

Corrupt Collaboration: Finding a Partner in Crime

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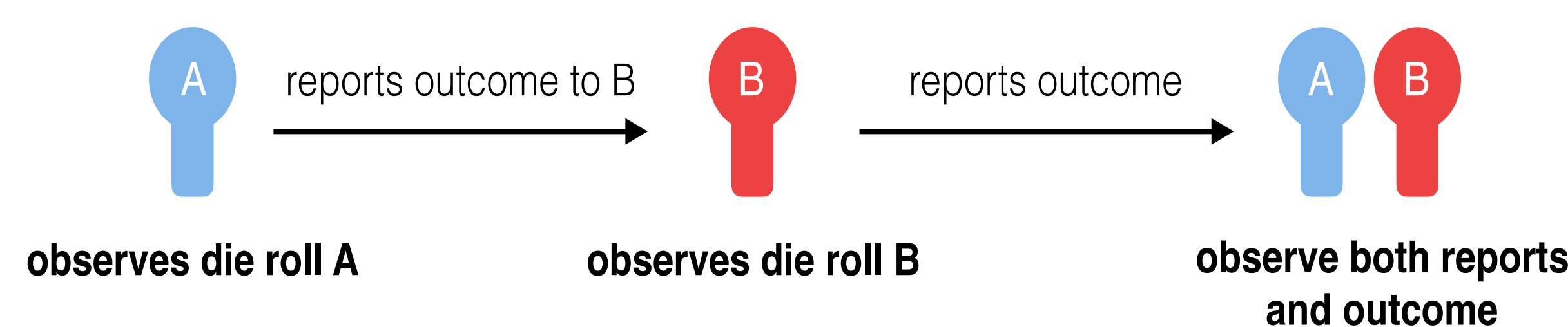
Introduction

Humans frequently cooperate to achieve mutual goals. Seeking ‘right partners’ that will cooperate and abandoning free riders helps to sustain cooperation [1,2].

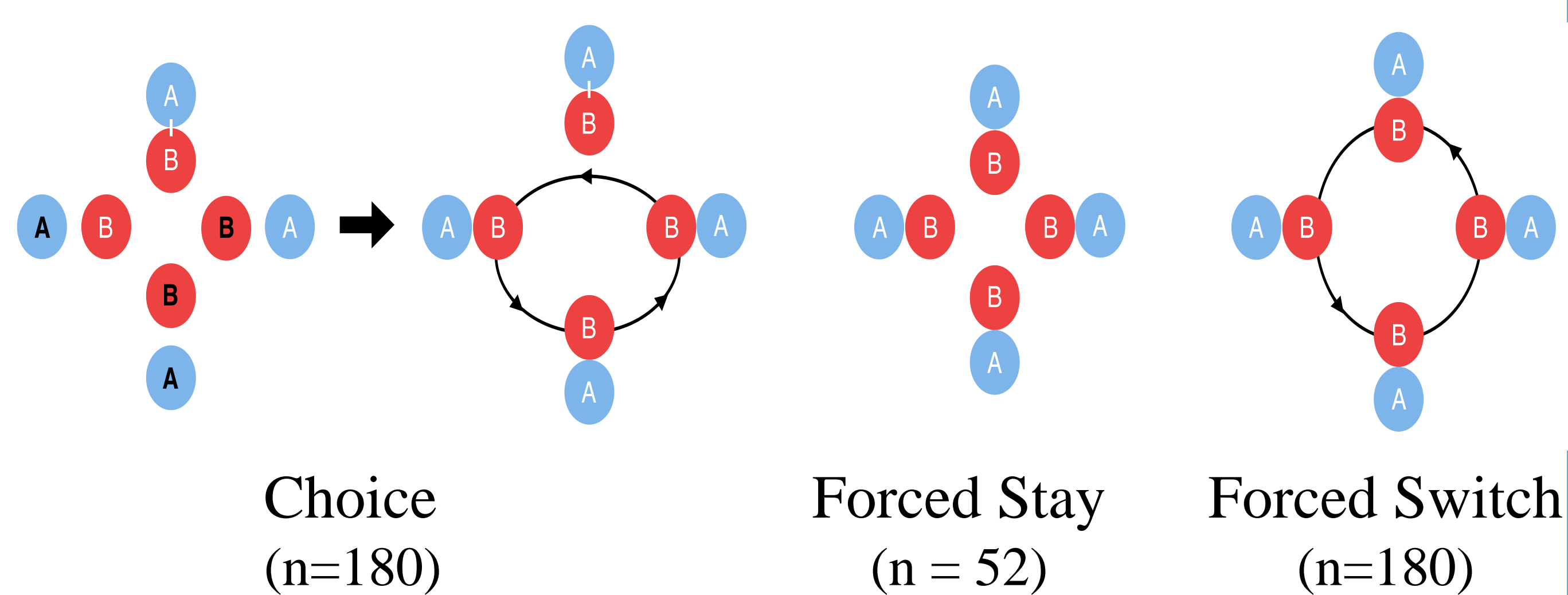
However, cooperation is also an essential part of corruption [3,4], and it is not clear how the ability (vs. lack of) to choose partners affect joint unethical acts (corruption).

We explore: Do dishonest people search ‘partners in crime’? With whom honest people choose to interact? And how the ability to choose partners affect corruption?

Method (n = 372)



Participants are paired, creating dyads of A and B. For 30 rounds, A observes a die roll on a computer screen [5] and reports it. B learns about A’s report, then observes a die roll and asked to report it. If A and B report the same outcome (double), each earns 1/2 of the doubles’ worth (in €), otherwise they earn €0.



In the **Choice** condition, each 3 rounds, A and B indicate if they want to switch partners, or stay with the same partner. If at least one dyad member asks to switch, both members get a new partner. In the **Forced Switch** condition, each 3 rounds all members get a new partner. In the **Forced Stay** condition, participants stay together throughout the task.

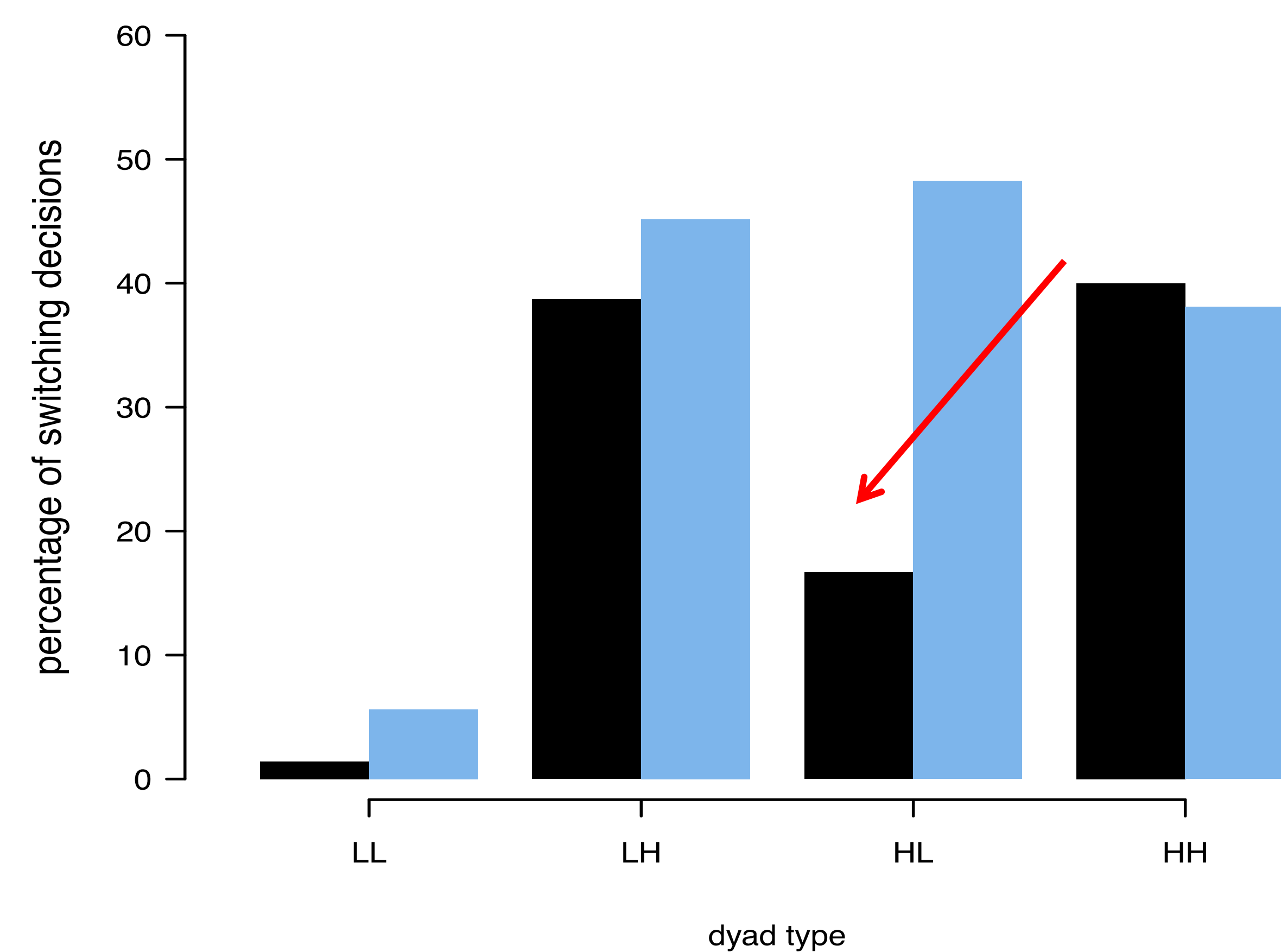
Results

Focusing on the Choice condition

Do dishonest people search ‘partners in crime’?

Yes. Liars A and B ask to switch more when interacting with an honest, compared to a dishonest partner. When both dyad members are dishonest (LL), the dyad is very stable.

% asking to switch

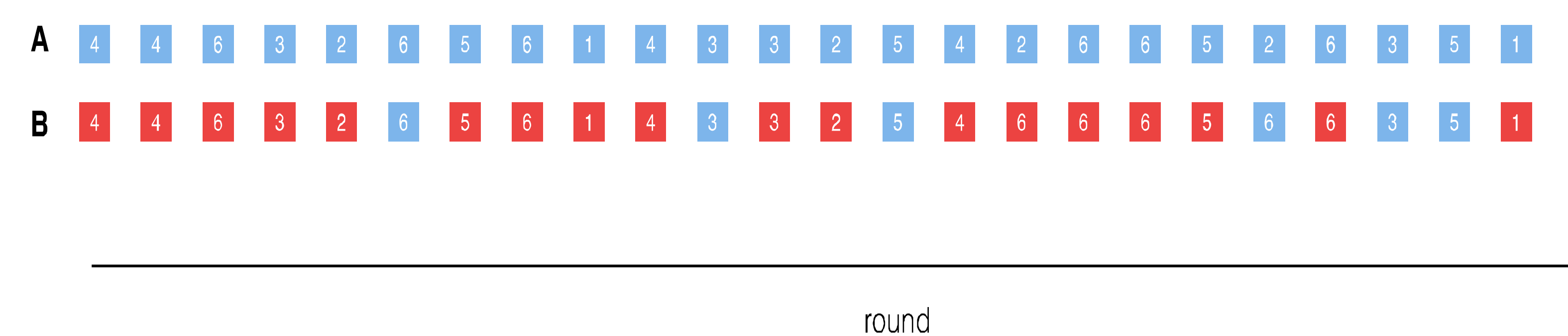


LL (lying A, lying B), LH (lying A, honest B), HL (honest A, lying B), and HH (honest A, honest B). Black = A, Blue = B

With whom honest people choose to interact?

Honest As, engage in **ethical free riding**: they refrain from lying but also from leaving lying partners, thus free riding their partner’s lies for personal profit. Honest As ask to switch more when interacting with an honest, compared to lying B.

A dyad from the study:



Numbers = the reported outcomes. Blue = honest report, red = dishonest report. A always reports honestly, and B matches by lying. Both dyad members asked to stay with their partner throughout the task.

Reference

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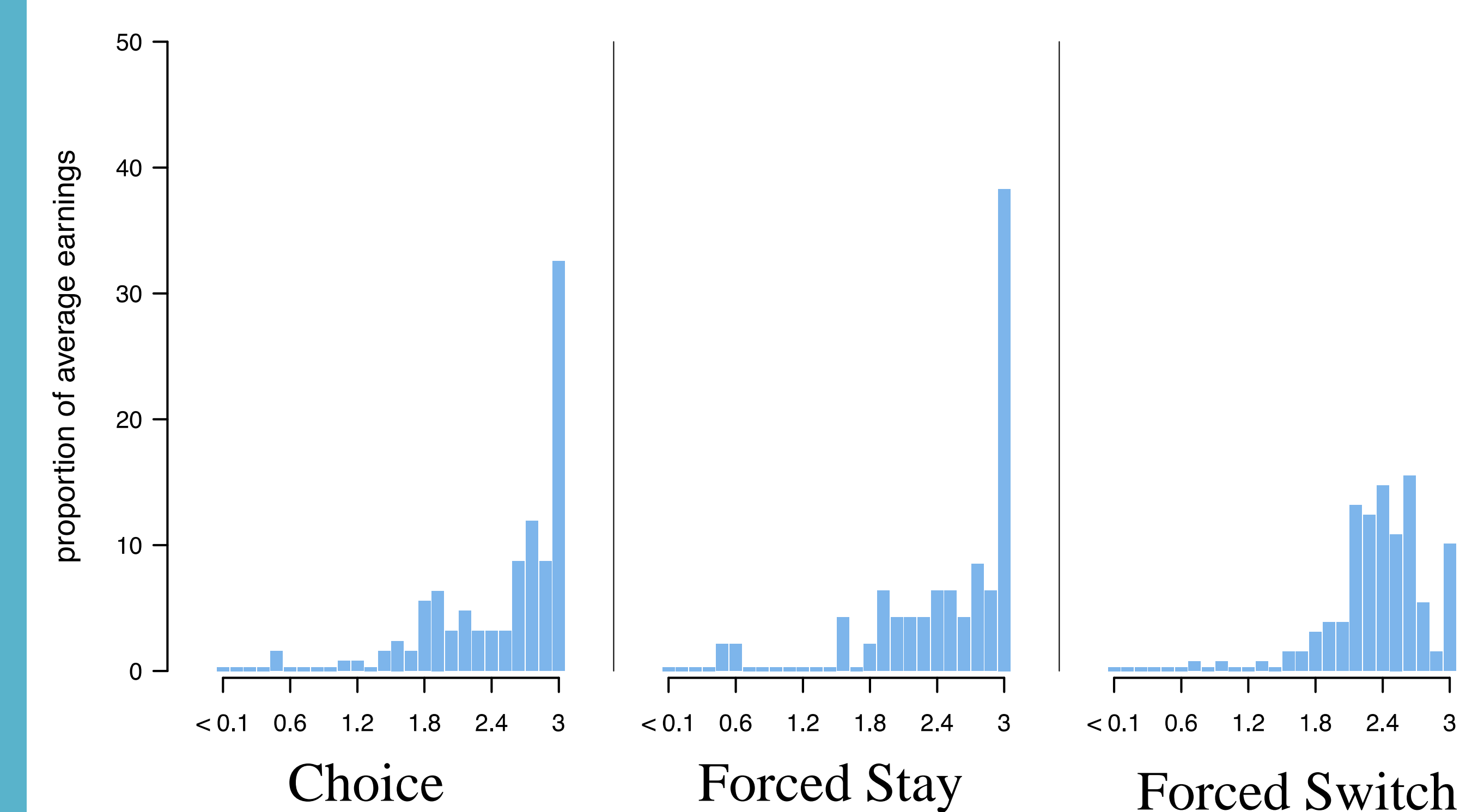
Results

Comparing all conditions:

How the ability to choose partners affect corruption?

Choosing partners leads to high coordination on corrupt behavior and **increases efficiency of lying** (compared to forced switching). High level of coordination also emerge when people are in a long-term relationships (Forced Stay).

Average earnings (€) per round of lying participants



Discussion

Whereas beneficial to sustain cooperation, the freedom to choose partners backfires in settings where people can engage in joint unethical acts.

The freedom to choose partners is exploit by both lying and honest people. Liars seek and find ‘partners in crime’, leading to high levels of coordination and efficiency of lying.

Honest people engage in ethical free riding – remain honest themselves but also interact with dishonest partners – a financially beneficial, but ethically dubious choice.

These results can help and inform job rotation policy, where employees are reassignment into new teams. Voluntary rotation (e.g., in EU), as compared to mandatory rotation (e.g., in UN), comes with moral hazards attached. The possible advantages of voluntary rotation should be weighed with the possible risk, especially in environments with high corruption potential.