

# Observing me or my decision: Explicit reputation concerns in prosocial and moral behavior



Per A. Andersson<sup>1</sup>, Arvid Erlandsson<sup>1</sup>, Daniel Västfjäll<sup>1,2</sup>, Gustav Tinghög<sup>1</sup>,  
<sup>1</sup>Linköping University, Sweden <sup>2</sup>Decision Research, Eugene Oregon, USA

## Introduction

- Prosocial behavior, such as donating to charitable organizations and contributing to the public good, can increase when being observed by others.<sup>1</sup>
- Preferences in moral sacrificial dilemmas can similarly change when being observed by others, to become less characteristically utilitarian.<sup>2</sup>
- Such findings can be due to explicit reputation concerns, due to mere presence of others, or an additive effect of both.<sup>3,4,5</sup>
- Studies have generally not distinguished explicit reputation concerns from mere presence of others.
- **In this study we hold constant the mere presence of others while manipulating the public reveal of decisions.**

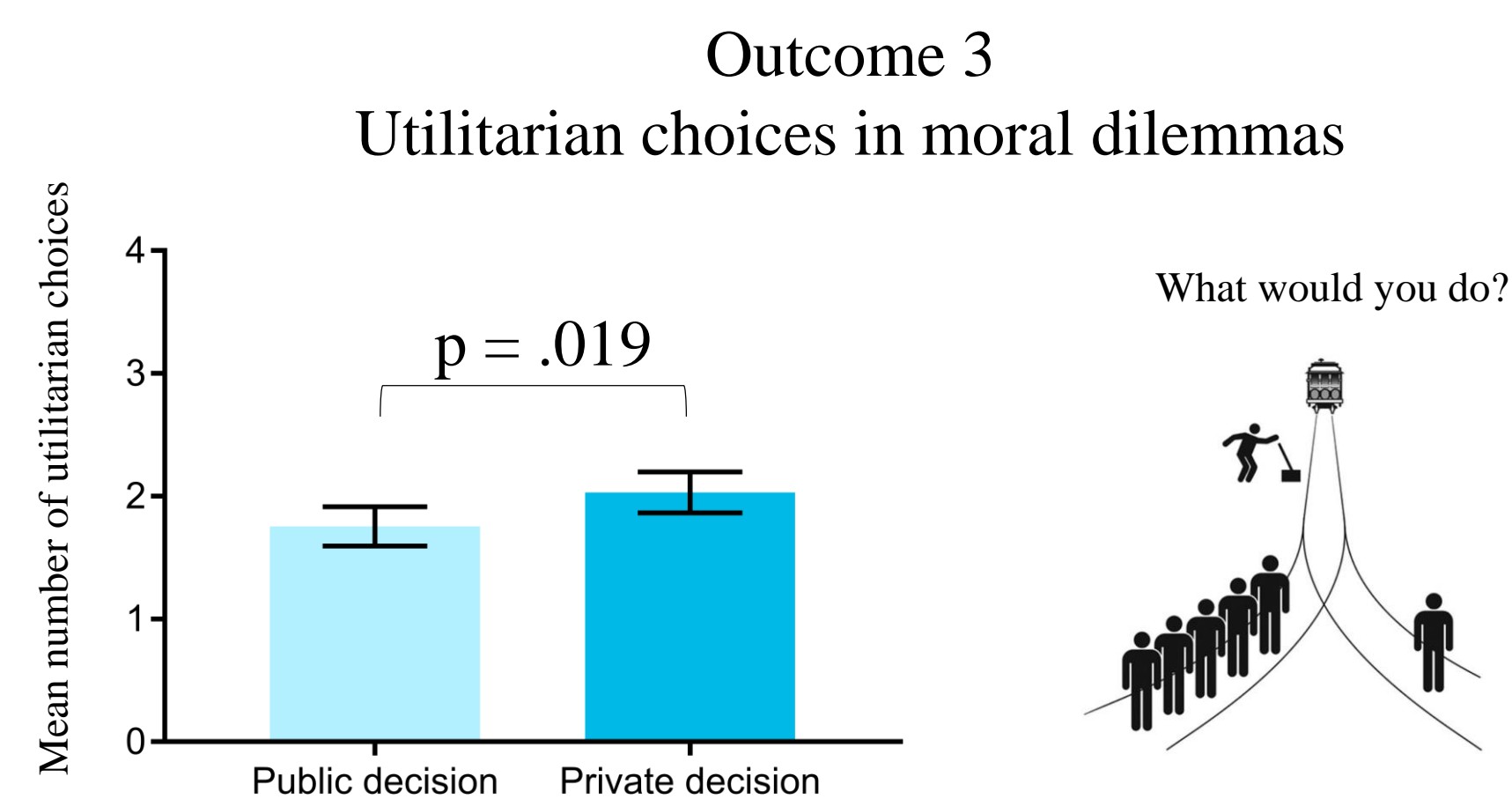
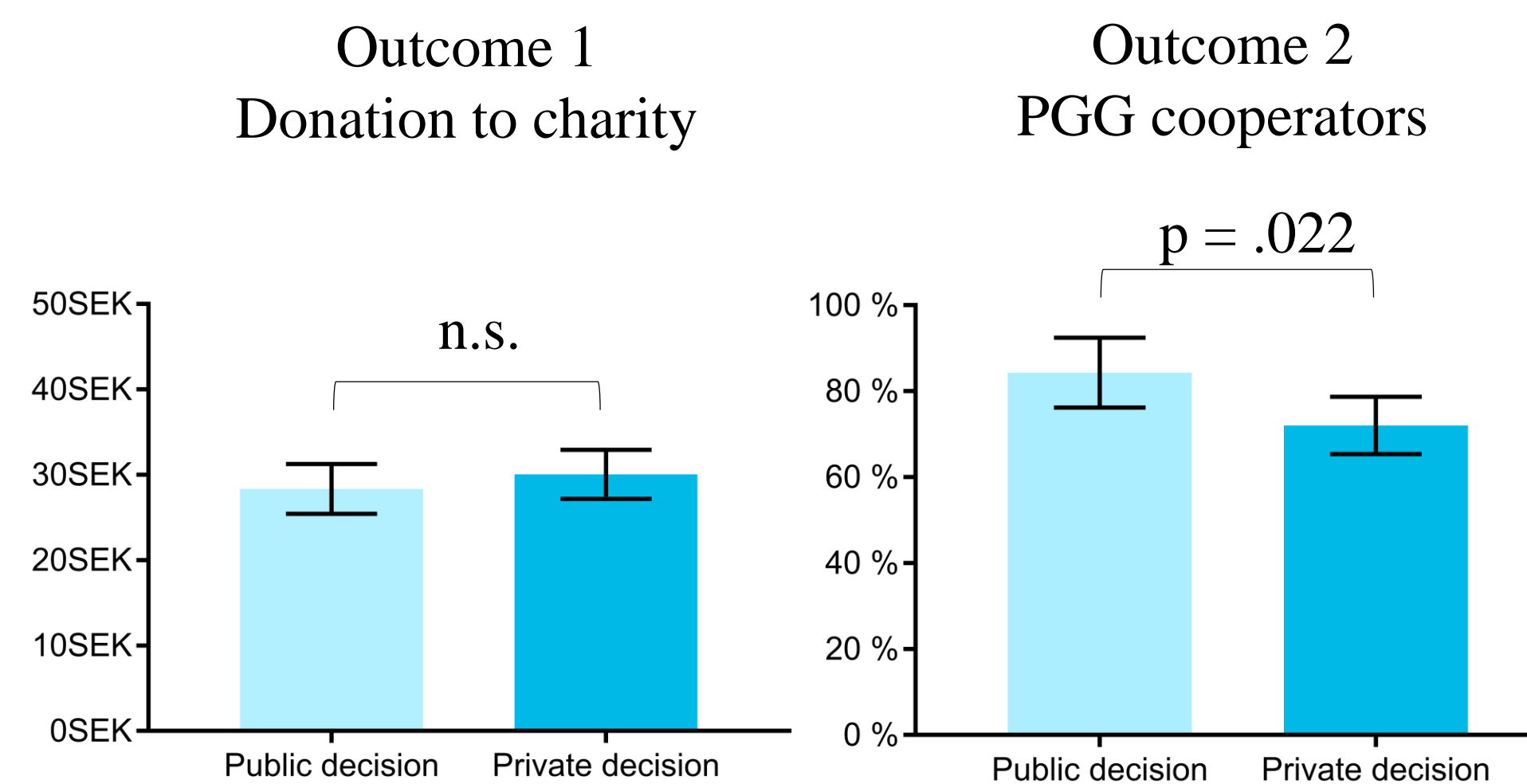
## Methods & Design

- We conducted a laboratory experiment with 374 students (44.1% female, mean age 23.27, SD = 3.98) at Linköping University in Sweden.
- Between-subjects design: participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions: a control group making private decisions in the mere presence of others, an experiment group making decisions in the same setting with the addition of a highly salient decision reveal. Decisions were revealed by displaying each persons decision, with their name and face, on a screen presentation.
- Outcome 1: **Donation to a charitable organization** (Doctors Without Borders / UNICEF).
- Outcome 2: **Public Goods Game** (only in the second wave of data collection, n=239).
- Outcome 3: **Preferences in moral sacrificial dilemmas, using 4 typical dilemmas** (Switch, Footbridge, Lifeboat, Crying baby).

Manipulation	Public decision	Private decision
Mere presence of others	Yes	Yes
Decision reveal	Yes	No

## Results

(See handout for regression analyses)



## Discussion

- Overall, we find that explicit reputation concerns, in the form of decision reveal, can (sometimes) have an effect beyond merely being in the presence of others.
- For Outcome 1, donation to a charitable organization, we find that participants do not donate more when decisions are revealed. There may be an aversion to standing out.
- For Outcome 2, Public Goods Game, we find that participants become more cooperative when decisions are revealed in public.
- For Outcome 3, moral sacrificial dilemmas, we find that on an aggregate level participants make fewer characteristically utilitarian choices when decisions are revealed in public.
- In regards to prosocial behavior, our results may shed light on why previous literature find inconsistent effects of being observed on prosocial behavior, as previous studies may see the additive effect of manipulating both the mere presence of others and revealed decisions.
- In regards to preferences in moral sacrificial dilemmas, our results are consistent with previous and concurrent research.

## Acknowledgements

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## References

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