

Research Question

How do recent patterns of choosing virtuous options affect inferences and predictions of future behavior?

Background

Many personal goals require that an individual *repeatedly* resist temptation (Milkman, 2012; Bazerman, Tenbrunsel, and Wade-Benzoni, 1998). When do consumers infer that they, or others, are “on track” for such virtue/vice decisions, and thus conclude that they are likely to succeed in the future?

We explore the impact of an individual's recent pattern of choosing a virtuous option. We hypothesize that people will infer that an individual is more likely to choose a given behavior if that individual has a recent streak of doing that behavior, compared to other patterns. This inference is due to people inferring that the individual is more committed to the given behavior when they have had a recent streak.

Study 1

Prediction: People will infer that an individual with a recent streak is more likely to continue a virtuous behavior (eating fruit for dessert) because they seem more committed to eating healthy.

- MTurk, N = 301
- Design: 3 (Pattern of choosing virtuous option: Recent Streak, Old Streak, or Scattered) between subjects

Stimuli:

Recent Streak

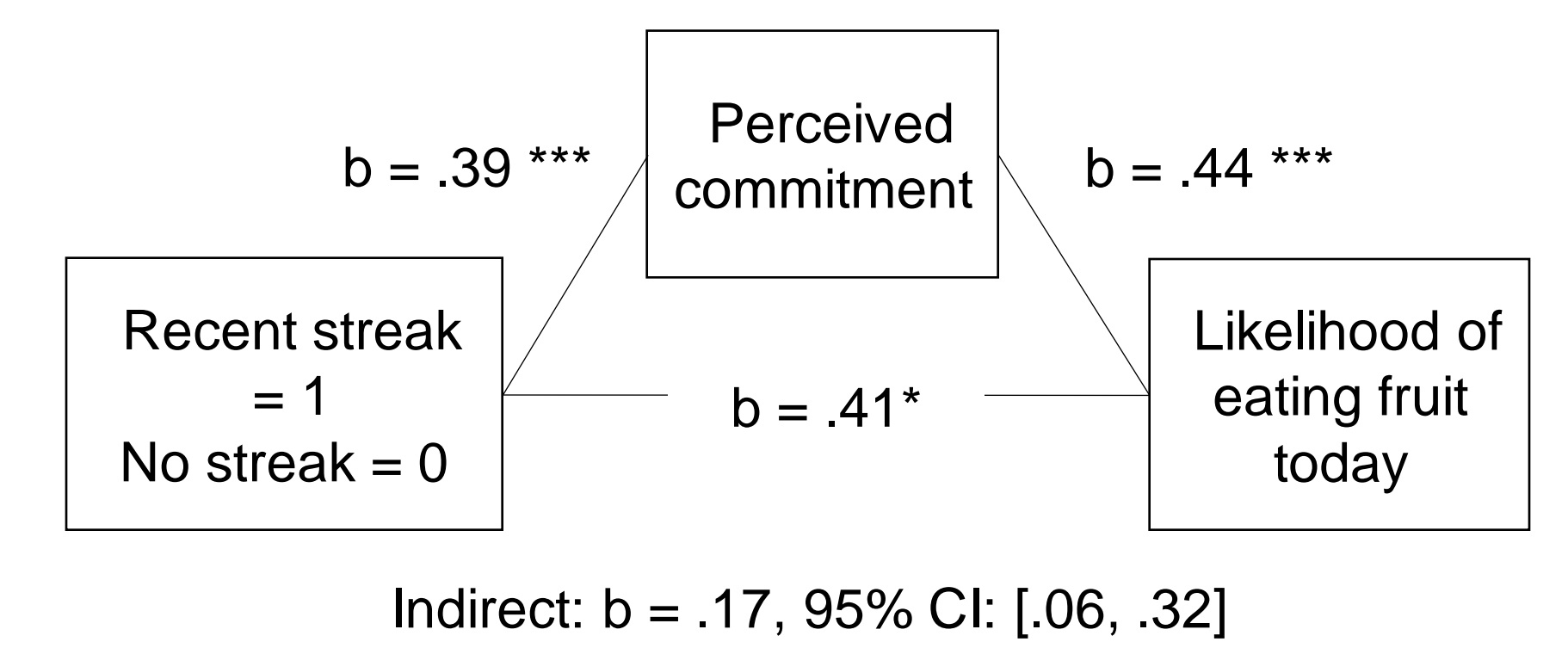
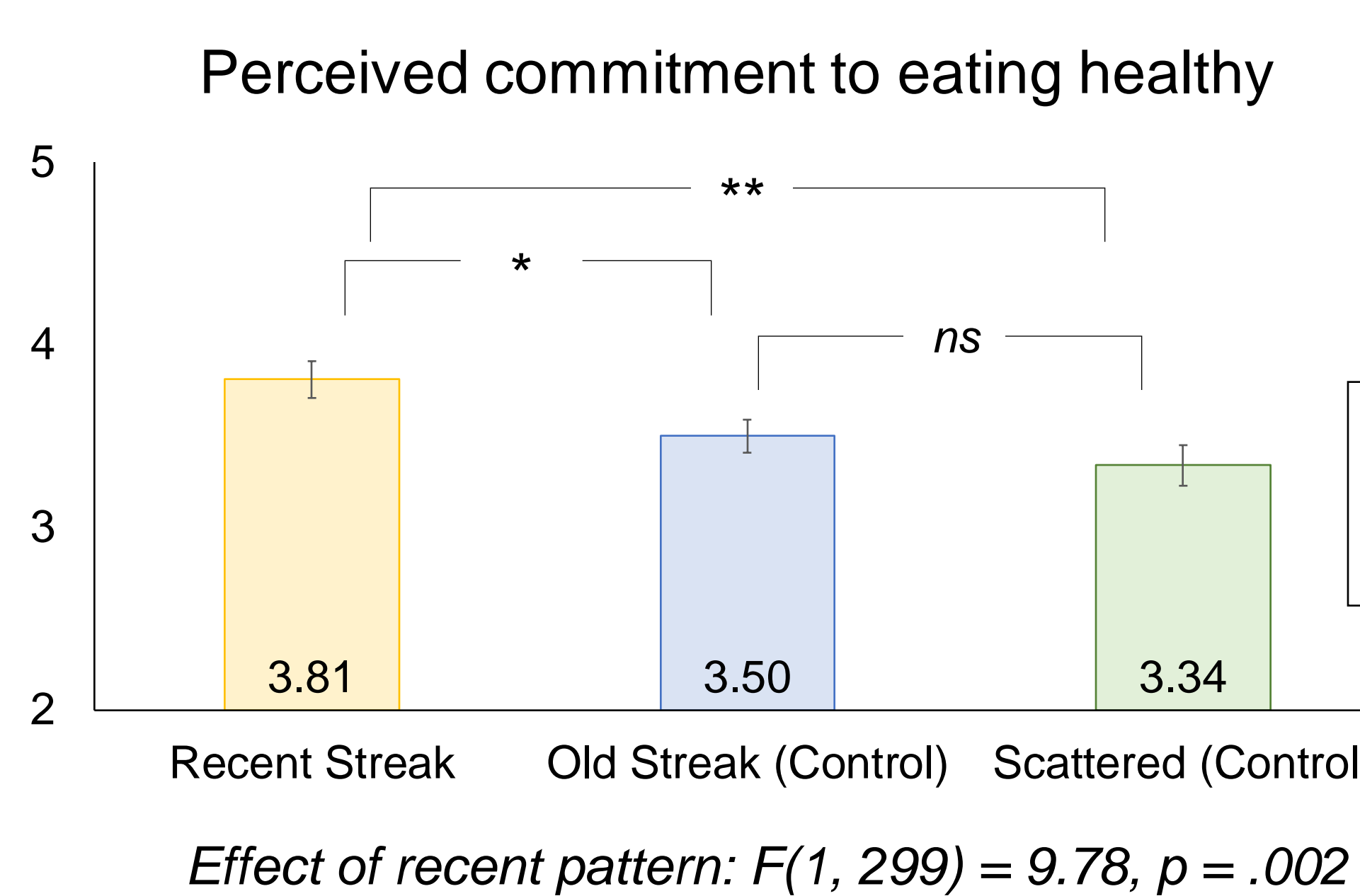
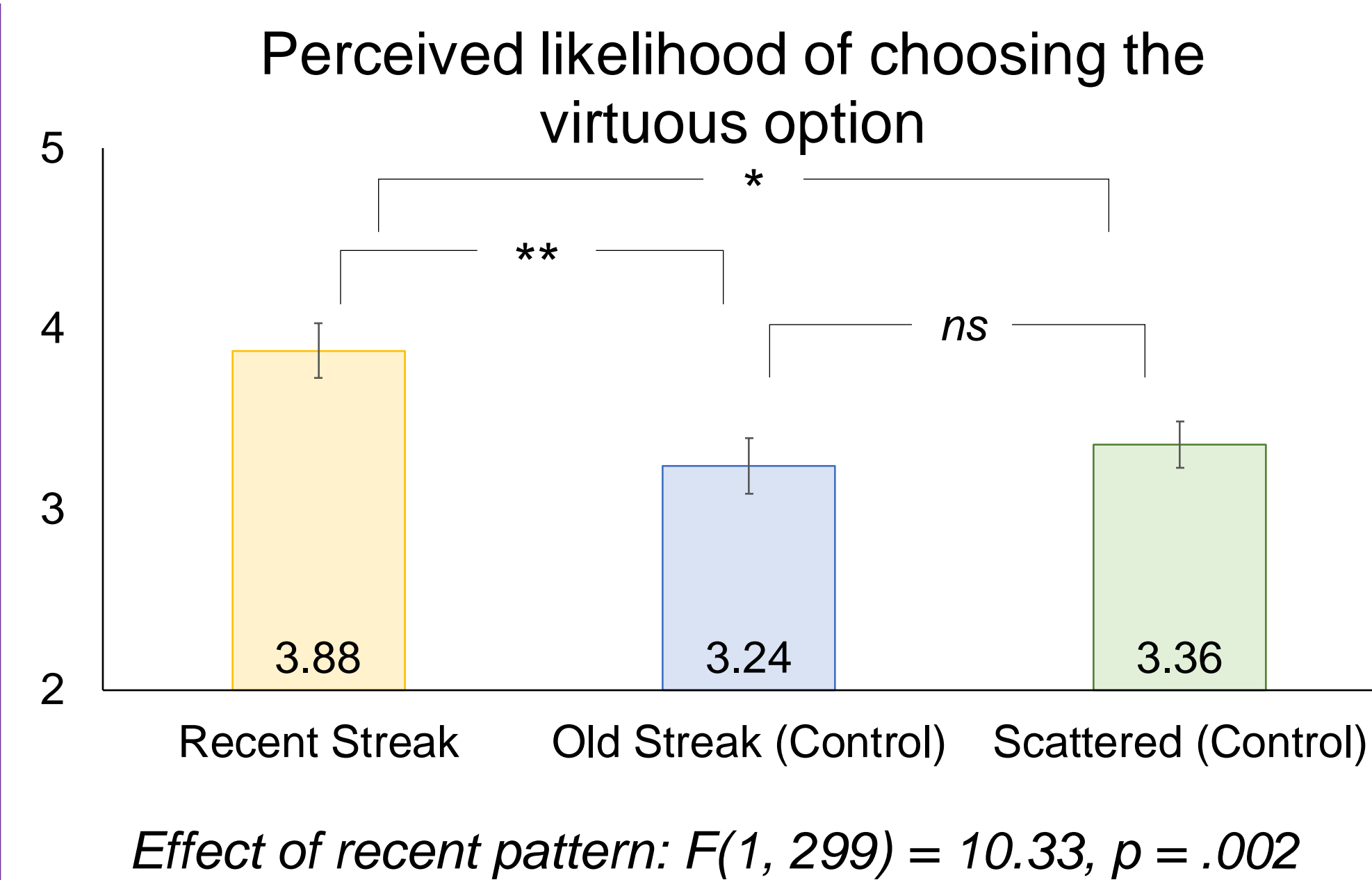
Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6
Ice Cream	Ice Cream	Ice Cream	Fruit	Fruit	Fruit

Old Streak (Control)

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6
Ice Cream	Ice Cream	Fruit	Fruit	Fruit	Ice Cream

Scattered (Control)

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6
Fruit	Ice Cream	Ice Cream	Fruit	Ice Cream	Fruit



(Hayes, Preacher, and Myers, 2011)

Study 2

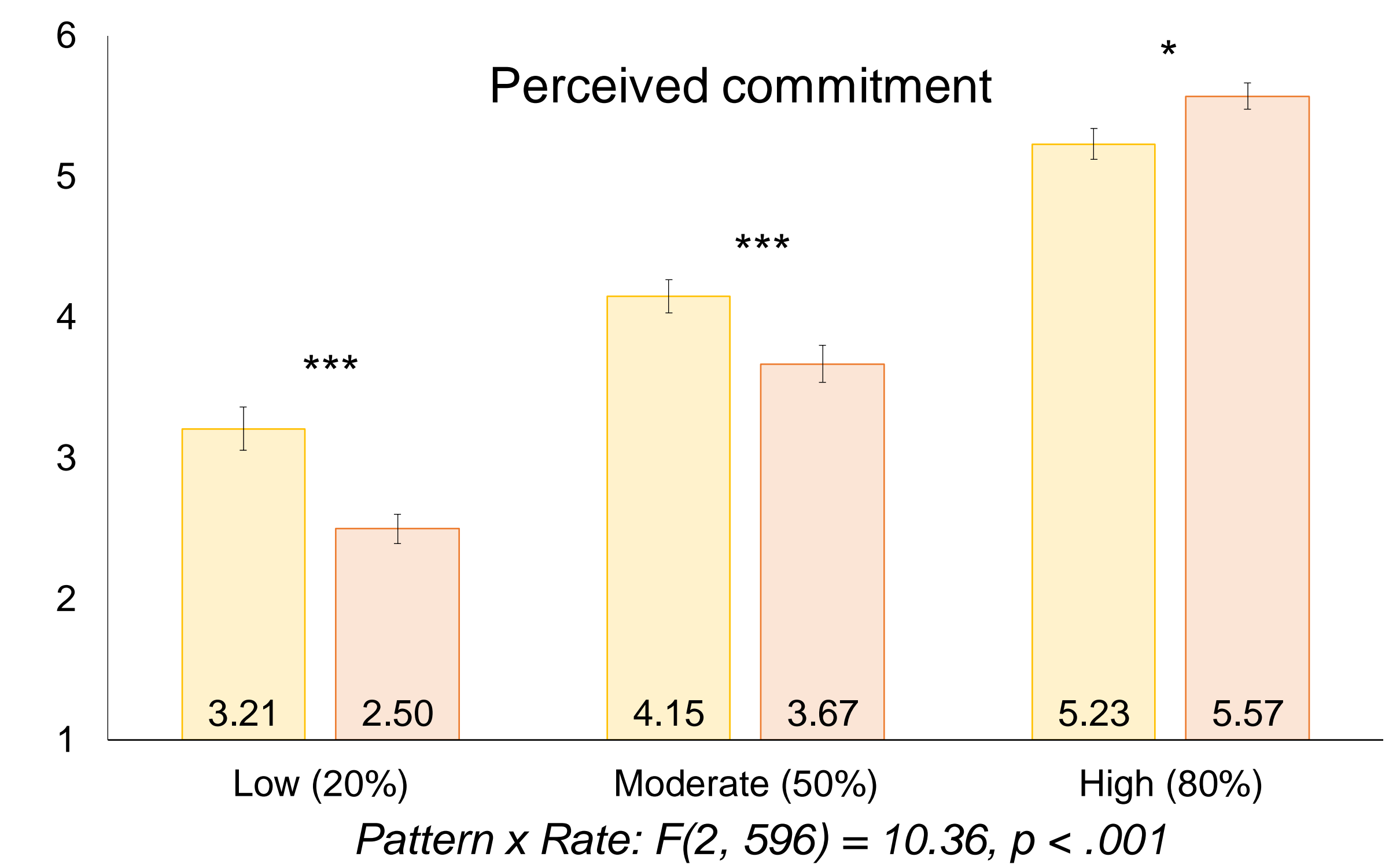
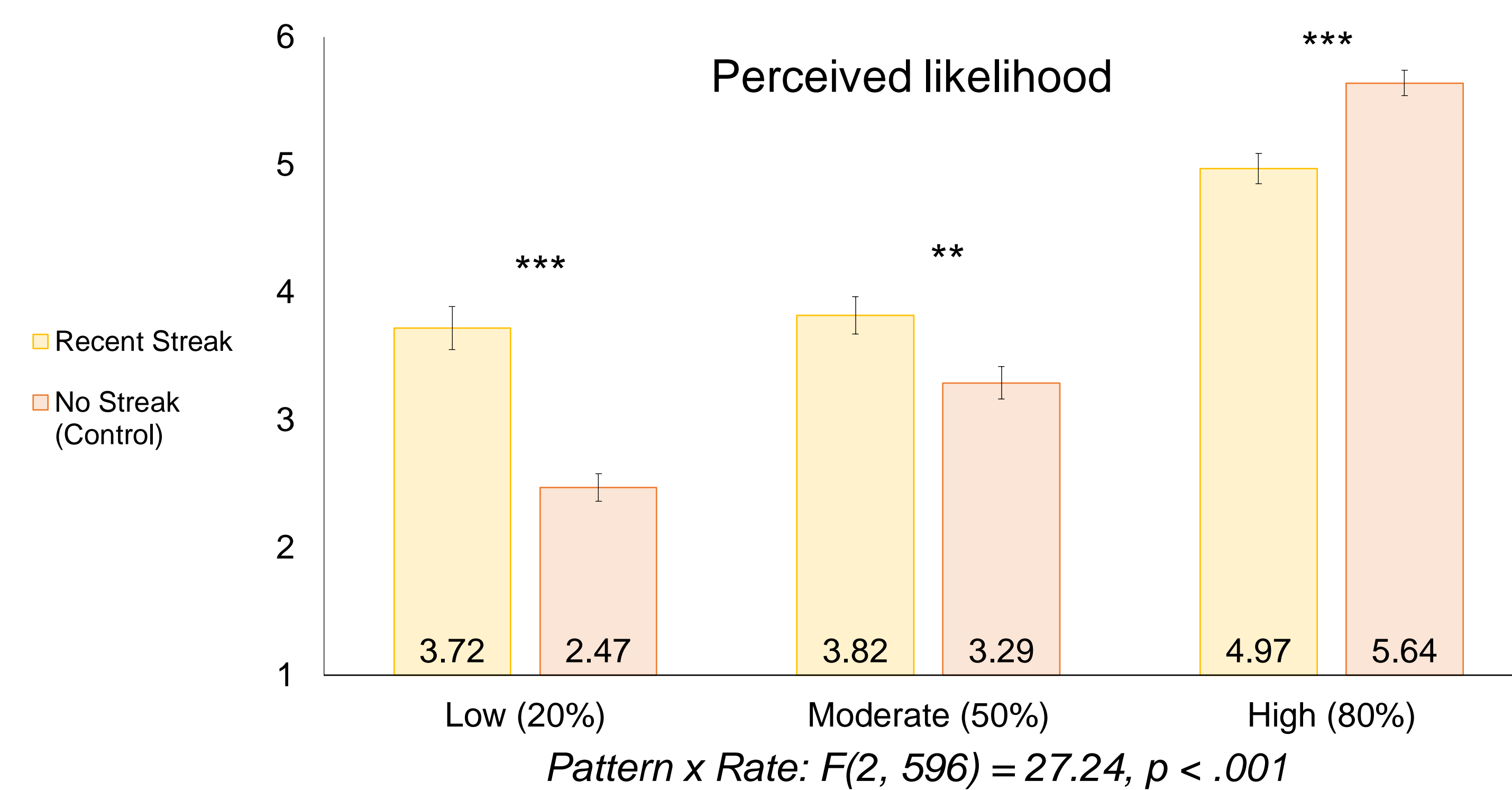
Prediction: Because a recent streak is perceived as more of a signal of commitment, the hypothesized effect will be stronger when the individual has a lower rate of choosing the virtuous option in the past.

- MTurk, N = 602
- Design: 2 (Pattern of choosing virtuous option: Streak or No Streak) x 3 (Rate: low (20%), medium (50%), or high (80%)) between subjects

Stimuli:

Pattern: Streak / No Streak (Control)
“[Over the last three days / Yesterday], this person ate fruit [on all three of the days].”

Rate: Low / Medium / High
“Over the past several weeks, this person chose fruit for dessert [20% / 50% / 80%] of the time and chose ice cream the other [80% / 50% / 20%] of the time.”



Commitment process - Mediation Indirect Effects by Rate:

Low: $b = .47, 95\% \text{ CI} = [.27, .68]$ **Moderate:** $b = .20, 95\% \text{ CI} = [.07, .33]$ **High:** $b = -.08, 95\% \text{ CI} = [-.24, .09]$

Study 3

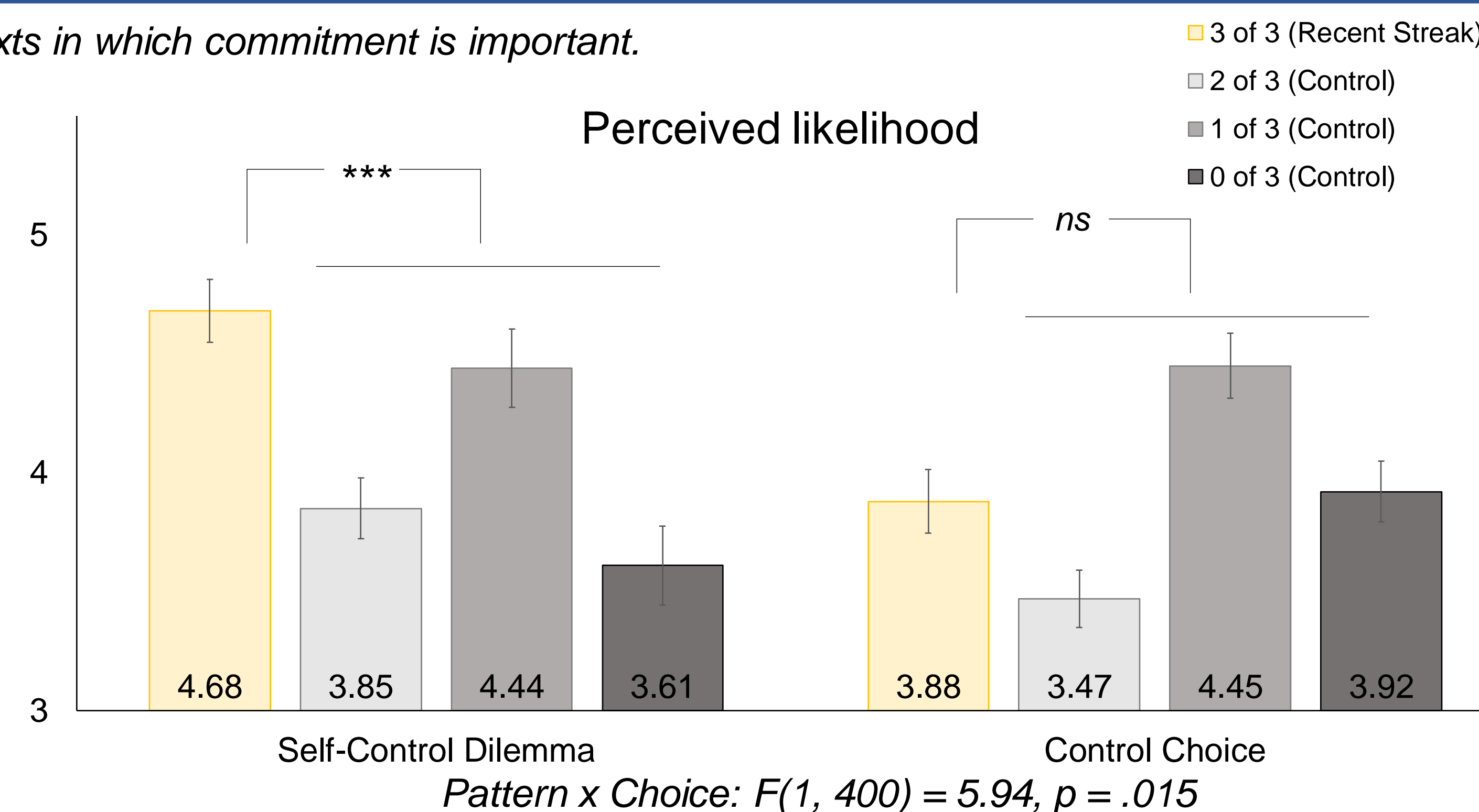
Prediction: The effect will exist only for self-control dilemmas, or contexts in which commitment is important.

- MTurk, N = 402
- Design: 3 (Pattern of choosing virtuous/neutral option: 0, 1, 2, or 3 of last 3 days) x 2 (Choice: Self-Control Dilemma or Control) mixed design

Stimuli:

Pattern: 0 / 1 / 2 / 3 of the last 3 days
“In the last three days, this person ate fruit/watched TV on [none / one / two / all three] of the days.”

Choice: Self-Control Dilemma / Control
“Over the past several weeks, this person [ate fruit / watched TV] 50% of the time and [ate ice cream / played video games] the other 50% of the time.”



Commitment process - Mediation Indirect Effects by Choice:

Self-Control Dilemma: $b = .35, 95\% \text{ CI} = [.23, .49]$
Control: $b = .16, 95\% \text{ CI} = [.08, .26]$

Discussion

- People infer that individuals are more likely to continue a virtuous behavior if that individual has a recent streak of choosing to do that behavior.
- Why? A recent streak signals commitment.

Selected References:

- Bazerman, M. H., Tenbrunsel, A. E., & Wade-Benzoni, K. (1998). Negotiating with yourself and losing: Making decisions with competing internal preferences. *Academy of Management Review*, 23(2), 225-241.
- Hayes, A. F., Preacher, K. J., & Myers, T. A. (2011). Mediation and the estimation of indirect effects in political communication research. In E. P. Bucy & R. L. Holbert (Eds.), *The sourcebook for political communication research: Methods, measures, and analytical techniques* (pp. 434-465). New York: Routledge.
- Milkman, K. L. (2012). Unsure what the future will bring? You may overindulge: Uncertainty increases the appeal of wants over shoulds. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 119(2), 163-176.

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All error bars are $\pm 1 \text{ SE}$. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

We also replicate this effect using the same pattern conditions as Study 1, and with different stimuli for the individual's choices.