

# A Little Appreciation Goes a Long Way: The Tangible and Relational Benefits of Gratitude Expression in Strategic Social Interactions

**Dejun Tony Kong**

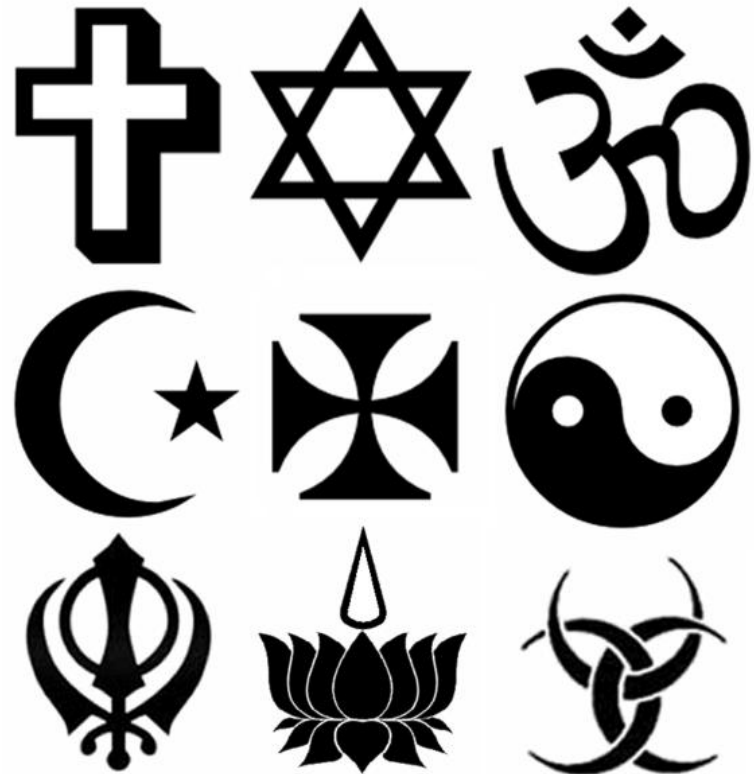
*Assistant Professor of Management*

*C. T. Bauer College of Business*

*BIG thanks to UH DoR*

# Religious Teaching of Gratitude

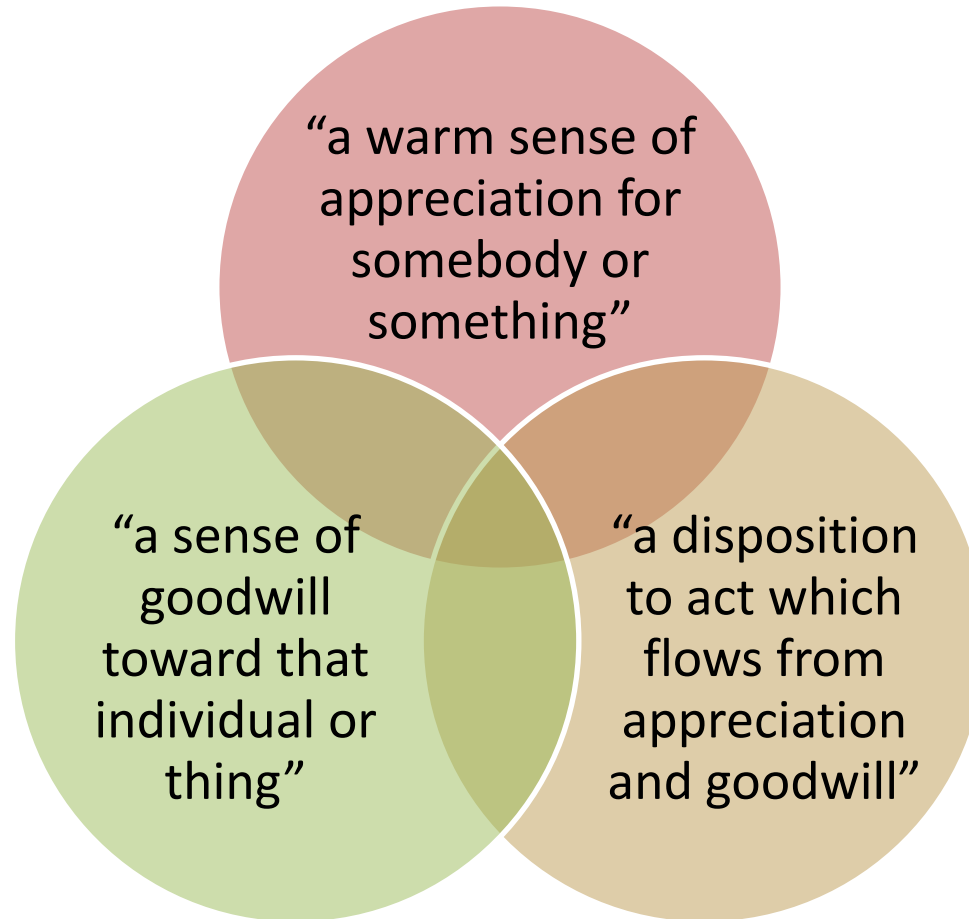
- Gratitude is highly valued in Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, and Hindu thought (McCullough et al., 2001, *Psychological Bulletin*)



# The Emotion of Gratitude

- A positive emotion that typically arises when an individual perceives that another individual or source (e.g., God, fate) has intentionally acted to improve his or her well-being (Fredrickson, 2004, 2013)

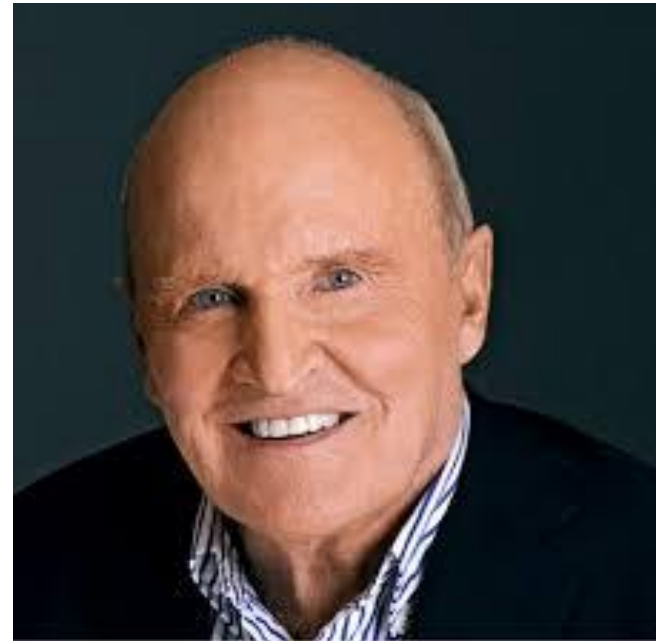
# Three Components of Gratitude



Fitzgerald (1998), p. 120

# Importance of Gratitude Expression

- Jack Welch (former GE CEO)
  - He thanked employees on every plant tour and facility visit.
  - “If you don’t do it, you don’t have a culture. You are just a bunch of bricks and mortar.”



# But...

- Sue Shellenbarger (*Wall Street Journal*)
  - “The workplace ranks dead last among the places people express gratitude, from homes and neighborhoods to places of worship.”
- A survey of 2,007 people by the John Templeton Foundation
  - Only 10% of adults say thanks to a colleague every day
  - Only 7% express gratitude daily to a boss
  - Only 40% express gratitude to their colleagues frequently
- A survey by the Society of Human Resource Management
  - Over 50% of the surveyed HR managers said their front-line bosses didn’t say “thank you” enough.

# What Makes the Workplace a “No-Thanks Zone”?

Worry that colleagues  
will take advantage of  
them if they express  
gratitude

Managers assume  
setting tough goals and  
pushing people is the  
only way to improve  
productivity

The attitude, "No one  
thanks me, so why  
should I coddle others?"

Employees will get a big  
head

Awkward feelings about  
saying thanks

Fear of appearing  
insincere

Sue Shellenbarger (*Wall Street Journal*), Nov. 20, 2012

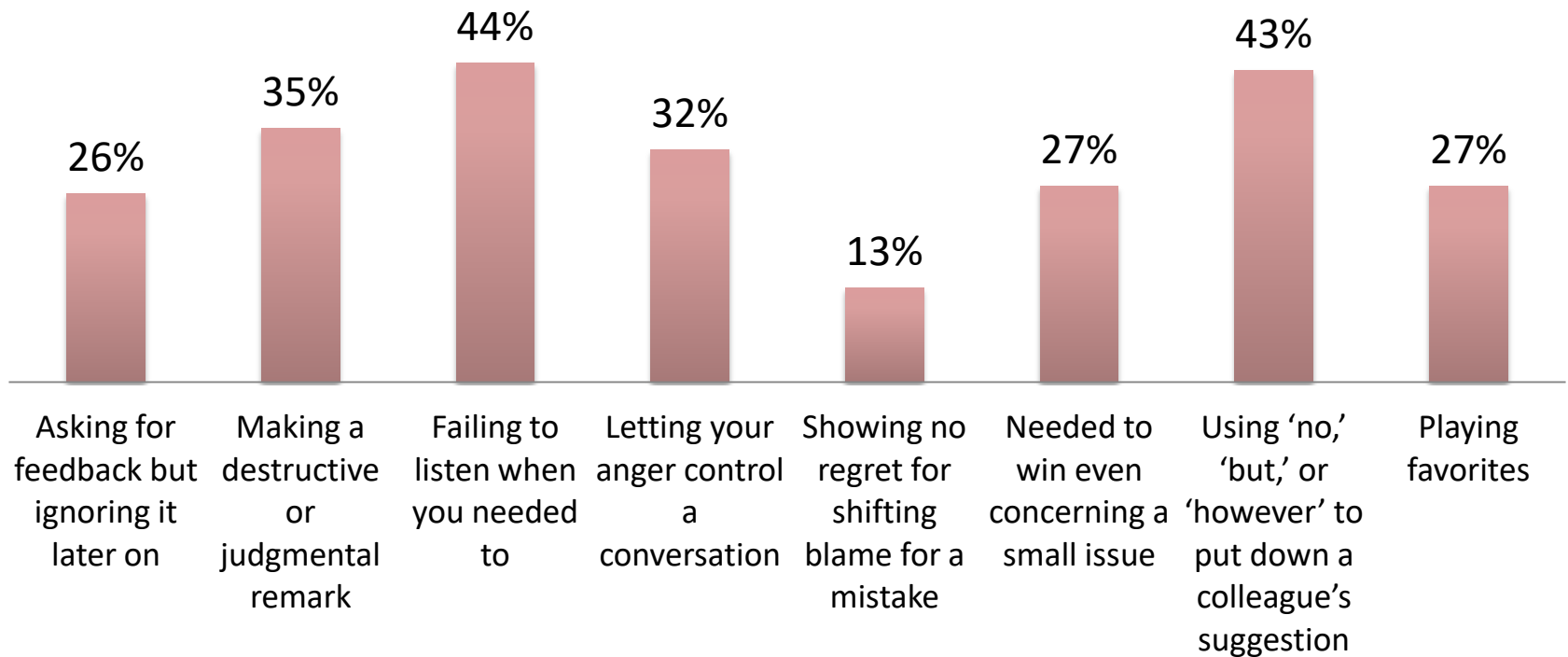
# What's Worse...

- Dr. Nelson (an author, speaker and president of Nelson Motivation): “it’s much easier to be the person who’s always finding fault. It feels more like being in charge.”
- This contributes to a systematic problem: Jerks are receiving more promotions and getting ahead (Kong & Gelb, 2018) and yet they “leave a trail of human carnage that does long-term damage” (McKinsey)



# What's Worse...

## Prevalence of "Jerk" Behaviors



Kong & Gelb (2018), *Rutgers Business Review*

# What's Worse...

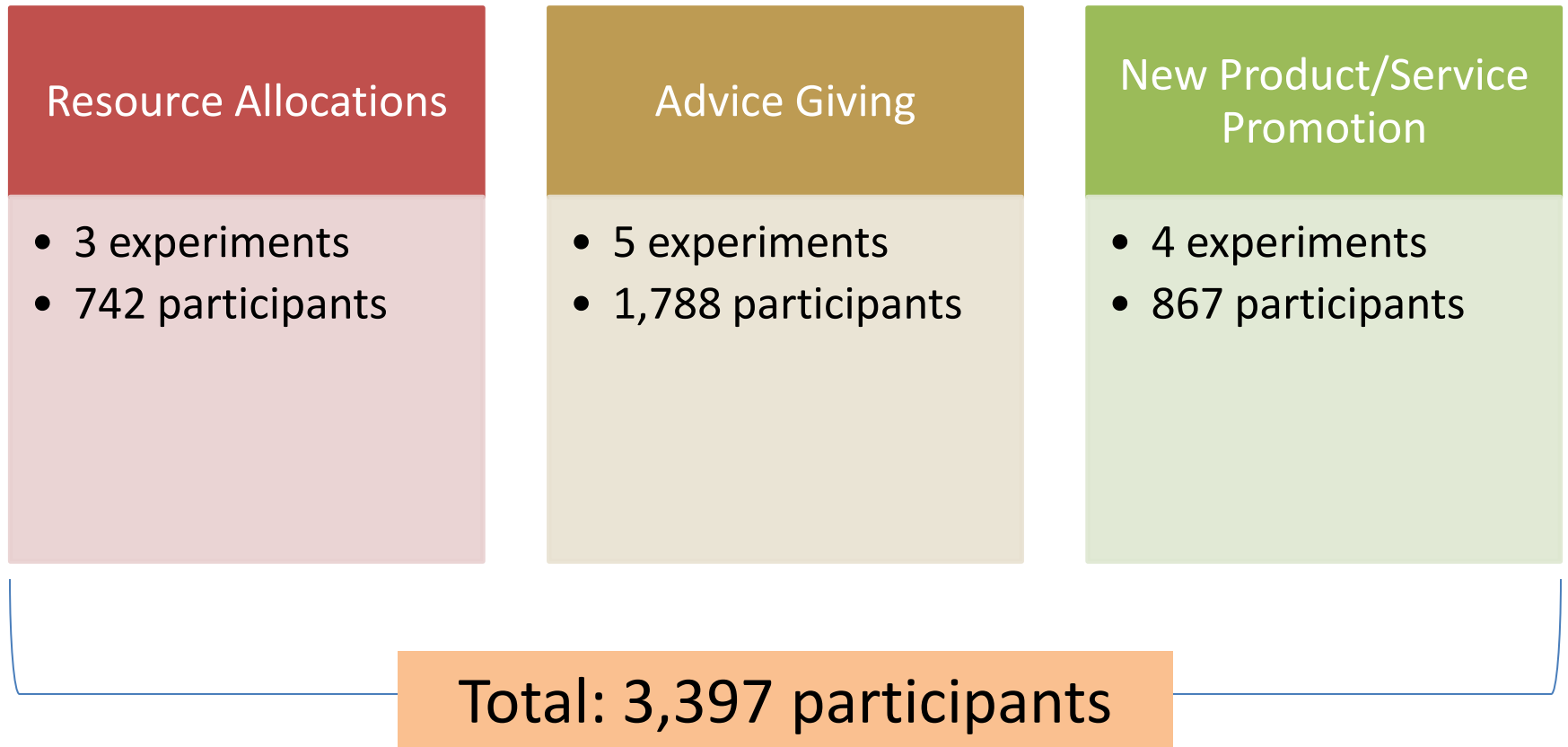
- What about professional education?
  - Dr. Nelson: “Business schools definitely do not focus on such things [e.g., gratitude expression].”
  - Jeff Pfeffer (Stanford business professor): “It’s all the things we rate negatively (e.g., arrogance) that are the best predictors of higher salaries or getting chosen for a leadership position...Most of my students have a problem because they’re way too nice.”

# BIG Questions

Do we need  
gratitude  
expression?

If so, why?  
What are some  
benefits of  
gratitude  
expression in  
strategic  
interactions?

# Gratitude Expression in Three Types of Strategic Interactions



# Gratitude Expression in Resource Allocations

- Do people provide more resources to others who express gratitude to them?
  - In other words, can people receive more resources from others by expressing gratitude?
- If so, why?

# Resource Allocation Study 1

PLAYER 1



PLAYER 2



114 adults (41% female; 78% White; 86% at least college educated; 83% employed; 98% U.S. nationals;  $M_{age} = 36.84$ ,  $SD_{age} = 11.67$ )



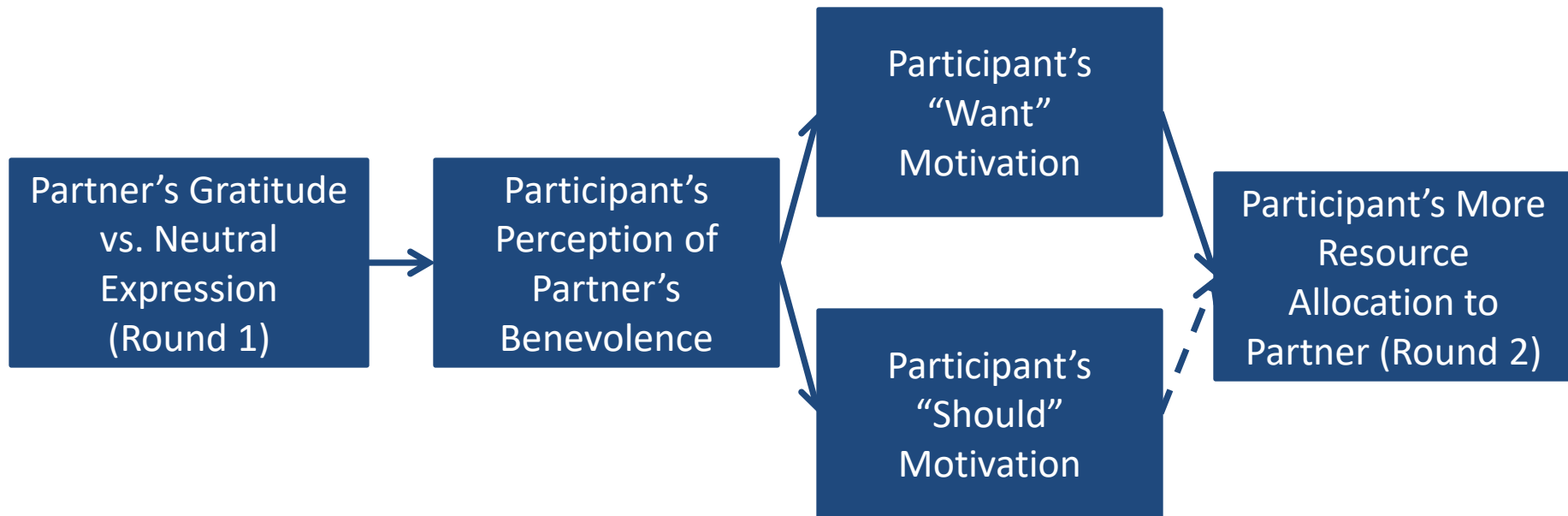
PLAYER 1



PLAYER 2



# Resource Allocation Study 1 Findings



Participant: Resource Allocator  
Partner: Resource Recipient

# Resource Allocation Study 2

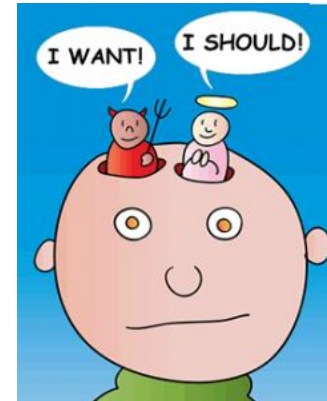
PLAYER 1



PLAYER 2



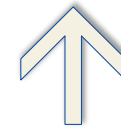
403 adults (48% female; 81% White; 90% at least college educated; 83% employed; 98% U.S. nationals;  $M_{age} = 39.66$ ,  $SD_{age} = 12.42$ )



PLAYER 1



PLAYER 2





# Benevolence Manipulation Message

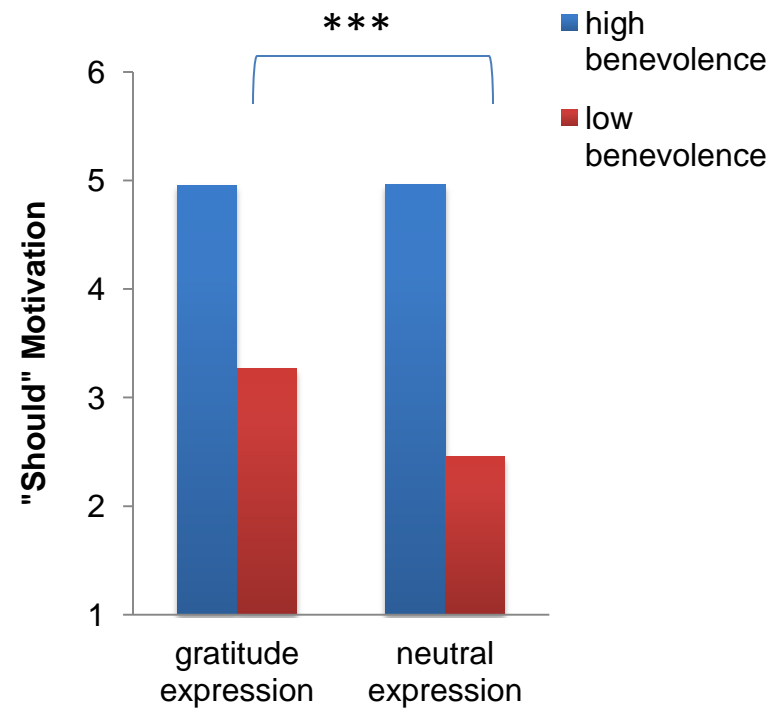
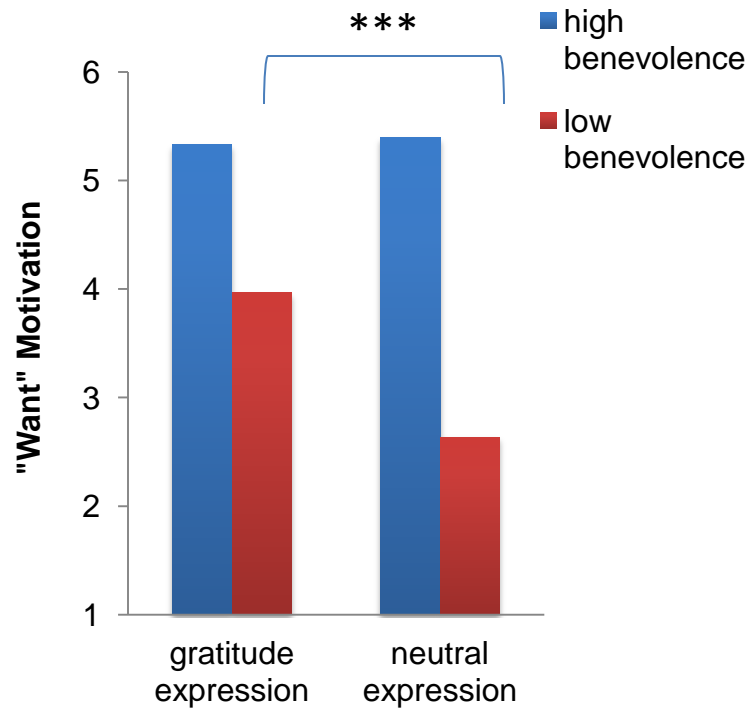
## High Benevolence

- “I care about how many raffle tickets my partner can get and his outcome is important to me. After all, we are in this together. It’s important for me to look out for his interest.”

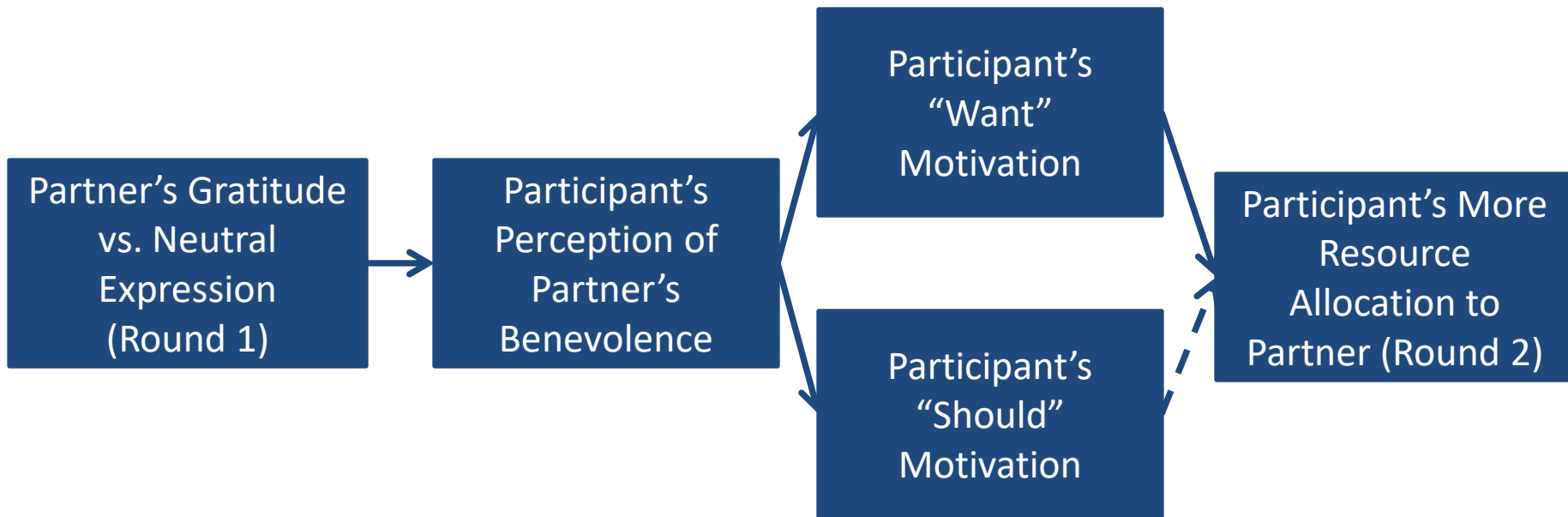
## Low Benevolence

- “I don’t really care about how many raffle tickets my partner can get and his outcome isn’t important to me. After all, everyone tries to get as much as possible for themselves. I need to look out for my own interest, not his.”

# Resource Allocation Study 2 Findings

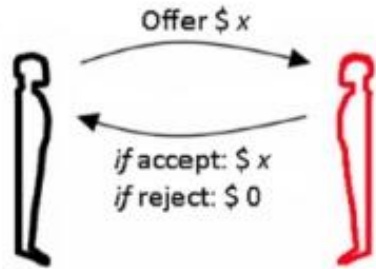


# Resource Allocation Study 2 Findings

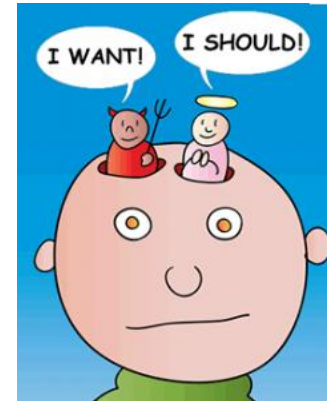


Participant: Resource Allocator  
Partner: Resource Recipient

# Resource Allocation Study 3



225 adults (56% female; 81% White; 89% at least college educated; 80% employed; 99% U.S. nationals;  $M_{age} = 37.33$ ,  $SD_{age} = 11.62$ )



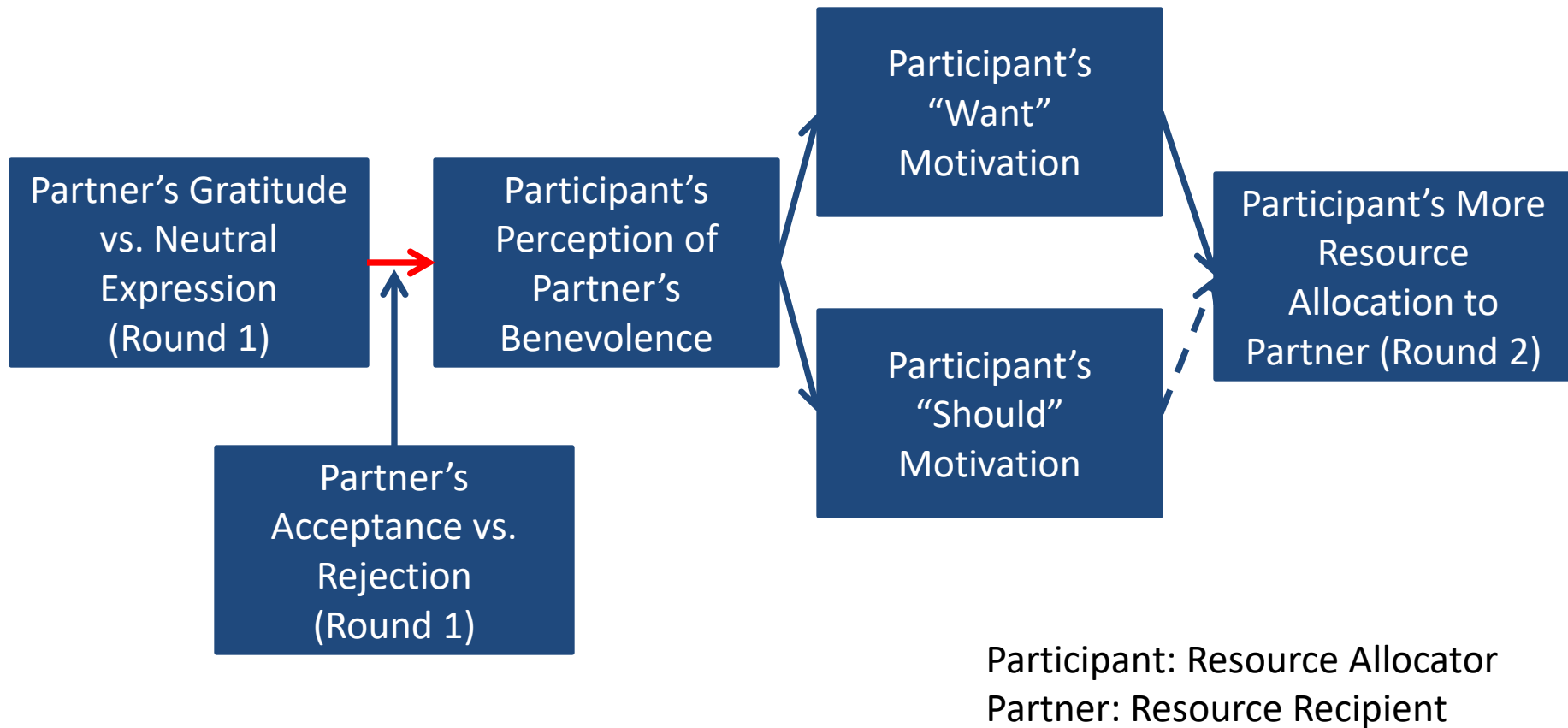
PLAYER 1



PLAYER 2



# Resource Allocation Study 3 Findings



# Take-away?



# Gratitude Expression in Advice Giving

- Can gratitude expression help people receive honest (rather than dishonest) advice from others, even when there is conflict of financial interest?
- If so, how?

# Advice Giving Study 1

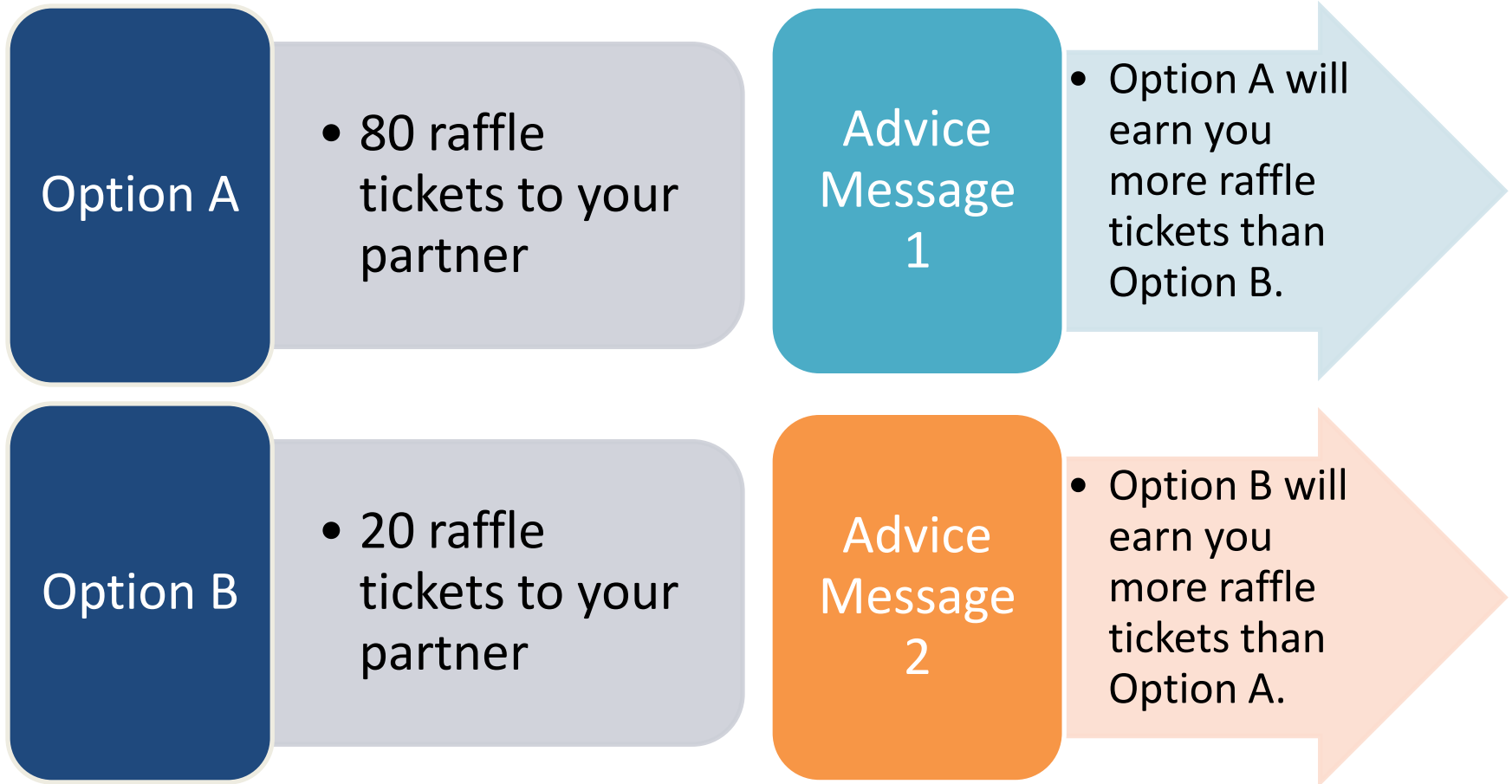


185 adults (52% female;  
80% White; 59% at least  
college educated; 82%  
currently employed;  
 $M_{age} = 37.36, SD_{age} =$   
11.97)

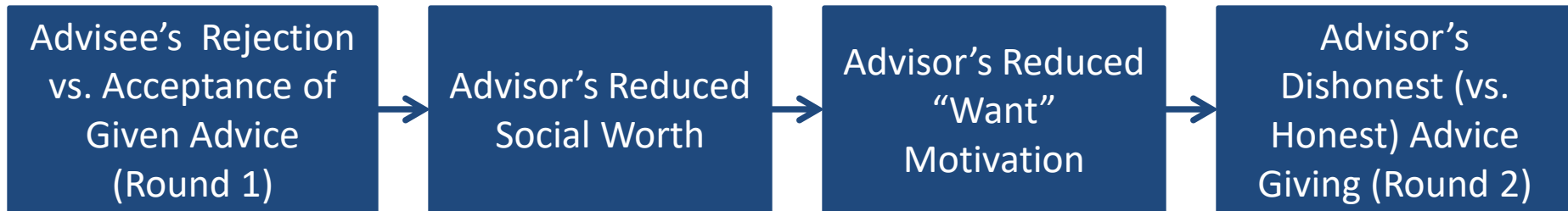




# Advice Giving Study 1: Second Task



# Advice Giving Study 1 Findings



## Ruling out alternative explanations:

- Felt positive emotions
- Felt negative emotions
- Felt anger
- Felt gratitude
- Depletion
- Revenge motivation

# Advice Giving Study 2



402 adults (51% female;  
75% White; 56% at least  
college educated; 83%  
currently employed;  
 $M_{age} = 37.11, SD_{age} =$   
11.61)



# Social Worth Manipulation Message

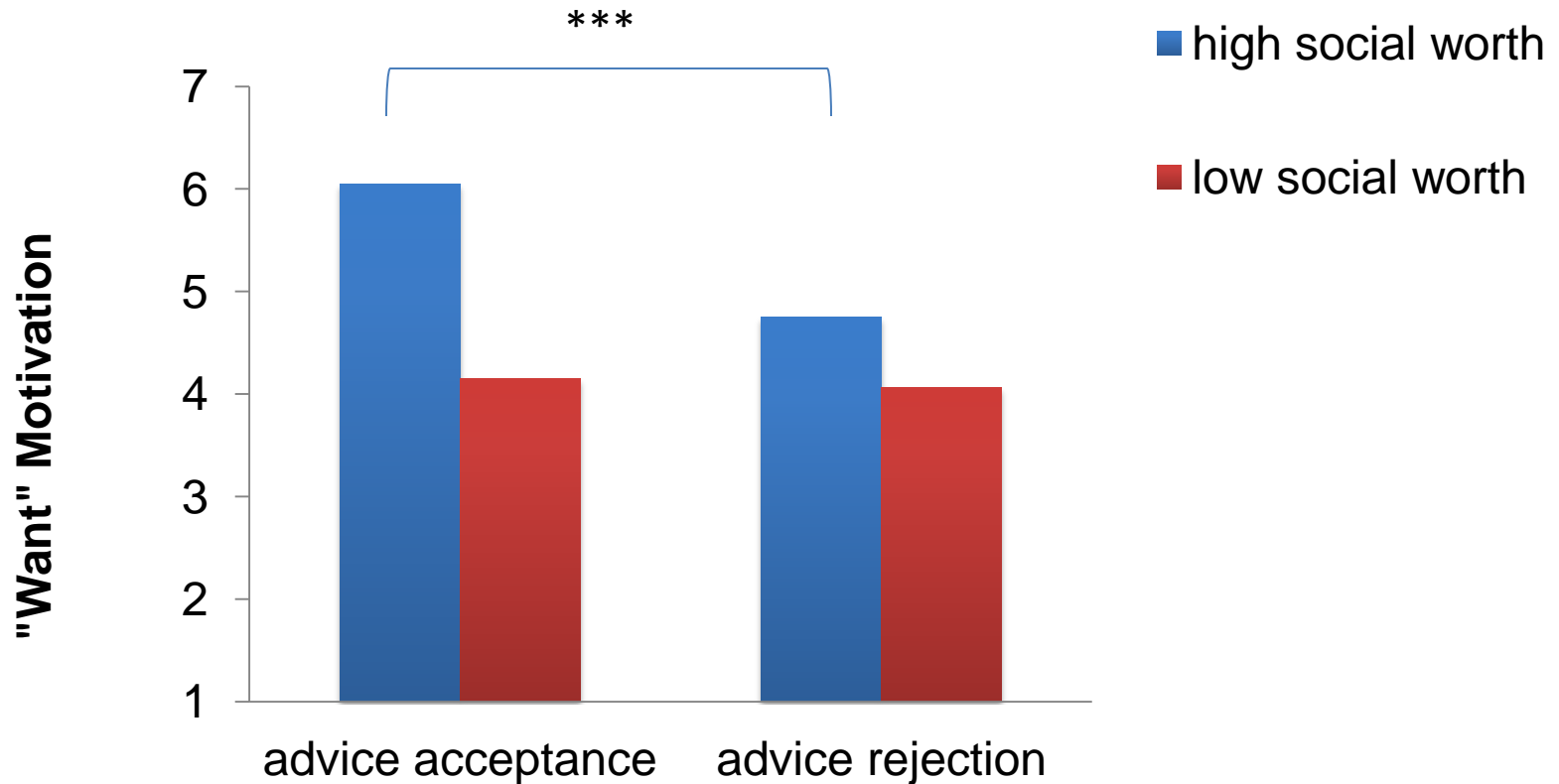
## High Social Worth

- “My partner is a good advisor. The advice makes good sense. I really appreciate my partner’s effort and intention to help me. My partner definitely fits the advisor role.”

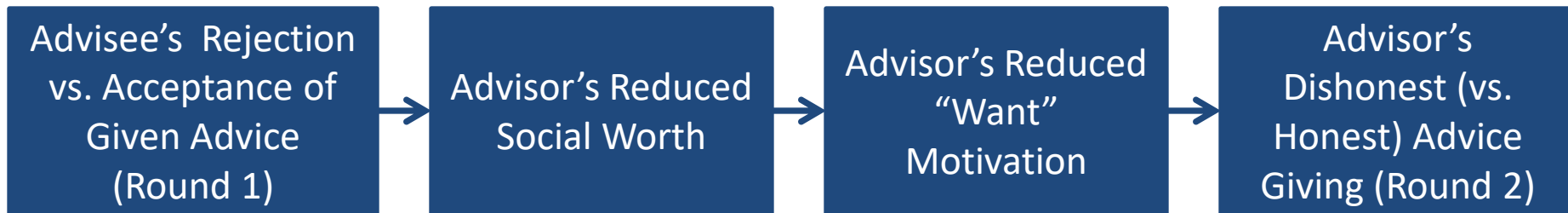
## Low Social Worth

- “My partner is not a good advisor. The advice makes no sense. I have doubts about my partner’s effort and intention to help me. My partner does not fit the advisor role.”

# Advice Giving Study 2 Findings



# Advice Giving Study 2 Findings



## Ruling out alternative explanations:

- Felt positive emotions
- Felt negative emotions
- Felt anger
- Felt gratitude
- Depletion
- Revenge motivation

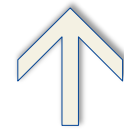
# Advice Giving Study 3



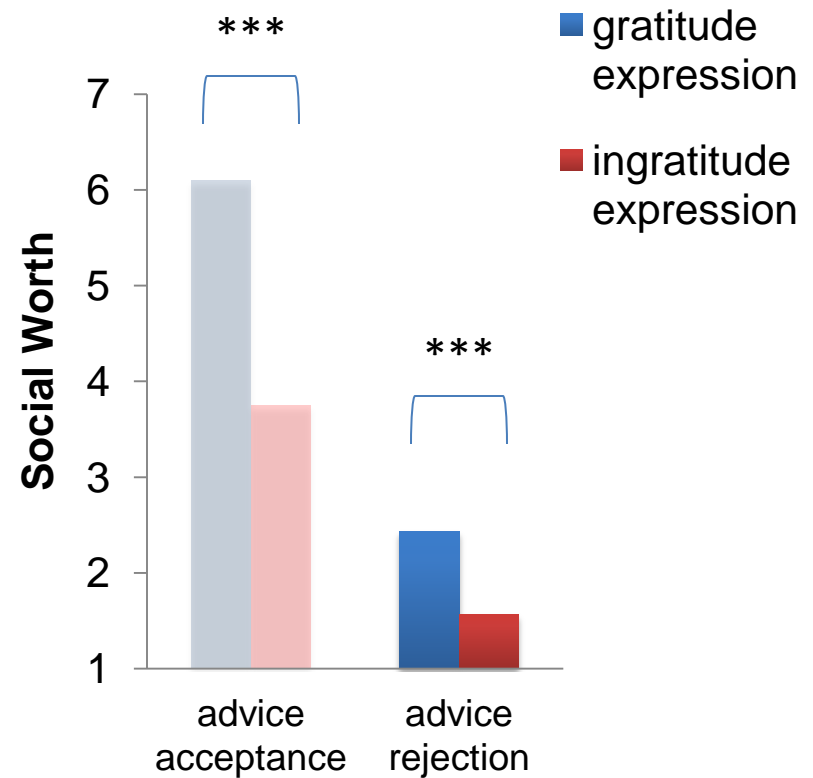
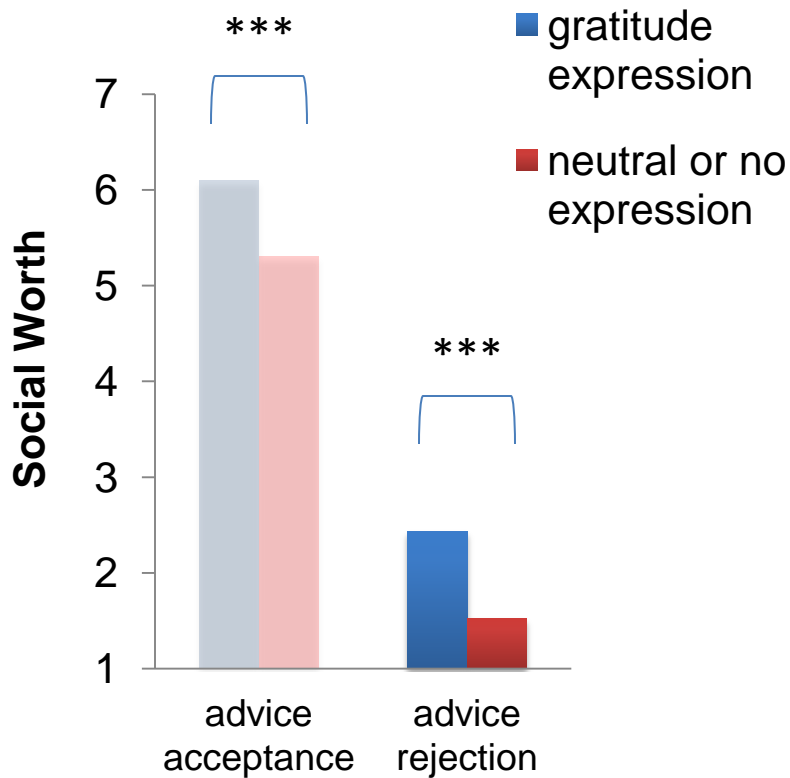
470 adults (55% female;  
80% White; 58% at least  
college educated; 81%  
employed;  $M_{age} = 36.16$ ,  
 $SD_{age} = 11.97$ )



X



# Advice Giving Study 3 Findings





# Advice Giving Study 3 Findings

Advisee's Gratitude  
(vs. Neutral /No or  
Ingratitude)  
Expression

Advisee's Rejection  
vs. Acceptance of  
Given Advice  
(Round 1)

Advisor's Reduced  
Social Worth

Advisor's Reduced  
"Want"  
Motivation

Advisor's  
Dishonest (vs.  
Honest) Advice  
Giving (Round 2)

Ruling out alternative explanations:

- Trait gratitude
- Trait guilt proneness
- Trait anger
- Trait positive affectivity
- Trait negative affectivity
- Expression inauthenticity

# Conflict of Interest in Advice Giving

The screenshot shows a USA Today news article. At the top, there is a navigation bar with categories like NEWS, SPORTS, LIFE, MONEY, TECH, TRAVEL, OPINION, and a search icon. The article title is "New rules for financial advisers prohibit conflicts of interest" by Gregory Korte, published on April 6, 2016. The main image shows a stack of US dollar bills with a wooden house model on top. Below the image, the text states that financial advisers will be required to recommend investments that are in their clients' best interests, not just the ones that yield the highest commissions. A sidebar on the right contains a CME Group advertisement and a "POPULAR STORIES" section featuring a story about Hillary Clinton.

Professional medical societies play an enormously influential role in determining how medicine is practiced, but their activities and financing are a mystery. Outsiders can't tell how independent the societies are from the

## Cleaning Up Medical Advice

APRIL 30, 2010

Professional medical societies play an enormously influential role in determining how medicine is practiced, but their activities and financing are a mystery. Outsiders can't tell how independent the societies are from the

## New rules for financial advisers prohibit conflicts of interest

Gregory Korte, USA TODAY | Published 6:02 a.m. ET April 6, 2016 | Updated 8:50 a.m. ET April 6, 2016

They're part of a balanced strategy.

CME Group | EXPLORE MORE

Share your feedback to help improve our site experience!

### POPULAR STORIES

Lewinsky rethinks consent with Clinton amid #MeToo

Blue ice appears in Michigan's Straits of Mackinac

4 ARTICLES REMAINING

# Advice Giving Study 4



358 adults (58% female;  
78% White; 54% at least  
college educated; 80%  
employed;  $M_{age} = 36.76$ ,  
 $SD_{age} = 12.04$ )



X



# Advice Giving Study 4: Second Task

Option A

- 20 raffle tickets to you and 60 raffle tickets to your partner

Option B

- 60 raffle tickets to you and 20 raffle tickets to your partner

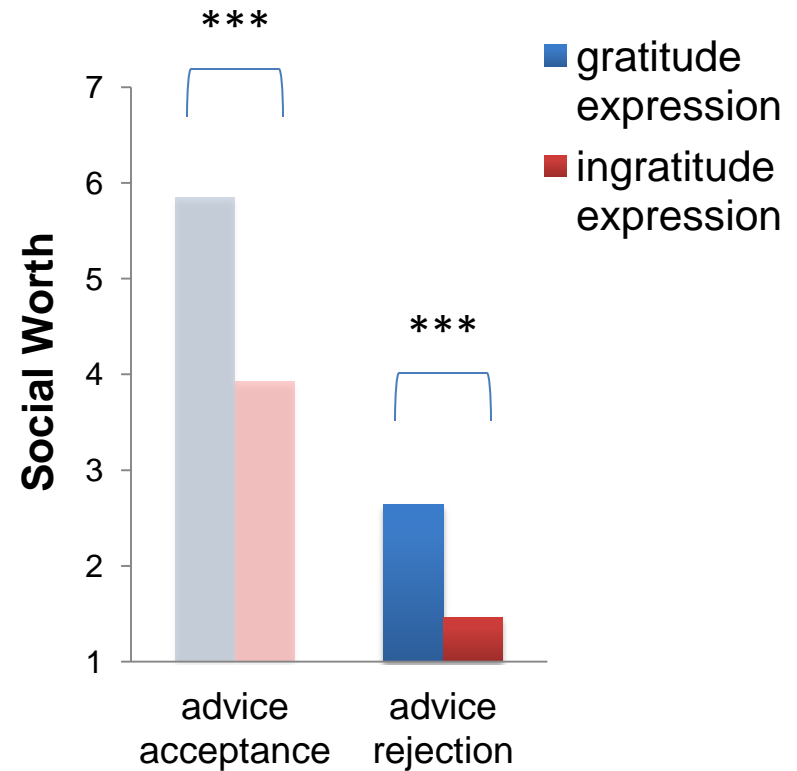
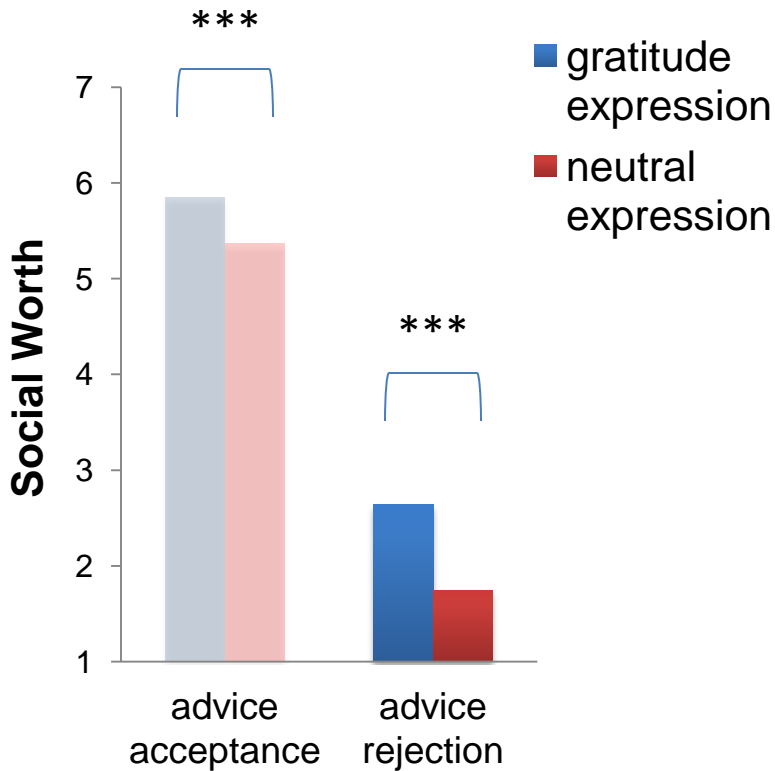
Advice Message 1

- Option A will earn you more raffle tickets than Option B.

Advice Message 2

- Option B will earn you more raffle tickets than Option A.

# Advice Giving Study 4 Findings



# Advice Giving Study 4 Findings

Advisee's Gratitude  
(vs. Neutral or  
Ingratitude)  
Expression

Advisee's Rejection  
vs. Acceptance of  
Given Advice  
(Round 1)

Advisor's Reduced  
Social Worth

Advisor's Reduced  
"Want"  
Motivation

Advisor's  
Dishonest (vs.  
Honest) Advice  
Giving (Round 2)

Ruling out alternative explanations:

- Trait gratitude
- Trait guilt proneness
- Trait anger
- Trait positive affectivity
- Trait negative affectivity
- Expression inauthenticity

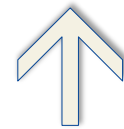
# Advice Giving Study 5



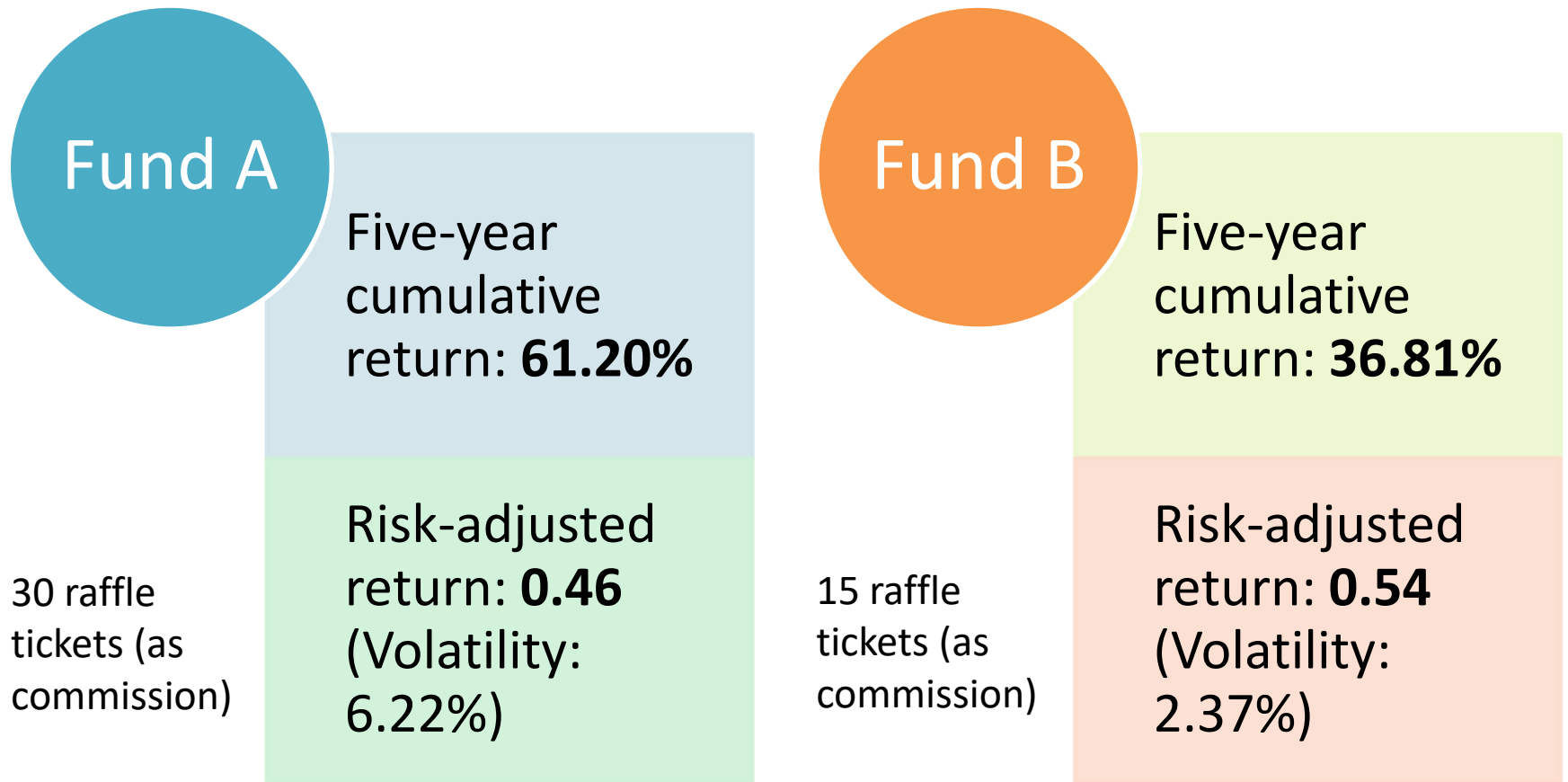
373 adults (52% female;  
78% White; 57% at least  
college educated; 81%  
employed;  $M_{age} = 38.85$ ,  
 $SD_{age} = 12.88$ )



X

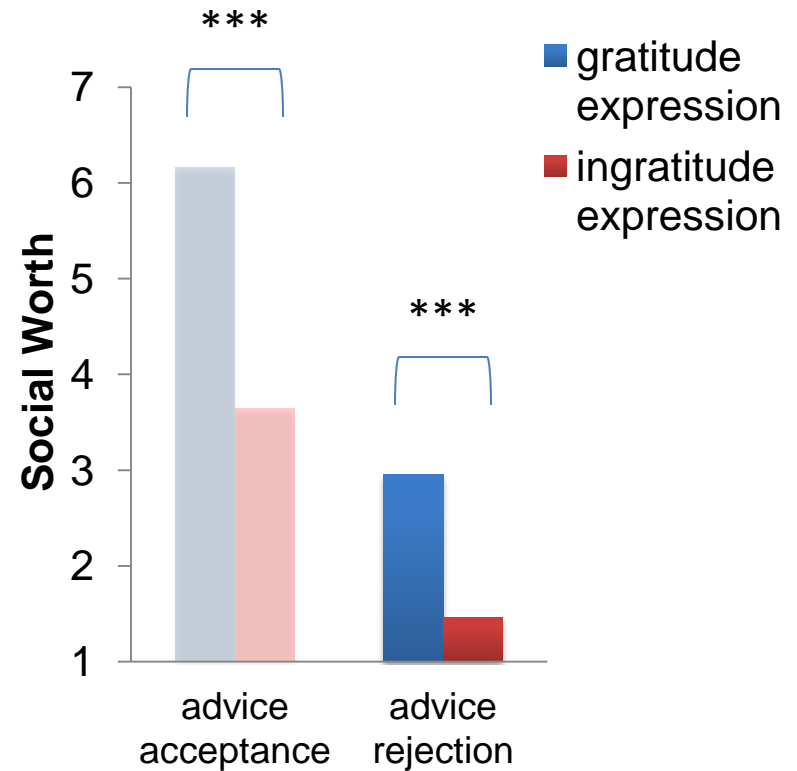
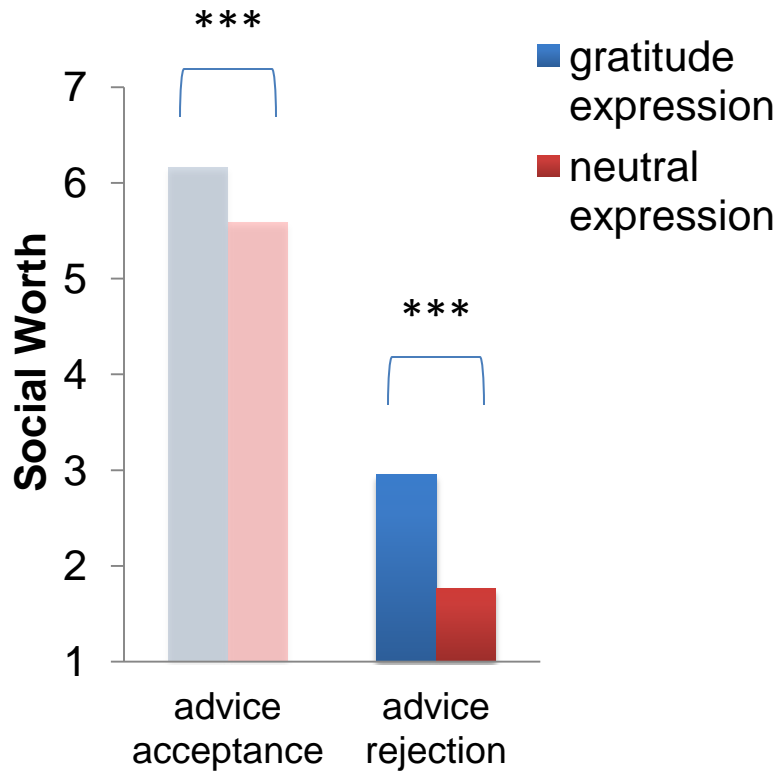


# Second Task: Financial Advising





# Advice Giving Study 5 Findings



# Advice Giving Study 5 Findings

Advisee's Gratitude  
(vs. Neutral or  
Ingratitude)  
Expression

Advisee's Rejection  
vs. Acceptance of  
Given Advice  
(Round 1)

Advisor's Reduced  
Social Worth

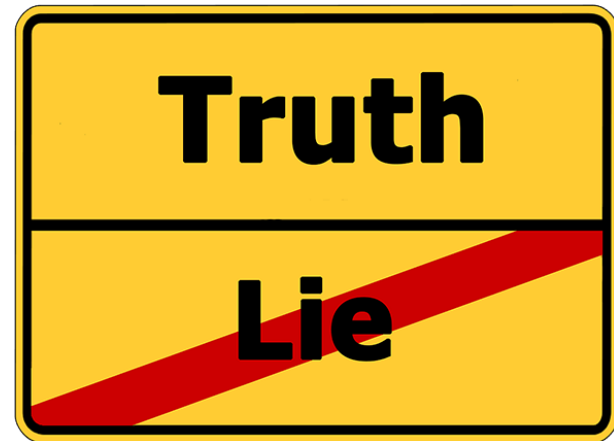
Advisor's Reduced  
"Want"  
Motivation

Advisor's  
Dishonest (vs.  
Honest) Advice  
Giving (Round 2)

Ruling out alternative explanations:

- Trait gratitude
- Trait guilt proneness
- Trait anger
- Trait positive affectivity
- Trait negative affectivity
- Expression inauthenticity

# Take-away?

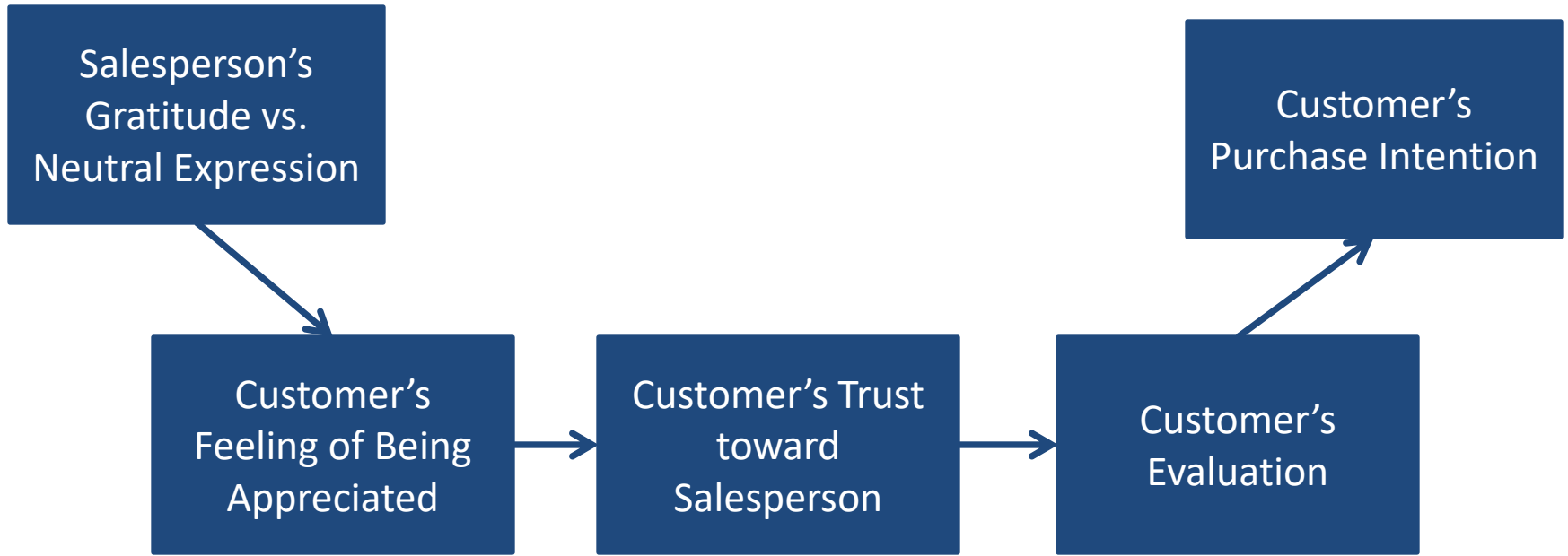


# Gratitude Expression in New Product/Service Promotion

- Can gratitude expression help salespeople persuade customers and increase customers' purchase intentions? If so, how?



# Consistent Finding across Four Studies



No moderation for the effect of gratitude expression on felt appreciation:

- Customer Big V (extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness), self-esteem, depression, gender, and need for appreciation from others

# Take-away?



# Going Back to Big Questions...

Do we  
need  
gratitude  
expression?

Yes! YES!  
**ABSOLUTELY**  
**YES!!!**

# Going Back to Big Questions...

What are some tangible benefits of gratitude expression in strategic interactions?

1. More resources from others
2. Honest advice from others
3. Potentially more customers for new products/services



# Going Back to Big Questions...

What are some relational benefits of gratitude expression in strategic interactions?

1. Others' perception of your benevolence
2. Others' strong motivation to help you
3. Others' trust in you

# My Message to Everyone...

- Not expressing gratitude is **irrational!**
- Be an awesome (and rational) person who sincerely appreciates others!



Say NO to...



**NO-THANKS ZONE**



UNIVERSITY of **HOUSTON**