

I Won't Let You Down...On The Surface: How Guilt Motivates Prosocial Deception

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Introduction

- Prosocial deception: false statements made with the intention of misleading and benefitting a target (Levine & Schweitzer, 2015);
- People anticipate less relational harm when telling a prosocial lie (vs. honesty) (Levine & Cohen, 2018);
- State guilt motivates individuals to actively repair and restore a relationship (Tangney, 1991);

Aim of the Paper

- We expect state guilt to promote prosocial deception through their concerns for relational harm;
- As behavior following guilt is mostly interpreted as moral behavior, we focus on *situations where the cost of dishonesty for the recipients is high*, therefore *revealing the immoral side of state guilt*.

Methods

Participants - Exp.1 | Exp.2

- 476 | 444 Mturk workers

Conditions - Exp.1 | Exp.2

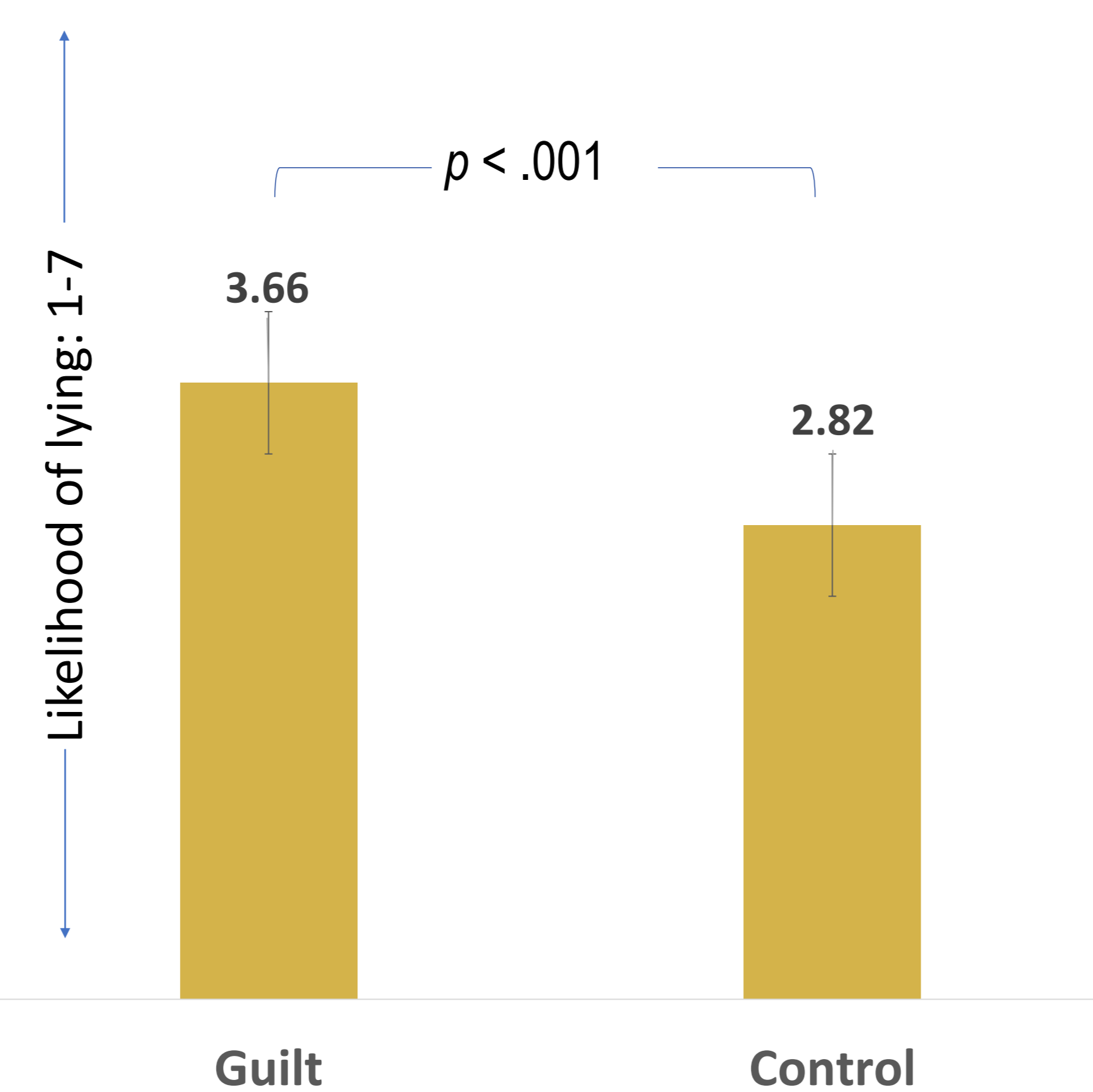
- *Guilt vs. Control* | *Guilt vs. Shame vs. Control*

Dependent variable - Exp.1 | Exp.2

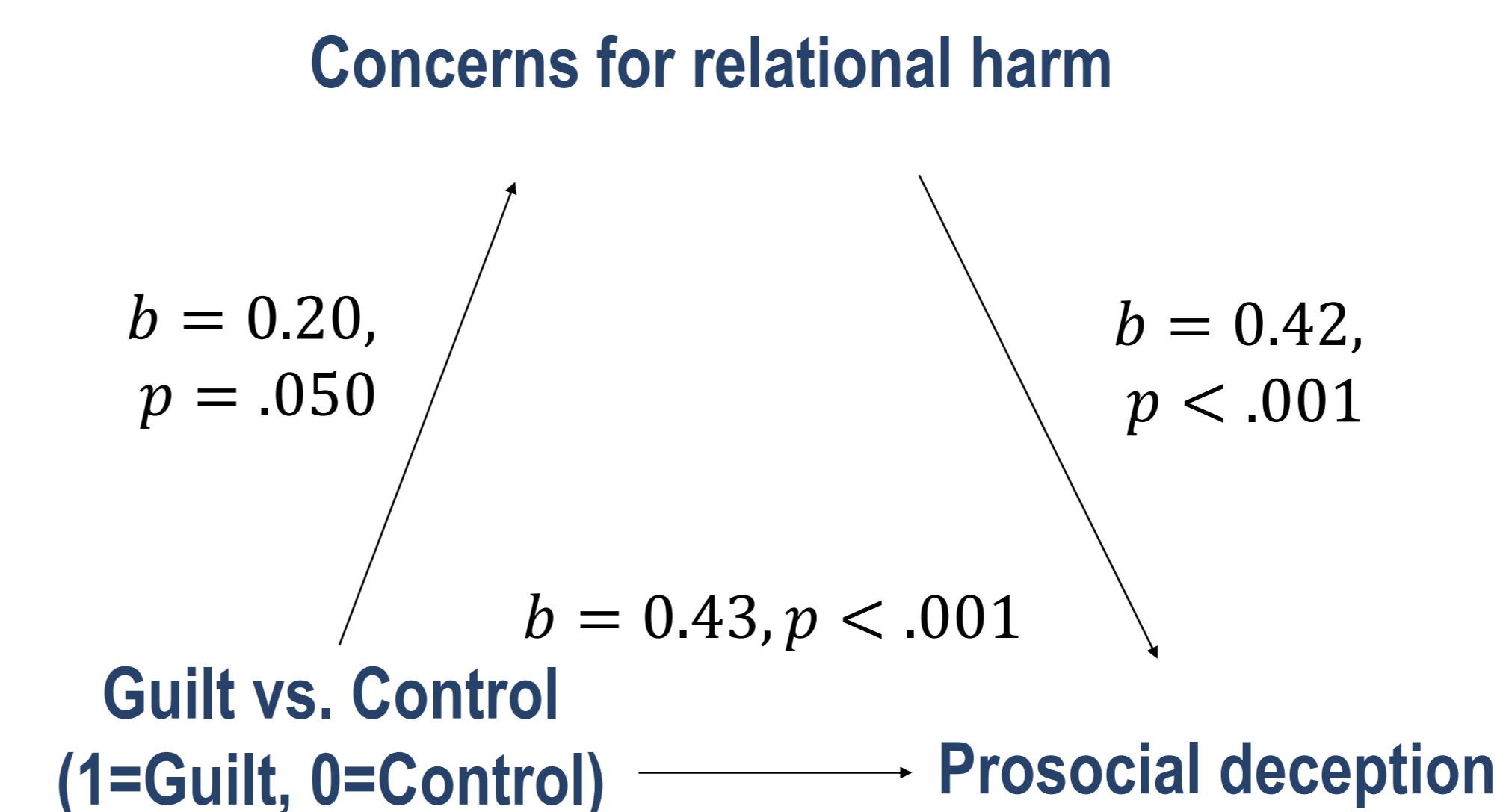
- Intention of prosocial deception | Prosocial lying task (Lupoli, et al., 2017)

Experiment 1 Results

Guilt Promotes Prosocial Deception



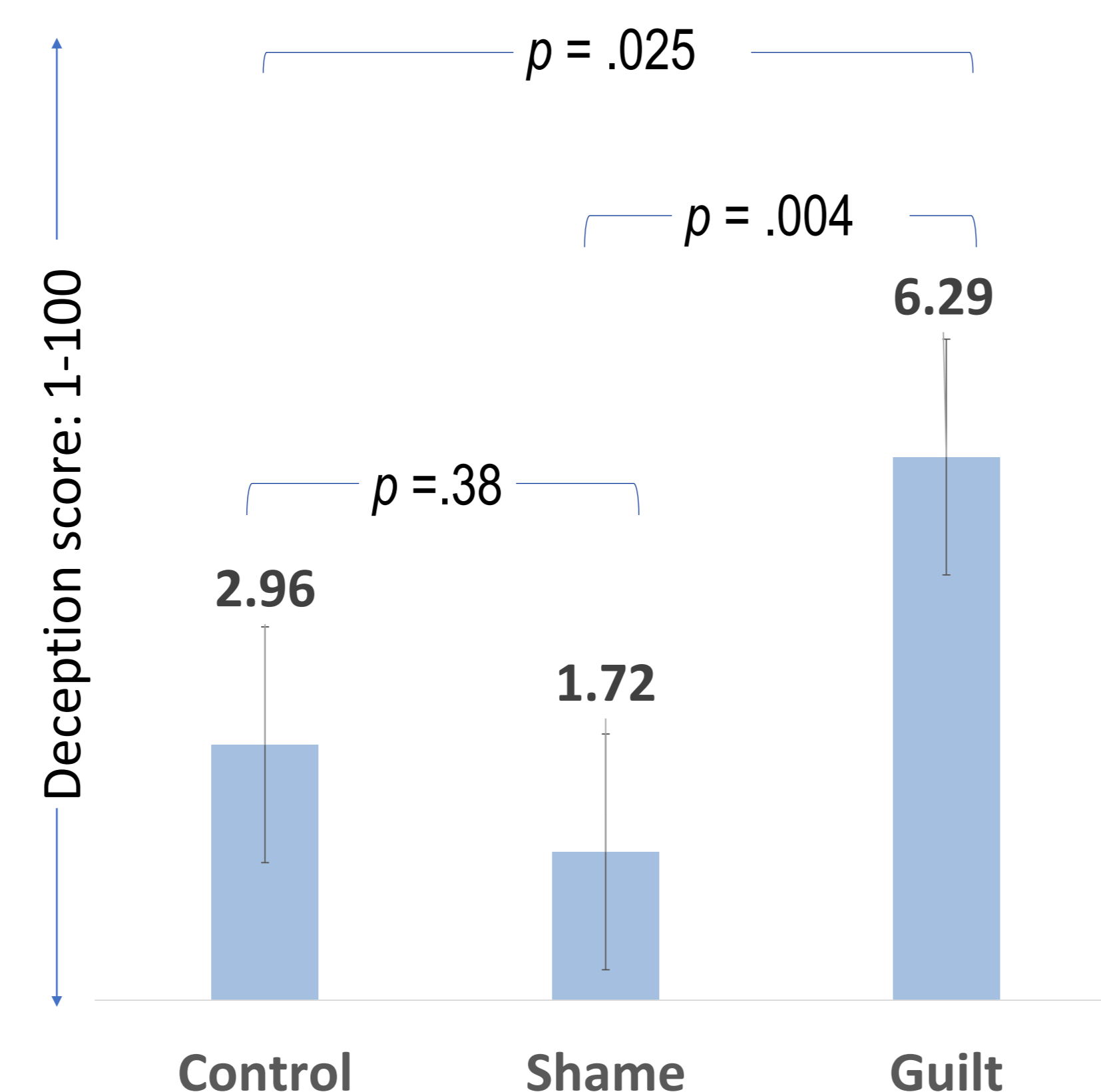
Mediation through Concerns for Relational Harm



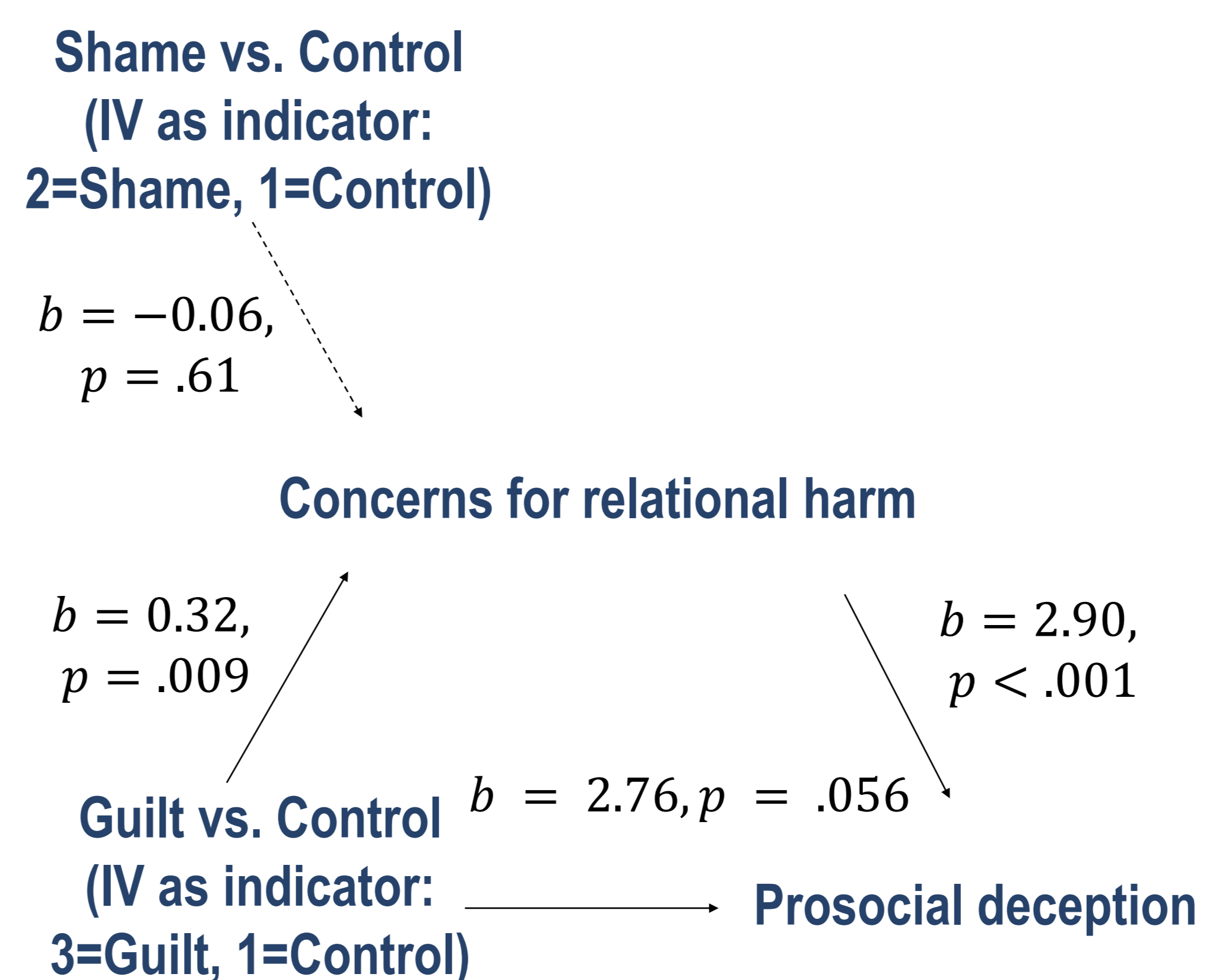
Indirect effect of guilt on prosocial deception:
95%CI [0.0041, 0.1801]

Experiment 2 Results

Contrasting Guilt with Shame



Mediation through Concerns for Relational Harm



Indirect effect of guilt on prosocial deception:
95%CI [0.2136, 1.8912]

Discussion

- While most papers on guilt assume that behavior following guilt is motivated out of concerns for the victim (e.g., De Hooge, 2011), in this study we disentangle transgressors' concern for the relationship *per se* from transgressors' concern for the victim by demonstrating that guilt promotes prosocial deception under situations where the cost of dishonesty for the recipients is high;
- This finding implies the immoral side-effect of guilt, which is raised from its relationship-oriented nature;
- We demonstrated that this effect is through transgressors' concerns for relational harm, and this effect cannot be generated to other negative moral emotions (e.g., shame).

Reference

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- De Hooge, I. E., Nelissen, R., Breugelmans, S. M., & Zeelenberg, M. (2011). What is moral about guilt? Acting "prosocially" at the disadvantage of others. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 100(3), 462.

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