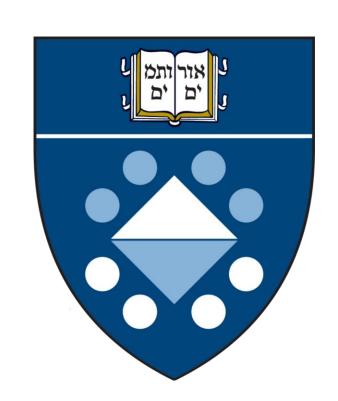


Attributional ambiguity as moral wiggle room

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Literature

Moral wiggle room

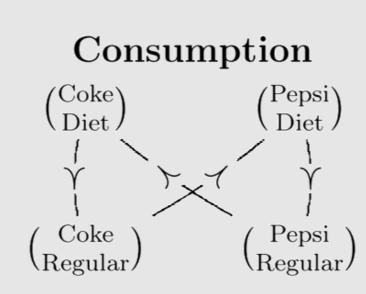
= situational characteristics that obfuscate the signal which the outcome of an own-payoff-maximizing (i.e., potentially selfish) behavior sends to others about one's intention to be selfish.

- People generally show prosociality both in everyday life, as well as in the lab (e.g.?)
- However, a lot of them do so reluctantly: they would rather behave selfish, but they do not want to be seen as selfish \rightarrow those people start behaving selfishly under moral wiggle room

Attributional ambiguity

= decision-makers can conceal their true motives when options vary on more than one attribute (Snyder et al., 1979).

 Based on Correspondent Inference Theory (Jones & Davis, 1965)



Mechanisms

Manipulating one's own evaluation (self-image)

 Making oneself believe to actually have a preference for the charity attached to the selfish option

Social norms (social image)

Change in appropriateness of selfish behavior

People often behave prosocially, but do so reluctantly.

Do people exploit attributional ambiguity in social decisions? What are the mechanisms driving this effect?

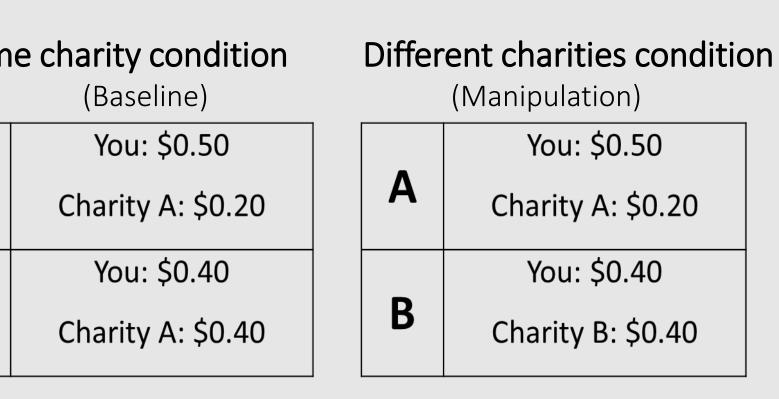
Results

Study 1

Design

- N = 222 mTurkers
- Binary dictator game with charities
- Manipulation receiving charity

Same charity condition (Baseline)			
	You: \$0.50		
Α	Charity A: \$0.20		
	You: \$0.40		
В	Charity A: \$0.40		



Proportion of prosocial participants Different charities Same charity

Same charity Different charities 105 selfish 40 (36.0%) 65 (58.6%) 117 71 (64.0%) 46 (41.4%) prosocial 111 111 222

Chi² (1)= 11.29, p = 0.001

→ More selfish behavior under attributional ambiguity

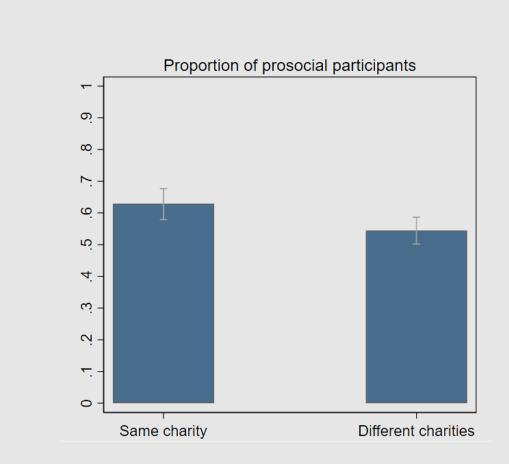
Study 2

Design

- Replication of study 1
- N = 781 mTurkers

Investigated mechanisms

- Self-image: I) Self-reported evaluations of the charities
- II) Incentivized "voting" for a charity
- Social image:
- I) Incentivized social norm elicitation (Krupka & Weber, 2013)



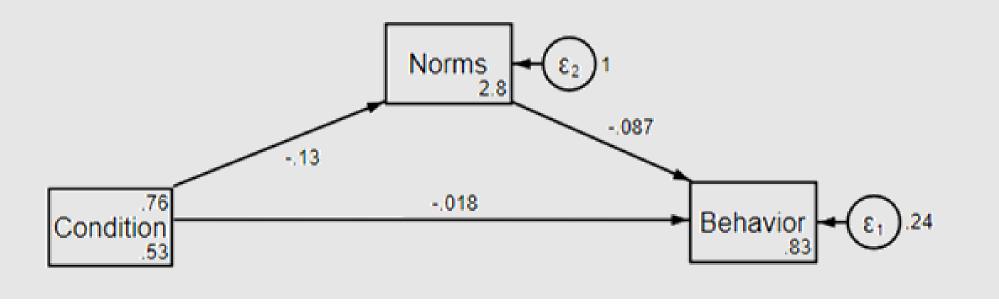
→ More selfish behavior under attributional ambiguity (replication study 1)

Chi² (1) = 3.988, p = .046

	Same Charity	Different Charities	
selfish	145 (37.1%)	172 (44.1%)	317
prosocial	246 (62.9%)	218 (55.9%)	464
	391	390	781

Results

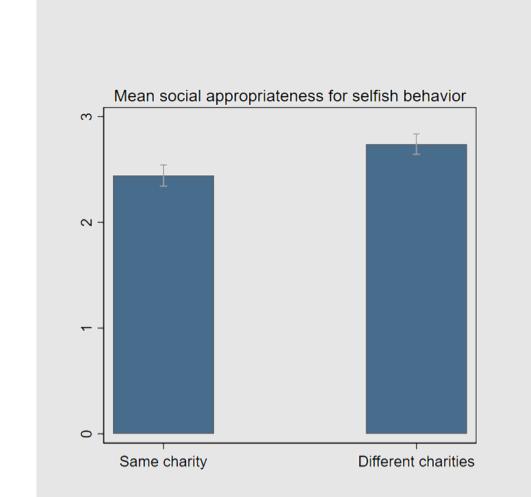
- No support for self-image:
 - No difference in evaluation of charity (self-report)
 - No difference in which charity is more popular (incentivized)
- Support for social image:
 - Selfish image is perceived as more socially appropriate under attributional ambiguity, t(779) = 8.26, p < .001
 - Full mediation (see below)



Study 3

Design

- N = 614 mTurkers
- Between-subject: Same vs. different charity condition
- Instructions identical to Study 1 & 2
- Instead of incentivized choice (Krupka & Weber, 2013): - Appropriateness ratings for choosing A or B
- Correct choices incentivized with a bonus of \$0.50



Results

- Selfish behavior is rated as more socially permissible in the Different Charities condition, t(612) = 4.20, p < .0001 (see figure left).
- Prosocial behavior is perceived as slightly but significantly less socially permissible in Different Charities condition, t(612) = -2.77; p = .0029.

General discussion

 Main findings
 Attributional ambiguity is a form of moral wiggle room: People behave more selfishly when options vary on more than one attribute

Exley, C. L. (2016). Excusing Selfishness in Charitable Giving: The Role of Risk. The Review of Economic Studies, 83(2), 587–628.

- No support for the mechanism of changing one's charity preferences (self-image)
 Support for social norm mechanism (social image)

Relation to literature

- Reveals hidden preference for selfishness, similar to other forms of moral wiggle room (Dana et al., 2007; Exley, 2016)
- Supports a social image account (Andreoni & Bernheim, 2009), instead of a self-image account (Grossman & van der Weele, 2017; Matthey & Regner, 2014)

Implications

- For research: Future research should further investigate how exactly social norms impact prosocial behavior in moral wiggle room settings.
 For real-life application: Decision settings should try to eliminate any attributional ambiguity to foster prosocial behavior.



Krupka, E. L., & Weber, R. A. (2013). Identifying social norms using coordination games: Why does dictator game sharing vary?. Journal of the European Andreoni, J., & Bernheim, B. D. (2009). Social image and the 50–50 norm: A theoretical and experimental analysis of audience effects. *Econometrica*, 77(5), 1607–1636. Dana, J., Weber, R. A., & Kuang, J. X. (2007). Exploiting moral wiggle room: experiments demonstrating an illusory preference for fairness. *Economic Theory*, 33(1), 67-

Grossman, Z., & van der Weele, J. J. (2017). Self-image and willful ignorance in social decisions. Journal of the European Economic Association, 15(1), 173–217.

Economic Association, 11(3), 495-524. Matthey, A., & Regner, T. (2014). More than outcomes: The role of self-image in other-regarding behavior (Working Paper No. 2014–036). Jena Economic Research Papers. https://www.econstor.eu/handle/10419/108543 Snyder, M. L., Kleck, R. E., Strenta, A., & Mentzer, S. J. (1979). Avoidance of the handicapped: an attributional ambiguity analysis. Journal of personality and social psychology, 37(12), 2297.

