

Collective self and individual choice: Inter-group comparisons affect environmental values and behavior

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UK lags Behind Europe on GM Regulation

Friends of the Earth slammed the UK Government over its failure to sign up to a ban on genetically modified (GM) crops in Europe.

The ban was proposed or implied in two declarations discussed by EU ministers at a meeting in Luxembourg, and was supported by all EU countries except the UK, Ireland, Portugal and Spain. The bans would have stopped commercial growing until the newly amended GM Directive (90/220) is in place, which may not be until 2002.

Press Association
guardian.co.uk, Monday
September 18 2006 11:30 BS
[Article history](#)

Britain's approach to the use of bioenergy is "piecemeal" and "lacking ambition" and calls in...

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The UK's paper recycling efforts are far too dependent on a healthy export market, according to figures from the Confederation of Paper Industries (CPI).

While Europe recycles nearly 90% of recovered material, the UK recycles just half – a figure expected to drop in 2007 – while the rest is exported. However, the UK actually uses far more recovered paper in products than its European counterparts.

Waste

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r, Siân Berry, has attacked the UK dumps more household waste state. She states:

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ure, there must also be easy facilities, so as much waste as some way."

paper recycling relies too exports

[atweek.com](#), 19 July 2007

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Applied background

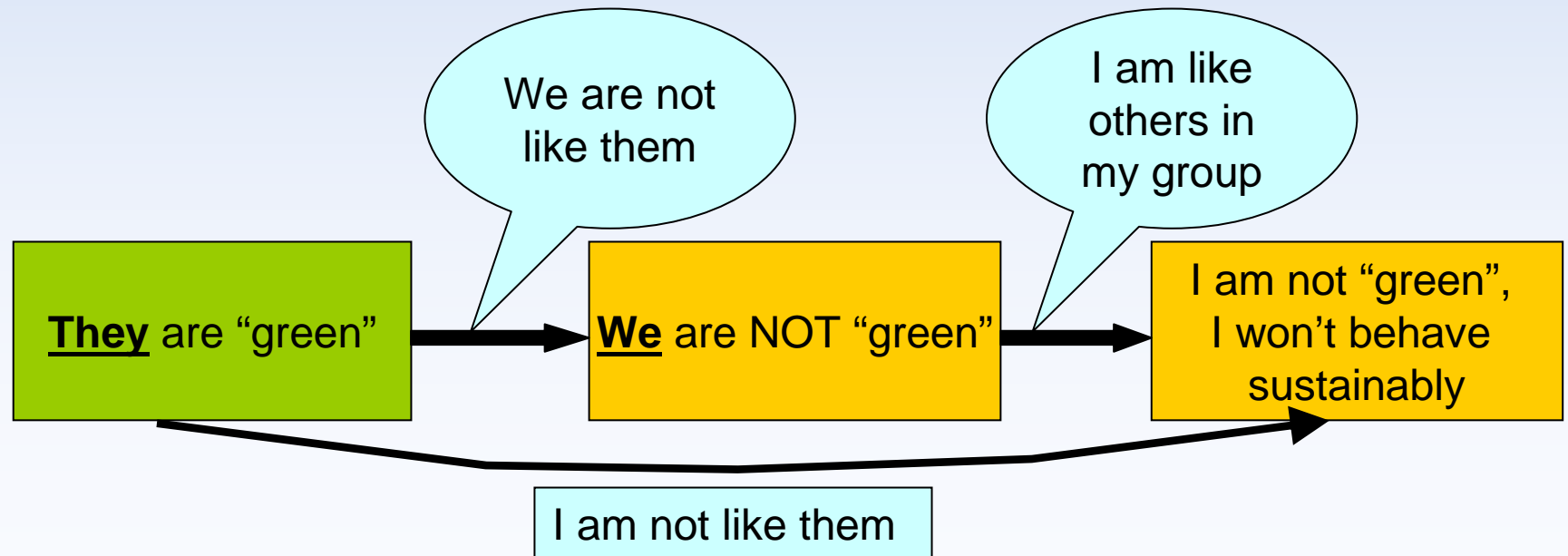
- Environmental information is frequently presented in inter-group context (e.g. “we are doing worse than others”)
- How does this social comparative information affect groups and individuals?
- Is this an effective method of communicating evaluative group-level feedback?

Theoretical background

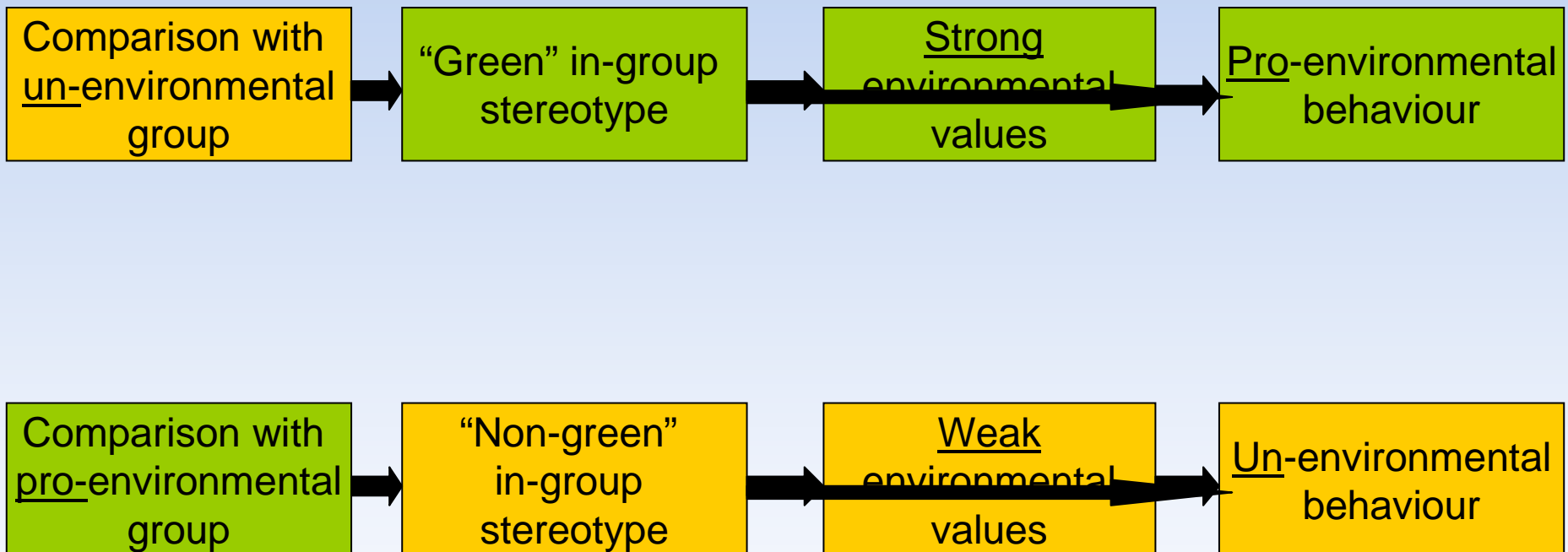
- Psychology so far: a variety of behaviour change models that predict individual behavioural choices
- For sustained behaviour change to occur, more than change in individual psychology is needed
- Social contexts must change (because they frame individual psychology)
- Self-categorization theory

Self-categorization theory

- People adopt the same norms and values that are ascribed to the groups they belong to
- Group norms and values are defined on the basis of comparison with other groups
- What we conclude about ourselves depends on inter-group comparison context



Hypotheses

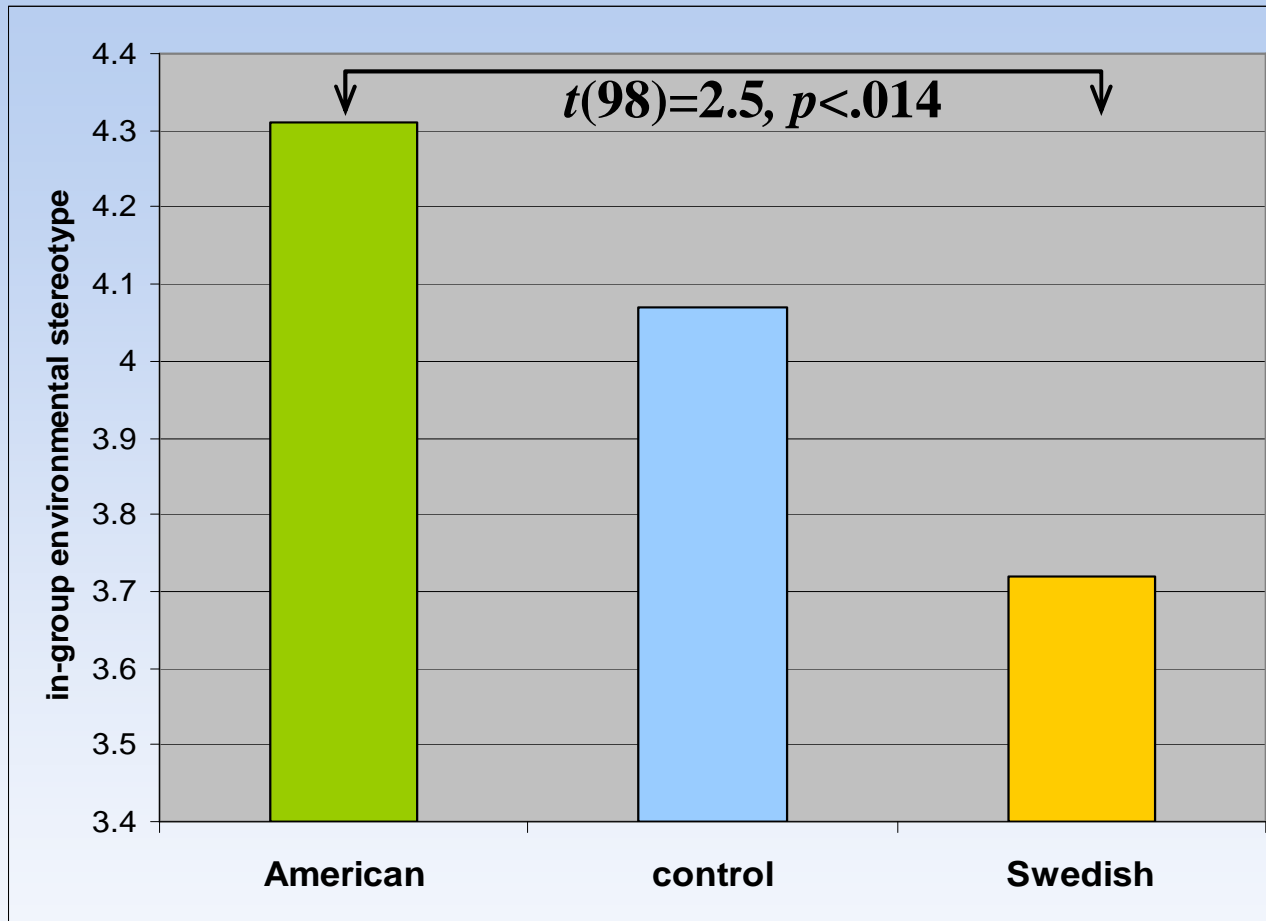


- Environmental behaviour depends on the nature of inter-group comparison

Study 1

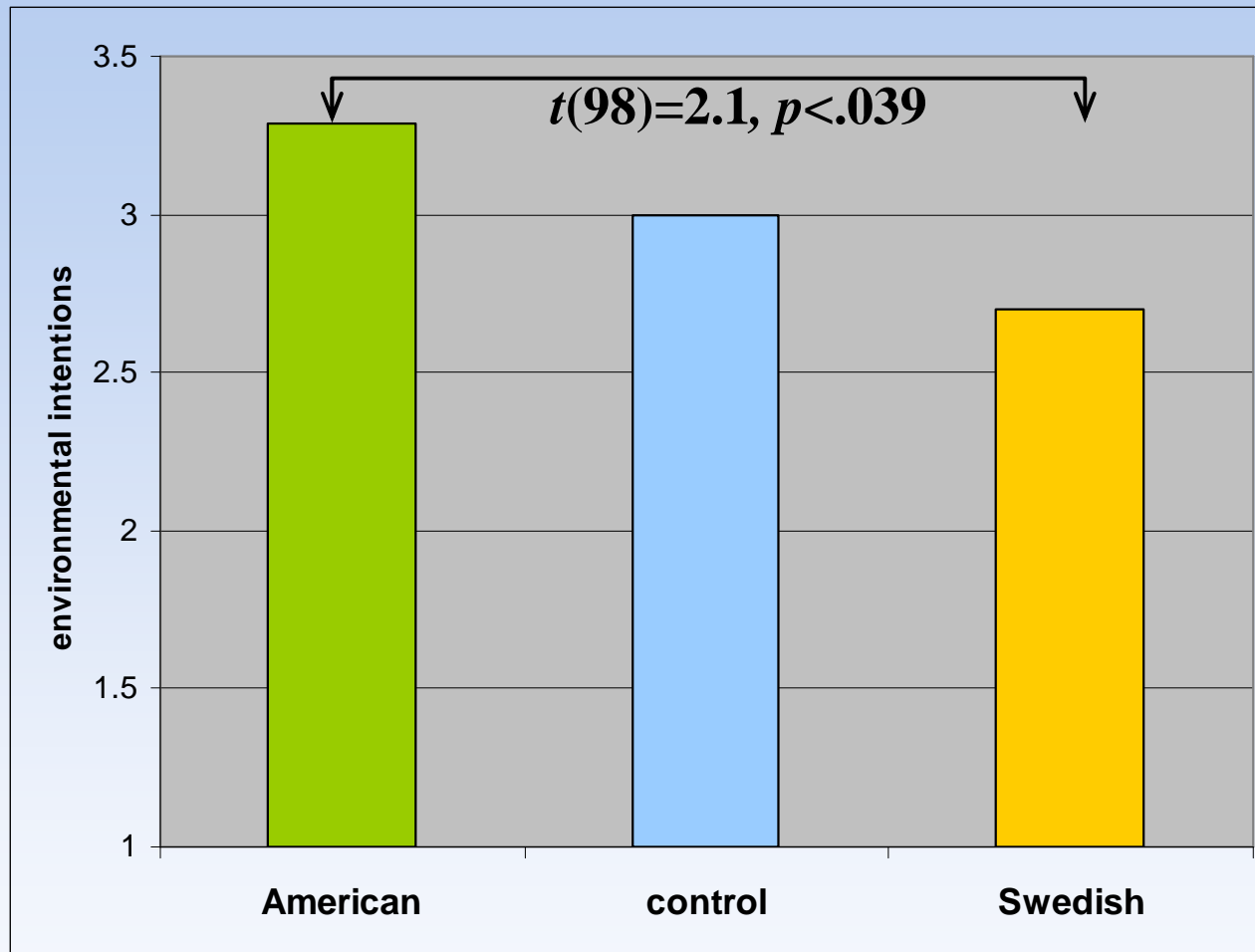
- 99 participants (British, mean age = 20)
- Inter-group comparative context manipulation (upward vs. downward vs. control)
 - What it means to be British as opposed to being American (Swedish), in what ways British people are different from American (Swedish) people
- In-group environmental stereotype measure
 - “Caring for the environment”, “living sustainable lifestyle” – does this describe the British?
- Environmental intentions measure
 - Buying mostly organic, decreasing energy/ fuel consumption, joining community env. activities, etc.

Study 1. Results – in-group stereotype



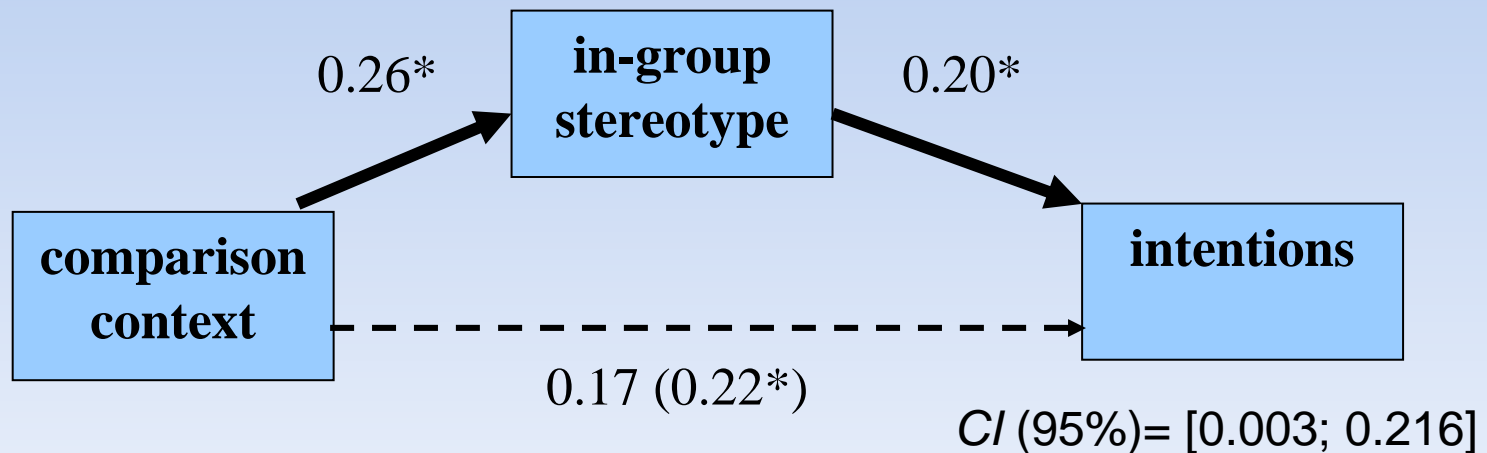
- In-group environmental stereotype is stronger in the downward comparison context

Study 1. Results - intentions



- Environmental intentions are stronger in the downward comparison context

Study 1. Results - mediation

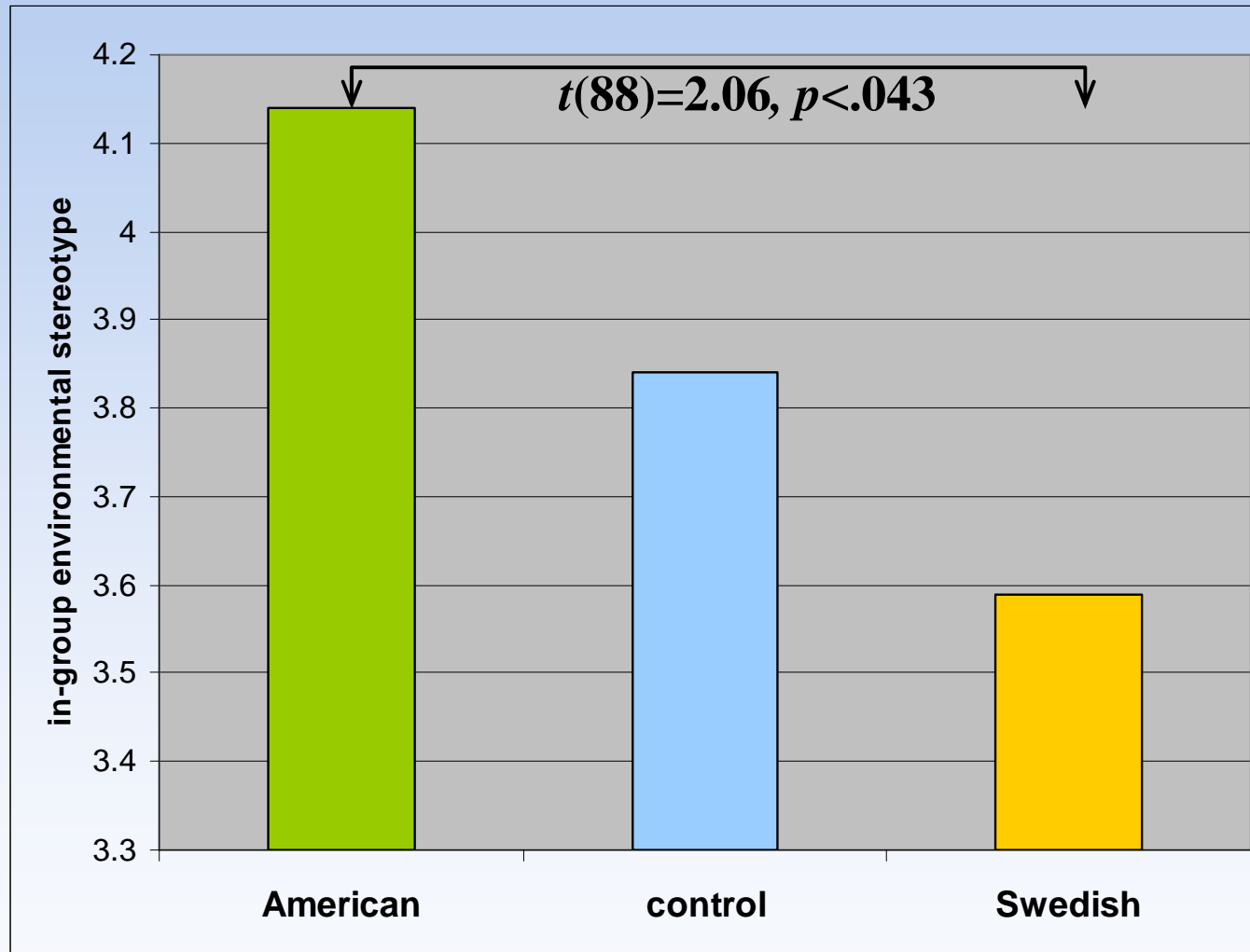


- Changes in in-group stereotype explain the effect of comparison context on individual intentions

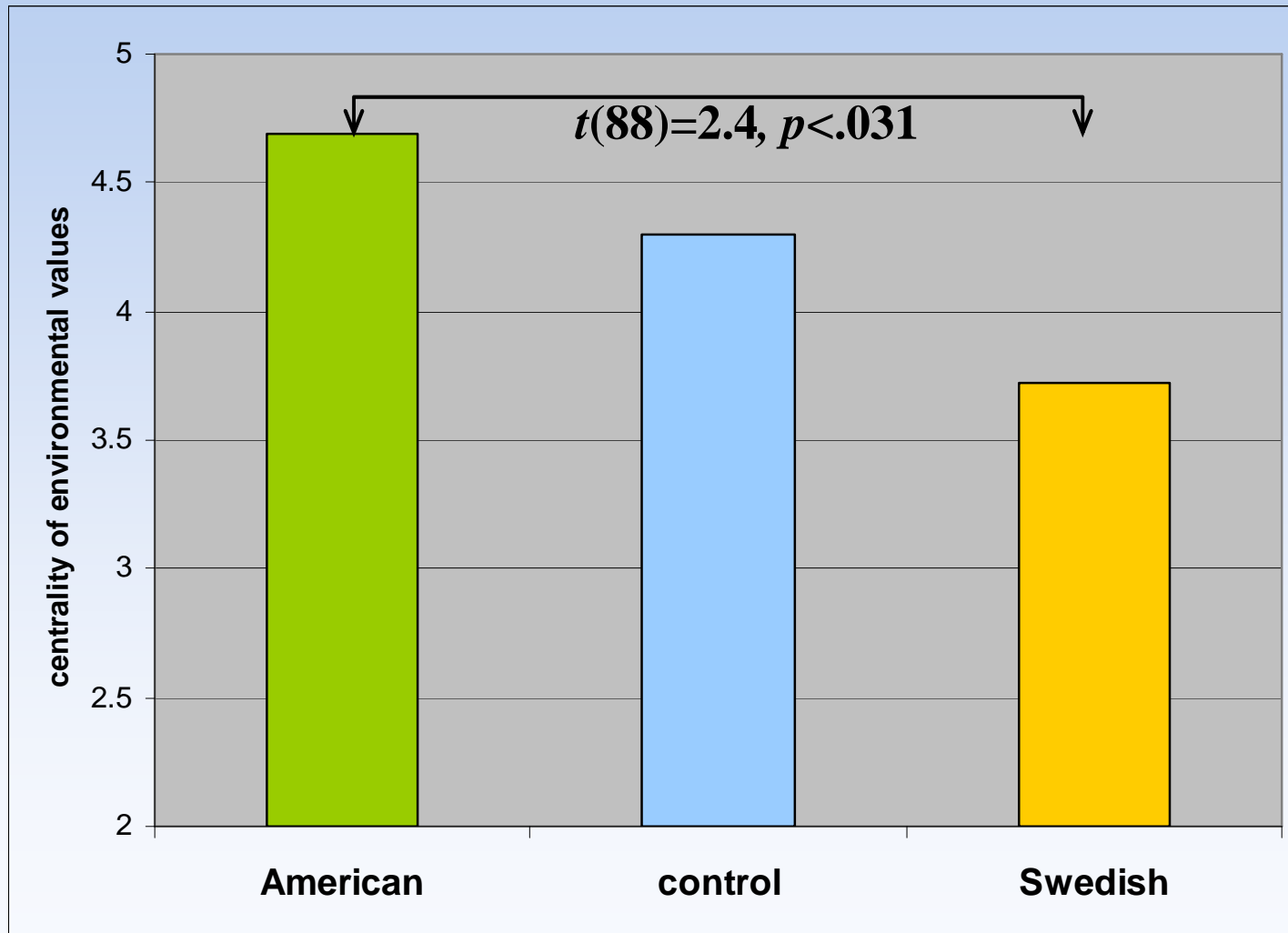
Study 2

- 90 adults (British, mean age = 30)
- Inter-group comparative context manipulation (as in Study 1)
- In-group stereotype measure
- Values centrality measure
 - How important are these values for you?
Among others – “protecting the environment”
- Environmental intentions measure

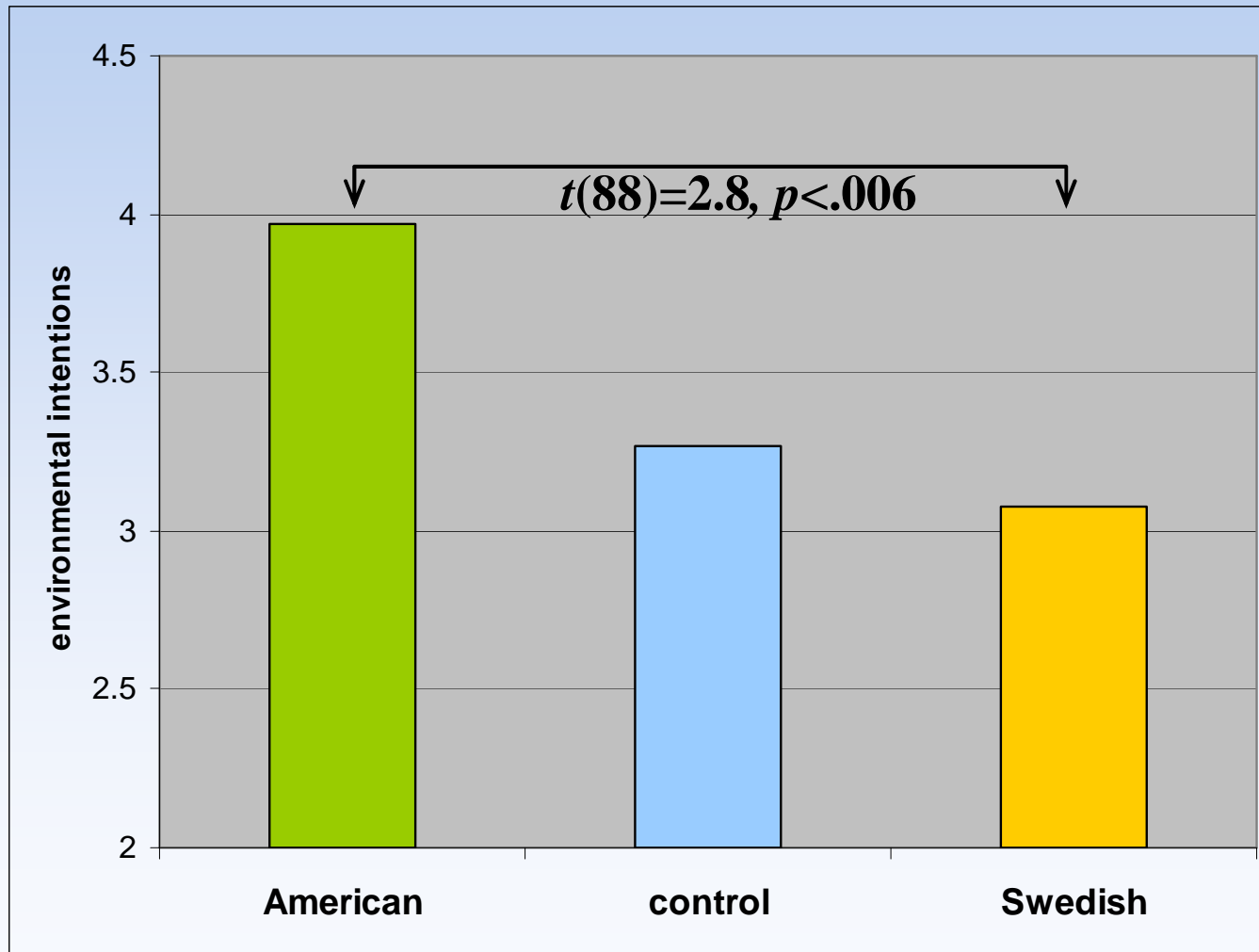
Study 2. Results – in-group stereotype



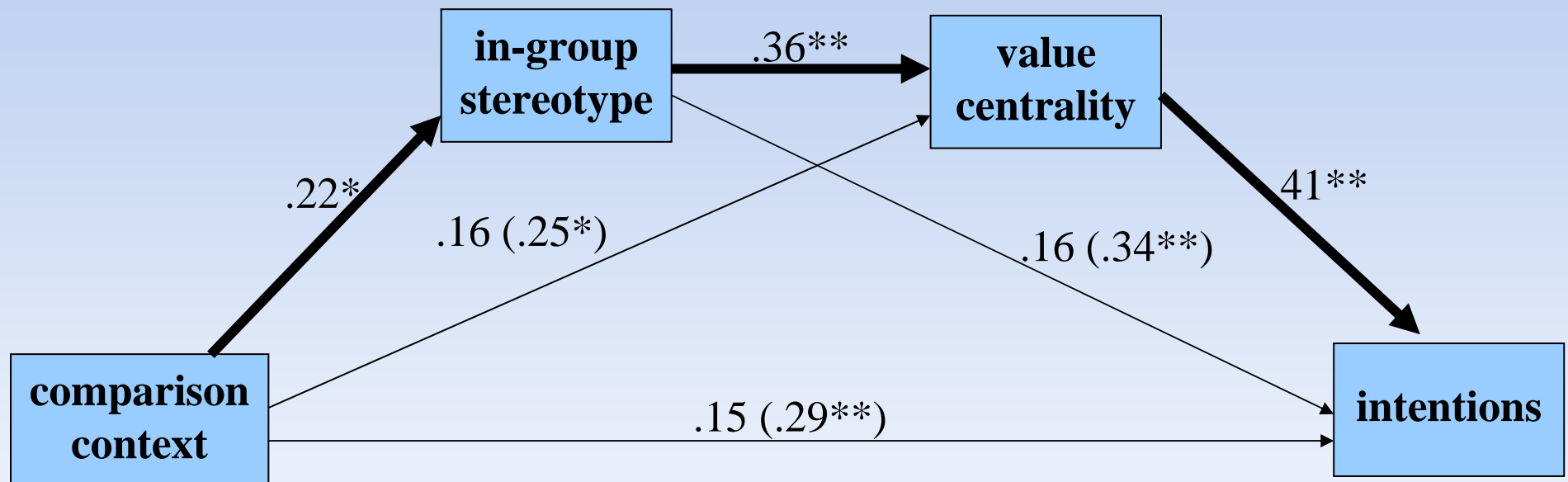
Study 2. Results – value centrality



Study 2. Results - intentions



Study 2. Results - mediation



- Inter-group comparison context affects intentions by changing in-group stereotype and centrality of personal values

Theoretical summary

- Inter-group comparison context determines the content of in-group environmental stereotype
- In-group stereotype affects individual intentions by changing importance of environmental values (internalization)
- Support for self-categorization theory

Applied summary

- Inter-group comparison standard can be used to stimulate environmental behaviour
- Upward comparison may undermine environmental values and intentions
- Sustainable changes can be stimulated by providing a downward comparison standard
- Possible moderators: similarities vs. differences, fairness concerns, common fate beliefs...