

**The Belief–Behavior Gap in Failure Contexts:  
Blame Allocation Strategies Impacting  
Observer’s Perceptions and Advice Valuation**

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### **Abstract**

How individuals accept or reject blame following a group failure influences how others perceive their warmth, competence, honesty, and willingness to pay for their advice. In this study (N = 184), participants evaluated a target that either claimed, assigned, shared, or remained neutral regarding blame after a hypothetical failure. Results indicate that targets who claim blame in any capacity are judged significantly warmer, their competence is not negatively impacted, and they are seen as more honest than individuals that assign blame. Descriptive results indicate participants were also more willing to pay for advice from these individuals. However, when using a behaviorally incentivized design (N = 62), people paid most for advice from targets that assigned blame. This reveals initial evidence for an important belief-behavior gap. Observers believe they value warmth and integrity, but when personal resources are at stake, they prioritize competence. However, non-significant Anova results were found for the willingness to pay measures, which highlights the need for future research to confirm these trend-level findings. These results can inform an individual's behavior for how to best navigate blame following a joint failure.

*Key words: warmth, competence, blame, failure, reputation, organizational context*

## Introduction

Failure is a highly prevalent outcome when people work together in teams. Miscommunication, conflicting goals, and uneven contributions are common factors that increase the likelihood of a failure (Dayton & Henriksen, 2007). Social loafing is a psychological construct where individuals exert less effort working in groups compared to working alone (Simms & Nicholes, 2014). In this instance, individuals believe other group members will increase their effort to compensate for their lack of contribution. However, this can backfire, as teammates will feel anger or mirror the slacking group member, ultimately leading to group failure. Miscommunication can similarly elicit failure as group members are not aligned on the overarching goal of the project, resulting in poor outcomes. For example, imagine two coworkers are assigned to prepare a quarterly report for an organization. One group member highlights concrete performance metrics, while the other focuses on demonstrating areas of improvement. Without clear alignment, this report lacks synergy and coherence, which could negatively impact the stakeholders' perception of the coworkers and the report. Team-based failures can be seen in many aspects of our daily lives including sports games, hospitals, and within organizations. It is a highly frequent outcome that demands more research.

When a team fails to deliver on a project, how members accept, reject, or ignore blame may influence how they are perceived by others. Specifically, it may affect how others (such as a supervisor) evaluate that member's warmth (e.g. kindness, empathy) and competence (e.g. skill, intelligence). This paper argues that people hold contrasting beliefs and behaviors regarding these blame allocation strategies. As well as observer's perceptions, this study explores how different blame allocation strategies used by a target impact an observer's willingness to pay for that person's advice on a future hypothetical task. This serves as a more practical measure of

observer's confidence in a target since it compels an observer to integrate their perceptions of warmth and competence into a single, consequential decision about the target's utility. This paper will compare these results with a behaviorally incentivized study assessing willingness to pay for advice on a future task when participants' money was at stake to determine if observer's beliefs match their behaviors. In these mirrored designs, the target has already tried a task which resulted in a group failure. This paper aims to detect whether people's preferences match their behavior, and it provides practical guidance to individual members about how to address blame following a team failure.

### **Literature review**

#### ***Warmth and Competence***

Social cognition refers to how we think about others. We process and store cues about others to help us navigate future interactions. Within this domain, perceived warmth and competence are considered two universal dimensions on which we evaluate others (Fiske et al., 2007). People's ratings of warmth stem from a target's perceived goals and reinforce how likeable they are (Cuddy et al., 2011). People's ratings of competence are driven by a target's perceived capacity to follow through on their goals and reinforce how respected they are (Cuddy et al., 2011). Prior research highlighted an asymmetry in how warmth and competence impact an observer's overall, global evaluations of a target. Specifically, observers' impressions are influenced more by warmth than competence perceptions in situations where observers did not have personal resources at stake (Cuddy et al., 2008; Wojciszke et al., 1998). Wojciszke et al (1998) demonstrated this asymmetry with a free-form task where participants, who were asked to list the 10 most important personality traits of another, wrote significantly more traits related to warmth than competence. Also, when participants were asked to form a global impression of a

target, positive morality traits (e.g. honest, helpful) were a stronger predictor of an observer's positive opinion than positive competence traits (e.g. creative, knowledgeable) (Wojciszke et al., 1998). Crucially, this was also not a behaviorally incentivized task. These findings suggest information related to warmth is more easily accessible and drives general impression formation more than information related to competence in hypothetical scenarios.

### ***Communicating Failure***

Prior work on warmth and competence in the workplace suggests these perceptions can be shaped by how teammates react to joint failure. The Responsibility Exchange Theory models communication as a negotiation of credit and blame (Chaudhry & Lowenstein, 2019). These researchers created a scenario where two coworkers submitted a report with a catastrophic error. Participants were uninformed about who caused the error but knew that one person was the advice-creator and the other the advice-receiver. According to their theory, the way these coworkers communicate about this failure produces a direct trade-off between warmth and competence. They theorize that when the advice-receiver blames their teammate for the error, they do so to increase their perceived competence but incur a cost to their perceived warmth. Alternatively, these researchers propose that when the advice-giver apologizes for the error, it helps their perceived warmth but risks decreasing their perceived competence (Chaudhry & Lowenstein, 2019). Thus, how people converse about joint failure, such as taking or assigning blame, can differentially shape an observers' perceptions of them.

### ***Contrasting Beliefs and Behaviors***

People often claim that they value warmth over competence, however past research argues that competence is preferred in behaviorally incentivized scenarios. Cuddy et al. (2008)

claim that initial impression formation is dominated by perceived warmth, however, competence becomes central to decision-making in leadership and organizational contexts. In these cases, leaders are personally invested in their company, so they prefer to make promotion decisions based on perceived competence, viewing it as critical in achieving important goals. Another study reviewing research looked at hiring decisions by organizations (Cuddy et al., 2011). These researchers found that in hiring cases for technical roles, where candidates were equally likeable, the applicant that demonstrated higher competence levels was consistently hired, especially when performance outcomes are emphasized. A final study depicted participants' preference for competence in personally invested scenarios. When their economic outcome was dependent on a partner's performance on a puzzle task, they consistently favored the "competent jerk" over the "loveable fool" (Belmi & Pfeffer, 2018). These findings demonstrate that people's behavior is dependent on competence when personal stakes are involved. Holding contrasting beliefs and behaviors about target individuals is especially important to understand following group failures where observers must evaluate a target's warmth and competence to navigate future interactions.

### **Research Question and Hypotheses**

This study aims to explore observer's perceptions and willingness to pay for advice depending on blame allocation strategies following group failure using a hypothetical design. This hypothetical design will allow us to assess people's beliefs regarding blame messages on social impressions. We then compare results to a previously run behaviorally incentivized pilot study assessing people's behaviors regarding willingness to pay for advice (Chaudhry et al., 2024). In this behavioral design, the participant's money is at stake. The designs are mirrored allowing us to isolate the comparison between hypothetical beliefs and behaviorally incentivized

preferences. Thus, the goal of this study is to first explore people's beliefs following a group failure and juxtapose their beliefs with their actual behaviors.

We hypothesize that people will prefer individuals that take blame following a group failure. Specifically, individuals that claim blame will have higher perceived warmth and honesty, no decrease in perceived competence, and more willingness to pay by participants to view their advice on a hypothetical task compared to individuals who only assign blame. Fiske et al. (2007) demonstrate that judgments regarding warmth are more easily recognizable than competence judgments perhaps because intent is easily recognizable whereas competence perceptions require repeated signals by a target. In this isolated scenario, perceived intent influences observers' beliefs more heavily, so we predict that competence perceptions will not significantly decrease in targets that claim any amount of blame compared to those who assign blame. Further, we hypothesize that sharing blame (both claiming and assigning blame) will lead to the highest warmth, competence, honesty, and willingness to pay ratings in the hypothetical design study. We believe the "both" blame allocation strategy allows a signal of warmth to be projected without severely penalizing perceived competence. Lastly, we hypothesize that ratings by a third-party observer will differ between the hypothetical and behaviorally incentivized study. When participants have personal resources on the line, they will prefer targets who assign blame following a group failure. This behavior supports the belief-behavior gap where people believe they prefer individuals who claim blame, but their behavior seeks targets that assign responsibility following a group failure.

This study helps address a gap in previous literature by bringing this divergence between beliefs and actual behaviors into the context of failure. It asks the questions: which blame allocation strategy do observers believe they prefer? And does their behavior differ from their

beliefs? Insights into these questions can help individuals understand the complex dynamics of blame assignment following a joint failure and how individuals can determine when to claim, assign, or share blame to best improve their reputation.

## **Methods**

### ***Study Design***

The hypothetical study used an experimental design to allow causal conclusions to be gathered about the impact of blame allocation strategies (take, assign, both, or control) on warmth, competence, and honesty perceptions, and willingness to pay for advice from a target. This was a between-subjects design, meaning the participants were only exposed to one blame message condition, so potential carryover and order effects were eliminated. This study received approval from the University of Chicago IRB ensuring no psychological or physical harm to participants. All participants provided explicit consent before participation.

### ***Participants***

We collected 232 total responses from participants recruited through the online crowdsourcing platform Prolific. Participants were screened to be at least 18 years old, fluent in English, living in the U.S. and had no prior participation in any other study within this research project. Forty-seven participants did not complete the survey or failed the attention check. One participant did not answer the comprehension check questions correctly. The data from these participants were dropped from the final analysis (N = 184).

### *Measures & Procedures*

Taking, assigning, and sharing blame were seen to be the most used blame allocation strategies when assessing over 500 articles on Retraction Watch (Chaudhry et al., 2024). This is a publicly available website describing retracted papers. The writers often interview the authors of the retracted papers to offer an explanation, which provides a naturalistic setting of blame strategies following a group failure. Participants in this study were introduced to two hypothetical teammates: Aiden and Bobby. They learned that in a hypothetical previous task, Aiden and Bobby had the chance to earn a bonus. They individually completed three mathematical questions, and if they got more than four or more questions correct together, they would receive a monetary bonus. Participants then were informed that Aiden's and Bobby's team did not answer enough questions correctly. Next, participants learned that Aiden had a chance to describe what occurred during the team task but could not talk specifically about the task questions directly.

This message was the independent variable which had four conditions: take, assign, both or control. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the four blame allocation strategies. All conditions started off with the statement "You probably already saw this, but my team lost," and ended with, "I wish it went better." The middle statement varied by condition. In the "take" condition, Aiden claimed all the blame: "I messed up during the game." In the "assign" condition, Aiden blamed their teammate: "My teammate messed up during the game." In the "both" condition, Aiden claimed some responsibility while also blaming their teammate: "My teammate and I both messed up during the game." In the "control" condition, Aiden did not mention anything about how the failure occurred, so there was no additional middle statement.

Regarding the dependent variables, participants were then told to imagine that they would participate in this mathematical task with a separate teammate. Before participating, they had the option to hypothetically pay for a piece of advice about the task itself from Aiden. They were informed that a computer will randomly choose a price between 0 and 100 cents. If their offer is equal to or higher than the computer's price, they will pay that price and receive the advice. However, if their offer is lower, they will pay nothing and not obtain the advice. They submitted their willingness to pay and then answered 6 Likert-style questions assessing their perceptions of warmth and competence. Warmth had three questions relating to perceptions of the target person's (Aiden) empathy, caringness, and kindness (Levine & Schweitzer, 2014). For example, "To what extent do you think Aiden is kind?" Participants choose how kind Aiden was on a -30 ("very unkind") to 30 ("very kind") scale. Competence had three questions relating to perceptions of the target person's competence, intelligence, and skillfulness (Cuddy et al., 2008). For example, "To what extent do you think Aiden is skillful?" This was also assessed using a -30 ("very unskillful") to 30 ("very skillful") scale. Next, they answered their belief in how honest Aiden was in describing how the failure occurred on a -3 (strongly disagree) to 3 (strongly agree) scale (see [Appendix 2](#) for the full survey). Finally, as part of the exploratory analysis, they answered how likely Aiden left advice from 0 ("not at all likely") to 100 ("extremely likely"), and their beliefs on the quality of the anticipated advice from 0 ("not at all useful") to 100 ("very useful") (see [Appendix 1](#)).

The behaviorally incentivized study had the exact same procedure, blame messages, and main dependent variables. However, there were two key differences. "Aiden" and "Bobby" were real participants in a previous study, and participants received the 100-cent bonus prior to learning the target person's message about blame allocation following the group failure. This

bonus served as the participant's personal resources which they could choose to use to purchase advice.

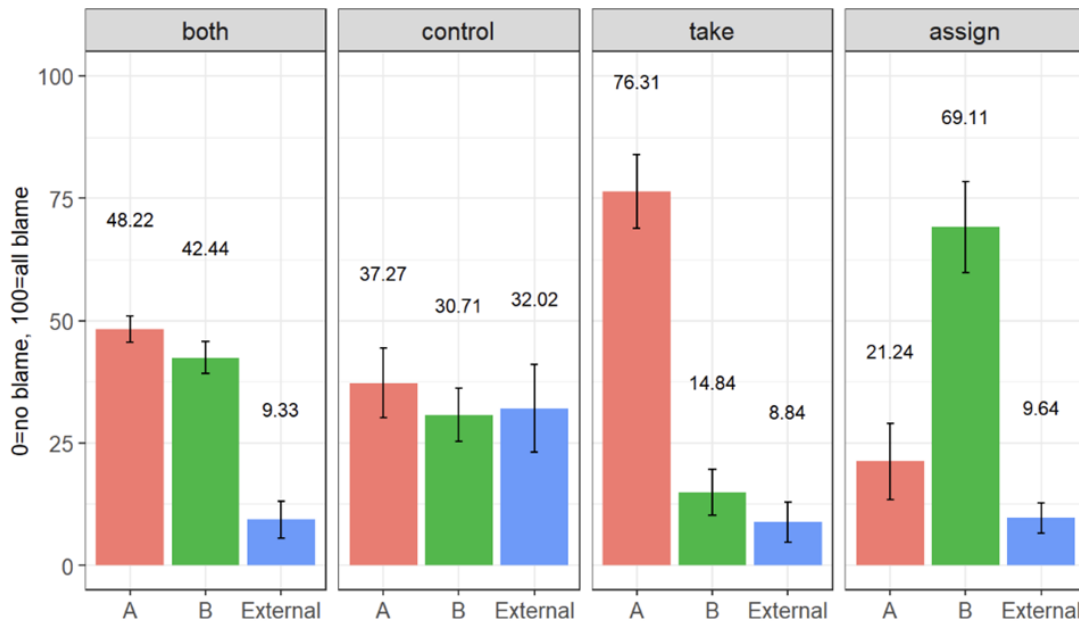
## Results

### *Manipulation Check*

A manipulation check confirmed that participants' perceptions of Aiden's blame varied across the message conditions as intended. Figure 1 depicts the mean blame attributed to Aiden and Bobby in each condition, with error bars representing 95% confidence intervals. A series of paired-samples t-tests was used to assess participants' perceptions of Aiden's blame assigned to them versus Bobby in each of the four conditions. In the take condition, participants assigned Aiden significantly more blame than Bobby,  $t(134) = 6.40$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = .55$ , 95% CI [0.37, 0.73]. Smaller, but still significant differences were found in the both  $t(134) = 5.00$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = .43$ , 95% CI [0.26, 0.61] and control conditions  $t(134) = 2.80$ ,  $p = .005$ ,  $d = .24$ , 95% CI [0.07, 0.42], with Aiden being attributed slightly more blame than Bobby. In contrast, the assign condition showed significantly more blame attributed to Bobby compared to Aiden,  $t(134) = -5.70$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 1.681$ , 95% CI [.77, 2.58]. These findings support the effectiveness of the blame allocation message manipulation.

**Figure 1**

**Perception of How Aiden Intended to Allocate Responsibility with His Message**



*Note.* Each panel represents one of the four conditions, as labeled on the top. On the X-axis, “A” represents Aiden, “B” refers to “Bobby,” and “External” refers to any cause of the problem outside of Aiden and Bobby. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

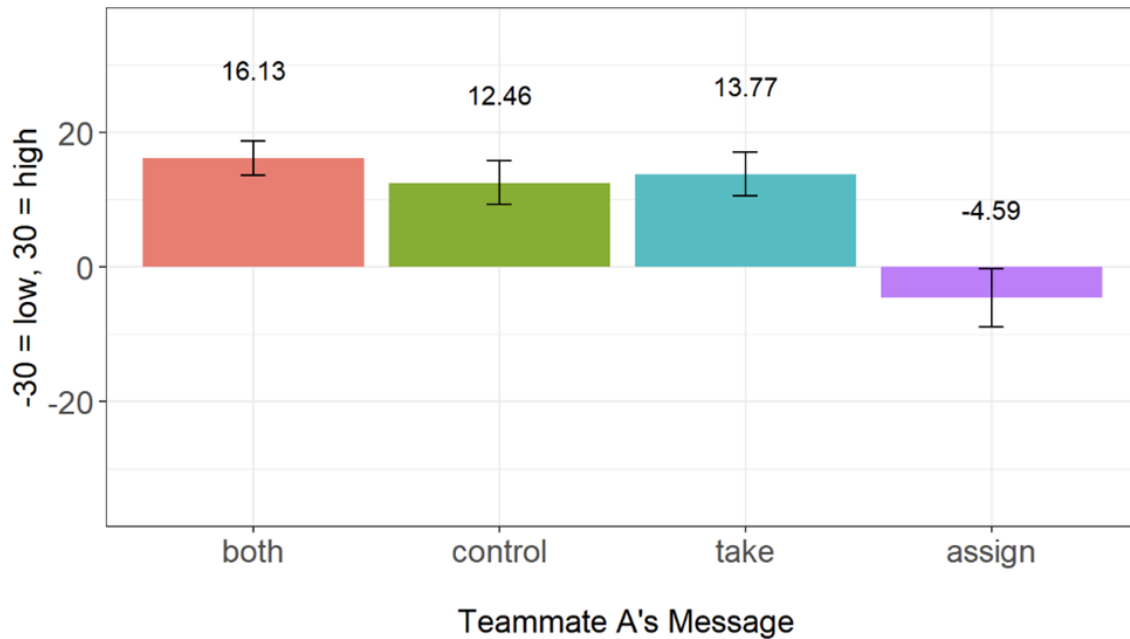
***Warmth Ratings***

We assessed observer perceptions of a target person’s warmth and competence using three questions each. Internal consistency was good for warmth ( $\alpha = .80$ ) and acceptable for competence ( $\alpha = .72$ ). Using a one-way ANOVA, we assessed the impact of blame allocation messages on participants’ warmth perceptions. The analysis showed a significant effect of

message condition on warmth ratings  $F(3, 176) = 31.70, p < .001, \eta^2 = .35, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.25, 1.00]$ , revealing that blame allocation type significantly influenced participants' perceptions. Post-hoc Tukey analysis shows that the assign blame conditions ( $M = -4.59, SD = 14.53$ ) resulted in significantly lower warmth ratings compared to all other message types: both ( $M = 16.13, SD = 8.31$ ), control ( $M = 12.46, SD = 10.84$ ) and take ( $M = 13.77, SD = 10.89$ ) conditions (all  $ps < .001$ ) (see Figure 2). The effect sizes for these comparisons were large:  $d = 1.75$  for assign vs both,  $d = 1.33$  for assign vs control, and  $d = 1.43$  for assign vs take. Warmth ratings did not differ significantly among the both, control, or take conditions (all  $ps > .41$ ), with effect sizes ranging from slightly negative to slightly positive ( $ds = -0.12$  to  $0.38$ ). These findings support our first hypothesis that people who claim any amount of blame are seen as warmer than individuals that assign blame following a group failure. It does not confirm our second hypothesis because targets that share blame are not seen as significantly warmer than targets that only stake blame.

## Figure 2

### Warmth Ratings for Each Message Condition



*Note.* Each bar represents one of the four conditions, as labeled on the X-axis. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

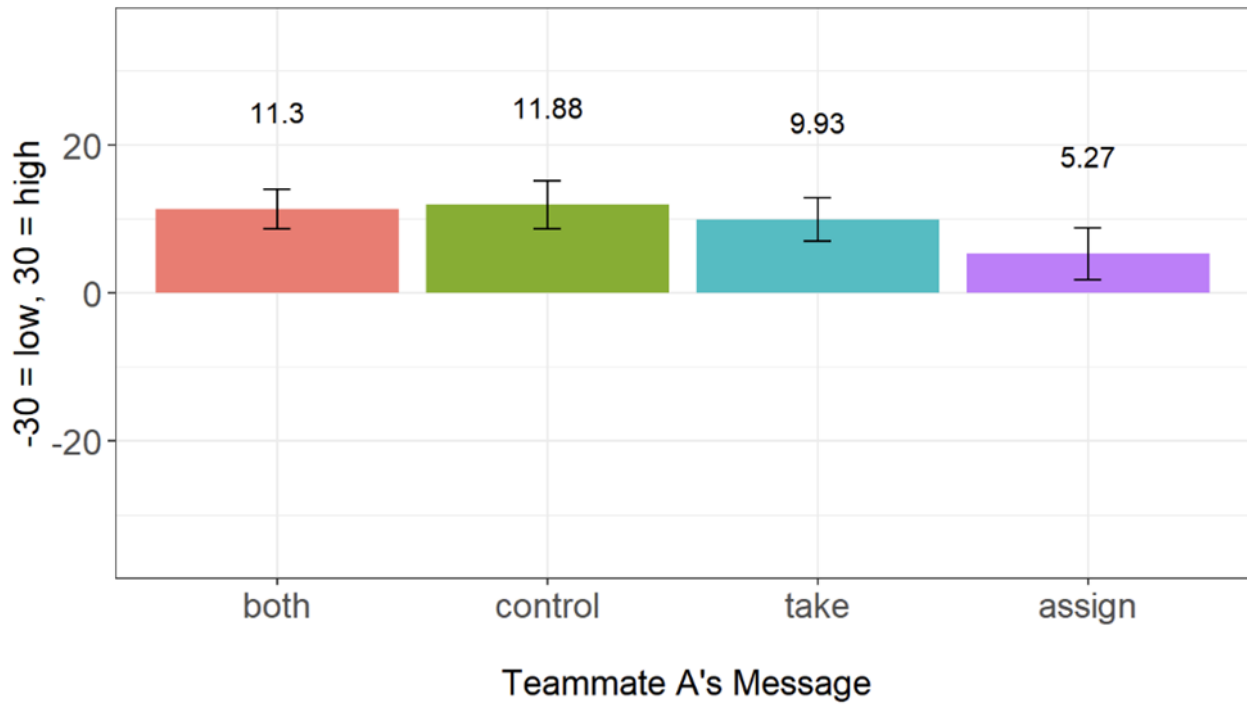
### ***Competence Ratings***

Another one-way ANOVA was used to assess the impact of blame allocation messages on participants' competence perceptions. This analysis revealed a significant main effect of message condition on perceived competence,  $F(3, 176) = 3.81, p < .011, \eta^2 = .06, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.01, 1.00]$ , indicating that competence perceptions were influenced by the blame messages. Post-hoc Tukey analysis shows that the assign blame conditions ( $M = 5.27, SD = 11.70$ ) resulted in significantly lower competence ratings compared both ( $M = 11.30, SD = 8.72$ ), and control ( $M = 11.88, SD = 10.86$ ) conditions (all  $ps < .036$ ). The difference between assign and take ( $M = 9.93, SD = 9.65$ ) was not statistically significant ( $p = .144$ ) (see Figure 3). The effect sizes for these comparisons were moderate:  $d = 0.58$  for assign vs both,  $d = 0.59$  for assign vs control, and  $d = 0.43$  for assign vs take. Competence ratings did not significantly differ among the both, control,

and take conditions (all  $ps > .804$ ;  $ds = -.06$  to  $.19$ ). These findings demonstrate that assigning blame hurts perceived competence, while taking or sharing blame does not significantly decrease competence ratings. These results confirm our first hypothesis that people who claim blame will see no significant decrease in competence perceptions compared to people who assign blame. However, these findings do not confirm our second hypothesis that people who share blame will be seen as most competent following a joint failure on a hypothetical task.

### **Figure 3**

#### **Competence Ratings for Each Message Condition**



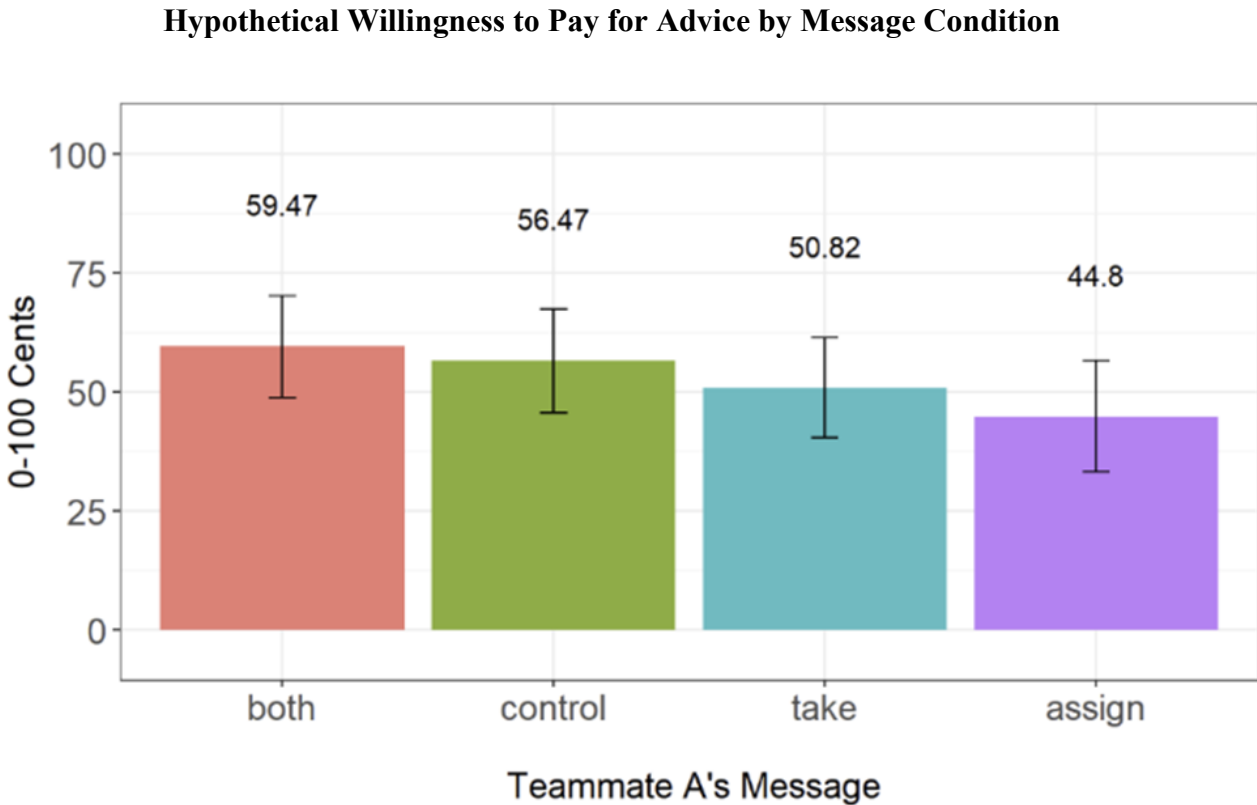
*Note.* Each bar represents one of the four conditions, as labeled on the X-axis. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

### ***Willingness to Pay***

In this study, using a hypothetical task design, we assessed participant's willingness to pay for advice from the target before participating in this hypothetical task using a one-way ANOVA. This analysis revealed no significant main effect of message condition on willingness to pay for advice,  $F(3, 176) = 1.42, p < .24, \eta^2 = .02, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.00, 1.00]$ , revealing that blame message type did not significantly influence participants' investment decisions. Although mean WTP values were descriptively higher in the both ( $M = 59.47, SD = 35.55$ ) control ( $M = 56.47, SD = 36.40$ ) and take ( $M = 50.82, SD = 34.92$ ) conditions compared to the assign ( $M = 44.80, SD = 38.85$ ) condition, post-hoc Tukey comparisons show no statistically significant differences between any message pairs (all  $ps > .228$ ) (see Figure 4). Effect sizes for pairwise comparisons

span from small to moderate, with Cohen's  $d$  amounts ranging between .08 and .39, but none are statistically significant. These findings show that message framing shows only descriptive differences in willingness to pay preferences, but it does not have significant impact.

**Figure 4**



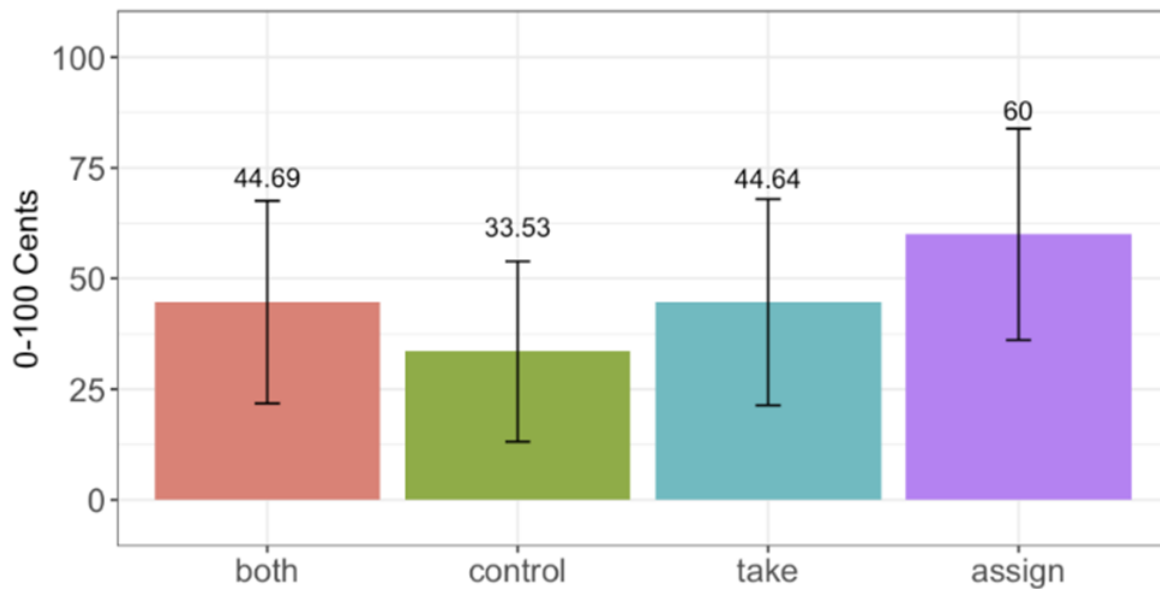
*Note.* Each bar represents one of the four conditions, as labeled on the X-axis. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

### ***Comparing Results on Willingness to Pay: Hypothetical vs. Real Behavior***

A behaviorally incentivized pilot study was previously run using the same procedures, except in this scenario, participants' actual money was on the line (Chaudhry et al., 2024). Using a one-way ANOVA, we found no significant effect of blame messages on willingness to pay,  $F(3, 58) = 1.09, p = .36, \eta^2 = .05, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.00, 1.00]$ . Post-hoc Tukey comparisons show no

statistically significant differences between any conditions ( $ps > .28$ ). Descriptive results indicate that participants in the assign condition ( $M = 60.00, SD = 43.09$ ) reported a higher willingness to pay for advice than those in the both ( $M = 44.69, SD = 42.95$ ), control ( $M = 33.53, SD = 39.64$ ), and take ( $M = 44.64, SD = 40.31$ ) conditions, although this result was not significantly different (see Figure 5). Effect sizes were small:  $d = -.36$  for assign vs both,  $d = -.64$  for assign vs control, and  $d = -.37$  for assign vs take. Comparisons between both, control, and take showed negligible effects ( $ds > .28$ ). These findings provide directional evidence for the belief-behavior gap; however, the small sample size did not result in significant effects between blame messages on willingness to pay for advice.

**Figure 5**

**Behaviorally Incentivized Willingness to Pay for Advice by Message Condition**

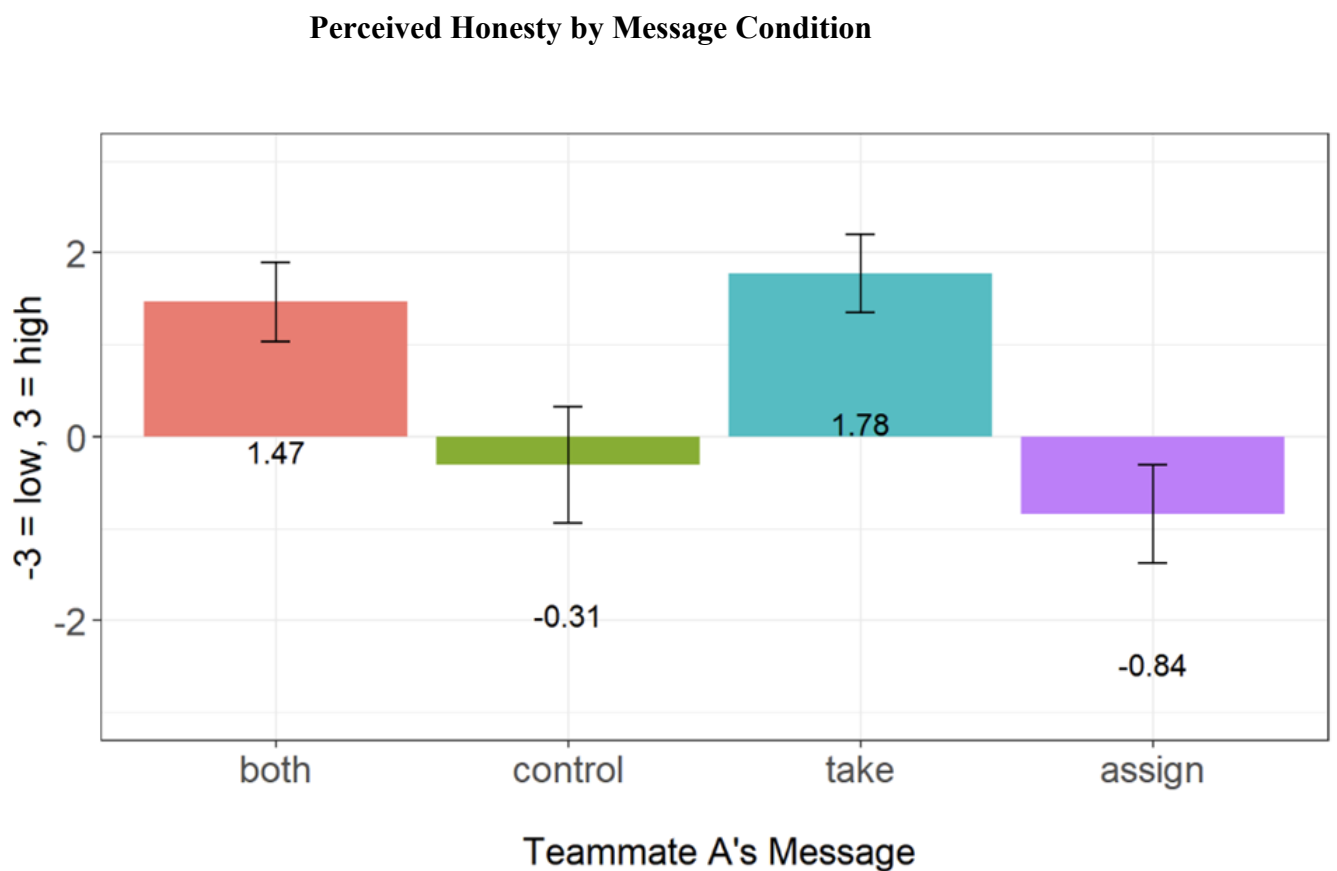
*Note.* Each bar represents one of the four conditions, as labeled on the X-axis. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

***Honesty***

Our last analysis looked at the perceived honesty. This was measured through a one-way ANOVA assessing participants' honesty perceptions depending on blame messages used by the target individual. Analysis found a significant main effect of message condition on perceived honesty,  $F(3, 176) = 25.90, p < .001, \eta^2 = .31, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.21, 1.00]$ , showing that the blame messages significantly influence participants' honesty judgments. Post-hoc Tukey comparisons showed that the assign condition ( $M = -0.84, SD = 1.77$ ) was rated significantly less honest than the both ( $M = 1.47, SD = 1.44$ ) and take ( $M = 1.78, SD = 1.41$ ) conditions ( $ps < .001$ ) (see Figure 6). The effect sizes for these comparisons were large:  $d = 1.43$  for assign vs both, and  $d = 1.64$  for assign vs take. The control condition ( $M = -0.31, SD = 2.11$ ) was also rated significantly less

honest than the both ( $p < .001$ ,  $d = 0.98$ ) and take ( $p < .001$ ,  $d = 1.16$ ) conditions (see Figure 6). Honesty ratings did not significantly differ between the both and take conditions ( $p = .82$ ,  $d = -.22$ ), nor between the assign and control conditions ( $p = .45$ ,  $d = 0.27$ ). These results support our first hypothesis by demonstrating that claiming blame significantly increases perceived honesty compared to targets that assign blame.

**Figure 6**



*Note.* Each bar represents one of the four conditions, as labeled on the X-axis. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

## General Discussion

This study examines observers' warmth, competence, and honesty perceptions, as well as their willingness to pay for advice based on the blame allocation message following a joint failure. Warmth and competence were used as the initial dependent variables because past literature describes them as being the two key dimensions people use for social perception (Cuddy et al., 2011; Fiske et al., 2007). Our results support our first hypothesis that targets who claim responsibility are seen as significantly warmer and more honest compared to individuals that assign blame following a group failure. This is consistent with theorizing in previous literature (Chaudhry & Loewenstein, 2019). The both condition produced the highest warmth score; however, this difference was not statistically significant compared to the take condition, which does not provide supportive evidence for our second hypothesis. In terms of competence, people that took blame did not have significantly reduced scores of perceived competence compared to those that assigned blame, which supports our first hypothesis. This may be because warmth is more influential and accessible when forming impressions of a target (Cuddy et al., 2008; Fiske et al., 2007, Wojciszke et al., 1998). Targets who shared blame were seen as slightly more competent than those who solely took blame. However, this difference was not statistically significant, which disconfirms our second hypothesis. This analysis demonstrates that claiming blame does not reduce perceived competence in hypothetical scenarios. Finally, in the hypothetical scenario, participants were descriptively most willing to pay for advice from targets who claimed all or some amount of blame, aligning with their warmth and competence perceptions. While not significant, this provides initial evidence for our first and second hypotheses that people prefer accountability after a group failure. In contrast, findings from the behaviorally incentivized pilot study show a conflicting pattern. When participants' real money was at stake, they allocated the most money for advice from targets that assigned blame. This

divergence provides preliminary evidence for our third hypothesis which demonstrates a belief-behavior gap: participants believe they prefer warm and kind individuals in hypothetical scenarios but prioritize competent targets when their personal resources are on the line. Future studies should aim to replicate these results with significant results regarding the willingness to pay variable.

### ***Exploratory Findings***

Exploratory analysis sheds further light on the impact of blame allocation following a group failure by looking at believed likelihood of advice left and the believed quality of anticipated advice. Targets who assigned blame were seen as less likely to leave advice, and if advice was given, people believe that the advice would be lacking quality. In comparison, participants believed that individuals who shared blame were most likely to leave advice, and if advice was given, it would be high-quality guidance.

### ***Limitations and Future Directions***

This study uses a hypothetical scenario, which is helpful for establishing participant's beliefs, however, it may not capture the complexities of real-world behavior. We try to address this by comparing results of a behaviorally incentivized pilot study, however the sample size for this pilot is small ( $N = 62$ ), so large error bars are apparent. Future studies could replicate the behaviorally incentivized design with a larger sample size to see if the directional belief-behavior divergence persists. This introduces another limitation; this paper assesses two separate studies, not two conditions. Future studies could introduce both a hypothetical and behaviorally incentivized design as two conditions of an independent variable: environmental context. Next, the wording of the blame messages may subtly influence interpretations of a target person. We

kept the wording parallel between conditions, but this meant we could not use blame messages found in the real world. Future work could use more naturalistic messages combining audio and visual components for the blame messages to increase ecological validity. Third, this study assesses a single domain of team failure within the context of the workplace. Future studies could use other contexts like sports teams or group projects within the educational environment to test the generalizability of these results. Finally, this sample was restricted to participants in the United States. To further increase generalizability, future studies can replicate this design with participants outside of the US to test cultural effects on perceptions of blame allocation following a group failure.

### ***Implications***

These findings offer important insights into how people socially evaluate group members following a failure. First, taking and sharing blame can increase warmth and honesty perceptions without reducing perceptions of competence in hypothetical scenarios. This can inform individual's behavior surrounding blame when observer's do not have personal resources at stake, like casual debriefs, peer evaluations, or failing in front of strangers. Second, people's beliefs and behaviors in evaluating target individuals are descriptively not consistent. Individuals should keep this in mind when observers are personally invested in future outcomes like stakeholders, fans, and supervisors. Leadership and training programs can use these results to inform their topics of discussion surrounding failure. Transparently claiming blame can increase warmth perceptions without negatively affecting competence perceptions. This could change people's default to hide failures within organizational contexts, which could improve cross-team collaboration and overall organizational efficiency. By claiming blame, it also provides a reputational benefit of signaling integrity, which could lead to more positive collaborations in the

future. This research contributes to reputation management and social judgment literature by providing initial evidence that perceptions of blame allocation strategies are dependent on if observers' personal resources are at stake. Understanding this trend-level divergence between observers' beliefs and behaviors could help individuals manage their reputation and opportunities for collaboration depending on contextual factors following a group failure.

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## Appendix 1

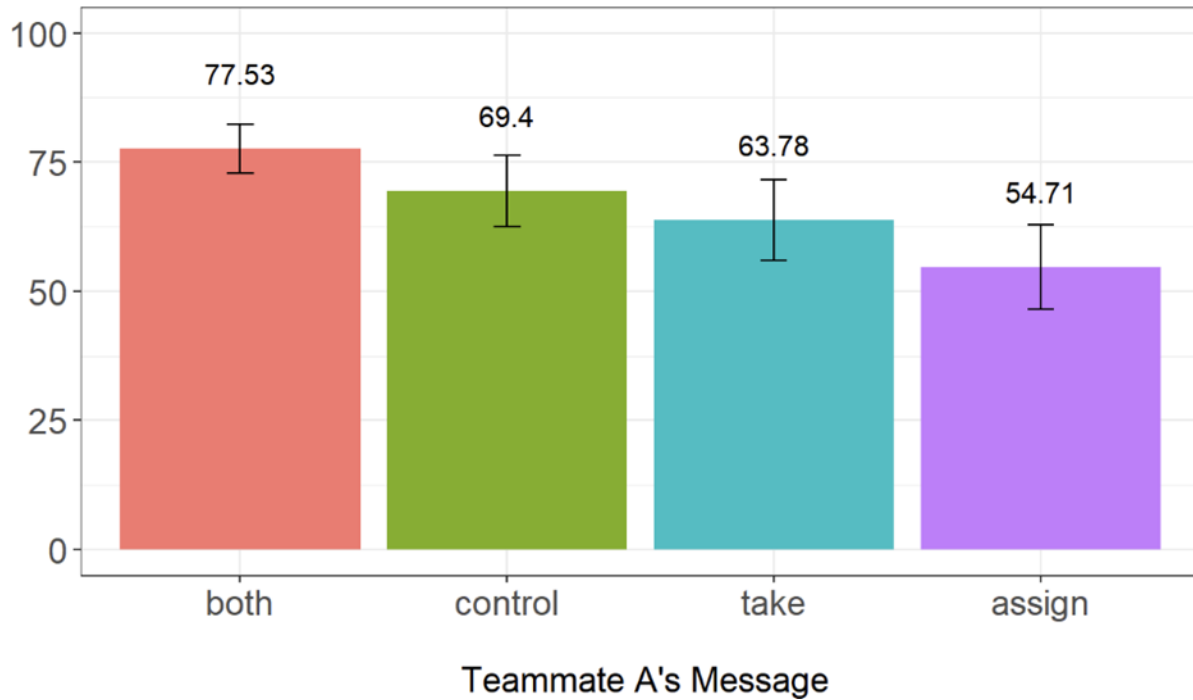
### Supplemental Exploratory Analysis

### ***Likely and Quality***

As part of our exploratory analysis, we assessed participants perceived likelihood that the target left advice and the believed quality of the anticipated advice. It should be noted that advice was never seen, these results are participant's beliefs on the hypothetical advice from the target individual. Using a one-way ANOVA, we found a significant effect of blame message condition on perceived likelihood that the target person left advice,  $F(3, 176) = 7.55, p < .001, \eta^2 = .11$ , 95% CI [0.04, 1.00], demonstrating that blame allocation strategies impact participants' belief that advice was left. Post-hoc Tukey comparisons showed that participants' believed targets that assigned blame ( $M = 54.71, SD = 27.27$ ) were significantly less likely to leave advice than targets that shared blame ( $M = 77.53, SD = 15.83; p < .001$ ) and targets in the control condition ( $M = 69.40, SD = 22.73; p = .017$ ), but not statistically different compared to participants that only take blame ( $M = 63.78, SD = 26.21; p = .261$ ) (see Figure 7). Participants also believed the likelihood of advice was significantly less likely in the take condition ( $p = .030$ ) compared to the both condition. The effect sizes for these comparisons were small to large:  $d = 1.02$  for assign vs both,  $d = .59$  for assign vs control, and  $d = .34$  for assign vs take. The likelihood ratings between the both and control ( $p = .36$ ) and control and take ( $p = .667$ ) were not statistically significant. This provides supporting evidence for our second hypothesis, that targets who share blame are seen as most likely to leave advice and therefore most favorably.

### **Figure 7**

#### **Believed Likelihood of Advice Being Left by Target**

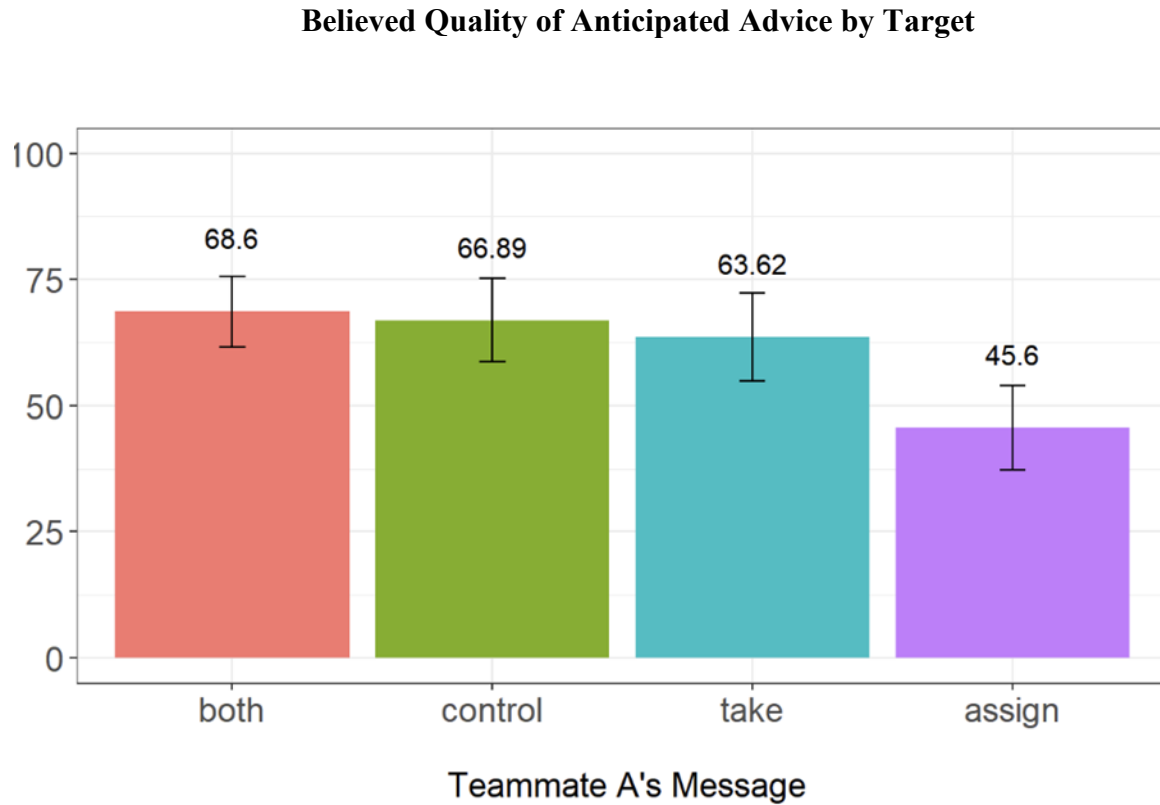


*Note.* Each bar represents one of the four conditions, as labeled on the X-axis. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

We used another one-way ANOVA to assess participants' beliefs on the quality of anticipated advice left by a target individual based on blame allocation strategy. We found a significant main effect of message condition on believed quality of anticipated advice,  $F(3, 176) = 6.91, p < .001, \eta^2 = .11, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.04, 1.00]$ , showing that perceptions of anticipated advice quality depend on the blame allocation strategy. Post-hoc Tukey comparisons showed that the assign condition ( $M = 45.60, SD = 27.91$ ) was rated significantly lower in perceived quality of anticipated advice compared to the both ( $M = 68.60, SD = 23.28$ ), control ( $M = 66.89, SD = 27.47$ ) and take ( $M = 63.62, SD = 29.08$ ) conditions (all  $ps < .009$ ) (see Figure 8). The effect sizes for these comparisons were moderate to large:  $d = 0.89$  for assign vs both,  $d = 0.77$  for assign vs control,  $d = .63$  for assign vs take. The perceived quality of anticipated advice did not significantly differ among the both, control and take conditions (all  $ps < .818; ds = .07$  to  $.19$ ).

These findings provide support for our first hypothesis showing that assigning blame leads to much lower quality perceptions of anticipated advice from observers compared to targets that claim blame.

**Figure 8**



*Note.* Each bar represents one of the four conditions, as labeled on the X-axis. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

## Appendix 2

### Experimental Materials

# BIT - Hypothetical Study - advice givingss

---

Start of Block: Consent



study\_info **University of Chicago Research Study** Time:  $\{e://Field/study\_time\}$  Task: Work on a set of tasks. Please read the general consent information below and answer the question to begin. -----  
 ----- **University of Chicago Online Consent Form for Research**  
**Participation** Study Number: IRB22-1166 Study Title: Judgment & Decision Making Study This is a consent form for research participation. It contains important information about this study and what to expect if you decide to participate. Your participation is voluntary. **Purpose:** In this research study, we are seeking to better understand human judgment and decision making. **Procedures and Time Required:** In this study, you will answer some questions. This study will take you  $\{e://Field/study\_time\}$ . Your participation is voluntary, so you may choose not to participate or to stop your participation in this research at any time. **Financial Information:** Participation in this study will involve no cost to you. **Compensation for FULL completion:**  $\{\{e://Field/completion\_fee\} + a$  chance of  $\{\{e://Field/bonus\}$  bonus. **Risks and Benefits:** Your participation in this study does not involve any risks to you beyond those of everyday life. Taking part in this research study may not benefit you personally, but we may learn new things that could help others. **Confidentiality:** We will work to make sure that no one sees your survey responses without approval. All data will be kept on password protected computers and servers. We will remove identifiers from the data before analyzing and reporting them. If you decide to withdraw from this study, the researchers will ask you if the information already collected from you can be used. If you decide to withdraw, data collected up until the point of withdrawal may still be included in analysis. De-identified information from this study may be used for future research studies or shared with other researchers for future research without your additional informed consent. **Contacts & Questions:** If you have questions or concerns about the study, you can contact the principal investigator Dr. Shereen Chaudhry, Assistant Professor of Behavioral Science, by emailing shereen.chaudhry@chicagobooth.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this research, feel you have been harmed, or wish to discuss other study-related concerns with someone who is not part of the research team, you can contact the University of Chicago Social & Behavioral Sciences Institutional Review Board (IRB): phone (773) 702-2915, email sbs-irb@uchicago.edu. **Consent:** Participation is voluntary. Refusal to participate or withdrawing from the research will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you might otherwise be entitled. By

clicking “Agree” below, you confirm that you have read the consent form, are at least 18 years old, and agree to participate in the research. Please print or save a copy of this page for your records.

AGREE (1)

DECLINE & EXIT SURVEY (0)

---

robot Please check the following box.

End of Block: Consent

---

Start of Block: Attention Check

message\_timer Timing

First Click (1)

Last Click (2)

Page Submit (3)

Click Count (4)



prolificid Please type in your Prolific ID:

---



attention Consider the following situation: This is an attention check. Please type the word tree into the box next to family friends.

	Not at all 1 (1)	2 (2)	Somewhat 3 (3)	4 (4)	Very much 5 (5)
Acquaintances (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Parents (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sibling or cousins (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Family friends (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Work colleagues (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

---



Q6 Write one short sentence naming **two hobbies** you like to do. Start the sentence by saying, "I like to..." (e.g., I like to ride bikes and eat apples.) Use something other than the example.

---

End of Block: Attention Check

---

Start of Block: Condition Selector

selector-message **Condition Selector:** Please copy and paste one of the following into the box to select a condition for message. assign take control both

---

End of Block: Condition Selector

---

Start of Block: Instructions about the game

Q472 IN THIS SURVEY, YOU WILL: 1. Learn about a past team-based task involving two people. 2. View a short message from one of those participants. 3. Answer questions about how you perceive that person. PLEASE READ CAREFULLY. There will be a comprehension check at the end, and you will receive a guaranteed  $\$e://Field/bonus$  bonus if you correctly answer ALL the comprehension check questions. So take your time.

Page Break



taskinst1

### 1. Information about a hypothetical previous scenario

A hypothetical past scenario involved two people — Aiden and Bobby — who worked together as a team to complete a task. This task involved answering a series of questions. At stake was a team bonus: if Aiden and Bobby succeeded, they would each receive a monetary bonus; if they failed, neither of them would receive any money.

Click to read more (1)

Display this question:

If 1. Information about a hypothetical previous scenario A hypothetical past scenario involved two p... = Click to read more



taskinst2 Both teammates worked independently on the same **three questions each**, and their final performance was based on the combined number of correct answers across their individual responses. To succeed and win the bonus, Aiden and Bobby had to get **a total of at least four questions correct between the two of them (see image below)**. Each teammate had up to two minutes per question.

Click to read more (1)

---

Display this question:

If Both teammates worked independently on the same three questions each, and their final performance... = Click to read more



taskinst3 Unfortunately, in this hypothetical scenario, Aiden and Bobby's team **did not** complete four questions correctly altogether. As a result, the team failed and neither person received the bonus.

Click to read more (1)

---

Display this question:

If Unfortunately, in this hypothetical scenario, Aiden and Bobby's team did not complete four questi... = Click to read more

taskinst4 Following this outcome, Aiden had the opportunity to write a short message to describe their interpretation of what occurred during this hypothetical situation. You will read this statement, and then answer some questions. There are no right or wrong answers. We're simply interested in your personal impressions based on what Aiden chooses to say in their message.

---

Page Break

taskcc\_start

**Comprehension check** Before you continue with the scenario, please answer the following comprehension check questions based on what you read previously.



taskcc1 What was the outcome of the past hypothetical scenario?

- They passed the task and earned a bonus (1)
  - Only Aiden earned the bonus (2)
  - Only Bobby earned the bonus (3)
  - They failed the task and did not earn a bonus (4)
- 



taskcc2 How did Aiden and Bobby work on this task?

- They worked together on every question (0)
- Only one of them answered questions (1)
- They worked independently, and their answers were combined (2)
- They could edit each other's answers before submission (3)

End of Block: Instructions about the game

---

Start of Block: Instructions about the game - 2nd Chance

failed\_cc **NOW, PLEASE RE-READ THE PAST HYPOTHETICAL SCENARIO AND TRY ONE MORE TIME.**

---



taskinstsc1

**1. Information about a hypothetical previous scenario**

A hypothetical past scenario involved two people — Aiden and Bobby — who worked together as a team to complete a task. This task involved answering a series of questions. At stake was a team bonus: if Aiden and Bobby succeeded, they would each receive a monetary bonus; if they failed, neither of them would receive any money.

Click to read more (1)

---

Display this question:

If 1. Information about a hypothetical previous scenario A hypothetical past scenario involved two p... = Click to read more



taskinstsc2 Both teammates worked independently on the same **three questions each**, and their final performance was based on the combined number of correct answers across their individual responses. To succeed and win the bonus, Aiden and Bobby had to get **a total of at least four questions correct between the two of them (see image below)**. Each teammate had up to two minutes per question.

Click to read more (1)

---

Display this question:

If Both teammates worked independently on the same three questions each, and their final performance... = Click to read more



taskinstsc3 Unfortunately, in this hypothetical scenario, Aiden and Bobby's team **did not** complete four questions correctly altogether. As a result, the team failed and neither person received the bonus.

Click to read more (1)

---

Display this question:

If Unfortunately, in this hypothetical scenario, Aiden and Bobby's team did not complete four questi... = Click to read more

taskinstsc4 Following this outcome, Aiden had the opportunity to write a short message to describe their interpretation of what occurred during this hypothetical situation. You will read this statement,

and then answer some questions. There are no right or wrong answers. We're simply interested in your personal impressions based on what Aiden chooses to say in their message.

---

Page Break

Q1089

**Comprehension check** Before you continue with the scenario, please answer the following comprehension check question based on what you read previously.



taskcc1.2 What was the outcome of the past hypothetical scenario?

- They passed the task and earned a bonus (1)
- Only Aiden earned the bonus (2)
- Only Bobby earned the bonus (3)
- They failed the task and did not earn a bonus (4)



taskcc2.2 How did Aiden and Bobby work on this task?

- They worked together on every question (0)
- Only one of them answered questions (1)
- They worked independently, and their answers were combined (2)
- They could edit each other's answers before submission (3)

End of Block: Instructions about the game - 2nd Chance

---

**Start of Block: CC 1 Answers**

Display this question:

*If passedtaskcc = no*

**cc\_noB You missed one or more comprehension check questions. Please review the correct answers below before continuing:** What was the outcome of the past hypothetical scenario? Correct answer: **They failed the task and did not earn a bonus** How did Aiden and Bobby work on this task? Correct answer: **They worked independently, and their answers were combined**

---

Display this question:

*If passedtaskcc = yes*

**cc\_yes You passed the comprehension check!**

**End of Block: CC 1 Answers**

---

**Start of Block: DV**

Manip

Before answering questions, please read what Aiden had to say about the past hypothetical task:

**" $\{e://Field/X\}$ "** Note that Aiden **could only send you a short message that did not discuss any details of the task itself.**

End of Block: DV

---

**Start of Block: CC2**

Q556

**Comprehension check 2** Before continuing with the scenario, please answer the following comprehension check question based on what you read previously.

---



CC2 Which of the following messages did Aiden write?

- You probably already saw this, but my team lost. I wish it went better. (9)
- You probably already saw this, but my team lost. The questions were quite difficult. I wish it went better. (10)
- You probably already saw this, but my team lost. This was a complex situation. I wish it went better. (11)
- You probably already saw this, but my team lost. My teammate messed up during the game. I wish it went better. (12)
- You probably already saw this, but my team lost. I messed up during the game. I wish it went better. (13)
- You probably already saw this, but my team lost. My teammate and I both messed up during the game. I wish it went better. (14)

End of Block: CC2

---

Start of Block: Manip\_2

Q560 **NOW, PLEASE RE-READ AIDEN'S MESSAGE AND TRY ONE MORE TIME.**

---

Q558

Please read what Aiden had to say about the past hypothetical task: "[\\${e://Field/X}](#)" Note that Aiden **could only send you a short message that did not discuss any details of the task itself.**

---

Page Break

---

Q561

**Comprehension check 2** Before continuing with the scenario, please answer the following comprehension check question based on what you read previously.

---



Q565 Which of the following messages did Aiden write?

- You probably already saw this, but my team lost. I wish it went better. (9)
- You probably already saw this, but my team lost. The questions were quite difficult. I wish it went better. (10)
- You probably already saw this, but my team lost. This was a complex situation. I wish it went better. (11)
- You probably already saw this, but my team lost. My teammate messed up during the game. I wish it went better. (12)
- You probably already saw this, but my team lost. I messed up during the game. I wish it went better. (13)
- You probably already saw this, but my team lost. My teammate and I both messed up during the game. I wish it went better. (14)

End of Block: Manip\_2

---

Start of Block: cc2\_answer

Display this question:

*If passedtaskcc2.2 = no*

**Q563 You missed the comprehension check question. Please review the correct answers below before continuing:** Which of the following messages did Aiden write? Correct answer:  $\{e://Field/X\}$

---

Display this question:

If `passedtaskcc2 = yes`

Or `passedtaskcc2.2 = yes`

Q566 You passed the comprehension check!

End of Block: cc2\_answer

---

Start of Block: DV

Q549 Aiden was given the option to leave advice for future participants. Imagine you are selected to complete the same task with three questions, but you will do this on your own. Each question involves some numeric ability and has a 2-minute time limit. Beforehand, you are given 100 cents and given the chance to pay to see Aiden's advice before completing the task yourself.

Click to view more (1)

---

Display this question:

If Aiden was given the option to leave advice for future participants. Imagine you are selected to c... = Click to view more

Q522

A computer will **randomly choose a price** between 0 and 100 cents. If your offer is **equal to or higher** than the computer's price, **you'll pay that price** (not your full offer), and **you'll get the advice**.

If your offer is **lower** than the computer's price, you'll **pay nothing** (keep your 100 cents), and **you won't get the advice**.

click to read more (4)

---

Display this question:

If A computer will randomly choose a price between 0 and 100 cents. If your offer is equal to or h... = click to read more

Q523

**Because the price is random and unknown to you, the best strategy is this:**

If you really

want the advice, offer the **full 100 cents**. If you really don't want it, offer **0 cents**. If you're unsure, offer a number in between that reflects **how much it's worth to you**.

This ensures you get the advice *only if it's worth it to you*, at a fair price.

Page Break



**DV Now, decide how much Aiden's advice on the game is worth to you. Enter an amount between 0 and 100 cents.** (We have repeated the instructions at the bottom of this page.)

**Q508 INSTRUCTIONS ARE REPEATED BELOW FOR YOUR REFERENCE:** A computer will **randomly choose a price** between 0 and 100 cents. If your offer is **equal to or higher** than the computer's price, **you'll pay that price** (not your full offer), and **you'll get the advice**.

If your offer is **lower** than the computer's price, **you'll pay nothing** (keep your 100 cents), and **you won't get the advice**. **Because the price is random and unknown to you, the best strategy is this:**

If you really want the advice, offer the **full 100 cents**. If you really don't want it, offer **0 cents**.

If you're unsure, offer a number in between that reflects **how much it's worth to you**. This ensures you get the advice only if it's worth it to you, at a fair price.

End of Block: DV

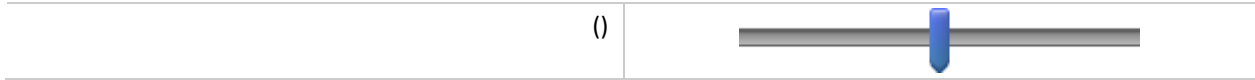
Start of Block: Likely & quality



Likely How likely is it that you think Aiden left advice?

Not at all likely Extremely Likely

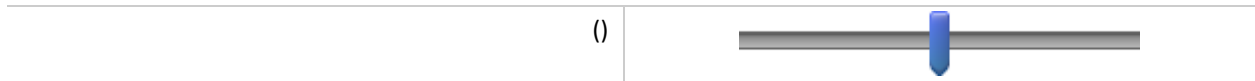
0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100



Quality How useful do you think the advice will be?

Not at all   Slightly   Moderately   Quite   Very  
 useful   useful   useful   useful   useful

0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100



End of Block: Likely & quality

Start of Block: Social Perceptions

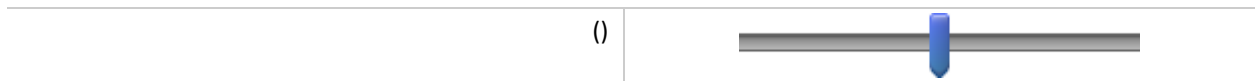


empathetic

To what extent do you think Aiden is **empathetic**?

Very   Moderately   Slightly   Neither   Slightly   Moderately   Very  
 UNEMPATHETIC   unempathetic   unempathetic   unempathetic   empathetic   empathetic   EMPATHETIC  
 nor  
 empathetic

-30 -20 -10 0 10 20 30



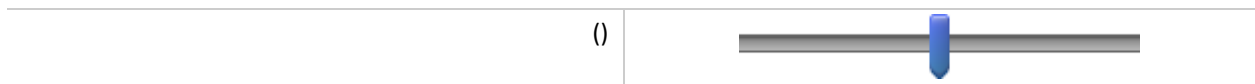


uncaring

To what extent do you think Aiden is **uncaring**?

Very Moderately Slightly Neither Slightly Moderately Very  
CARING caring caring caring uncaring uncaring UNCARING  
nor  
uncaring

-30 -20 -10 0 10 20 30

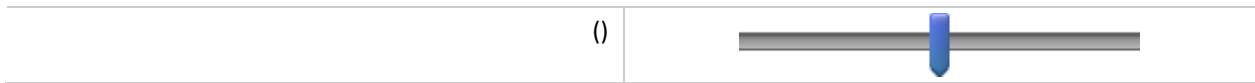


kind

To what extent do you think Aiden is **kind**?

Very Moderately Slightly Neither Slightly Moderately Very  
UNKIND unkind unkind unkind kind kind KIND  
nor  
kind

-30 -20 -10 0 10 20 30



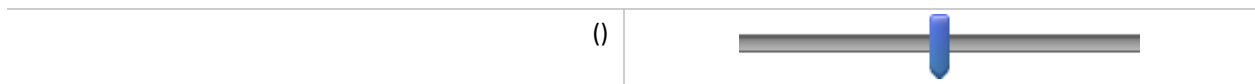


competent

To what extent do you think Aiden is **competent**?

Very      Moderately      Slightly      Neither      Slightly      Moderately      Very  
 INCOMPETENT incompetent incompetent incompetent competent competent COMPETENT  
 nor  
 competent

-30   -20   -10   0   10   20   30

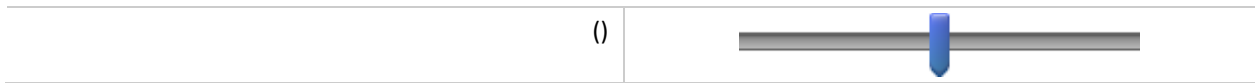


unintelligent

To what extent do you think Aiden is **unintelligent**?

Very      Moderately      Slightly      Neither      Slightly      Moderately      Very  
 INTELLIGENT intelligent intelligent intelligent unintelligentunintelligentUNINTELLIGENT  
 nor  
 unintelligent

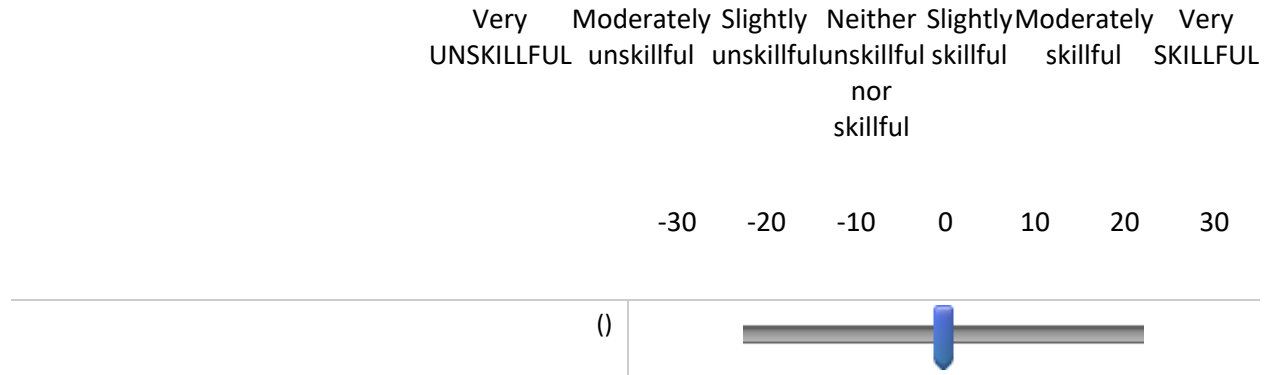
-30   -20   -10   0   10   20   30





skillful

To what extent do you think Aiden is **skillful**?



Q550 How willing would you be to join a team working on this task with Aiden in the future?

	-3 (1)	-2 (2)	-1 (3)	0 (4)	1 (5)	2 (6)	3 (7)
(1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

End of Block: Social Perceptions

Start of Block: Blame



blame\_ithink **How much responsibility would YOU assign to each of the following sources for losing the game in the previous hypothetical team-based task?** Please indicate exactly how much responsibility you assign to each person or source from 0 (none) to 100 (all). If you assign the same amount of responsibility to multiple people or sources, enter the same number. **The total amount of blame must add up to 100.**

- Aiden (i.e., who sent you a message) : \_\_\_\_\_ (1)
- Bobby : \_\_\_\_\_ (2)
- Other factors (e.g., luck, question difficulty) : \_\_\_\_\_ (3)
- Total : \_\_\_\_\_

Page Break



blame\_take **Based on Aiden's statement, how much responsibility do you think AIDEN was trying to assign to each of the following sources for losing the game in the previous hypothetical team-based task?** Please indicate exactly how much responsibility Aiden was trying to assign from 0 (none) to 100 (all). If Aiden assigned the same amount of responsibility to multiple people or sources, enter the same number. **The total amount of blame must add up to 100.**

Aiden (i.e., who sent you a message) : \_\_\_\_\_ (1)  
 Bobby : \_\_\_\_\_ (2)  
 Other factors (e.g., luck, question difficulty) : \_\_\_\_\_ (3)  
 Total : \_\_\_\_\_

End of Block: Blame

Start of Block: Honesty + advice



honest **Do you agree or disagree: Aiden honestly told you about how much blame they deserved.**

	-3 (-3)	-2 (-2)	-1 (-1)	0 (0)	1 (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)
Aiden honestly told you about how much blame they deserved. (honest)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

End of Block: Honesty + advice

Start of Block: Demographics



gender What is your gender?

- Male (1)
- Female (2)
- Other (3) \_\_\_\_\_



age What is your age?

---

guess\_purpose What do you think we are investigating in this study?

---

---

---

---

---

comments (Optional) Would you like to explain your answers or provide any additional comments?

---

---

---

---

---

---

Page Break

Display this question:

*If passedtaskcc = yes  
And passedtaskcc2 = yes  
Or passedtaskcc2.2 = yes*

correct

You correctly answered the comprehension check question!

You will receive a bonus of  $\$\{e://Field/bonus\}$ , in addition to the  $\$\{e://Field/completion\_fee\}$  completion payment.

---

Display this question:

*If passedtaskcc = no  
Or passedtaskcc2.2 = no*

wrong

You are not eligible to receive the  $\$\{e://Field/bonus\}$  bonus because you answered at least one comprehension check question incorrectly.

However, you will receive  $\$\{e://Field/completion\_fee\}$  for completing this survey.

---

Q45

**Click the button below to record your response & receive the completion code.**

End of Block: Demographics

---