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Bridging the Gap Between Spatial and Social Reasoning: A Look at Social Distance and Estimated Caloric Expenditure

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Abstract: How does social presence influence the perception of energy expenditure? People often think about social relationships in terms of space. For instance, when drawing routes on maps they draw paths closer to friends than strangers (Matthews & Matlock, 2011). How does the mere presence of a friend influence reasoning about caloric expenditure? Here, participants who imagined working for an outdoor magazine viewed photos of walking bridges that one might encounter while hiking in groups. Some participants were told they preferred crossing first. Others were told they preferred crossing them last. All participants estimated how many calories they would burn while crossing the bridge. Those who imagined their friends on the far side of the bridge estimated fewer calories than those who imagined their friends standing immediately behind them. These results provide new insights into how social presence can influence our perceptions of predicted energy expenditure.