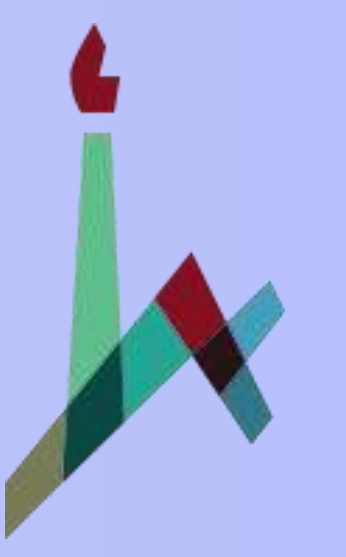


Moral deception? Comparing judgments of prosocial and selfish lies



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Zoom meeting link: <https://huji.zoom.us/j/84924706117?pwd=ZVpZRkZraHN4RIBIL3EwOUJRVzdOdz09>

Introduction

People lie often (Mazar et al., 2008). The literature has mainly focused on lies that benefit the self.

Yet people engage also in **prosocial lies** that intend to benefit another person. Such lies may be perceived as more moral than telling the truth (Levine & Schweitzer, 2014).

In this project we compare judgments of selfish and prosocial lies that involve the same moral transgression, inflict the same harm, and lead to the same benefit to self or other.

We hypothesize that:

1. People judge a liar who benefited someone else less harshly than a liar who benefited herself.
2. People expect others to judge them less harshly when they lie to benefit someone else rather than themselves.

Study 2: Predictions of Moral Judgment

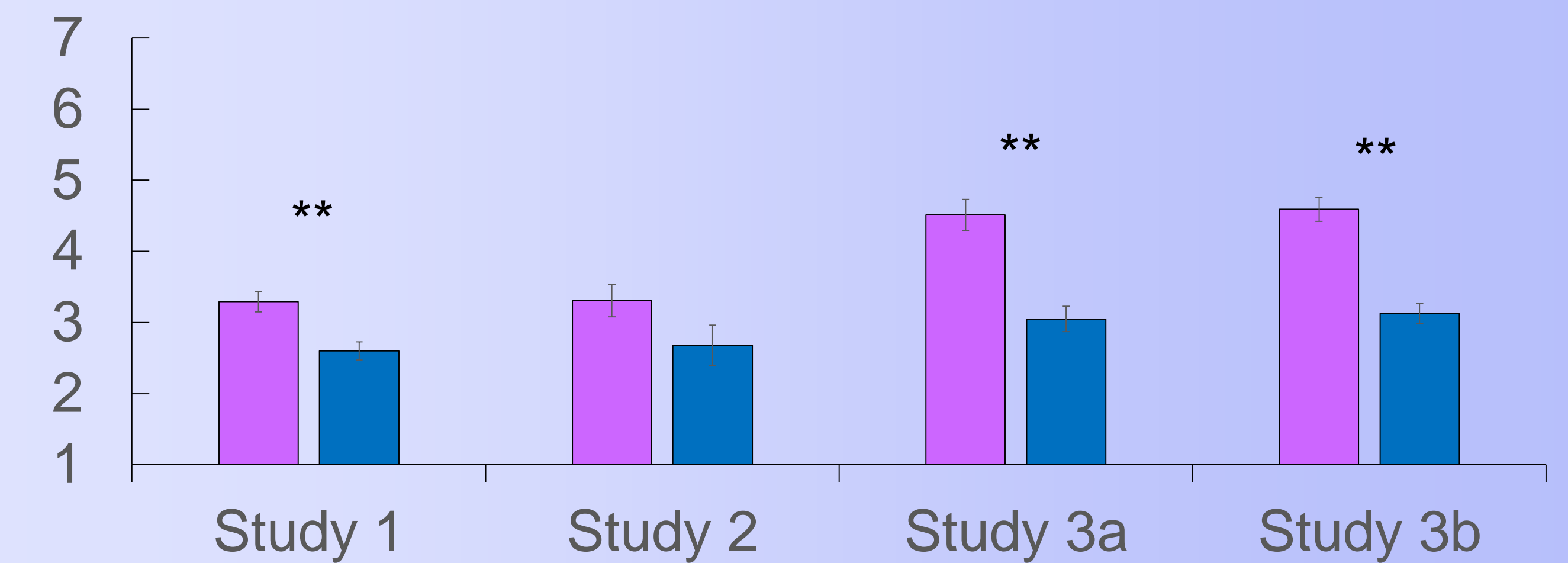
Mturk workers (N=90) were told that they were in charge of the hour report. They reported either that **they** worked more hours than they did or that **another worker** in the team did.

Participants rated how their colleagues would judge their morality and intentions were they to find out that they had lied.

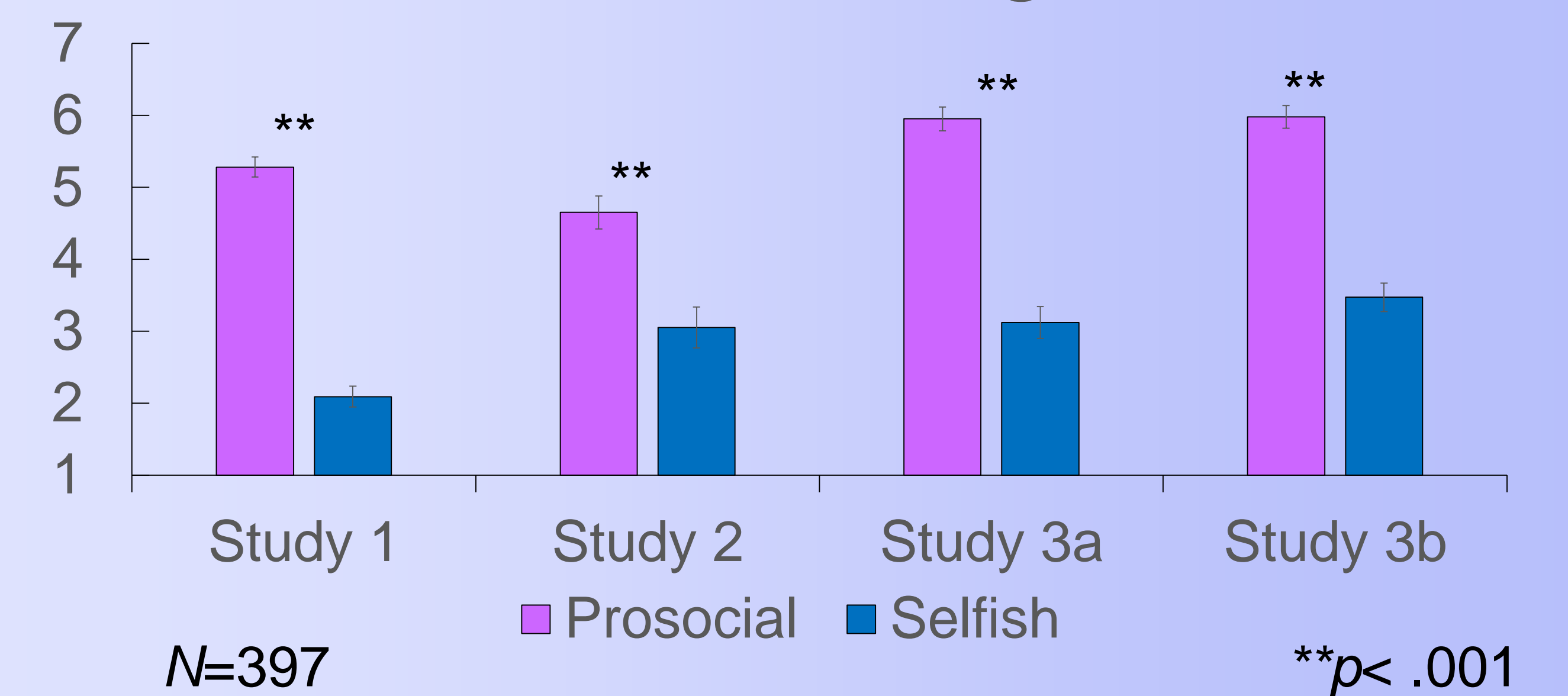
Participants expected that their colleagues would judge them as having better intentions when they over-reported someone else's hours and not their own. There was a marginal effect for morality.



Morality Ratings



Intentions Ratings



Study 1: Moral Judgment of Lies

Students (N=152) were presented with a scenario involving Barak, an employee who is in charge of his team's hours report. Employees' salary depends on his report. Barak lied and reported that either **he** or **another worker** in his team worked more hours than they actually did.

Participants rated Barak's morality and intentions.

As predicted, participants rated Barak as more moral and having better intentions when he over-reported someone else's hours than his own.

Studies 3a&b: Real-Life Stories

Prolific workers (N=86) described a time in their life when they had lied either for their **own** benefit or for **someone else's**. Participants rated how others would judge their morality, intentions, honesty and trustworthiness were they to read their story.

Participants expected others to judge them more positively on all measures when they lied for someone else's benefit rather than their own.

Each story from Study 3a was presented to several Prolific workers (N=304). Participants rated the liar's morality, intentions, honesty and trustworthiness.

As predicted, participants rated the liar more positively on all measures when he lied for someone else's benefit rather than his own.

Conclusions

Our results indicate a more positive judgment of prosocial liars than selfish ones.

Participants anticipated this pattern of judgment.

These findings advance our knowledge on dishonesty and unethical behavior and may have implications for lying behavior.

References

Levine, E. E., and Schweitzer, M. E. (2014). Are liars ethical? On the tension between benevolence and honesty. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 53, 107-117.

Mazar, N., Amir, O., and Ariely, D. (2008). The dishonesty of honest people: A theory of self-concept maintenance. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 45, 633-644.

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