

1 A Combination of Positive and Negative Niche 2 Construction Favors the Evolution of 3 Cooperation

4
5 **Abstract**

6 TODO

7 **Introduction**

8 Cooperative behaviors are common across all branches of the tree of life. In-
9 sects divide labor within their colonies, plants and soil bacteria exchange es-
10 sential nutrients, birds care for others' young, and the trillions of cells in the
11 human body restrain their growth and coordinate to provide vital functions.
12 Each instance of cooperation presents an evolutionary challenge: How can in-
13 dividuals that sacrifice their own well-being to help others avoid subversion by
14 those that do not? Over time, we would expect these *defectors* to rise in abun-
15 dance at the expense of others, eventually driving cooperators—and perhaps
16 the entire population—to extinction.

17 Several factors can prevent this *tragedy of the commons* (Hamilton, 1964;
18 Hardin, 1968; Nowak, 2006; West *et al.*, 2007b). One important factor in-
19 volves non-random social interaction, in which cooperators benefit more from
20 the cooperative act than defectors. This can occur when cooperators are clus-
21 tered together in spatially-structured populations (Fletcher and Doebeli, 2009;
22 Nadell *et al.*, 2010; Kuzdzal-Fick *et al.*, 2011) or when cooperators use com-
23 munication (Brown and Johnstone, 2001; Darch *et al.*, 2012) or other cues
24 (Sinervo *et al.*, 2006; Gardner and West, 2010; Veelders *et al.*, 2010) to coop-
25 erate conditionally with kin. Cooperation can also be bolstered by pleiotropic
26 connections to personal benefits (Foster *et al.*, 2004; Dandekar *et al.*, 2012) or
27 alleles encoding self-benefitting traits (Asfahl *et al.*, 2015). In the latter case,
28 the alleles may provide (private) benefits that are completely independent from
29 the (public) benefits of cooperation. In a population of both cooperators and
30 defectors, this sets the stage for an “adaptive race” in which both types vie
31 for the first highly beneficial adaptation (Waite and Shou, 2012; Morgan *et*
32 *al.*, 2012). The tragedy of the commons can be deferred if a cooperator, by
33 chance, wins the adaptive race.

34 Hammarlund *et al.* (2015) recently showed that in spatially structured popu-
35 lations, cooperators can gain a substantial leg up on defectors in an adaptive
36 race. Specifically, cooperation increases local population density, thus increas-
37 ing the likelihood of acquiring beneficial mutations. By hitchhiking along with
38 these adaptations, the cooperative trait can rapidly rise in abundance. Never-
39 theless, this advantage is fleeting. As soon as the opportunities for adaptation
40 are exhausted, cooperators are once again at a disadvantage against adapted

41 defectors. However, Hammarlund et al. (2015) demonstrated that cooperation
42 can be maintained indefinitely when frequent environmental changes produce
43 a steady stream of adaptive opportunities. Although organisms typically find
44 themselves in dynamic environments, change might not occur at a rate that
45 provides sufficient adaptive opportunities to ensure long-term cooperator per-
46 sistence.

47 In this work, we explore whether cooperation can be maintained indefinitely
48 by niche construction. We expand upon the model presented in Hammarlund
49 et al. (2015) to allow populations to alter their local environment. As environ-
50 ments change, so too does selection, which creates an eco-evolutionary feedback
51 whereby selection is dependent on the genotypes present in the population, and
52 the composition of genotypes is dependent on selection. Niche construction
53 can be positive or negative, depending on whether the environmental change
54 increases or decreases the fitness of the niche-constructing individual. We in-
55 vestigate whether these selective feedbacks can act as a continual source of
56 adaptive opportunities for cooperators.

57 Although niche construction occurs independently of cooperation in our model,
58 the increase in density that results from cooperation has a profound effect on
59 how populations evolve in the presence of selective feedbacks. First, these pop-
60 ulations exert greater influence on their environments, which better enables
61 them to benefit from positive niche construction. Additionally, as environ-
62 ments change, either through negative niche construction or external influ-
63 ences, these larger populations can adapt more quickly. Finally, because large
64 populations produce more emigrants, these populations will exert a stronger in-

fluence on neighboring populations, effectively exporting their niche. Because of these potential benefits, we also focus our attention on how population size and migration rate influence evolutionary outcomes in these environments.

Methods

We build upon the model described in Hammarlund et al. (2015), in which cooperators and defectors compete and evolve in a metapopulation (a collection of populations). Individuals in each of the populations reproduce, mutate, and migrate to neighboring populations. Importantly, adaptation can occur. In our model here, we further allow populations to modify their local environment, and these modifications feed back to affect selection.

Model Description

Our simulated environment consists of N^2 patches arranged as an $N \times N$ lattice (see Table 1 for model parameters and their values), where each patch can support a population. Each individual in a population has a genotype, which is an ordered list of $L + 1$ integers (loci). The first L loci are *adaptive loci*, and are each occupied by 0 or an integer from the set $\{1, 2, \dots, A\}$, where A is the number of alleles conferring a selective benefit. Specifically, the presence of any non-zero allele at any of these loci represents an adaptation that confers fitness benefit δ . A binary allele at locus $L + 1$ determines whether or not that individual is a cooperator. Individuals with allelic state 1 at this locus

are cooperators, carrying a cost c , while individuals with allelic state 0 are defectors. When $\delta \geq c$, a minimally adapted cooperator recoups the cost of cooperation.

Organisms also influence their environment, which, in turn, influences selection. We model this as a form of density dependent selection. Specifically, the selective value of adaptive allele a at locus l increases with the number of individuals in the population that have allele $a - 1$ at locus $l - 1$. We treat both adaptive loci and allelic states as “circular”, so the allelic state at locus 1 is affected by the allelic composition of the population at locus L , and the selective value of allele 1 at any locus increases with the number of individuals carrying allele A at the previous locus. For the remainder of this section, this circularity is represented by the function below, which gives the integer below x in the set $\{1, 2, \dots, X\}$.

$$\beta(x, X) = \text{mod}_X(x - 2 + X) + 1 \quad (1)$$

Here, $\text{mod}_Y(y)$ is the integer remainder after dividing y by Y . Thus, the value of adaptive allele a at locus l increases with the number of individuals that have allele $\beta(a, A)$ at locus $\beta(l, L)$. The slope of this increase is ϵ , which specifies the intensity of niche construction. Consider a genotype g with allelic state at locus l given by $a_{g,l}$; its fitness is defined as:

$$W_g = z + \delta \sum_{l=1}^L I(a_{g,l}) + \epsilon \sum_{l=1}^L n(\beta(a_{g,l}, A), \beta(l, L)) - ca_{g,L+1} \quad (2)$$

103 where z is a baseline fitness, and $I(a)$ indicates whether an adaptive allele is
 104 non-zero:

$$I(a) = \begin{cases} 1 & \text{if } a \in \{1, 2, \dots, A\} \\ 0 & \text{otherwise} \end{cases} \quad (3)$$

105 As a consequence of this form of density dependent selection, genotypes with
 106 sequentially increasing allelic states will tend to evolve. Because mutations
 107 are random (see below), each population will evolve different consecutive se-
 108 quences. These different sequences represent the unique niches constructed by
 109 populations.

110 Cooperation allows the population to reach greater density. If p is the propor-
 111 tion of cooperators in a population at the beginning of a growth cycle, then
 112 that population reaches the following size during the growth phase:

$$S(p) = S_{min} + p(S_{max} - S_{min}) \quad (4)$$

113 The function $S(p)$ reflects the benefit of cooperation. During growth, individ-
 114 uals compete for inclusion in the resulting population. The composition of a
 115 population with size P and cooperator proportion p after growth is multino-
 116 mial with parameters and $S(p)$ and $\{\pi_1, \pi_2, \dots, \pi_P\}$, where:

$$\pi_i = \frac{W_{\gamma(i)}}{\sum_{j=1}^P W_{\gamma(j)}} \quad (5)$$

Here, $W_{\gamma(i)}$ is the fitness of an individual i with genotype $\gamma(i)$ (see Equation
 2). The value π_i therefore reflects an individual's relative reproductive fitness.
 For simplicity, we apply mutations after population growth. Mutations occur
 independently at each locus and cause the allelic state to change. Mutations
 occur at each adaptive locus at rate μ_a , in which a new allele is chosen at
 random from the set $\{0\} \cup \{1, 2, \dots, A\}$. At the binary cooperation locus,
 mutations occur at rate μ_c . These mutations flip the allelic state, causing
 cooperators to become defectors and vice versa.
 After mutation, individuals emigrate to an adjacent patch at rate m . The
 destination patch is randomly chosen with uniform probability from the source
 patch's Moore neighborhood, which is composed of the nearest 8 patches on the
 lattice. Because the metapopulation lattice has boundaries, patches located
 on an edge have smaller neighborhoods.
 Metapopulations are initiated in a state that follows an environmental change.
 First, populations are seeded at all patches with cooperator proportion p_0 and
 grown to density $S(p_0)$. An environmental challenge is then introduced, which
 subjects the population to a bottleneck. For each individual, the probability
 of survival is μ_t , which represents the likelihood that a mutation occurs that
 confers tolerance. Survivors are chosen by binomial sampling. Because indi-
 viduals have not yet adapted to this new environment, the allelic state of each
 individual's genotype is set to 0 at each adaptive locus. Following initializa-
 tion, simulations are run for T cycles, where each discrete cycle consists of
 population growth, mutation, and migration. At the end of each cycle, popu-

140 lations are thinned to allow for growth in the next cycle. The individuals that
141 remain are chosen by binomial sampling, where each individual persists with
142 probability d , regardless of allelic state.

143 Source Code and Software Environment

144 The simulation software and configurations for the experiments reported are
145 available online. Simulations used Python 3.4.0, NumPy 1.9.1, Pandas 0.15.2
146 (McKinney, 2010), and NetworkX 1.9.1 (Hagberg *et al.*, 2008). Data analyses
147 were performed with R 3.1.3 (R Core Team, 2015).

148 Results

149 We follow the evolution of cooperation in a metapopulation consisting of pop-
150 ulations connected by spatially-limited migration. Individuals in these popu-
151 lations can gain a limited number of adaptations that confer selective benefits.
152 While the allele at an individual’s cooperation locus does not directly affect
153 the value of alleles at adaptive loci, cooperation can have indirect effects on the
154 process of adaptation. Specifically, because cooperation increases population
155 density, isolated cooperators experience more mutational opportunities to gain
156 adaptations. Cooperation can hitchhike along with these adaptations, which
157 compensate for the cost of cooperation. Additionally, populations alter their
158 environment. Here, we explore how niche construction can favor the evolution
159 of cooperation. Our simulation environment is defined by the parameter val-

ues listed in [Table 1](#). Unless otherwise noted, 10 replicate simulations were performed for each experiment. We quantify cooperator success using the area under the cooperator proportion curve. This measure of cooperator presence increases as cooperators rise in abundance or remain in the population longer.

Niche Construction Maintains Cooperation

Without any opportunity for adaptation ($L = 0$), cooperators are swiftly eliminated in competition with defectors (Figure 1). Despite an initial lift due to increased productivity, the cost of cooperation becomes disadvantageous as migration mixes the initially isolated populations. When there are opportunities for adaptation ($L = 5$) but no niche construction ($\epsilon = 0$), cooperators are maintained transiently (Figure 1B). Here, the additional mutational opportunities provided by their larger sizes allows cooperator populations to more quickly adapt to their environment. As previously described by Hammarlund et al. (2015), however, cooperation is subsequently lost as *adapted* defector populations arise via mutation. When niche construction is incorporated, cooperation persists (Figure 1C).

Fitness Increases Alone do not Support Persisting Cooperation

In our model, niche construction introduces additional selective benefits. To determine how these selective effects influence evolutionary outcomes, we performed simulations in which the selective effects of niche construction were

181 removed ($\epsilon = 0$), and we instead increased the fitness benefits conferred by
182 adaptation ($\delta = 0.6$). Here, we are conservative by lifting the selective value of
183 exogenous adaptation by the maximum value possible from niche construction.

184 We find that higher selective values do not provide a significant increase in
185 cooperator presence (Figure 2, column C). As shown in Figure 3, cooperators
186 gain adaptations more quickly than defectors, which provides a fitness advantage.
187 However, the cost of cooperation puts defectors at an advantage once
188 these populations become fully adapted.

189 **Negative Niche Construction is Critical to Cooperator** 190 **Persistence**

191 Negative niche construction occurs in our model due to selection for
192 sequentially-increasing allelic states and the circular arrangement of these
193 alleles. When the genome length (L) is not evenly divided by the number
194 of adaptive alleles (A), then it is not possible for the population to be fixed
195 for a genotype that is perfectly adapted to the constructed environment.
196 Technically (in terms of the model) this is because the equality:

$$\beta(a_{g,l}, A) = a_{g,\beta(l,L)}$$

197 cannot simultaneously hold for all l .

198 For example, consider genotype (1,2) when $L = 2$ and $A = 3$. Here, allelic
199 state 2 at locus 2 will be beneficial, because it follows allelic state 1 at

locus 1. However, due to the circular effects, allelic state 1 at locus 1 will be deleterious relative to allelic state 3 at locus 1. Yet, fixation for genotype (3, 2) does not solve the problem, because a mutant (3, 1) is fitter, and so on.

We first focus on the effects of positive niche construction by removing the allelic conflict that leads to negative niche construction ($L = 5$, $A = 5$). In the absence of this conflict, cooperator presence is significantly increased (Figure 2, column D). Within these environments, we find that positive niche construction prolongs the fitness advantage that cooperators have over defectors (Figure 3C).

Positive niche construction is important to cooperator persistence

To determine how negative niche construction influences the evolution of co-operation, we maximize the allelic conflict ($L = 1$, $A = 6$). Here, selection for increasing allelic states among the stress loci means that any allelic state will not be greater than at the previous allele (itself), and thus there will always be opportunity for adaptation. Despite this constant opportunity, niche construction does not increase cooperator presence (Figure 2, column E).

NC Enables Cooperator Spread

Figure 4 - if not, could be why thinning is a must.

219 NC Prevents Defector Invasion

220 Figure 5

221 How Cooperation Fuels all of this

222 To directly explore how the increase in population size affects evolutionary
223 outcomes, we vary the maximum size that a population can reach (S_{max} , see
224 Equation 4). Figure 6A shows the result of these simulations. (**TODO** de-
225 scription of results)

226 To address how migration affects the evolutionary process in this system, we
227 vary the rate at which migration occurs (m). As seen in Figure 6B, cooperation
228 decreases as migration rate increases. This is likely because migration defines
229 the spatial structuring in this system. As migration increases, the population
230 becomes more like a well-mixed system, where defectors are better able to
231 exploit the benefits of cooperation (Griffin *et al.*, 2004; Kümmerli *et al.*, 2009).

232 # Discussion

233 Despite their negative effects, deleterious traits can rise in abundance due to
234 genetic linkage with other traits that are strongly favored by selection (May-
235 nard Smith and Haigh, 1974). In a process termed the “Hankshaw effect”,
236 Hammarlund et al. (2015) recently demonstrated that cooperative behaviors
237 can prolong their existence by actively increasing their likelihood of hitchhik-
238 ing with a beneficial trait. While this process does favor cooperation in the
239 short term, it eventually reaches a dead end. When the opportunities for
240 adaptation are exhausted, and cooperators can no longer hitchhike, they face

241 extinction. In this work, we have considered whether niche construction can
242 maintain cooperation indefinitely.

243 We demonstrate that when niche construction occurs, cooperation can indeed
244 persist (Figure 1C). But what aspects of niche construction produce this result?
245 In our model, niche construction introduces additional selective effects that
246 could influence the evolutionary process. However, simply raising the selective
247 benefits provided by adaptations does not significantly increase cooperator
248 presence (Figure 2, columns C and A), and indicates that niche construction
249 plays an important role. Although cooperators benefit greatly from positive
250 niche construction, it does not fully explain our results (Figure 2 D). Indeed,
251 despite an initial increase in abundance, cooperators are eventually driven to
252 extinction when environmental change produces only positive fitness effects.
253 As with the Hankshaw effect, adaption eventually slows, allowing defectors to
254 outcompete cooperators (Figure 3C). While it does not benefit cooperation
255 when alone (Figure 3E), negative niche construction acts to prevent this stasis.
256 Combined, we find that both positive and negative niche construction are
257 required to main cooperation.

258 When successful, we observe that populations do not reach the maximum pos-
259 sible fitness (Figure 3A). Although cooperation is the focus of this study, it
260 can be seen as deleterious. Previous work has shown that niche construction
261 can favor deleterious alleles (Laland *et al.*, 1996, 1999). Similarly here, coop-
262 eration is maintained in the presence of niche construction, but lost otherwise
263 (Figure 2). Van Dyken and Wade (2012) showed that when two cooperative
264 behaviors co-evolve and niche construction feedbacks benefit the other type,

265 niche construction can increasingly favor these traits, which were otherwise
266 disfavored when alone.

267 By their very nature, public goods benefit populations by making their envi-
268 ronment more hospitable (West *et al.*, 2007a). For example, bacteria produce
269 a host of extracellular products that find soluble iron (Griffin *et al.*, 2004),
270 digest large proteins (Diggle *et al.*, 2007; Darch *et al.*, 2012), and reduce the
271 risk of predation (Cosson *et al.*, 2002). While many studies have explored how
272 the environment affects the evolution of cooperative behaviors such as these,
273 relatively few have examined how those behaviors affect the environment and
274 how the resulting feedbacks influence evolutionary trajectories.

275 In our model, the environmental state was implicitly modeled, and depended
276 solely on the current state of the population. In natural settings, however, the
277 timescales at which environments are modified and reproduction are likely to
278 be decoupled. For example, a multitude of factors including protein durabil-
279 ity (Brown and Taddei, 2007; Kümmerli and Brown, 2010), diffusion (Allison,
280 2005; Driscoll and Pepper, 2010), and resource availability (Zhang and Rainey,
281 2013; Ghoul *et al.*, 2014) influence both the rate and the degree to which public
282 goods alter the environment. These factors are likely to influence evolution-
283 ary trajectories (Laland *et al.*, 1996). Lehmann (2007) demonstrated that a
284 cooperative, niche constructing behavior can be favored when it only affected
285 selection for future generations, thus reducing the potential for competition
286 among contemporary kin. The evolutionary inertia that this creates, however,
287 may ultimately work against cooperators. When public good accumulates in
288 the environment, cooperators must reduce their investment in production to re-

289 main competitive (Kümmerli and Brown, 2010; Dumas and Kümmerli, 2012).
290 Cooperation that occurs facultatively, perhaps by sensing the abiotic (Bernier
291 *et al.*, 2011; Koestler and Waters, 2014) or biotic environment (Brown and
292 Johnstone, 2001; Darch *et al.*, 2012), are likely to be favored in these environ-
293 ments.

294 In many instances of cooperation, the environment is itself a biological entity,
295 which can produce additional evolutionary feedbacks. As the host population
296 changes, so too will selection on their symbiont populations. Here, evolution-
297 ary outcomes depend greatly on the degree of shared interest between the host
298 and symbiont. For example, the cooperative production of virulence factors by
299 the human pathogen *P. aeruginosa* in lung infections is harmful to those with
300 cystic fibrosis (Harrison, 2007). Conversely, cooperative light production by *A.*
301 *fischeri* is vital for the survival of its host, the Hawaiian bobtail squid (Ruby,
302 1996). It was recently argued that incorporating the effects of niche construc-
303 tion is critical for improving our understanding of viral evolution (Hamblin *et*
304 *al.*, 2014) and evolution in co-infecting parasites (Hafer and Milinski, 2015).
305 Incorporating host dynamics, co-evolution, and the feedbacks that they pro-
306 duce into models is likely to be equally important for gaining an understanding
307 of how cooperative behaviors evolve in these host-symbiont settings.

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- 309 • TODO: Organizers?
- 310 • TODO: lab comments

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319 Figures

320 **Figure 1**

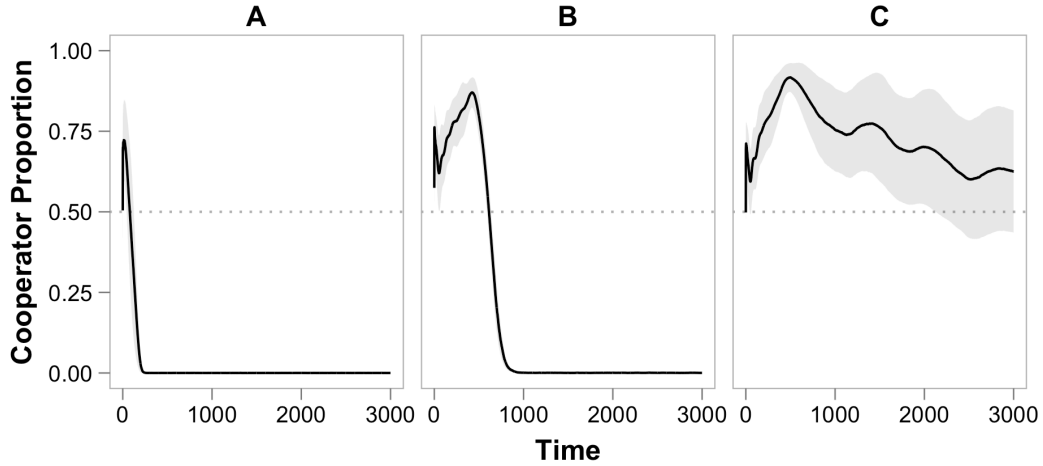


Figure 1: **Adaptation, niche construction, and the evolution of cooperation.** Curves show the average cooperators proportion among replicate populations, while shaded areas indicate 95% confidence intervals. Unless otherwise noted, parameter values used are listed in [Table 1](#). **(A)** When there is no opportunity for adaptation (L , the number of adaptive loci, is zero), cooperation is quickly lost. **(B)** When adaptation can occur ($L = 5$), but populations do not alter their environment (ϵ , the intensity of niche construction, is zero), cooperators temporarily rise in abundance before eventually going extinct. **(C)** Selective feedbacks from niche construction allow cooperation to be the dominant phenotype in 13 of 18 replicate populations.

321 **Figure 2**

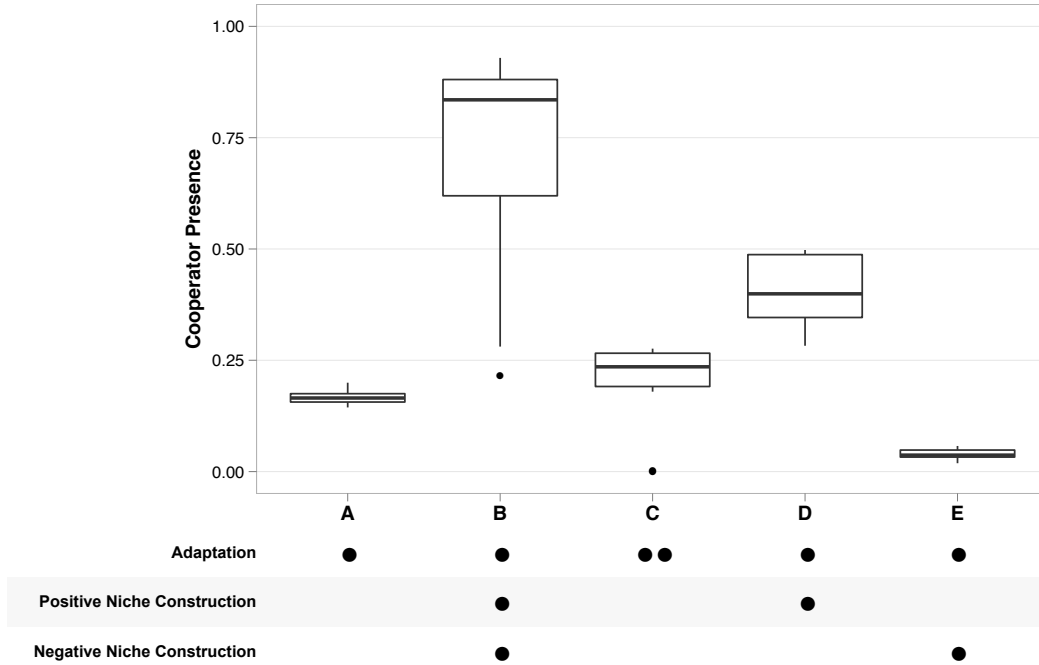


Figure 2: **Evolutionary Processes and their Effect on Cooperator Presence.** (A) In our model, adaptations allow cooperation to hitchhike. This effect is transient, which limits cooperator presence. (B) In the presence of niche construction (positive and negative), cooperator presence is significantly increased. (C) When incorporating the potential benefits that it provides, but removing the selective feedback produced by niche construction, cooperator presence is unaffected. (D) Positive niche construction increases cooperator proportion, but not to the levels seen in B. (E) Negative niche construction alone does not account for the increase in cooperator presence. In these box plots, whiskers show range of data within 1.5 IQR.

322 **Figure 3**

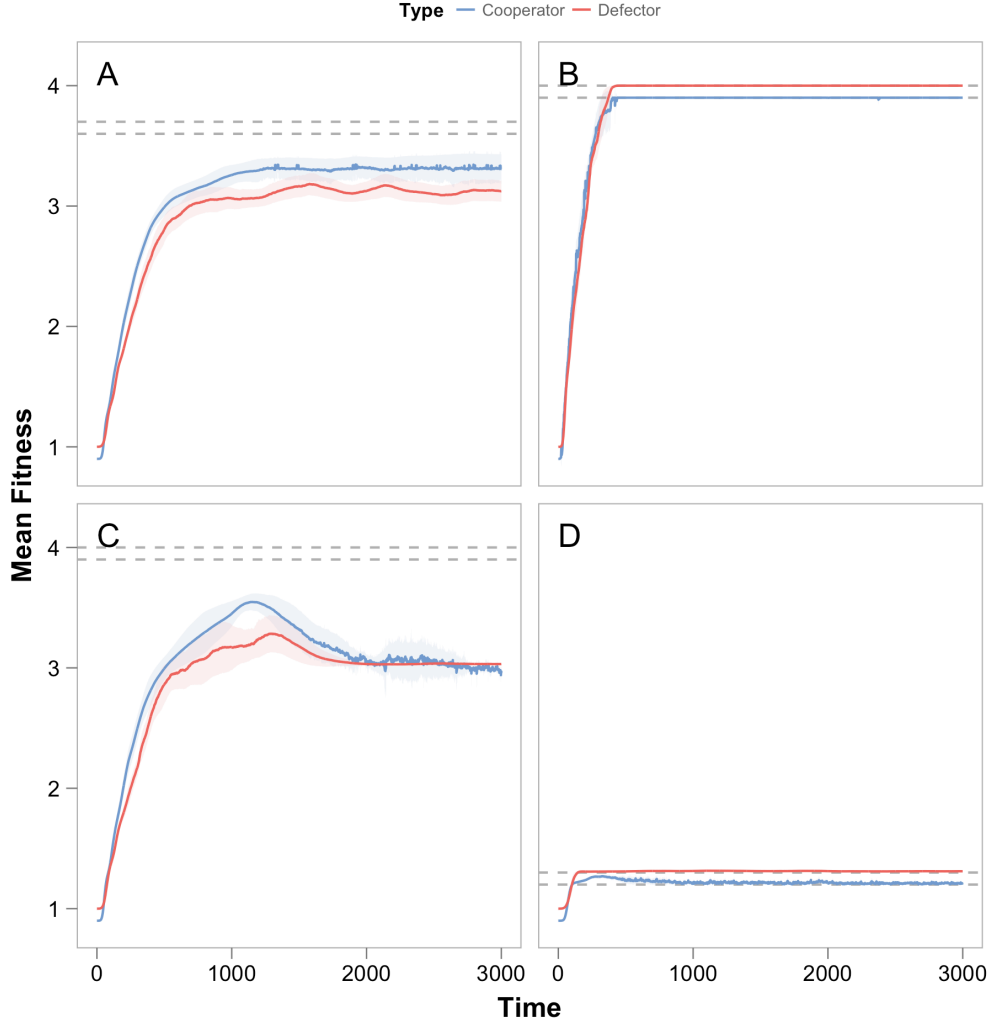


Figure 3: **Fitness Effects of Mutation Accumulation by Cooperators and Defectors.** Lines indicate the grand mean of cooperator (blue) and defector (red) fitness among replicate populations, while shaded areas indicate 95% confidence intervals. Upper and lower dotted lines indicate the maximum fitness values achievable by defectors and cooperators, respectively. **(A)** In the presence of niche construction, cooperators persist in the population by maintaining a greater mean fitness. **(B)** When selective values are increased ($\delta = 0.6$), populations rapidly adapt. In the absence of niche construction ($\epsilon = 0$), defectors eventually become equally adapted and surpass cooperators. At this point, cooperators are driven from the population due to the cost of cooperation. **(C)** With the effects of niche construction removed ($\epsilon = 0$), positive niche construction prolongs the time when cooperators are at an advantage over defectors. Once again, however, defectors eventually become equally adapted, leading to the loss of cooperation. **(D)** Without positive niche construction or further adaptive opportunities ($L = 1, a_{max} = 6$) cooperators do not benefit from niche construction.

323 **Figure 4**

324 Cooperators invade defector population. Fully adapted but mismatched. Neg-
325 ative NC.

326 **Figure 5**

327 Defectors invade cooperator population. Fully adapted and matched. Role of
328 Export.

329 **Figure 6**

330 **Figure 6A - Effect of Public Good Benefit ($S_{\max}-S_{\min}$)**

331 **Figure 6B - Effect of Migration Rate (m)**

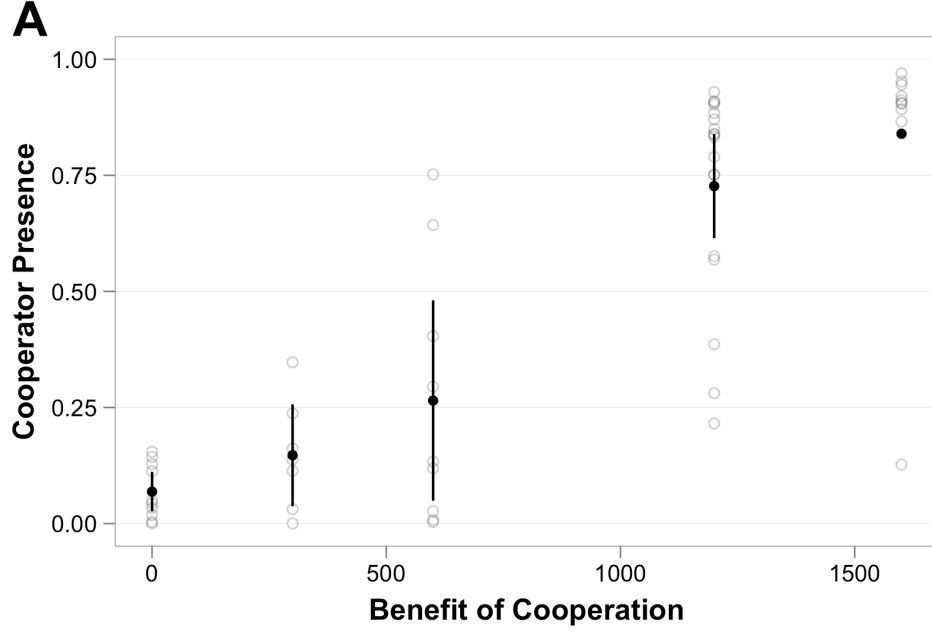


Figure 4: **Cooperator Presence as a Function of Population Size and Migration Rate.** Cooperator presence for each replicate population is shown as an open circle. The mean among these replicates is represented by a filled circle, and bars indicate 95% confidence intervals. **(A)** Cooperator presence increases proportional to increases in population size. Here, the benefit of cooperation (S_{max}) is varied. **(B)** Cooperator presence decreases with migration rate (m). When migration is low, cooperators can not export their niche, which limits expansion. When migration is high, the defectors immigrate into populations more quickly than cooperators can adapt.

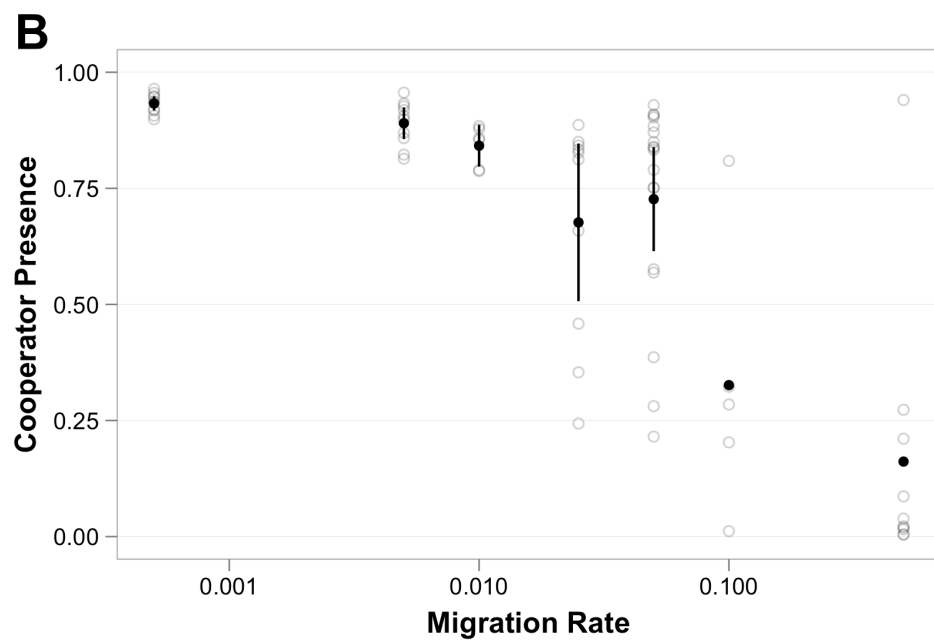


Figure 5: Will share caption with 6A

Table 1: Model parameters and their value

Parameter	Description	Base Value
N^2	Number of metapopulation sites	625
L	Number of adaptive loci	5
A	Number of alleles	6
δ	Fitness benefit, nonzero alleles	0.3
c	Production cost	0.1
ϵ	Fitness benefit, sequential alleles	0.00015
z	Baseline fitness	1
S_{min}	Minimum population size	800
S_{max}	Maximum population size	2000
μ_a	Mutation rate (adaptation)	10^{-5}
μ_c	Mutation rate (cooperation)	10^{-5}
m	Migration rate	0.05
p_0	Initial cooperator proportion	0.5
μ_t	Mutation rate (tolerance to new environment)	10^{-5}
T	Number of simulation cycles	1000
d	Population dilution factor	0.1

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