Design

This was a laboratory experiment using an independent samples design. This design was chosen because I will only show one car crash and it would not be possible for a single participant to see two versions of the critical question without guessing the nature of the experiment.

The independent variable is the verb used in the critical question: either ‘smashed’ or ‘contacted’. The critical question for the experimental group was: About how fast was the red car going when it smashed into the white car? The critical for the other group (used as a control group) was: About how fast was the red car going when it contacted the white car?

The dependent variable is the speed estimate in kilometres per hour (km/h) given by participants in response to the question.

Driving experience might be an extraneous variable that could affect results so those with a driving license were removed from the sample. The experiment was conducted in two sessions in the same room, at the same time, but on different days, to ensure that participants in the two conditions were tested under the same circumstances.

Informed consent was obtained when participants agreed to participate, and although they were not told before the experiment what I was measuring, feedback was given in the form of a debriefing note distributed the day after the experiment. Potential participants were told that the experiment required them to see a film of a car crash so that they could choose not to participate if this would cause them distress.

Participants

Participants were a convenience sample of students at \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ who are studying for the IB Diploma. The sample was obtained by asking among all of my IB classes for anyone who was free to come either on Tuesday at 3.30 p.m. (the ‘smashed’ group) or Wednesday at 3.30 p.m. (the ‘contacted’ group). When they agreed to participate, they were alternately assigned to Tuesday or Wednesday. Three participants could not attend on their given days and were swapped. A convenience sample was chosen because most of the students in the school are under 16 and therefore unable to sign the consent form for themselves and a random sample of students would have included psychology students. Given the limitations on time and the complicated restrictions on creating a random sample, the convenience sample seemed to be the most efficient way to obtain participants.

The average age of participants was 17.7 and there were 21 in total, 10 in the ‘smashed’ group (4 female) and 11 in the ‘contacted’ group (9 female). All participants study in English and the majority of them are fluent in one other language. None of them are studying psychology as they may recognize the purpose of the task.

Materials

* Informed consent (see Appendix 1)
* Standardized instructions (see Appendix 2)
* Film clip of a car crash used with permission of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (available on request): The clip shows a red car on a major road failing to brake in time and hitting a white car stopped at a set of traffic lights.
* Questionnaire containing 5 questions, including the 1 critical question, in two versions (see Appendix 3)
* Debriefing note (see Appendix 1)

Procedure

* The television station \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ was contacted and permission obtained to use the film clip from their website.
* The questionnaire was produced.
* During Monday, I approached students and asked them if they would consider participating. If they agreed, they were given the informed consent form to sign.
* Students were alternately assigned to Tuesday or Wednesday groups and if they were not able to come on that day, they were shifted and the next person took their place.
* On the day of the experiment at 3.30 p.m., after school, participants came to the room specified and when they were all there, standardized instructions were read.
* The film clip was shown.
* The questionnaire was given out, completed, and collected.
* Participants were told that they would receive full information about the study after it was completed.
* The procedure was repeated for the second group.
* Results were processed and the debriefing note was distributed to everyone who participated.