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Equality in Dictator Games: Methodological Concerns in Interpreting Default-Mode Strategies and Norms for Equity

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Abstract

Standard behavioral economic games assume that rational actors have stable, well-defined preferences. Two experiments were created to simulate various priming factors within a standard dictator game. Throughout the first experiment nearly 50% of the participants gave an equal distribution of value between themselves and the recipient. This trend persisted when the recipient was clearly labelled as a computer. The second study evaluated whether or not the equal distribution observed in the first experiment was due to an automatic response, where the default mode is to allocate resources equitably. After providing participants with a time delay and critical thinking prompt, there was a 6% shift in the number of equal distributions given. These results indicate that equal distributions may be the result of an automatic thinking process. Methodological implications pertaining to past studies in which automatic behavior was not considered during the use of dictator games may arise.