



Keep Your Friends Close and Your Phones Closer: The Impact of Close Others on Consent Requests

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Full
thesis:



If you were asked to **unlock and hand your phone to a stranger**, would you comply? Would your answer change if you were **with a friend**?

BACKGROUND

Consent requests are made across contexts and play a key role in a legal setting. Scholars estimate that 90% of all warrantless searches made under the Fourth Amendment are based on compliance with a consent request¹. In a lab setting, we are more likely to grant consent for a phone search request than we anticipate². The presence of a close other can lower stress³ and change our decision-making⁴, but it is unknown how this social influence changes compliance rates and experiences of a consent request.

OBJECTIVE

The aim of these studies is to determine how the presence of a close friend changes both expectations and experiences of a consent request.

STUDY ONE (*expectations; online survey*)

N = 178 undergraduates

Procedure: Participants (Ps) watched a video of an experimenter entering the room and asking them to unlock and hand over their phone. They reported how they would respond when alone or with a friend.

Measures: Compliance (whether they imagined that they would hand over their phone), self-reported emotions

STUDY TWO (*reality; in-lab experiment*)

N = 127 undergraduate friend pairs

Procedure: Friend pairs were randomly assigned to be in separate rooms (alone condition) or remain together (friend condition). An experimenter entered the room and asked Ps (only one P in friend condition, the "target") to unlock and hand over their phone.

Measures: Compliance (whether they handed over their phone), self-reported emotions, blood pressure

HYPOTHESES

I hypothesize that Ps:

- 1) will anticipate complying less when imagining themselves with a close friend than when imagining themselves facing the request alone.
- 2) responding to a consent request when seated with a friend will be less likely to comply (i.e., less likely to hand over their phone) than those seated alone.
- 3) will feel more comfortable with the request when with a close friend (whether imagined or actual).

I collected blood pressure in Study 2 to explore whether Ps showed a physiological stress response.

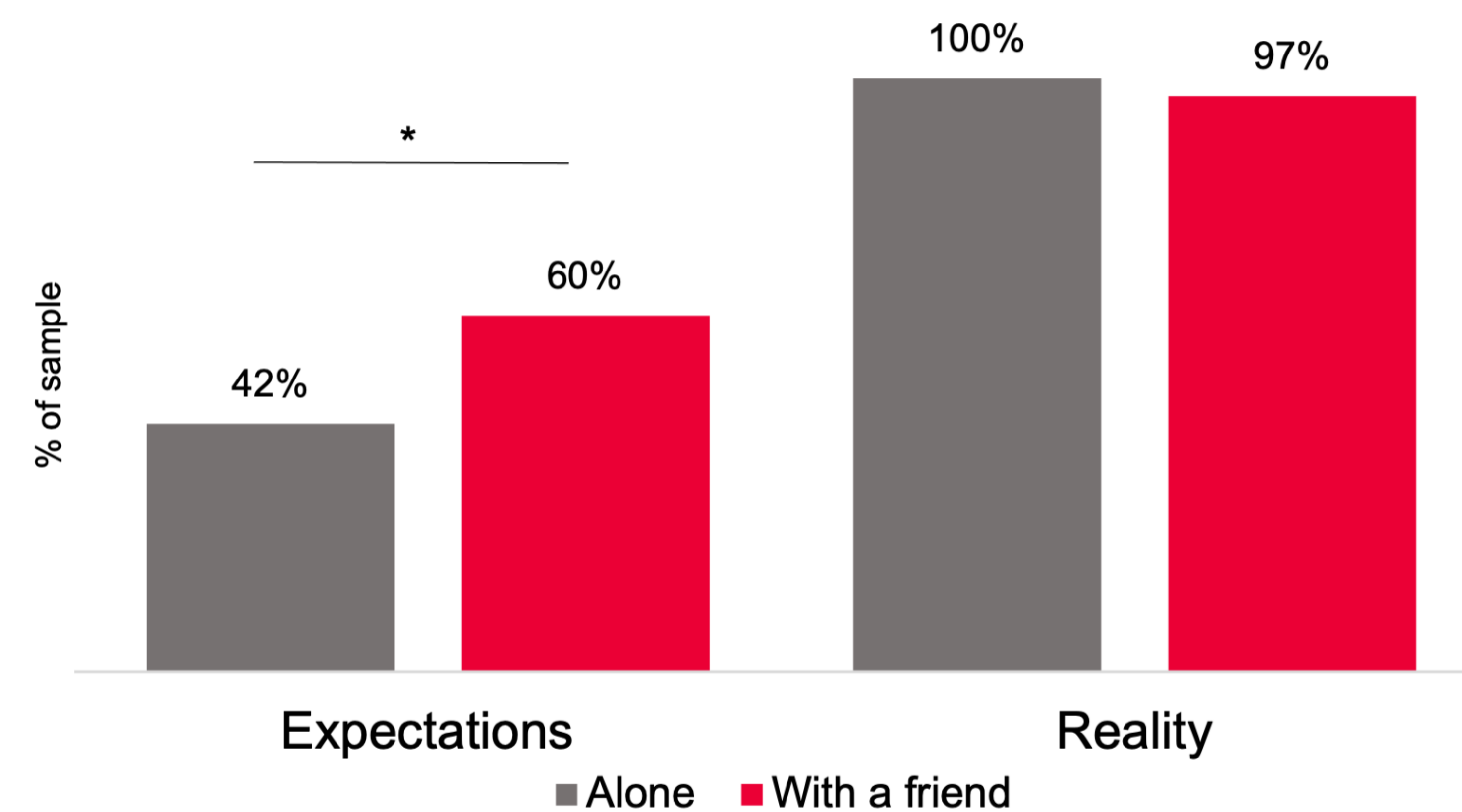


HIGHER IMAGINED COMPLIANCE WITH A FRIEND MAJORITY IN-LAB Ps HAND OVER THEIR PHONE

Study 1 Ps in the friend condition were more likely to imagine complying than Ps in the alone condition, $p = .04$.

The majority of Study 2 Ps complied with the request, regardless of condition, $p = .192$.

Expected vs Actual Compliance with Phone Search Request



Against expectations, participants comply with a phone search request when alone or with a close friend, despite feeling it would be easier to say no with a friend

Ps WITH A FRIEND = EASIER TO SAY NO

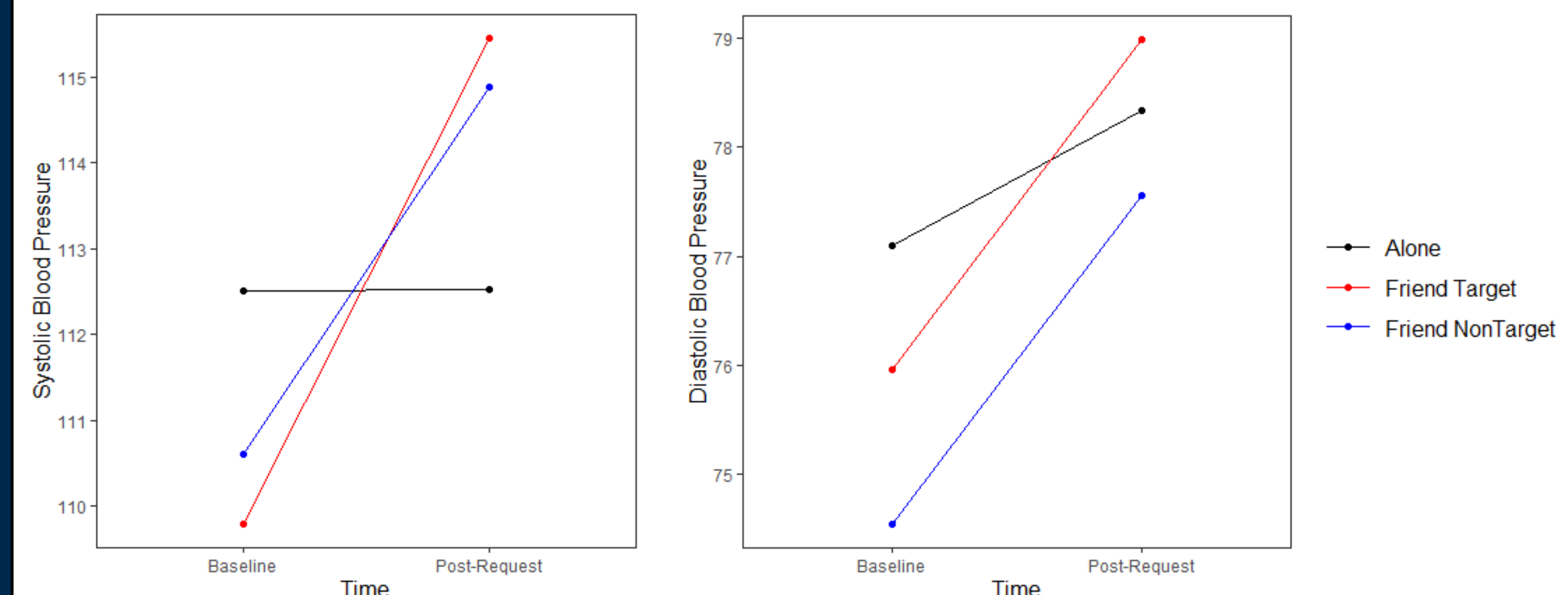
Study 2 Ps in the friend condition judged the request to be easier to say no to, $t(139.79) = -2.05, p = .042, d = .32$. Other emotions (e.g., comfort, confidence, etc.) were not significantly different between conditions.

PHYSIOLOGICAL STRESS BY CONDITION

In Study 2, participants who were alone had higher BP readings at baseline than friend condition Ps.

Ps in the friend condition showed significant BP increases ($ps < .001$) following the request.

Ps in the alone condition showed an average slight BP increase following the request, but differences were not significant, Systolic: $p = .371$, Diastolic: $p = .681$.



DISCUSSION

Though people tend to anticipate that they wouldn't comply with a phone search request, the majority of our in-lab participants did, whether seated with a close friend or alone

Despite the presence of a friend making participants feel it would be easier to say no, their behavior was not changed

The physiological response was in line with a stress response for those in the friend condition

Results suggest **the presence of a friend may change the experience of a consent request, but not behavioral responses**

REFERENCES

1. Burke (2015). *Florida Law Review*; 2. Sommers & Bohns (2019). *The Yale Law Journal*; 3. Kamarck et al. (1990). *Psychosomatic Medicine*; 4. Rini et al. (2011). *Journal of Behavioral Medicine*