

Supplemental Materials to “Causal Attributions and the Trolley Problem”

Study 1

Billy and Suzy work for a company that has a central computer. Both Billy and Suzy answer incoming calls.

Since incoming calls are logged through the central computer, in order to make sure that one person is always available to answer incoming phone calls, the company issued the following official policy: Suzy is supposed to log into the central computer in the mornings, whereas Billy is supposed to log into the central computer in the afternoons. Further, the policy states that both Billy and Suzy are supposed to log out of the central computer when they are done answering calls.

Unfortunately, a problem has recently developed with the computer system: if two people are logged into the central computer at the same time, some important work e-mails will be immediately deleted.

Yesterday, Billy logged into the central computer in the afternoon. He did not log out when he was done, however, because a pirated movie he wanted to watch was still downloading. This morning, Suzy logged into the central computer to answer incoming calls. Since two people were logged into the central computer at the same time, some important work e-mails were deleted.

On a scale of 1-7, one being strongly disagree and seven being strongly agree, how much do you agree with each of the following claims?

[order randomized]

Billy caused the e-mails to be deleted.

Suzy caused the e-mails to be deleted.

Study 2

Billy and Suzy work for a company that has a central computer. Billy answers incoming calls and Suzy works in the marketing department.

Since incoming calls are logged through the central computer, in order to make sure that one person is always available to answer incoming phone calls, the company issued the following official policy: Billy is supposed to log into the central computer in the mornings. Suzy is also allowed to log into the central computer, although her job does not require her to do so.

Unfortunately, a problem has recently developed with the computer system: if nobody logs into the computer in the morning, some important work e-mails will be immediately deleted.

This morning, neither Billy nor Suzy logged into the central computer. Billy didn't log in because he was chatting with a friend in the breakroom. Suzy didn't log in because she was busy working on a marketing project and didn't need to access any information from the computer. Since nobody logged into the central computer, some important work e-mails are deleted.

On a scale of 1-7, one being strongly disagree and seven being strongly agree, how much do you agree with each of the following claims?

[order randomized]
Billy caused the e-mails to be deleted.
Suzy caused the e-mails to be deleted.

Study 3

Flip

A runaway trolley is headed toward five innocent people who are on the track and who will be killed unless something is done. Marcy is too far away to warn the people to get off the track, but she is standing next to a switch that she can flip to redirect the trolley onto a second track. If Marcy flips the switch, the five people on the original track will be saved. However, an innocent bystander is standing on the second track. If Marcy flips the switch, the trolley will hit and kill the bystander.

Marcy flips the switch, redirecting the trolley onto the second track. The trolley hits and kills the bystander, but not the five people.

On a scale of 1-7, one being strongly disagree and seven being strongly agree, how much do you agree with the following claim?

[given one of the following three statements]
Marcy acted morally.
Marcy is responsible for the death of the bystander.
Marcy caused the death of the bystander.

Refrain

[first paragraph same as *Flip*]

Marcy does not flip the switch and the trolley continues down the original track. The trolley hits and kills the five people, but not the bystander.

On a scale of 1-7, one being strongly disagree and seven being strongly agree, how much do you agree with the following claim?

[given one of the following three statements]
Marcy acted morally.
Marcy is responsible for the death of the five people.
Marcy caused the death of the five people.

Study 4

Flip

Tom is walking to the trolley station when he finds himself in a life and death situation: A runaway trolley is hurtling down the tracks toward five people. All five people will be killed if the trolley proceeds on its present course.

Tom is too far away to warn the people, and he has no way to stop the trolley. The only thing that he can do is to flip the switch next to him to divert the trolley onto a secondary track, which has a single person on it.

Tom is faced with a decision:

If he decides to flip the switch, the trolley will be diverted and the person on the secondary track will die.

If he decides to do nothing, the trolley will not be diverted and the five people on the original track will die.

Tom decides to flip the switch. The trolley is diverted onto the secondary track. The person on the track is hit and dies.

On a scale of 1-7, one being strongly disagree and seven being strongly agree, how much do you agree with the following claim?

Tom caused the death of the person on the secondary track.

Refrain

[first five paragraphs same as *Flip*]

Tom decides to do nothing. The trolley proceeds down the original track. The five people on the track are hit and die.

On a scale of 1-7, one being strongly disagree and seven being strongly agree, how much do you agree with the following claim?

Tom caused the death of the five people on the original track.

Study 5

Flip

[vignette same as *Flip* from Study 4]

On a scale of 1-7, one being strongly disagree and seven being strongly agree, how much do you agree with the following claim?

Tom's decision caused the death of the person on the secondary track.

Refrain

[vignette same as *Refrain* from Study 4]

On a scale of 1-7, one being strongly disagree and seven being strongly agree, how much do you agree with the following claim?

Tom's decision caused the death of the five people on the original track.

Study 6

Flip

Tom is walking to the trolley station when he finds himself in a dangerous situation: A runaway trolley is hurtling down the tracks. The only thing that Tom can do is to flip the switch next to him to divert the trolley onto a secondary track, which has a single person on it.

Tom is faced with a decision:

If he decides to flip the switch, the trolley will be diverted and the person on the secondary track will die.

If he decides to do nothing, the trolley will not be diverted and will continue along the original track, eventually slowing to a stop with nobody getting hurt.

Tom decides to flip the switch. The trolley is diverted onto the secondary track. The person on the track is hit and dies.

On a scale of 1-7, one being strongly disagree and seven being strongly agree, how much do you agree with each of the following claims?

Tom's decision caused the death of the person on the secondary track.

Refrain

Tom is walking to the trolley station when he finds himself in a dangerous situation: A runaway trolley is hurtling down the tracks toward five people. All five people will be killed if the trolley proceeds on its present course. The only thing that Tom can do is to flip the switch next to him to divert the trolley onto a secondary track, which has nobody on it.

Tom is faced with a decision:

If he decides to flip the switch, the trolley will be diverted and will continue along the secondary track, eventually slowing to a stop with nobody getting hurt.

If he decides to do nothing, the trolley will not be diverted and the five people on the original track will die.

Tom decides to do nothing. The trolley proceeds down the original track. The five people on the track are hit and die.

On a scale of 1-7, one being strongly disagree and seven being strongly agree, how much do you agree with each of the following claims?

Tom's decision caused the death of the five people on the original track.