

DISCUSSION PAPER SERIES

IZA DP No. 12406

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JUNE 2019

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## ABSTRACT

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### **DIY or Ask Someone Nice?**

We design an experiment to assess the effect of beliefs about gender in selecting oneself or a designated person to carry out a volunteering task. Participants in a volunteering task are given the option of selecting oneself or nominating someone from their group, and the group is described to them in terms of cartoons depicting women and men displaying different emotional states: happy, neutral or unhappy. We introduce a treatment consisting of gender priming, in which we elicit gender views with a set of 12 questions routinely used in social attitudes surveys to determine the degree of sexism of respondents. We find that women offer to volunteer more than men, and that while neither the emotional affect or the gender of the nominated person per se influence designation, men in the unprimed condition are more likely to choose the happy female face. Gender priming reduces designations and increases volunteering for all, but the treatment effect differs across genders: though both women and men are likelier to volunteer when primed, the men nominate fewer women across the spectrum of moods once gender primed, and the effect is stronger for the more sexist men, whilst women are reducing their delegation more uniformly once gender-primed, never nominate the neutral woman, and nominate the happy woman more often the less sexist they are. Our results provide evidence of both stereotyping by men and self-stereotyping by women: men are happy to pick any woman for the volunteering, though they display a preference for the happy woman, whilst women are both more sensitive to the mood displayed and prefer to pick women who might be happy to do it the less sexist they are. When it comes to actually carrying out the volunteering task, we find that, conditional on volunteering, women are more likely to actually follow through than men.

**JEL Classification:** J16, D91, C93, J23

**Keywords:** facial emotions, gender priming, stereotyping, volunteering

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## 1. Background

A large body of experimental and survey literature documents gender differences in preferences for competitiveness, risk, and altruism (Eckel and Grossman, 1998 and 2008; Gneezy et al, 2003; Niederle and Vesterlund, 2007 and 2011; Croson and Gneezy, 2008; Apicella et al., 2015), and has been variously linked to gender gaps in education (Buser et al. 2014; Niederle, 2010), occupational choices (Bertrand et al., 2010; Goldin, 2014; Bandiera et al. 2016), and gender gaps in pay and career (Babcock et al. 2017a and b; Reuben et al. 2015). Two major reviews of this evidence by Bertrand (2011) and Azmat and Petrongolo (2014) have both highlighted the lack of evidence on the impact of these differences on labour market outcomes. Women are actually found to be no less responsive to performance pay than men (Bandiera et al., 2017), no gender differences in performance are found when competing against oneself (Apicella et al., 2017) and when considering size effects there are practically no gender differences in the distribution of risk preferences (for a meta review see Nelson, 2015). A consistent body literature has instead shown that the proportion of women who choose a competitive task is smaller, *ceteris paribus*, across several studies (for a review see Niederle, 2016 and 2017) based on the choice of piece rate rather than tournament payment schemes in experiments conducted in both lab and field.

An interesting area of discussion is whether women are or not on average more altruistic: Andreoni and Vesterlund (2001) find that when altruism is expensive women are on average kinder, but when it is cheap men are on average more altruistic, and recent findings from the Global Preference Survey (Falk et al., 2015) also suggest that women tend to exhibit a stronger social predisposition than men, and that they are more responsive to social cues (Eckel and Fullbrunn, 2015; Zetland and Della Giusta, 2013). This may help explain the effect on women of being offered and accepting tasks associated with low promotability (Babcock et al., 2017 a and b), that is tasks that have to seemingly be endured without real career benefits. In this case, the perception that women are more altruistic functions as a reason for receiving the offers, and the fear of the backlash ensuing when not doing so motivates the acceptances (Babcock et al., 2017b).

The expectation that women are compliant is ubiquitous in the psychological literature on personality traits: women on average are expected to be conscientious and compliant (Carter, 2014; Eswaran, 2014) and the evidence on the distribution of personality traits suggest that on responses to the Big Five Inventory, women report on average higher levels of neuroticism, extraversion, agreeableness, and conscientiousness than men across most nations (Schmit et al., 2008; Costa et al., 2001). There is of course a social desirability bias at play (Edwards,

1953), which means both men and women are likely to conform to expected roles even in their self-description: men on average perceive their general intellect as higher and they tend to overestimate it, whilst women on average tend to do the opposite (Karwowski et al., 2013)<sup>1</sup>. Women also tend to state more than men that social objectives are more important than the goals connected with achievements (Kuhn and Villeval, 2015; Piirto, 1991). All this may fuel stereotyping by principals and by agents themselves (as found in Babcock et al., 2017) and lead to such tasks being disproportionately allocated to women, under the distorted belief that they will be better at them, whether in the workplace or the household, thereby also creating self-fulfilling dynamics of discrimination. The process has been discussed in models of belief formation by Gennaioli and Schleifer (2010) who show that significant biases in beliefs can arise from the use of representativeness heuristics (Kahnemann and Tversky, 1983) which lead to exaggerating small differences in some parts of the distribution of attributes of one group relative to another. In particular, Oxoby (2014) shows how the process of forming beliefs about one's own ability incorporating irrelevant information on observable types can bias downward one's perception of one's own ability (or upward if the type-based biases are positive), and lead to inefficient allocations of agents across more and less skilled sectors in the labour market and a growing segregation over time through the feedback to agents from increased type-based biases in their beliefs.

We design an experiment to assess the effect of beliefs about gender in selecting oneself or a designated person to carry out a volunteering task. To do this, we present participants in a volunteering task with the option of selecting oneself or nominating someone from their group, and the group is described to them in terms of cartoons depicting women and men displaying different emotional states: happy, neutral or unhappy. We want to therefore firstly ascertain whether the choice of whom to designate is based mostly on gender or mostly on mood displayed.

We also introduce a treatment consisting of gender priming, in which we elicit gender views with a set of 12 questions routinely used in social attitudes surveys to determine the degree of sexism of respondents. We do this before carrying out the task for half of the participants, and afterwards for the rest. A second objective of the paper is to see whether there are differences between treatments in the proportion of subjects who choose to do the donation themselves, and in who gets designated as the group member who should donate. We then discuss how

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<sup>1</sup> Parents also perceive their sons' intelligence to be higher than their daughters', while children perceive the intelligence of their fathers to be higher than that of their mothers (Karwowski et al., 2013).

such differences are correlated with the degree of subjects' sexism as detected in their responses to the questionnaire, and finally how the subjects' choices of designated volunteers correspond to the gender of students who actually do volunteer afterwards and their gender views, to establish whether people have stereotyped beliefs that do not correspond to real behaviours.

## 2. Experimental procedure

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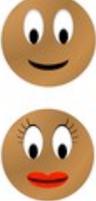
Participants (students across three cohorts of the undergraduate economics programme at the University of Reading) took part in an experiment in which they were asked to open an envelope they found on their desk and complete a two pages survey within 10 minutes, retaining the envelope for later use. One version presented participants with a set of 12 questions eliciting their gender views before the task, the other presented these questions after the task (please see appendix).

The task itself consisted in volunteering to help donate food to a local food bank by bringing one packaged dry food item by a specified date. Participants were told they belonged to a group of five students from their cohort, and had to choose between volunteering themselves to bring an item to the food collection box, or designate someone else in their group to do so, choosing from the following options:

- Option 1: I volunteer to bring something myself to the food collection box (***please use the envelope provided when placing your item –tins, cereals, pasta, rice- in the collection box***).

*If selecting that option, other members of your group will be exempted. Also, there is no issue in having more than one volunteer per group!*

- Option 2: I designate someone from my group. *Please note that if nobody from your group volunteered by selecting option 1, you may also be designated by other students. If you opt for Option 2, please help us in selecting that person by voting for one of the following 5 possibilities.*

Option 1 I volunteer	Option 2 I designate someone from my group				
					
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				

We gave participants five different cartoons representing types of designated people to choose from: a happy man, a neutral woman, an unhappy man, a happy woman and a happy man (the ratio of women to men reflects that of most economics undergraduate classes). We then matched these faces to the real faces of participants as captured in their Uni Id pictures by means of real facial action coding system software called OpenFace (<https://www.cl.cam.ac.uk/~tb346/res/openface.html>) which creates excel files for images in a directory making use of a range classifying parameters about faces. True pictures of the participants from their university official registration were used to create an “affective ordering” of people from most to least smiling based on a factor analysis of their OpenFace parameters separately for each gender/cohort cell. The matching was then done in the following way: if the happiest male-stereotyped face received e.g. 15 designations within a cohort, the 15 men at the top of that cohort’s affective ordering were contacted and asked to volunteer a food donation. This was done from the bottom of the affect ordering for the least-smiling figures and repeated for both genders in each cohort. Since there were three male-stereotyped figures, the nominations to the one with intermediate smile intensity went to those men closest to the median of the affect ordering.

### 3. Results

#### *Volunteering*

We find that women volunteer more than men, Christians more than atheists (other groups a being too small for inference), and UK natives more than EU nationals (Brexit may have something to do with their generosity towards British people). Differences across cohorts are also of interest, given the evidence on economics students becoming more selfish as they progress (Bauman and Rose, 2011). In our sample, third years volunteer the most (although there may be a selection effect via class attendance).

**Table 1: Descriptive statistics (N=274)**

	Gender		Religion							Nationality			Year of Study			
	F	M	No	Chr	Mus	Hi	Jw	Bd	Ta	UK	EU	Oth	1	2	3	PG
n	112	162	132	85	27	7	2	7	14	215	21	38	141	98	26	9
%	59.12	40.88	48.18	31.02	9.85	2.55	0.73	2.55	5.11	78.47	7.66	13.87	51.46	35.77	9.49	3.28

Factor analysis on answers of the survey questions eliciting gender views reveals that all are positively correlated with similar factor loadings, suggesting that they could be added together to get a measure of gender attitudes. This summed measure we denote *sexism*. Conversely, the variable *progressive* is defined as the maximum score minus the respondent's sexism score. Unsurprisingly we find that men have more sexist gender attitudes than women.

### *Nominating nice people or nominating women?*

One question we were interested in was whether students chose to nominate always nice people or whether their expectation was rather driven by assumptions about gender. To test this hypothesis we run a conditional logit model of discrete choice on the attributes of the facial pictures, the results of which are reported in table 2 below.

**Table 2:**

Designation	Women (Fisher's exact =0.025)		Men (Fisher's exact =0.056)	
	unprimed	primed	unprimed	primed
Volunteer	41	45	42	49
Neutral man	2	3	20	2
Neutral woman	0	0	6	3
Sad man	5	1	11	10
Happy woman	5	2	13	6
Happy man	7	1	3	7
Total	61	51	85	77

The results indicate that while neither the emotional affect or the gender of the nominated person per se influence designation, men in the unprimed condition were more likely to choose the smiling female-stereotyped face. Note that given the setup of the experiment the assumption made in this case must be that nice women will be spontaneously more compliant with the request to volunteer, as the designators have no way of knowing who the corresponding real female student will be and thus cannot expect to exert any pressure on her to comply.

We can furthermore elucidate the likelihood of a face being chosen for each group by the two genders of subjects under each condition. This is done by running nested conditional logit regressions, results are estimated in Table 3:

**Table 3:**

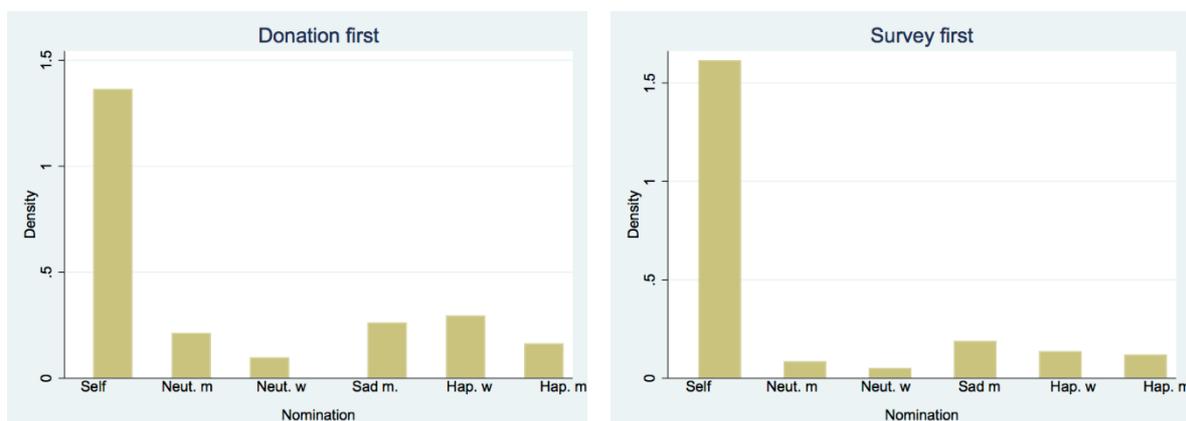
Face attributes	Women		Men	
	unprimed	primed	unprimed	primed
female	-1.797*** (0.475)	-2.506*** (0.728)	-0.997** (0.427)	-1.733*** (0.590)
smiling	0.154 (0.185)	-2.68e-08 (0.200)	-0.244 (0.175)	-0.0883 (0.172)
female X smiling			1.017* (0.524)	0.781 (0.728)

\*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

We can see that while men are likely to delegate to smiling women, they are unlikely to delegate to non-smiling women. This effect is much stronger in the unprimed condition. The mood of the delegate is relatively unimportant for both genders.

***Effect of the treatment (gender norms priming)***

We then turn to the effect of gender priming on the result that the nice woman is designated to volunteer most often. As can be seen in Figure 1 below, those primed with gender norms (the survey first treatment) are less likely to delegate to agreeable women and more likely to volunteer.



To estimate these effects more clearly and break down treatment effects by gender/treatment/survey response we run multinomial logit regressions (see Table 4 below).

**Table 4:**

Men	Delegation (baseline volunteer)				
	Neutral m.	Neutral w.	Sad m.	Happy w.	Happy m.
primed	1.726 (2.385)	-2.672 (2.916)	0.828 (1.980)	-1.650 (1.834)	-0.371 (2.731)
progressive	0.0366 (0.0578)	0.00846 (0.0698)	0.0546 (0.0570)	-0.0664 (0.0502)	-0.0288 (0.0933)
proXprimed	-0.158 (0.109)	0.0682 (0.103)	-0.0396 (0.0728)	0.0285 (0.0766)	0.0428 (0.107)
Constant	-2.393 (1.581)	-2.163 (1.851)	-2.788* (1.584)	0.431 (1.221)	-1.921 (2.356)

Women	Delegation (baseline volunteer)			
	Neutral m.	Sad m.	Happy w.	Happy m.
primed	-1.608 (4.249)	5.862 (5.617)	-8.425 (6.384)	-19.61 (4.795)
progressive	-0.0917 (0.0962)	0.0457 (0.0765)	0.0562 (0.0773)	-0.128* (0.0699)
proXprimed	0.0465 (0.139)	-0.264 (0.212)	0.206 (0.166)	0.130 (150.4)
Constant	0.276 (2.945)	-3.672 (2.720)	-4.042 (2.773)	2.163 (2.080)

\*  $p < 0.1$

The treatment effect differs across genders: though both women and men are likelier to volunteer when primed, the men seem to be nominating fewer women across the spectrum of moods once gender primed, and the effect is stronger for the more sexist men.

Women are reducing their delegation more uniformly once gender-primed. They never nominate the neutral woman, and they pick the happy woman more often the less sexist they are.

Taken together, these last two results provide some indication of both stereotyping by men and self-stereotyping by women: men are happy to pick any woman for the volunteering and indifferent to the mood she displays, whilst women are both more sensitive to the mood displayed *and* prefer to pick women who might be happy to do it the less sexist they are.

#### ***Are women more compliant with requests?***

To answer this question, we estimate a Heckman selection model, given there were differences in who volunteered in the first place (those who did not volunteer are treated as not selected). We find that, conditional on volunteering, women *are* more likely to actually follow through. We also had 5 people who did not volunteer but donated nonetheless, 4 of whom are men.

Heckman selection model			
actually donated	Coef	Std. Err.	P> z
amount			
donated			
Female	.1670017	.089094	0.061
Unprimed	.2116511	.0976518	0.030
Constant	.0730987	.0610943	0.232
Volunteered			
Unprimed	-.5760423	.1629876	0.000
Female	.5887897	.1685215	0.000
Constant	.5276502	.1361377	0.000

#### 4. Conclusions

Overall our findings suggest that women both volunteer and carry out the actual volunteering more than men, and that they are also more likely to be designated to do so, especially by more sexist men. Whilst neither the emotional affect or the gender of the nominated person per se influence designation, men in the unprimed condition are more likely to choose the happy female face. Gender priming reduces that by both decreasing designations overall and particularly by decreasing designation of women by men. We interpret our findings to support both stereotyping by men and self-stereotyping by women: men are happy to pick any woman for the volunteering, though they display a preference for the happy woman, whilst women are both more sensitive to the mood displayed *and* prefer to pick women who might be happy to do it the less sexist they are.

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## Appendices

### 1. Participant Instructions Faces First

Questionnaire \_\_\_\_\_

**The following is an individual and anonymous Survey on Food Donation.**  
**Please read the instructions carefully and answer independently.**

The Department of Economics at the University of Reading is going to donate food to ReadiFood (Reading's local food bank) and we are running this anonymous Survey to raise participation for this charity event.

**Please could you bring one packaged dry food item (tins, cereals, pasta, rice...) by the 20<sup>th</sup> of November 2018?** (Details to follow).

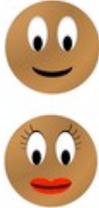
You have been allocated to a group made of 5 other students from your cohort. We expect that each group will contribute to the food harvest by bringing at least one item. You have two options. Option 1 consists in volunteering yourself to bring an item to the food collection box (situated on the third floor in the Edith Morley building, office 321.) by the 20<sup>th</sup> of November 2018. **Please use the numbered envelope provided** to place your food item in the box. Option 2 consists in designating someone else from your group.

Which option do you select?

- Option 1: I volunteer to bring something myself to the food collection box (**please use the envelope provided when placing your item –tins, cereals, pasta, rice- in the collection box**). *If selecting that option, other members of your group will be exempted. Also, there is no issue in having more than one volunteer per group!*

- Option 2: I designate someone from my group. *Please note that if nobody from your group volunteered by selecting option 1, you may also be designated by other students. If you opt for Option 2, please help us in selecting that person by voting for one of the following 5 possibilities.*

Select your preferred option (Tick only one box):

Option 1 I volunteer	Option 2 I designate someone from my group				
					
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				

The designation process will take place upon completion of this survey<sup>2</sup>. You will be informed about designated students by email in the coming days. **Please keep your numbered envelope in a secured place as you may be designated.**

Please note that your survey response and donation decision will remain entirely anonymous and we thank you for participating in this charity survey.

<sup>2</sup> The designation process will be as follows: each participant will be matched via their ID number to the avatar which most closely matches the characteristics of their photo on file in RISIS.

**The following is an individual and anonymous Survey about Your Opinion.**  
**Please read the instructions carefully and answer independently.**

There are some questions below and you should take about 5 minutes to complete. There are no right or wrong answers and all responses will remain anonymous. So please answer them as truthfully as possible. The results of the questionnaire are only used by the issuer of the questionnaire. Thank you for your cooperation!

PLEASE answer all the questions, and indicate only one answer per question.

1. **A man is the head of a family.**  
 Strongly agree       Agree       Neutral       Disagree       Strongly disagree
2. **Men should assume more social responsibility.**  
 Strongly agree       Agree       Neutral       Disagree       Strongly disagree
3. **Women will be rated as less competent and less achievement-oriented than men in male gender-typed jobs such as scientist or astronaut.**  
 Strongly agree       Agree       Neutral       Disagree       Strongly disagree
4. **It is strange for men to cry when they get in terrible trouble.**  
 Strongly agree       Agree       Neutral       Disagree       Strongly disagree
5. **It is strange for men to wear makeup in daily life.**  
 Strongly agree       Agree       Neutral       Disagree       Strongly disagree
6. **It is reasonable for men to show stronger entrepreneurial intentions than women.**  
 Strongly agree       Agree       Neutral       Disagree       Strongly disagree
7. **Women are more sentimental.**  
 Strongly agree       Agree       Neutral       Disagree       Strongly disagree
8. **Women are more responsible for assuming overall care of children at home.**  
 Strongly agree       Agree       Neutral       Disagree       Strongly disagree
9. **Women are better qualified for jobs such as nurse, secretary, or babysitter.**  
 Strongly agree       Agree       Neutral       Disagree       Strongly disagree
10. **Girls prefer Barbie dolls and stuffed animals.**  
 Strongly agree       Agree       Neutral       Disagree       Strongly disagree
11. **Men are easier to vote for as candidates than women.**  
 Strongly agree       Agree       Neutral       Disagree       Strongly disagree
12. **Women are not suited for masculine sports which are powerful and aggressive.**  
 Strongly agree       Agree       Neutral       Disagree       Strongly disagree
14. **Your age**       18-20       over 20
13. **Gender**  Male       Female       Other
15. **Nationality**       UK       EU       Others \_\_\_\_\_ (Please write down your nationality on the line.)
16. **Religion** (Please write "none" if you don't have religion):  
 Christianity       Islam       Hinduism       Judaism       Buddhism       Taoism  
 Others \_\_\_\_\_ (Please write down your religion on the line)       None

*End of Questionnaire - Thank you for your participation!*

## 2. Participant Instructions Survey First

Questionnaire \_\_\_\_\_

**The following is an individual and anonymous Survey about Your Opinion.**  
**Please read the instructions carefully and answer independently.**

*There are some questions below and you should take about 5 minutes to complete. There are no right or wrong answers and all responses will remain anonymous. So please answer them as truthfully as possible.*

*The results of the questionnaire are only used by the issuer of the questionnaire. Thank you for your cooperation!*

PLEASE answer all the questions, and indicate only one answer per question.

13. **area man is the head of a family.**

Strongly agree       Agree       Neutral       Disagree       Strongly disagree

14. **Men should assume more social responsibility**

Strongly agree       Agree       Neutral       Disagree       Strongly disagree

15. **Women will be rated as less competent and less achievement oriented than men in male gender-typed jobs such as scientist or astronaut.**

Strongly agree       Agree       Neutral       Disagree       Strongly disagree

16. **It is strange for men to cry when they get in terrible trouble.**

Strongly agree       Agree       Neutral       Disagree       Strongly disagree

17. **It is strange for men to wear makeup in daily life.**

Strongly agree       Agree       Neutral       Disagree       Strongly disagree

18. **It is reasonable for men to show stronger entrepreneurial intentions than women.**

Strongly agree       Agree       Neutral       Disagree       Strongly disagree

19. **Women are more sentimental.**

Strongly agree       Agree       Neutral       Disagree       Strongly disagree

20. **Women are more responsible for assuming overall care of children at home.**

Strongly agree       Agree       Neutral       Disagree       Strongly disagree

21. **Women are better qualified for jobs such as nurse, secretary, or babysitter.**

Strongly agree       Agree       Neutral       Disagree       Strongly disagree

22. **Girls prefer Barbie dolls and stuffed animals.**

Strongly agree       Agree       Neutral       Disagree       Strongly disagree

23. **Men are easier to vote for as candidates than women.**

Strongly agree       Agree       Neutral       Disagree       Strongly disagree

24. **Women are not suited for masculine sports which are powerful and aggressive.**

Strongly agree       Agree       Neutral       Disagree       Strongly disagree

**The following is an individual and anonymous Survey on Food Donation.**

**Please read the instructions carefully and answer independently.**

The Department of Economics at the University of Reading is going to donate food to ReadiFood (Reading's local food bank) and we are running this anonymous Survey to raise participation for this charity event.

**Please could you bring one packaged dry food item (tins, cereals, pasta, rice...) by the 20<sup>th</sup> of November 2018?** (Details to follow).

You have been allocated to a group made of 5 other students from your cohort. We expect that each group will contribute to the food harvest by bringing at least one item. You have two options. Option 1 consists in volunteering yourself to bring an item to the food collection box (situated on the third floor in the Edith Morley building, office 321.) by the 20<sup>th</sup> of November 2018. **Please use the numbered envelope provided** to place your food item in the box. Option 2 consists in designating someone else from your group.

Which option do you select?

- Option 1: I volunteer to bring something myself to the food collection box (**please use the envelope provided when placing your item –tins, cereals, pasta, rice- in the collection box**). *If selecting that option, other members of your group will be exempted. Also, there is no issue in having more than one volunteer per group!*

- Option 2: I designate someone from my group. *Please note that if nobody from your group volunteered by selecting option 1, you may also be designated by other students. If you opt for Option 2, please help us in selecting that person by voting for one of the following 5 possibilities.*

Select your preferred option (Tick only one box):

Option 1 I volunteer	Option 2 I designate someone from my group				
					
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				

The designation process will take place upon completion of this survey<sup>3</sup>. You will be informed about designated students by email in the coming days. **Please keep your numbered envelope in a secured place as you may be designated.** Please note that your survey response and donation decision will remain entirely anonymous and we thank you for participating in this charity survey.

13. **Your age**     18-20             over 20
14. **Gender**     Male             Female             Other
15. **Nationality**     UK             EU             Others \_\_\_\_\_ (Please write down your nationality on the line.)
16. **Religion** (Please write "none" if you don't have religion):
- Christianity     Islam             Hinduism             Judaism             Buddhism             Taoism
- Others \_\_\_\_\_ ( Please write down your religion on the line)             None

***End of Questionnaire - Thank you for your participation!***

<sup>3</sup> The designation process will be as follows: each participant will be matched via their ID number to the avatar which most closely matches the characteristics of their photo on file in RISIS.

### 3. Follow up email

Dear Students,

Thank you again for taking part in the charity survey on Thursday.

Remember that the department of Economics is raising donations for a food collection going to ReadFood (Reading's local food bank). Our target is to have **1 person in each group of 6 contributing on average**.

**You have been nominated by one of your group members** to bring one packaged dry food item (tins, cereals, pasta, rice....) **by the 20th of November 2018 to the food collection box situated on the third floor in the Edith Morley building, nearby office 321, using the envelope you have been provided.** Since members in your group are counting on you, please collaborate and help us to reach our target!

We count on you to make this food collection a success!