

# Noticing Numbers or Noticing Negligence? Task Effects in Punishment Judgments of Moral Luck Cases

Kasandra A. Vazquez, Benjamin A. Lemli, Kaylee E. Hamblen, Rebekah Sager, & Justin F. Landy



## Background

Punishment judgments in negligence cases respond to both degree of negligence and outcome severity.

In a novel approach, we present participants with negligence scenarios and ask them how severely agents should be punished across three elicitation tasks: choice, rating, and matching.

We alternate which attribute (negligence or outcome) is qualitative or quantitative. We assess competing hypotheses such that (a) cognitively simple tasks (choice and rating) and cognitively difficult tasks (matching) elicit different responses, or (b) matching draws attention to numeric attributes and find that judgments are susceptible to reversal across forms of elicitation.

## Study 1: Quantitative Negligence, Qualitative Outcome

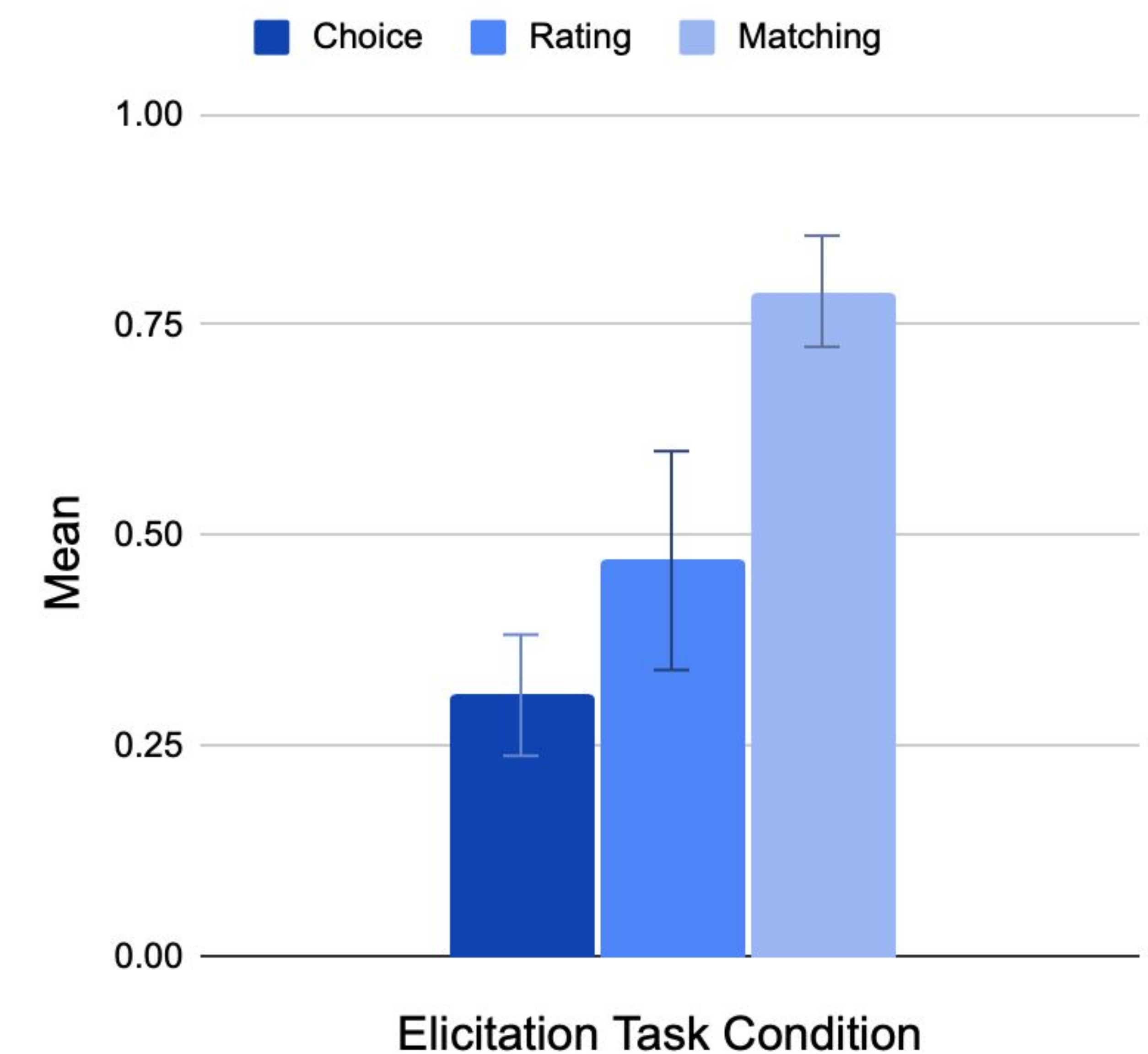
**Method:** Stimuli were four pairs of moral luck cases (*Text*, *Drunk-driving*, *Baby*, and *Speeding*). Each pair pitted degree of negligence (low vs. high) as a quantitative attribute (i.e., number of beers had before driving) against degree of outcome (better vs. worse) as a qualitative attribute (i.e., hit pedestrian vs. hit parked car).

MTurkers ( $N = 206$ ) were assigned to one of three elicitation task conditions:

- **Choice:** Choose one or the other
- **Rating:** Rate each on a 1-7 Likert scale (*Not At All Severely* to *Very Severely*)
- **Matching:** Fill in an omitted numerical value (for outcome) in order to make both agents deserving of equal punishment

DV: Proportion of trials on which participants preferred to punish the HNBO agent

## Study 1 Results



Proportion of trials on which participants preferred to punish the HNBO agent. Error bars represent SEs.

## Conclusion

Overall, the results suggest that punishment judgments in negligence cases depend on how they are elicited.

Choice tasks routinely evoke outcome-focused judgments that reflect our depth of processing hypothesis. Alternatively, Rating tasks cause participants to focus more on qualitative information and Matching tasks cause participants to focus more on quantitative information, supporting the numeric-presentation hypothesis.

## Study 2: Qualitative Negligence, Quantitative Outcome

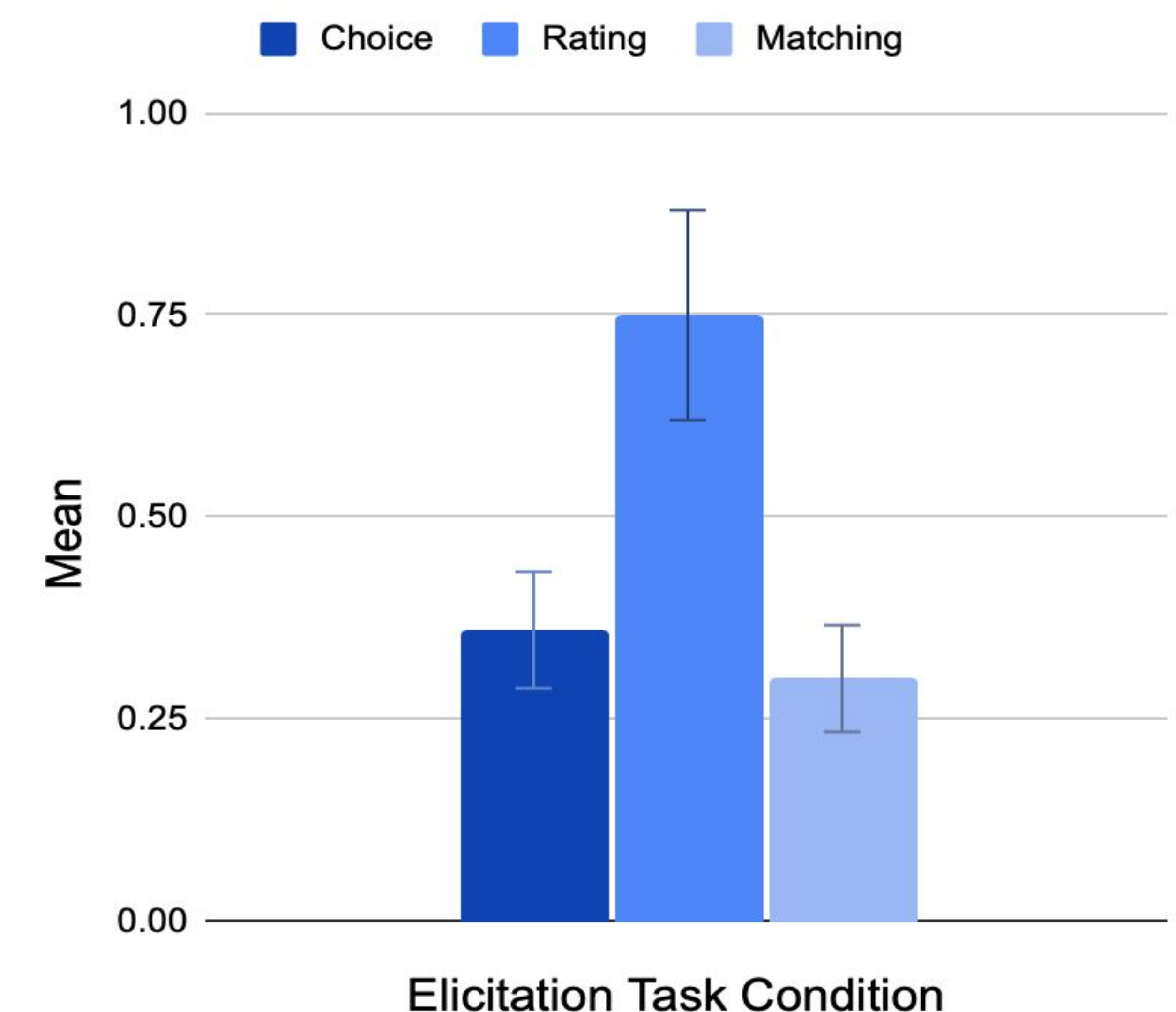
**Method:** Stimuli were three pairs of moral luck cases (*Text*, *Drunk-driving*, and *Speeding*). Each pair pitted degree of negligence (low vs. high) as a qualitative attribute (i.e., “a little buzzed” vs. “extremely drunk”) against degree of outcome (better vs. worse) as a quantitative attribute (i.e., hit and killed 2 vs. 8 pedestrians).

MTurkers ( $N = 91$ ) were assigned to one of three elicitation task conditions:

- **Choice:** Choose one or the other
- **Rating:** Rate each on a 1-7 Likert scale (*Not At All Severely* to *Very Severely*)
- **Matching:** Fill in an omitted numerical value (for negligence) in order to make both agents deserving of equal punishment

DV: Proportion of trials on which participants preferred to punish the HNBO agent

## Study 2 Results



Proportion of trials on which participants preferred to punish the HNBO agent. Error bars represent SEs.

## Contact Information

Kasandra Vazquez, [kv592@mysu.nova.edu](mailto:kv592@mysu.nova.edu)  
Nova Southeastern University