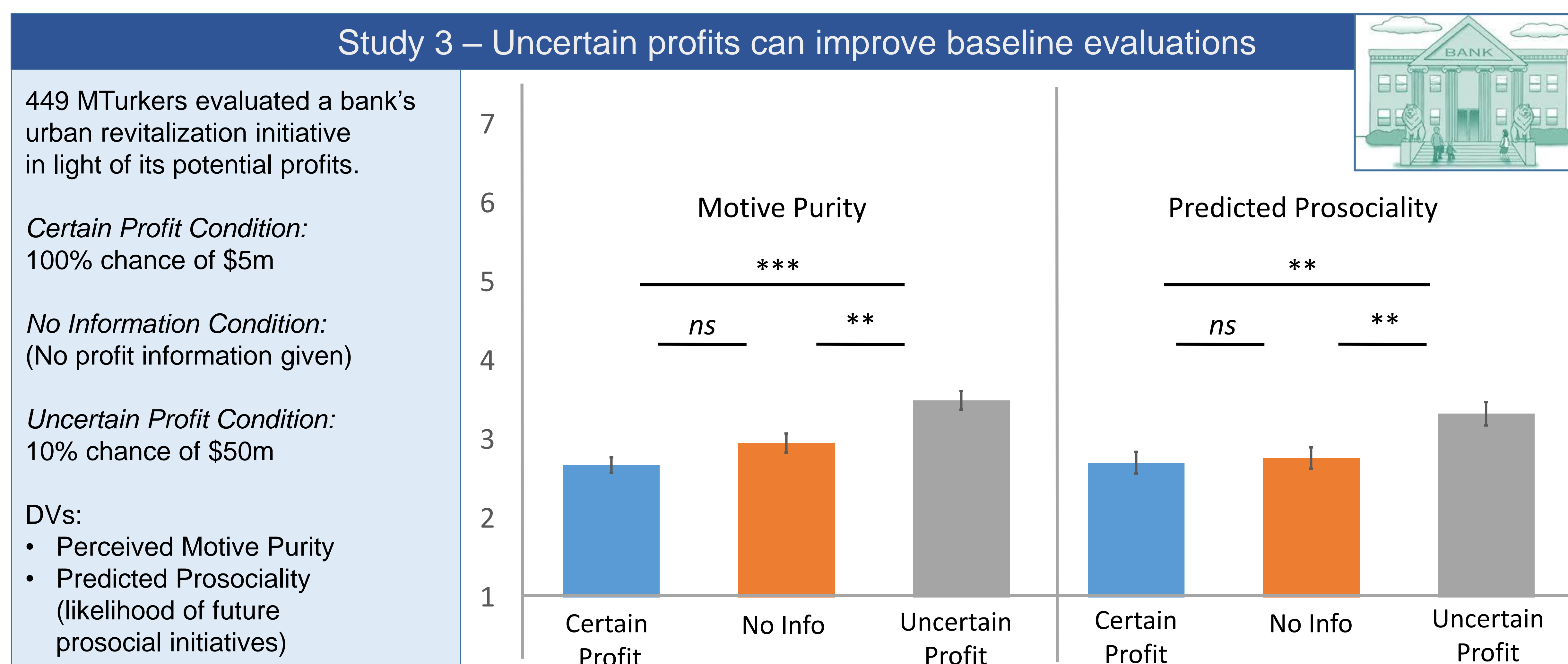
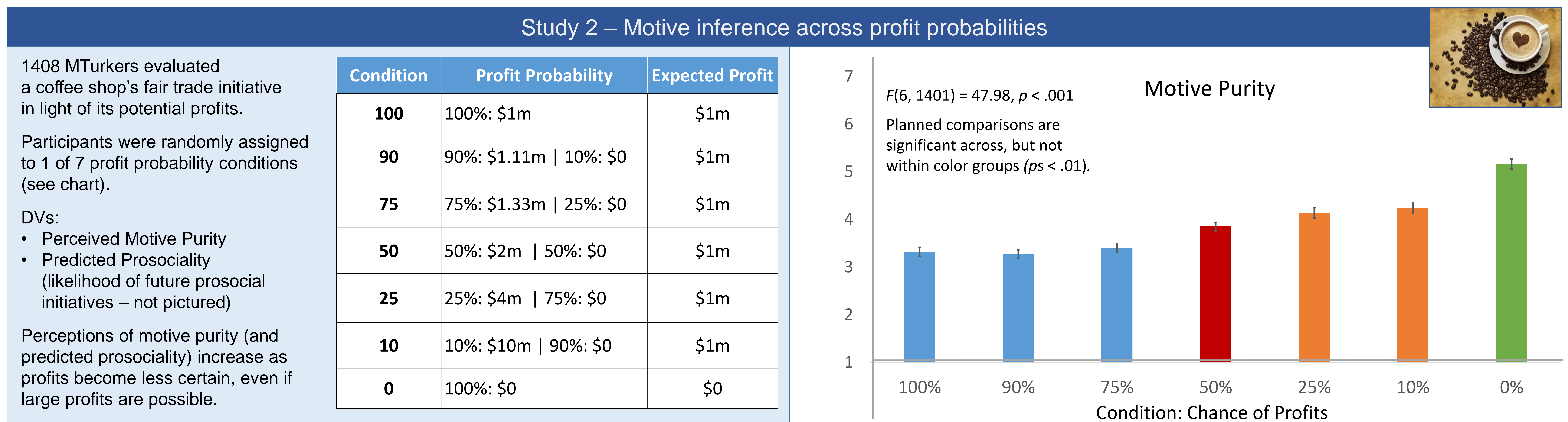
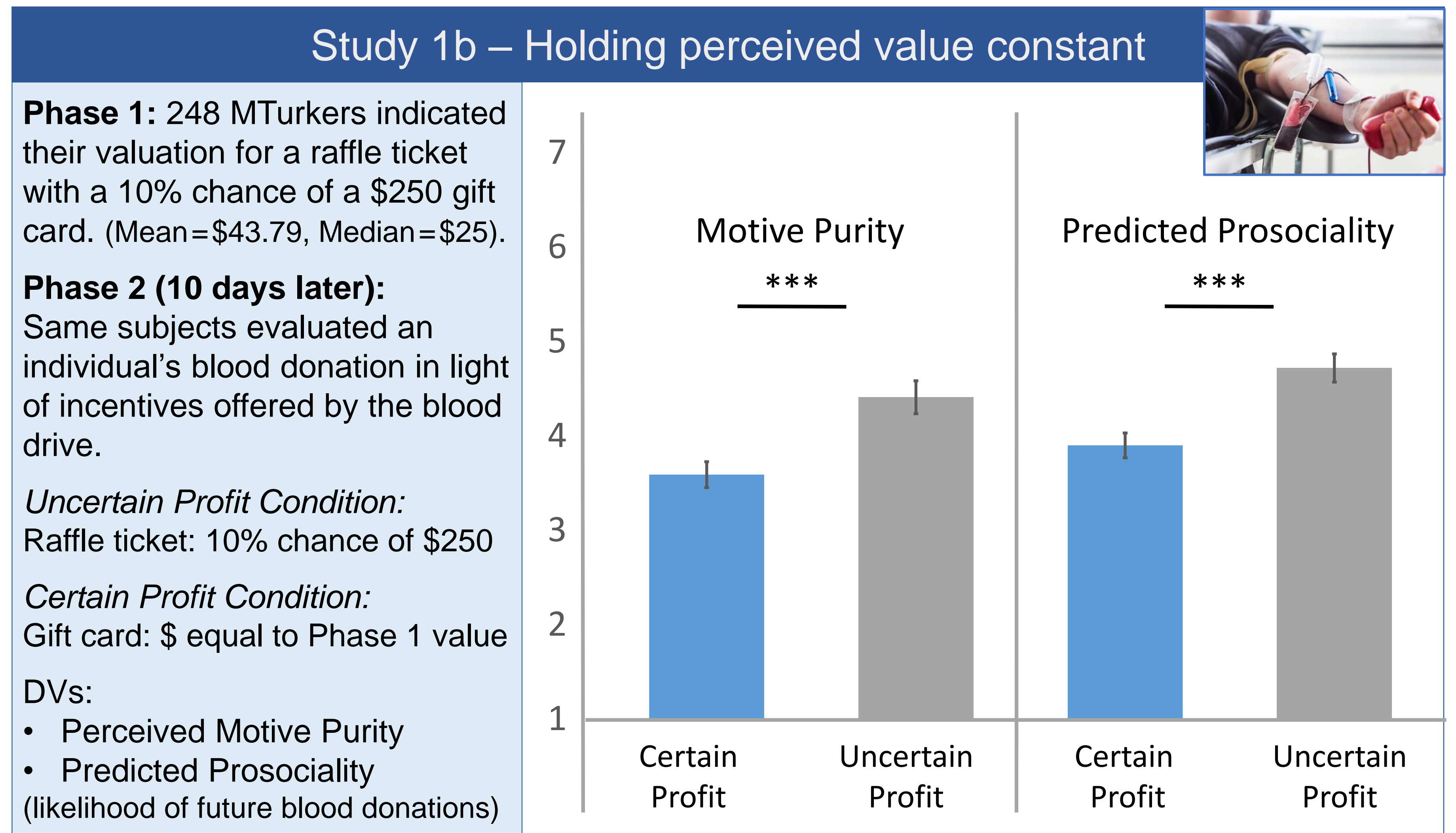
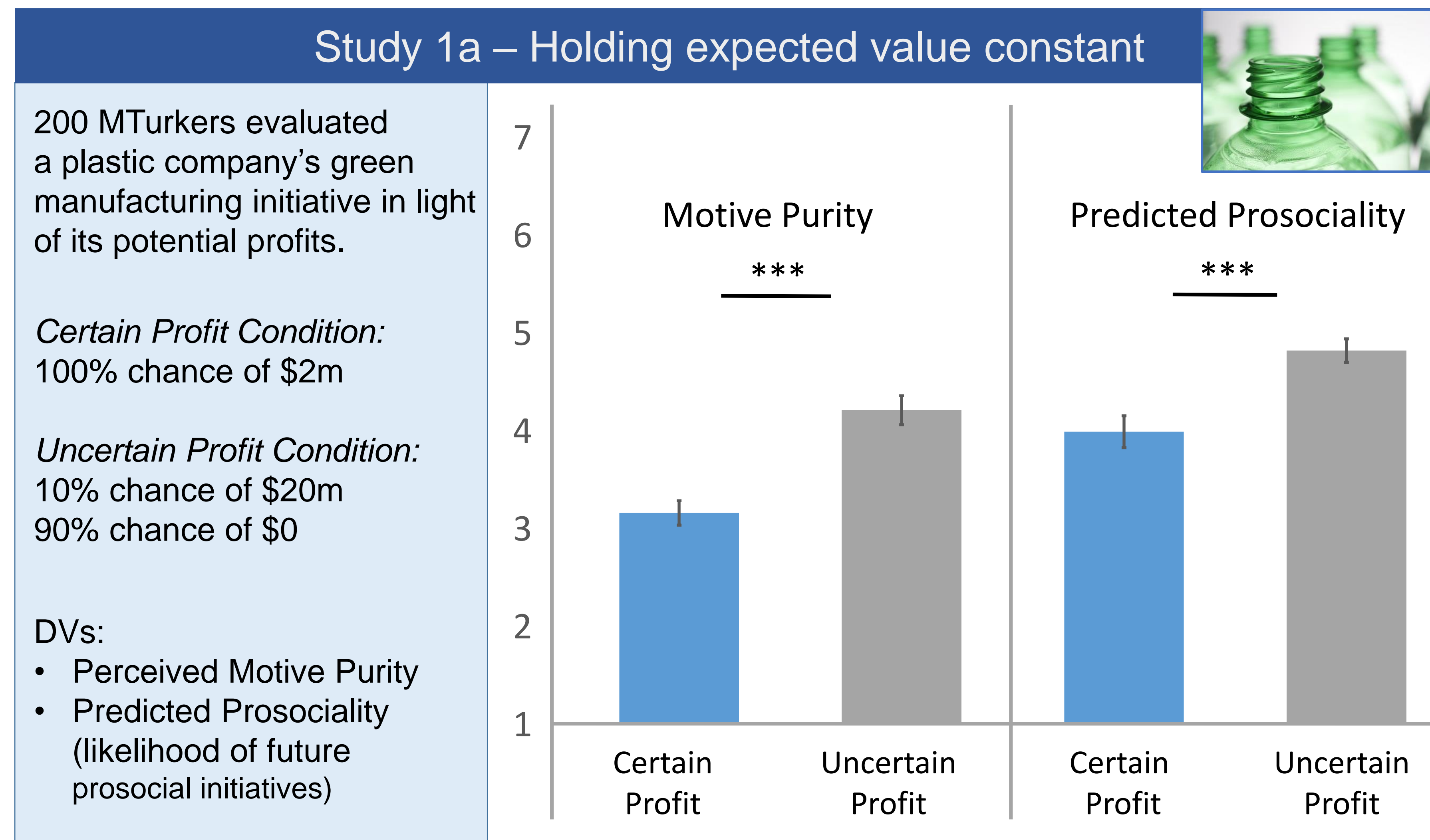


# Doing Good for (Maybe) Nothing: Motive Inferences When Rewards Are Uncertain

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At a glance	
<b>Research Question</b>	How do people evaluate prosocial behavior with uncertain profits (i.e. a chance of a large reward and a chance of no reward)?
<b>Methods</b>	Pre-registered experiments manipulating potential profits from a firm or individual's prosocial act. Measuring perceived motive, predicted likelihood of future prosocial behavior.
<b>Key Result</b>	Holding value constant, profit uncertainty (i.e., a chance that the actor may not be rewarded for their good behavior) increases perceptions of motive purity in evaluations of prosocial behavior.

Motivation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Prosocial (i.e., other-benefitting, socially positive) behavior is viewed positively when the actor's motives appear pure (Small &amp; Cryder 2016).</li> <li>Monetary rewards can attenuate the reputational benefits of being prosocial: When actors profit from prosocial behavior, their motives seem tainted (Lin-Healy &amp; Small 2013; Newman &amp; Cain 2014).</li> <li>Like many other decision contexts, deciding to be prosocial can involve <b>uncertain profits</b>: The actor may or may not be rewarded, and outcomes are not known <i>ex ante</i>.</li> <li>We predict that doing good when monetary rewards are possible but not certain will signal motive purity – observers will infer a <i>willingness</i> to do good in exchange for nothing.</li> </ul>



### Discussion

- When profits from prosocial behavior are uncertain *ex ante*, actors seem more purely motivated.
- Advertising an uncertain profit outlook from prosocial behavior can lead to more positive evaluations than not mentioning profits at all.
- Additional studies find that this effect holds for different kinds of rewards (gift cards, corporate profits, reputation) even if these are subsequently realized, that it mediates broader character evaluations, and that it attenuates when a chance of no reward is not present.

**References:**  
 Lin-Healy, Fern and Deborah A. Small (2013), "Nice Guys Finish Last and Guys in Last Are Nice: The Clash Between Doing Well and Doing Good," *Social Psychological and Personality Science*.  
 Newman, George, E. and Daylian M. Cain (2014), "When Doing Some Good Is Evaluated as Worse Than Doing No Good at All," *Psychological Science*.  
 Small, Deborah A. and Cynthia Cryder (2016), "Prosocial Consumer Behavior," *Current Opinion in Psychology*.

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