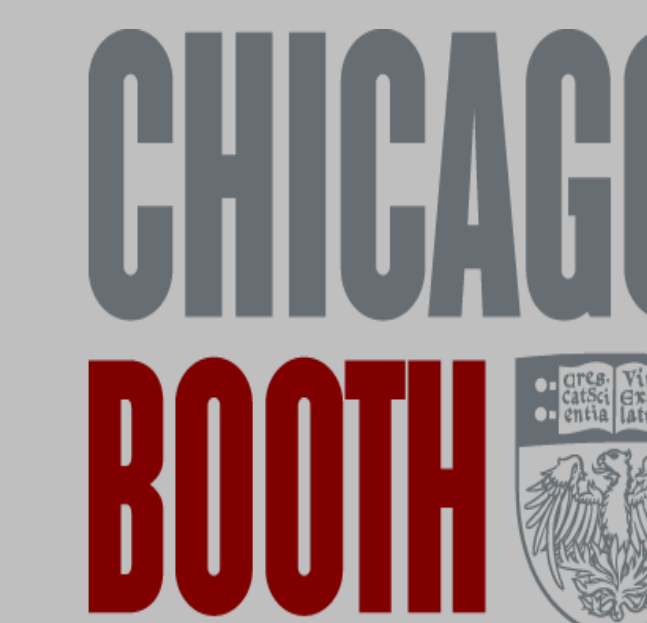


Cheap Talk in Celebrating Positive Change

Samantha Zaw, Ed O'Brien

The University of Chicago Booth School of Business



This material is based upon work supported by the National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship under Grant No. 2140001.

Background

- Our society claims to celebrate second chances and self-improvement. People are drawn to stories of resilience (Furnham, 1984; King et al., 2021; Vandello et al., 2007).
- Overcoming adversity is viewed positively, and even more inspirational than those who have been consistently great (Klein & O'Brien, 2017).
- Although people often prefer less risky choices (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979), overcoming past adversity is not framed as a risk in the current literature.
- **Our research examines whether people “back up” what they say when it matters in high-stakes situations.**
- **We hypothesize that in high-stakes (vs. low-stakes) situations, people are less likely to favor someone who has overcome adversity.**

Methods

- **Study 1: Resume study (N = 586; Prolific)**
 - **Task:** Participants reviewed two resumes of similar quality, which were randomly assigned either the “adversity” or “successful journey” label.
 - **IV:** Hiring decision is high vs. low stakes for a software engineer position (between-subjects)
 - **DV:** Candidate selection
- **Study 2: Real adversity experiences (N = 1,128; Prolific)**

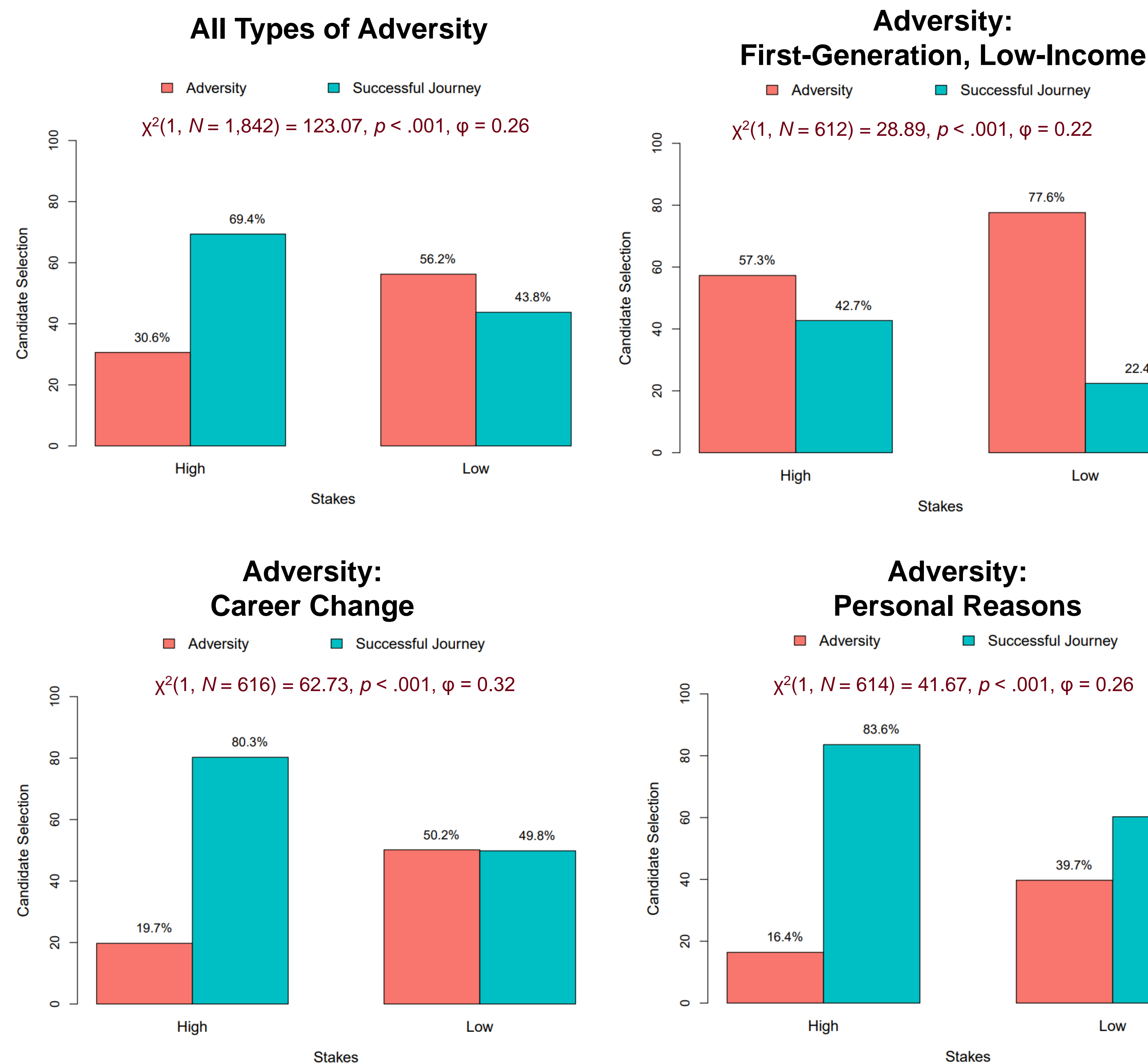
In a separate survey, we collected 5 real adversity essays. We then created 5 successful journey essays matching adversity scenarios.

 - **Task:** Participants read one essay about a person’s experience in their career and professional life, either adversity or successful journey.
 - **IV:** 2 (Stakes [between-subjects]: High vs. Low) x 2 (Account [between-subjects]: Adversity vs. Success)
 - **DV:** Hiring preference
- **Study 3: “Real” hiring decisions by individuals who value improvement/second chances (N = 1,842; Prolific)**

In a separate survey, we collected 2,074 participants who indicated that they valued improvement/second chances when evaluating candidates.

 - **Task:** Prescreened participants read descriptions of two people:
 - Karl, the applicant who overcame adversity
 - » First-gen, low-income; career change; personal reasons
 - Rick, the applicant who consistently performed well
 - **IV:** Hiring decision for junior vs. senior research assistant position in our lab (between-subjects), and participants were told we would hire the candidate who gets the most votes
 - **DV:** Candidate selection

Study 3 Results



Study 3 Low vs. High Stakes Manipulation

- **LOW:** This job is for a junior research assistant position. This role involves supporting senior research assistants with creating surveys and recruiting participants with limited decision-making responsibility. If a mistake is made, the impact is small and easily corrected.
- **HIGH:** This job is for a senior research assistant position. This role involves making important decisions about the study design and analyzing and interpreting data. Mistakes at this level could result in significant financial loss and flawed conclusions.

References

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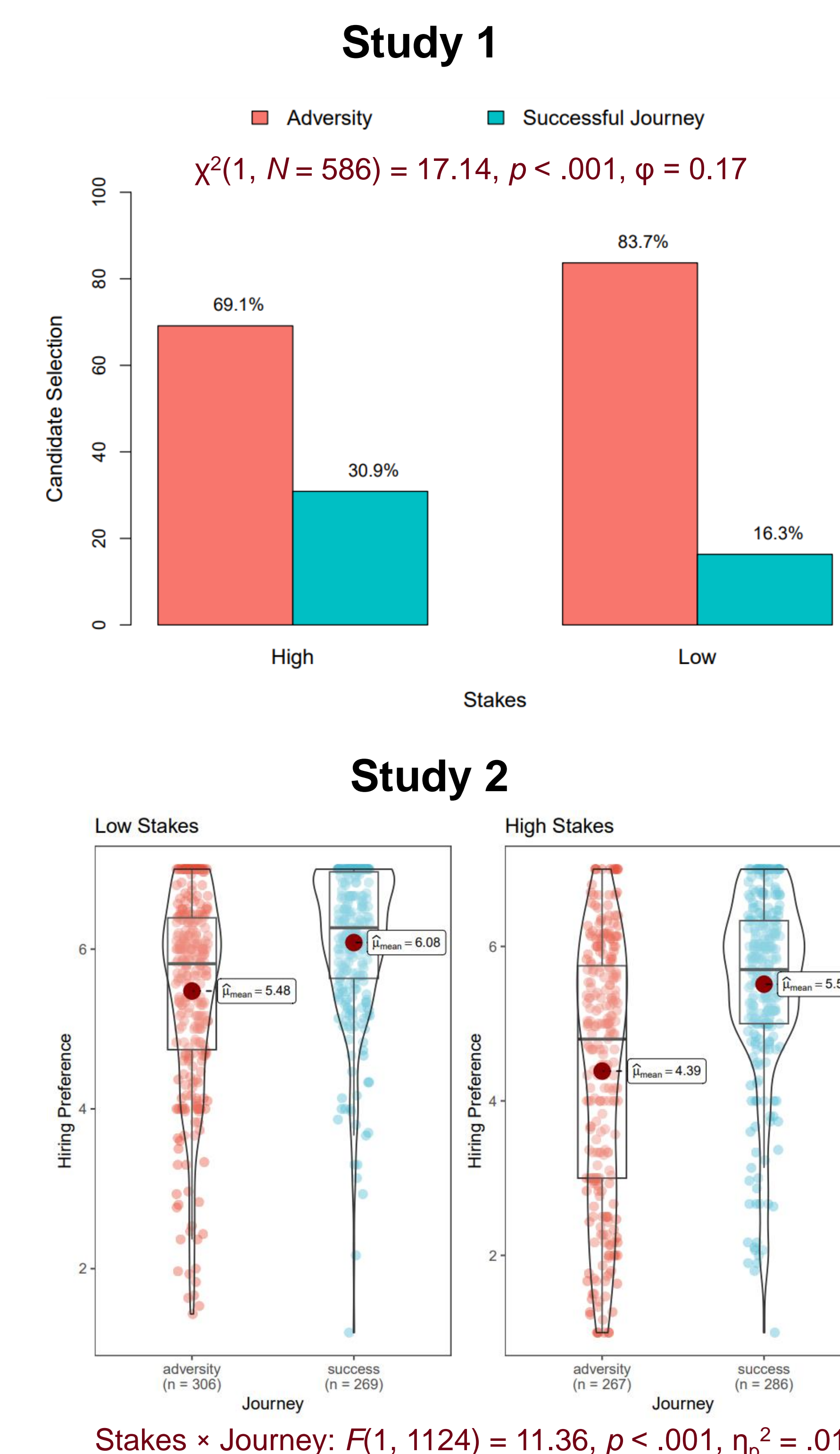
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Study 1 & 2 Results



Summary

- For the three types of adversity examined (i.e., first-generation low-income, career change, personal reasons), preference for the adversity candidate decreases in high-stakes situations.
- These findings highlight “cheap talk” in celebrating positive change.

Please direct your comments and questions regarding the project to: szaw@chicagobooth.edu