

Random Assignment Task

This is a Step-By-Step guide of study procedures for those who wish to use the Random Assignment Task as an in-lab induction and/or measure of compassionate responding. Any questions can be directed to Daniel Lim dc.daniel.lim@gmail.com or David Desteno d.desteno@gmail.com at Northeastern University.

Step 1: Set up for the session.

Resources Needed: A camera system, at least 2 computers, 2 separate lab rooms (one for the experimenter as the lab office, and one for the participant as the actual lab space), a holding area for the confederate (out of sight from the participant), and a female research assistant to play the confederate role*.

- **Set up both computers -- for the participant and the confederate.**
- **Ensure that the camera system allows the experimenter to observe the participant in the lab from the lab office.**
- **Place the confederate in the holding area (this could be a separate room or an actual waiting area) so she is ready to play her role when the time comes.**

*Gender of the confederate is not a factor. Across studies, we found no gender differences in helping behavior between male and female confederates -- both genders elicited help at the same rate.

Step 2: Participant arrives, receives the consent form and detailed oral explanation about all aspects of the study and what their participation will entail.

- **Participant will return the signed consent form to the experimenter, receives oral explanation, and begins the first round of filler questions or tasks (you may wish to alter the filler questions/tasks to the context of your cover story).**
- **At the end of the filler task, a set of instructions will be displayed on the screen, informing the participant about his/her role as an observer in the upcoming Random Assignment Task. After reading the instructions, the participant is asked to inform the experimenter that he/she is done with the first part of the experiment.**

Step 3: Setting up the participant for the role of observer in the Random Assignment Task.

- **Once informed, the experimenter will bring the participant back into the lab space and provide a second round of briefing, in-person, to reinforce the instructions for observing the upcoming Random Assignment task. In both instances of briefing, the participant is informed that he/she will observe another participant (the confederate) complete a randomizer task that will assign her (and the next participant) to one of two possible experimental conditions via a randomizer program. The assigned condition could either be: (1) the "green condition" -- a short and easy task where they answer some questionnaires and play a photo hunting game, or (2) the "red condition" -- a longer, more strenuous task where they would complete a set of spatial rotation tasks and logic questions. **The randomizer program is rigged to always assign the confederate the red condition (spatial rotation tasks and logic questions).****

- After the briefing, a dual-monitor link is triggered between the participant's monitor and the confederate's PC, enabling the participant to observe the activities of the confederate's computer at his own monitor (refer to the video for more details on this set up).

Step 4: Compassion Induction via Random Assignment Task.

- Once the computers are linked-up, the experimenter then tells the participant to wait while they check to see if the other participant (the confederate) is here. When the confederate enters the lab, she is instructed to sign the consent forms and receives an oral briefing for the study. The participant is in the same room and hears the oral briefing, which serves as a third round of reinforcement of the tasks to come.
- Once briefing has concluded, the confederate will complete the first portion of the study which is a "well-being" questionnaire about how she is feeling today -- the confederate is instructed always answer this questionnaire in a manner that indicates poor well-being (refer to the video). All this is being done while the participant is observing which would give the participant the impression that the confederate is indeed ill-feeling.
- Once the "well-being" questionnaire has been completed, the confederate will trigger a randomizer program that will assign her one of the two aforementioned experimental conditions (the "red" or "green" condition). The program is always rigged to assign the ill-feeling confederate the "red" condition. Upon receiving the "red" condition, the confederate will let out a soft but audible sigh.
- The computer will instruct the confederate to summon the experimenter. Once the experimenter has been summoned, both of them will engage in a conversation right outside the lab entrance, allowing the participant to eavesdrop on the conversation.
- The confederate asks the experimenter if she can come back another time to finish the experiment as she is not feeling well and has an appointment at the student health service in less than an hour (refer to the video for an example). The experimenter denies this request saying that the lab has limited research credits and it might be impossible to reschedule the experiment.
- The confederate then reconsiders rescheduling and decides to stay to complete the experiment instead.

Step 5: Measuring State Emotions (Compassion)

- The confederate leaves the scene and into another room to complete the supposed "red" condition.
- The experimenter returns to the main lab and instructs the participant to move on to the next section which includes a set of filler questions that probes for feedback regarding the procedures that the participant observed, and an emotions checklist that ask the participant about his/her current feeling state.
- In the emotions checklist, the items of sympathy and compassion are used to measure compassion felt in the moment (as an average).

Step 6: Opportunity to help the sick confederate

- After completing the emotions checklist, the participant's screen will display a debriefing screen which indicates that he/she is done with the study and that he/she may either leave the lab via a non-public exit, or stay and help the other participant with her workload (specifically the logic questions -- recall that the confederate is supposedly in a different room completing the spatial task on the computer).
- They are told that if they choose to help, they can do as many questions they have time for and any remaining questions will be done by the ill-feeling participant.

Step 7: Measuring in-lab helping behavior

Materials Needed: a set of logic problems (GRE questions), answer sheet, scratch paper, pencil

- If the participant chooses to stay and help, they are provided with GRE logic questions to solve. They are reassured that they can do as many or as little as they felt like doing, and just leave the papers on the desk when they are finished.
 - Helping behavior is operationalized as the amount of time the participant stayed to work on the logic questions on behalf of the confederate (regardless of how many problems they actually complete).
 - The participant is asked to sit down at his/her computer as the experimenter provide instructions. Once the experimenter has finished giving instructions, a timer is triggered to start measuring the amount of time the participant spent in doing these questions.
 - The experimenter then retreats to the lab office and would stop the timer when the participant has been observed to leave his/her seat. A camera should be set up to facilitate this observation.
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