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Balancing Personal and Social Outcomes: Cultural Differences in Childrens Moral Decision-Making

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Abstract

Previous work by Tasimi and Wynn (2016) suggests that children (5 to 8 years old) prefer to affiliate with other people based on evaluations of their moral valence, but that this tendency is balanced against the child's personal costs and benefits. We predicted that children from individualistic cultures may prioritize individual outcomes, whereas children from collectivistic cultures may consider social outcomes and harmony as more important. We applied a forced-choice paradigm to measure children's rejection of associating with a wrongdoer (mean person) by refusing stickers they offered, even though the alternative reward offered by a nice person was much smaller. Results suggest that overall, Asian children are more likely to reject wrongdoers than Caucasian children at the expense of personal rewards. We also found that such cultural effects occur only among 7 to 8 years old children.