

A coin flip suggesting to act in a self-interested way leads people to feel better and to make less biased decisions when they adhere to it.

Random suggestions license self-interested behavior

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INTRO

- People like to resolve moral dilemmas by chance (i.e., a coin flip; Lin & Reich, 2018).
- We expand this finding by providing only a suggestion by a coin flip. Participants are free to decide independently.

METHODS

- Study 1 ($N = 457$): We asked participants whether they would like to donate or keep a monetary bonus, and assessed their feelings.
- Study 2 ($N = 456$): We presented participants with a vignette describing an interpersonal sunk cost scenario (Olivola, 2018) and asked whether they would continue investing or would stop. We also assessed personal and relational concern (Kong & Belkin, 2019).

RESULTS

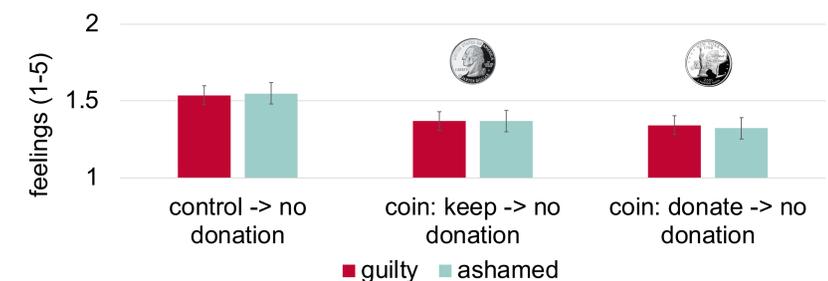
- Participants follow the coin's suggestion more often when the outcome is favorable for them (Study 1: 63% vs. 46%), which results in less interpersonal sunk cost bias (Study 2: 59% vs. 49%).
- Coin participants feel better than control participants after making the same self-interested decision (Study 1), and are more concerned with their own feelings (Study 2).

DISCUSSION

- Flipping a coin can help realize one's preference, which then leads to better decisions for oneself.
- The same (self-interested) decision without a coin flip leads to more negative feelings and more relational versus personal concern.

STUDY 1

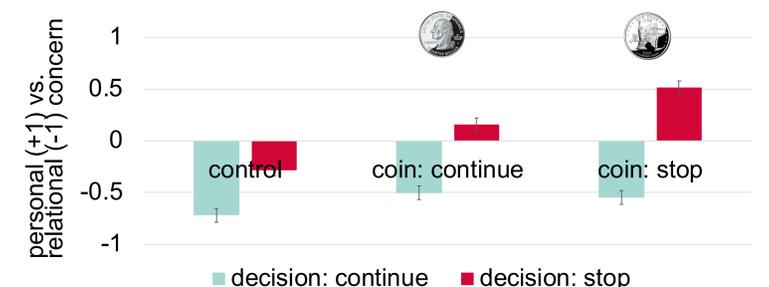
Coin-keep group more often adheres to coin than coin-donate group, $\chi^2(1) = 8.12, p = .004$. Not donating after a coin suggests to not donate lowers felt guilt and shame (compared to not donating in the control group):



Note: Variables were measured on 5-point Likert scales. Error bars represent standard errors.

STUDY 2

Coin-stop group exhibits less sunk-cost bias, $\chi^2(2) = 6.01, p = .050$. Coin participants feel more personal concern (+1) than relational concern (-1) when they decide to stop investing (= do not show interpersonal sunk cost bias):



Note: Three items measured relational concern and were subtracted from two items measuring personal concern. Error bars represent standard errors.