



Seeker Beware: Relational Costs When Advice is Not Followed

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Abstract

Maintaining positive interpersonal relationships plays an important role in nearly every aspect of our personal and professional lives. Despite the significance of such relational considerations, advice research has largely focused on advice giving and seeking behavior between previously unacquainted others with little incentive to continue their relationship. In this paper, we investigate the relational outcomes of advice seekers' decisions not to utilize the advice they receive. Through a series of experimental studies, we provide evidence that (1) advisors penalize those who disregard their advice; (2) that this effect stems from both lowered perceptions of the seeker and a threat to advisors' self-worth when their advice is not followed; and (3) that advice seekers fail to identify or account for this negative relational impact, exposing them to unanticipated adverse consequences of their advice utilization decisions. These findings challenge previous recommendations for optimal advice seeking behavior.

Study 1

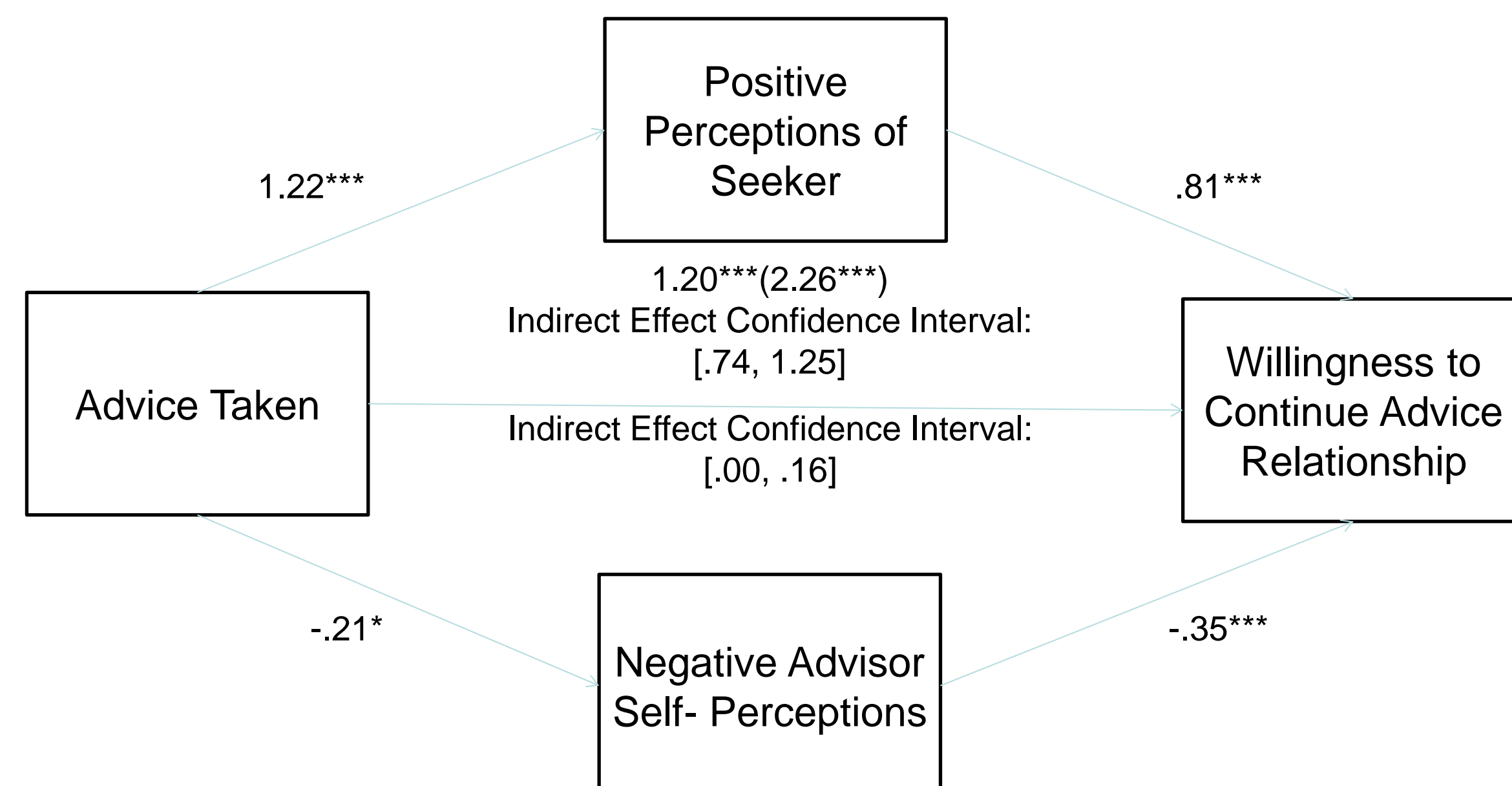
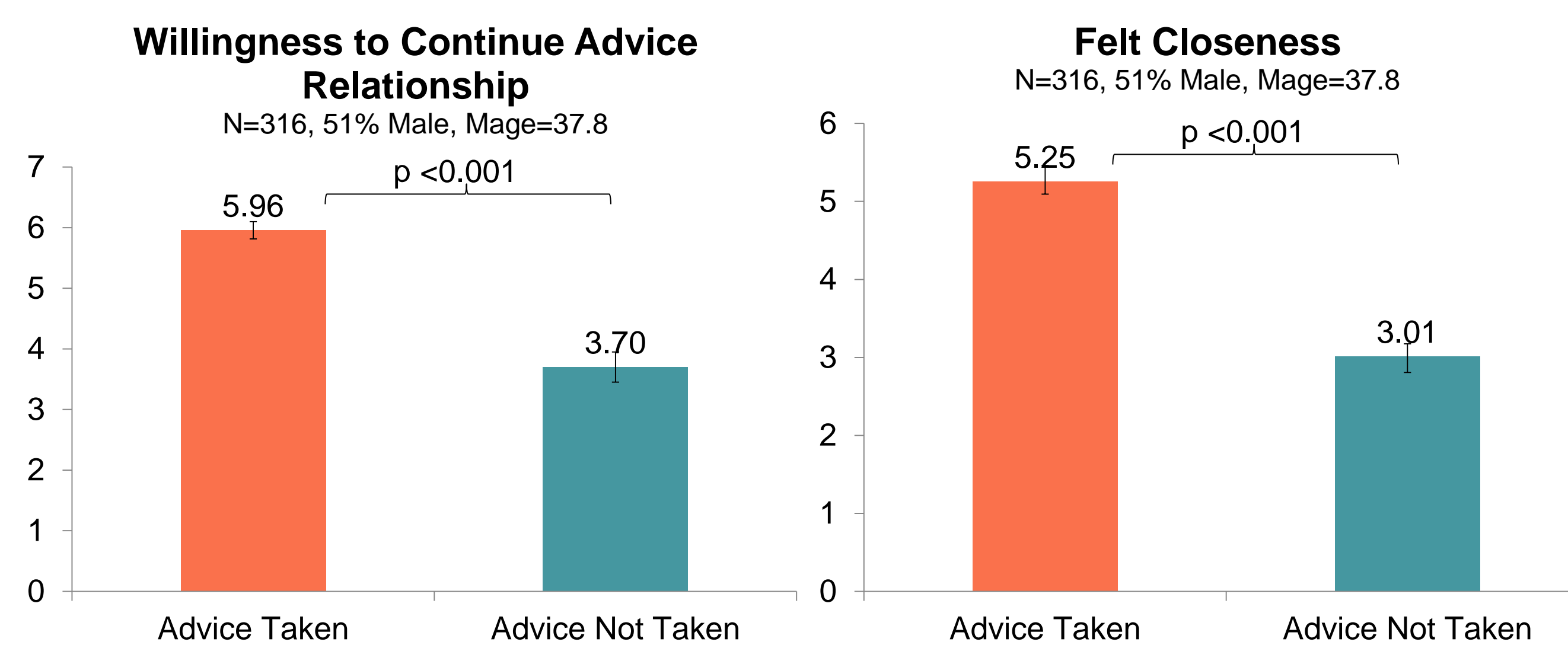
Do advisors punish seekers who don't take their advice?

Scenario:

Imagine one of your more junior colleagues, John, approaches you for career advice. You and John are not on the same team, but you work in a similar area, and encounter one another multiple times each day at work. You take a few hours to reflect on and document what has been helpful thus far, and you schedule time to meet with John in the next week. At your meeting, you walk through a specific plan that you think John could follow to be successful. John ends up [does not end up] taking your advice.

Measures:

- Willingness to continue advice relationship (3 items, $\alpha=.94$)
- Felt closeness
- Warmth & competence of advice seeker (Cuddy, Fiske & Glick, 2008)
- Advisor self-perceived ineptitude (Hysom, 2009) & social esteem concern (Heatheron & Polivy, 1991)



Advisors punish seekers who don't take their advice because not taking it worsens (1) advisors' perceptions of the seeker and (2) advisors' self-perceptions.

Study 2

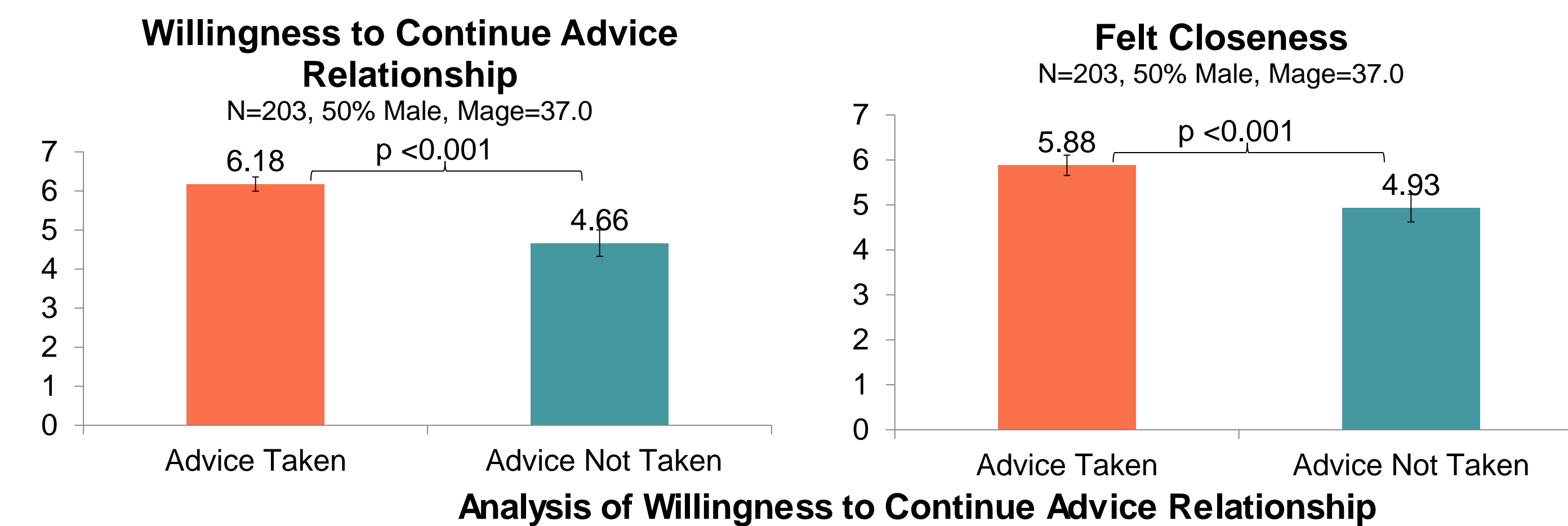
Under what conditions do advisors punish seekers who don't take their advice?

Recall Task:

Please recall a particular incident in which someone else asked you for advice and ultimately followed [did not follow] your advice.

Measures:

- Willingness to continue advice relationship (3 items, $\alpha=.91$)
- Felt closeness



| | (1) | (2) | (3) |
|-------------------------------------|------|---------|----------|
| Adjusted R ² | .233 | .249 | .309 |
| Characteristics of Situation | | | |
| Good Outcome | | .883 ** | .690 * |
| Structural Power of Counterpart | | -.447 | -.682 ** |
| Comparative Status of Counterpart | | .090 | .139 |
| Personal Domain (vs. Professional) | | .244 | .142 |
| Characteristics of Advisor & Seeker | | | |
| Relational Closeness | | | .273 *** |
| Partner Age - Participant Age | | | -.016 * |
| Participant Female | | | -.548 ** |
| Seeker Female | | | -.062 |
| Same Gender | | | .045 |

* $p < .10$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$
Advisors punish seekers who don't take their advice controlling for a variety of situational and individual characteristics.

Study 3

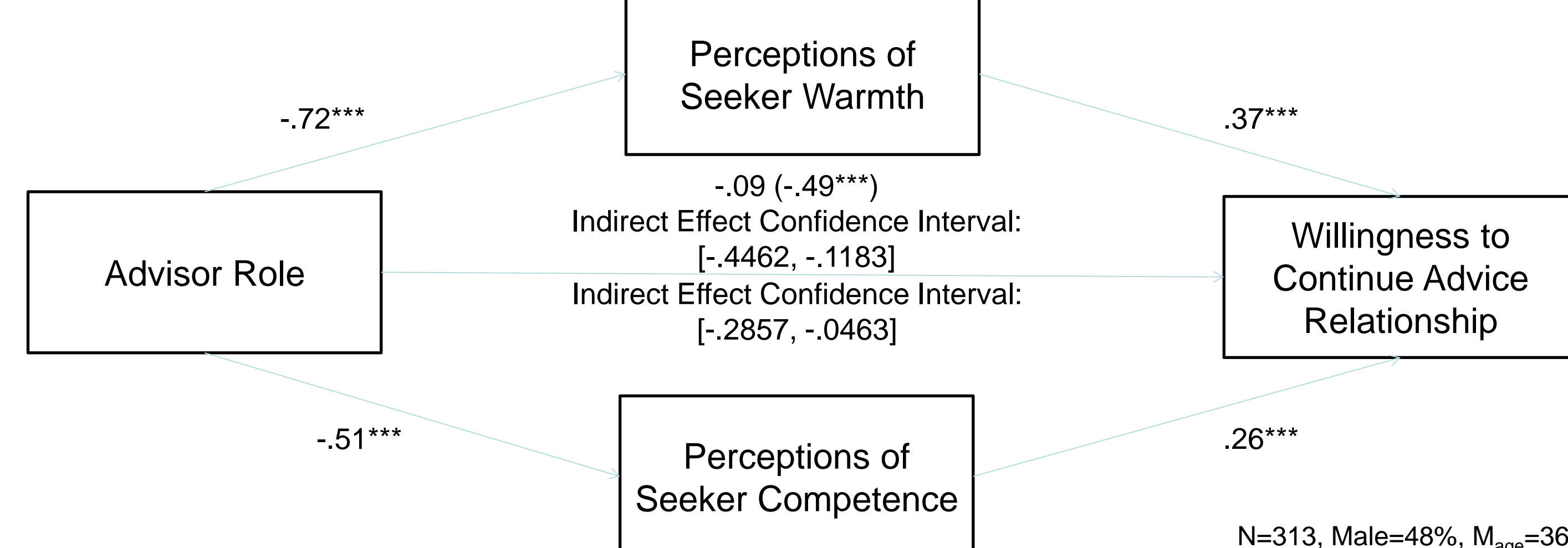
Do seekers anticipate how advisors will react?

Scenario:

Imagine one of your more junior colleagues, John, approaches you [you approach one of your senior colleagues, John] for career advice. ... [details from Study 1] ... However, John does not end up taking your [you do not end up taking John's] advice.

Measures:

- Willingness to continue advice relationship (3 items, $\alpha=.88$)
- Felt closeness
- Advisor's perceptions of seeker warmth & competence (Cuddy, Fiske & Glick, 2008)



Seekers underestimate the strength of the negative relational consequences when they don't take advice.

Study 4

Can we intervene to improve the advice relationship?

Recall Task:

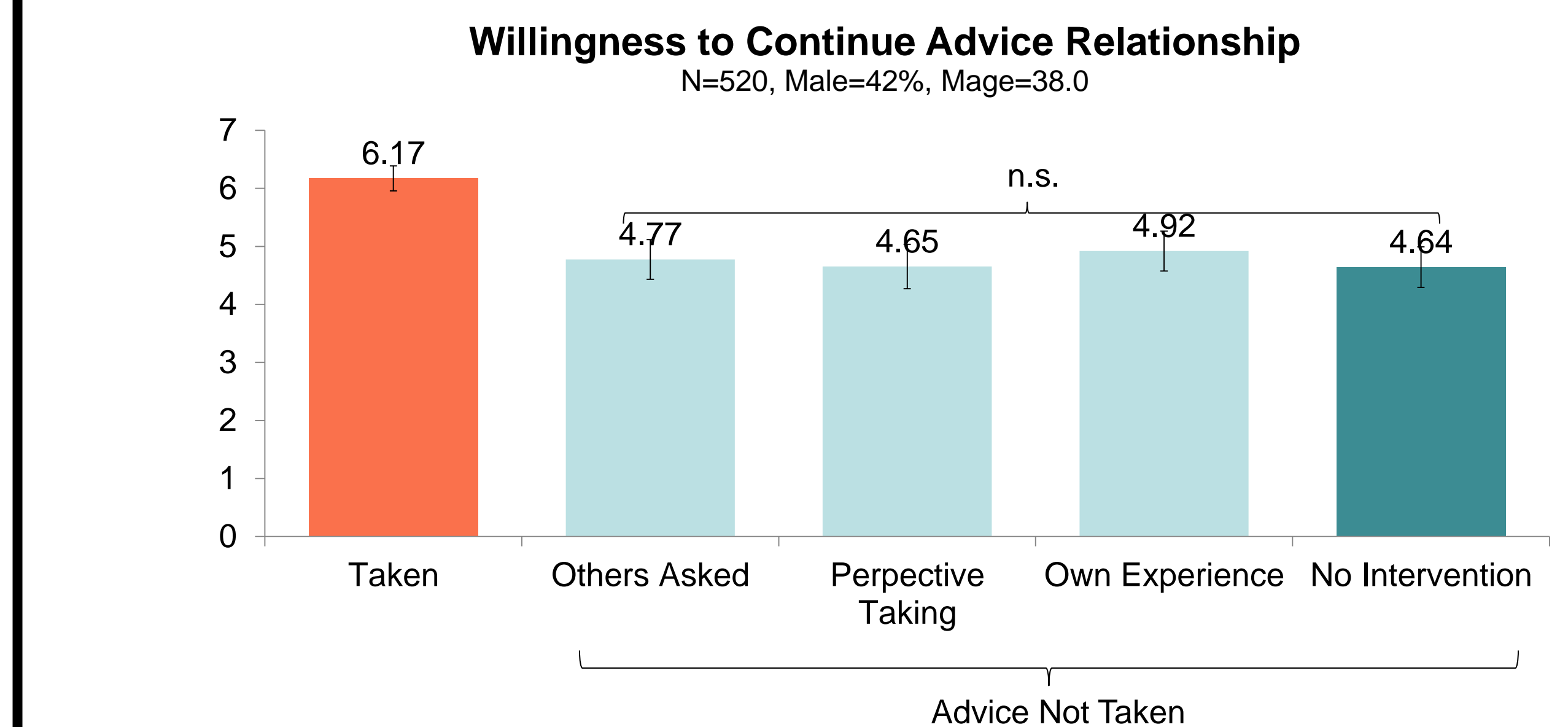
Please recall a particular incident in which someone else asked you for advice and ultimately followed [did not follow] your advice.

Interventions (for did not follow condition):

- Others Asked: Consider and list the other people the seeker asked for advice
- Perspective Taking: Describe the situation from the seeker's point of view
- Own Experience: Recall a different incident in which you didn't follow someone's advice

Measures:

- Willingness to continue advice relationship (3 items, $\alpha=.94$)
- Felt closeness
- Warmth & competence of advice seeker (Cuddy, Fiske & Glick, 2008)



Advisors' negative reactions when their advice is not followed are robust to a variety of targeted interventions.

Conclusions

While most prior advice research has focused on advice utilization and accuracy (Bonaccio & Dalal, 2006), these findings highlight an important, yet previously overlooked outcome of interest to both seekers and advisors: relational consequences. The consideration of this outcome challenges previous recommendations for optimal advice seeking behavior. Prior advisor selection recommendations have suggested that:

- Seekers should request advice from multiple, uncorrelated sources to improve decision accuracy (Johnson, Budescu & Wallsten, 2001; Soll, 1999) BUT this would require seekers to follow only some of the advice they receive, exposing them to negative relational consequences from some of their advisors
- Seekers should pursue an advisor with significant expertise in the domain of interest (Feng & MacGeorge, 2006) BUT such advisors are likely to be more confident in and more closely identified with their recommendations (Shanteau, 1988), likely rendering them more inclined to relationally punish seekers to who do not follow their advice
- Seekers should avoid selecting advisors on the basis of friendship and comfort (Garvin & Margolis, 2015) BUT such positive relational ties may act as a buffer against negative relational consequences when advice is not followed

Future research that incorporates relational outcomes in analyses of advice exchanges could help identify modifications to current advising and advice-seeking recommendations.

Key References

- Bonaccio, S., & Dalal, R. S. (2006). Advice taking and decision-making: An integrative literature review, and implications for the organizational sciences. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 101(2), 127-151.
- Feng, B., & MacGeorge, E. L. (2006). Predicting receptiveness to advice: Characteristics of the problem, the advice-giver, and the recipient. *Southern Communication Journal*, 71(1), 67-85.
- Garvin, D.A., & Margolis, J. D. (2015). The Art of Giving and Receiving Advice. *Harvard Business Review*. January-February 2015.
- Johnson, T. R., Budescu, D. V., & Wallsten, T. S. (2001). Averaging probability judgments: Monte Carlo analyses of asymptotic diagnostic value. *Journal of Behavioral Decision Making*, 14(2), 123-140.

Questions & feedback welcome! Contact Hayley Blunden at hblunden@hbs.edu