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Costs and Benefits of Helping; How Children and Adults Estimate the Intended Effort of Acting Together

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Abstract

During social interactions, we adapt our behavior in anticipation and response to the actions of our partners. This project explores whether anticipating that we are going to do something together also affects how we perceive objects in the world. In 4 Experiments, children and adults estimated the weight of objects when they anticipated that they will be lifted alone and when they thought they would have help. Results showed that the estimated weight of objects varied for adults and children depending on whether they thought they would lift alone or together. Children reliably perceived objects as lighter when they expected help from an adult parent compared to lifting them alone or with the help of a sibling. Parents, in turn, estimated objects would be heavier when they were helping their child. Overall, results suggest that we take into account the costs and benefits of helping another person when acting together.