star \star \star$
Balance	balanced	0.320	0.167	0.523	0.246	0.267	0.426
		$p : \star \star \star$	$p : \star \star \star$	$p : \star \star \star$	$p : \star \star \star$	$p : \star \star \star$	$p : \star \star \star$
	unbalanced	0.259	0.178	0.686	0.073	0.310	0.329
		$p : \star \star \star$	$p : \star \star \star$	$p : \star \star \star$	$p : \star \star \star$	$p : \star \star \star$	$p : \star \star \star$
Repeated scenario (S7)		0.286	0.211	0.737	0.091	0.490	0.338
		$p : \star \star \star$	$p : \star \star \star$	$p : \star \star \star$	$p : \star \star \star$	$p : \star \star$	$p : \star \star \star$

Table 6. Ratio of the swap rates and  $p$ -values of the test statistic for testing the independence of swap rates and optimal choice under different treatments. The  $\chi^2$  test is used except when the  $p$ -value is annotated with a “†”, in which case, it is the result of the Fisher’s exact test. The  $p$ -value of the test statistic is represented as follows: a cell labeled ns (not significant) implies that  $p > 0.05$ , ★ for  $p \in (0.01, 0.05]$ , ★★ for  $p \in (0.001, 0.01]$ , and ★★★ for  $p < 0.001$ .

Treatment	sEF1	HEFk	EF1	HEF0	HEF1	HEF2
swap-is-opt	50.241	3.835	5.559	N/A	3.121	6.514
/ stay-is-opt	$p : ★★★$	$p : ★★★$	$†p : ★★★$		$p : ★★★$	$p : ★★★$

*Perceived envy comparing treatments.* First, Tables 5 and 6 depicts the results of hypothesis tests comparing the independence of swap rates and treatments, while adjusting for different variables. These provide more information than Tables 1 and 2 in the main text.

Second, Table 7 presents tests for independence among the pairwise treatments of HEF0, HEF1, and HEF2. Notably, there is a statistically significant difference between HEF0 and both HEF1 and HEF2 for all questions, although there is no significant difference between the treatments conditioning on either stay-is-opt or swap-is-opt. By Figure 4, this suggests HEF0 (i.e., envy-free) allocations are perceived as more fair than either HEF1 or HEF2 allocations.

*Cognitive effort on HEFk allocations.* Figure 8 presents the distribution of time spent per scenario over all HEF0, HEF1 and HEF2 scenarios. We find that overall, as the number of hidden goods increases, the cognitive effort, measured as the amount of time spent in order to decide which bundle to keep, also increases. Specifically, both the mean and variance of time spent increases as the value of  $k$  increases for HEFk scenarios.

Notice that in an HEF0 scenario, the participant already has the highest valued bundle and this is readily verifiable since all goods are visible. However, as  $k$  increases, the participant must reason about and form beliefs about how the hidden goods may be allocated to the other pirates. The task of computing and deciding whether it may be worth swapping for another pirate’s bundle therefore becomes increasingly more complex as more goods are hidden.

*Cognitive effort conditioned on stay-is-opt scenarios.* As Figure 9 shows for stay-is-opt scenarios, hiding goods under the HEFk treatment comes at the cost of an increased cognitive burden on the participants. Here, the participant’s

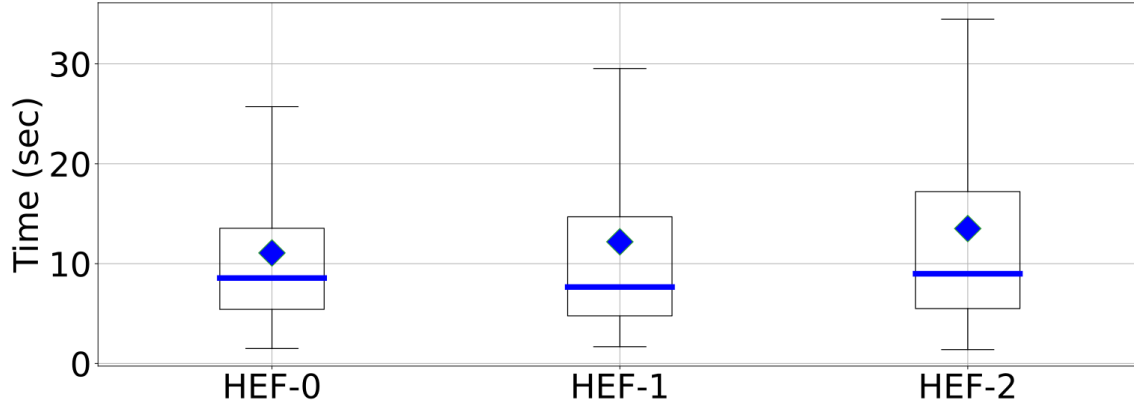


Fig. 8. Box-plot of time spent per scenario by treatment with averages shown. Outliers excluded.

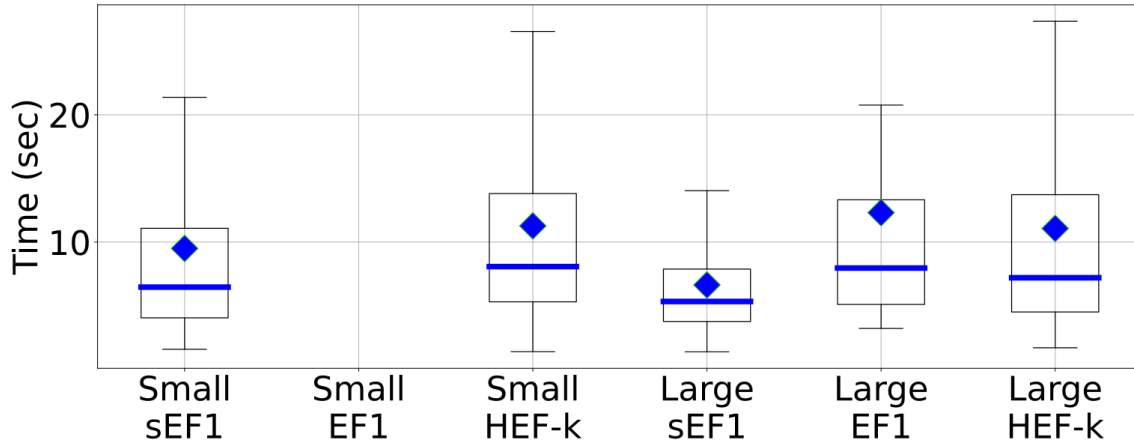


Fig. 9. Box-plot of time spent per scenario by treatment with average shown, conditioned on stay-is-opt. Outliers excluded. There were no such small EF1 scenarios.

bundle has the highest value. This is evident for the sEF1 and EF1 treatments, but may not be clear under the HEFk treatment, where goods may need to be hidden in order to eliminate envy between the other pirates.

*Effect Size.* We supplement our results of statistical significance with their effect sizes. Table 10, Table 11, Table 12, Table 13, and Table 14 demonstrate the effect size for each statistically significant test for Table 5, Table 6, Table 7, Table 8, and Table 9 respectively. Effect sizes are measured with Cramer's V for  $\chi^2$  tests [17] and Cohen's d for Welch  $t$ -tests [15].

Table 7. Ratio of swap rates and  $p$ -values of the  $\chi^2$  statistic for testing the independence of swap rates and treatments under different pairs of treatments, and adjusting for different variables.

Key: (ns :  $p > 0.05$ ) ( $\star$  :  $p \in (0.01, 0.05]$ ), ( $\star\star$  :  $p \in (0.001, 0.01]$ ), ( $\star\star\star$  :  $p < 0.001$ ).

Variable	value	Pairs of Treatments		
		HEF0, HEF1	HEF0, HEF2	HEF1, HEF2
All scenarios		0.494 <i>p</i> : ★★	0.406 <i>p</i> : ★★★	0.826 <i>p</i> : ns
Optimal Choice	stay-is-opt	0.820 <i>p</i> : ns	1.604 <i>p</i> : ns	1.956 <i>p</i> : ns
	swap-is-opt	N/A	N/A	0.937 <i>p</i> : ns
Instance Size	small	0.299 <i>p</i> : ★★★	0.289 <i>p</i> : ★★★	0.966 <i>p</i> : ns
	large	1.271 <i>p</i> : ns	1.130 <i>p</i> : ns	0.889 <i>p</i> : ns
Balance	balanced	0.992 <i>p</i> : ns	0.578 <i>p</i> : ns	0.627 <i>p</i> : ns
	unbalanced	0.237 <i>p</i> : ★★★	0.223 <i>p</i> : ★★★	0.941 <i>p</i> : ns
Repeated scenario (Q7)		0.186 <i>p</i> : ★	0.270 <i>p</i> : ns	1.448 <i>p</i> : ns

Table 8.  $p$ -values of the  $t$  statistic for testing equal means of participant response times per scenario using Welch's t-test – for different pairs of treatments, and adjusting for different variables.

Key: (ns :  $p > 0.05$ ) ( $\star$  :  $p \in (0.01, 0.05]$ ), ( $\star\star$  :  $p \in (0.001, 0.01]$ ), ( $\star\star\star$  :  $p < 0.001$ ).

Variable	Instance Size	Pairs of Treatments		
		sEF1, EF1	sEF1, HEFk	EF1, HEFk
All scenarios	small	$p : ns$	$p : \star\star\star$	$p : \star\star\star$
	large	$p : \star$	$p : \star\star\star$	$p : \star\star\star$
stay-is-opt	small	N/A	$p : \star$	N/A
	large	$p : ns$	$p : \star\star\star$	$p : ns$
Variable		Pairs of Treatments		
		HEF0, HEF1	HEF0, HEF2	HEF1, HEF2
All scenarios		$p : ns$	$p : \star\star$	$p : ns$

Table 9.  $p$ -values of the  $t$  statistic for testing equal means of participant reported feedback using Welch's t-test – for different pairs of treatments.

Key: (ns :  $p > 0.05$ ) ( $\star$  :  $p \in (0.01, 0.05]$ ), ( $\star\star$  :  $p \in (0.001, 0.01]$ ), ( $\star\star\star$  :  $p < 0.001$ ).

Variable	Instance Size	Pairs of Treatments		
		sEF1, EF1	sEF1, HEFk	EF1, HEFk
All scenarios	small	$p : \star$	$p : \star\star\star$	$p : \star\star\star$
	large	$p : ns$	$p : \star\star\star$	$p : \star\star\star$

Table 10. Effect size demonstrating the strength in statistically significant relationships between swap rates and treatments – under different pairs of treatments, adjusting for different variables, and corresponding to tests in Table 1. Not significant tests are labelled ns. Cramer’s V is reported for  $\chi^2$  tests as follows: ★ for  $V \leq 0.2$ , ★★ for  $V \in (0.2, 0.6]$ , and ★★★ for  $V > 0.6$ . Odds ratio and 95% confidence intervals are reported for Fisher’s exact test, annotated by “†.”

Variable	value	Pairs of Treatments					
		HEFk, sEF1	HEFk, EF1	sEF1, EF1	HEF0, sEF1	HEF1, sEF1	HEF2, sEF1
All scenarios		V : ★★	V : ★★★	V : ★★	V : ★★	V : ★★	V : ★★
Optimal Choice	stay-is-opt	V : ★	ns	†OR : 0.096 95% CI : (0.026, 0.447)	V : ★	V : ★	ns
	swap-is-opt	V : ★★★	V : ★★★	V : ★	N/A	V : ★★★	V : ★★★
Instance Size	small	V : ★★	V : ★★★	V : ★★	V : ★★	V : ★★	V : ★★
	large	V : ★★	V : ★★★	V : ★★	V : ★★	V : ★★	V : ★★
Balance	balanced	V : ★★	V : ★★★	V : ★★	V : ★★	V : ★★	V : ★★
	unbalanced	V : ★★	V : ★★★	V : ★★	V : ★★	V : ★★	V : ★★
Repeated scenario (S7)		V : ★★	V : ★★★	V : ★★	V : ★★	V : ★★	V : ★★

Table 11. Effect size demonstrating the strength in statistically significant relationships between swap rates and optimal choice, for different treatments in Table 2. Not significant tests are labelled ns. Cramer’s V is reported for  $\chi^2$  tests as follows: ★ for  $V \leq 0.2$ , ★★ for  $V \in (0.2, 0.6]$ , and ★★★ for  $V > 0.6$ . Odds ratio and 95% confidence intervals are reported for Fisher’s exact test, annotated by “†.”

Treatment	sEF1	HEFk	EF1	HEF0	HEF1	HEF2
swap-is-opt / stay-is-opt	V : ★★★	V : ★★	†OR : 0.007 95% CI : (0.002, 0.023)	N/A	V : ★★	V : ★★

Table 12. Effect size measured by Cramer’s V for  $\chi^2$  tests corresponding with Table 7, under different pairs of treatments and adjusting for different variables. Not significant tests are labelled as ns.

Key: (ns :  $p > 0.05$ ) (★ :  $V \leq 0.2$ ), (★★ :  $p \in (0.2, 0.6]$ ), (★★★ :  $p > 0.6$ ).

Variable	value	Pairs of Treatments		
		HEF0, HEF1	HEF0, HEF2	HEF1, HEF2
All scenarios		V : ★	V : ★	ns
Optimal Choice	stay-is-opt	ns	ns	ns
	swap-is-opt	N/A	N/A	ns
Instance Size	small	V : ★★	V : ★★	ns
	large	ns	ns	ns
Balance	balanced	ns	ns	ns
	unbalanced	V : ★	V : ★★	ns
Repeated scenario (S7)		V : ★★	ns	ns

Table 13. Effect size measured by Cohen’s d for Welch t-tests corresponding with Table 8, under different pairs of treatments and adjusting for different variables. Not significant tests are labelled as ns.

Key: (★ :  $d \leq 0.3$ ), (★★ :  $d \in (0.3, 0.7]$ ), (★★★ :  $d > 0.7$ ).

Variable	Instance Size	Pairs of Treatments		
		sEF1, EF1	sEF1, HEFk	EF1, HEFk
All scenarios	small	ns	d : ★★	d : ★
	large	d : ★★	d : ★★	d : ★★
stay-is-opt	small	N/A	d : ★	N/A
	large	ns	d : ★★	ns
Variable		Pairs of Treatments		
		HEF0, HEF1	HEF0, HEF2	HEF1, HEF2
All scenarios		ns	d : ★	ns

Table 14. Effect size measured by Cohen's  $d$  for Welch t-tests corresponding with Table 9, under different pairs of treatments and adjusting for different variables. Not significant tests are labelled as ns.

Key: ( $\star$  :  $d \leq 0.3$ ), ( $\star\star$  :  $d \in (0.3, 0.7]$ ), ( $\star\star\star$  :  $d > 0.7$ ).

Variable	Instance Size	Pairs of Treatments		
		sEF1, EF1	sEF1, HEFk	EF1, HEFk
All scenarios	small	$d : \star$	$d : \star\star\star$	$d : \star\star\star$
	large	ns	$d : \star\star\star$	$d : \star\star\star$