

# The Unexpected Power of Positivity: Predictions Versus Decisions About Advisor Selection

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In almost any profession, selecting a good advisor is crucial for success. The current research examines the discrepancy between predicted versus actual advisor selection decisions. We found that individuals make consistent predictions that they would rely primarily on competence-based characteristics (e.g., expertise, experience) when selecting an advisor (Studies 1, 2, and 4). This predicted preference remained even when all potential advisors had relatively similar levels of expertise (Study 4). Using data from the reality competition *The Voice*, we examined whether this prediction translates into actual, high-stakes decision-making (Study 3). The results showed that, contrary to predictions, individuals were more likely to select advisors who expressed high amounts of positivity toward them. We then extended our investigation by testing predicted versus actual advisor selections in a single experiment, again finding evidence that people failed to anticipate the influence that expressed positivity would exert on their selection of an advisor (Study 5). Finally, we examined the performance consequences of this pattern of advisor selection, demonstrating that reliance on expressed positivity over expertise when selecting an advisor can inhibit advisees' performance improvements (Study 6).

**Keywords:** advice, advisors, advice-seeking, positivity, decision-making

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Everybody has goals, but nobody pursues them in a vacuum. Social ties play a crucial role in helping individuals achieve their goals (Converse & Fishbach, 2012; Gunia, Sivanathan, & Galinsky, 2009). These ties come in many different forms from peers to subordinates and provide many different types of resources from financial capital to tacit knowledge (Levin & Cross, 2004; Uzzi, 1999). One type of tie that can be particularly beneficial for achieving important life goals,

such as getting a promotion or hired for a dream job, is that of advisor: a person who provides advisees with advice, knowledge, and support. However, how do people select this important figure in their professional lives? Previous research has focused almost exclusively on examining single, one-time advice interactions, treating *advisor* selection as synonymous with *advice* selection, and has neglected the critical relational aspects of the advisor-advisee dynamic (Bonaccio & Dalal, 2006; Goldsmith & Fitch, 1997).

The current research explores both predictions and actual decisions about advisor selection. We suggest that people tend to predict that they would select advisors based on the characteristics that signal advisors' competence, such as expertise and experience. Yet, when they actually get to make a decision, *expressed positivity*—verbal and behavioral feedback that an individual has strong, positive feelings toward the self (adapted from Ekman, 2004; Finkelstein & Fishbach, 2012; Pennebaker, Francis, & Booth, 2001)—would play a crucial role in advisor selection. Specifically, we hypothesize that people tend to select advisors who express more positivity toward them to build relationships, drawing on the literature demonstrating that expressed positive emotion produces strong positive affective and behavioral reactions (George & Bettenhausen, 1990; Harker & Keltner, 2001) and influences how people build long-term relationships (Fredrickson, Cohn, Coffey, Pek, & Finkel, 2008).

Further, we argue that this discrepancy reflects a prediction error (Gilbert, Gill, & Wilson, 2002; Van Boven, Loewenstein, Dunning, & Nordgren, 2013), such that people do not accurately anticipate the impact of expressed positivity on their decisions.

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When simply thinking about their choices, people predict that they would choose an advisor based on competence-related characteristics, not the positivity advisors express toward themselves, discounting its effect on their decision-making.

### Advisors

Broadly, advice can be defined as any relevant ideas or judgments offered to someone regarding a decision or course of action, and advisors are typically defined as the people who offer the judgments or recommended courses of action (Gino, Brooks, & Schweitzer, 2012; Gino & Schweitzer, 2008; Polman, 2012). Existing research on advice-taking has focused largely on *when* advice is taken (vs. disregarded), and which situational or personal characteristics affect the decision to utilize the given advice (Larick & Soll, 2006; Yaniv, 2004). For example, people tend to believe they should seek or take advice from those with high expertise (French, Raven, & Cartwright, 1959; Goldsmith & Fitch, 1997) and more previous experience with the task (Harvey & Fischer, 1997; Yaniv & Kleinberger, 2000).

Researchers have also conceptualized advisors as those who give a recommendation to improve performance on a specific task without much interaction with advisees (for review, see Bonaccio & Dalal, 2006). For example, these studies typically use a “Judge-Advisor System” (JAS) paradigm in which participants are randomly assigned to a role of advisor or judge (i.e., an advisee). Advisor attributes are subtly manipulated to reflect one or two important characteristics (e.g., trustworthiness, confidence; Snizek & Van Swol, 2001). Advisors then give advice to judges on a specific task, and judges decide whether or not to take the advice. In most cases using this paradigm, advisors do not interact with judges at all (Budesu & Rantilla, 2000; Schrah, Dalal, & Snizek, 2006) or interact with them in a restricted manner (e.g., via written messages, Snizek & Van Swol, 2001). Only a small number of studies had advisors interact with advisees in person (Savadori, Van Swol, & Snizek, 2001; van Swol & Snizek, 2005). Moreover, there was almost no possibility for meaningful future interactions between advisors and advisees because most participants were strangers to each other and met only for the experiment, with only a few exceptions (Snizek & Van Swol, 2001; Van Swol, Savadori, & Snizek, 2003 using classmates). One-shot interactions tend to differ from longer-term relationships in significant ways (e.g., Hoffman, McCabe, Shachat, & Smith, 1994; List, 2004), and in real life, advice giving and taking are often repetitive actions that occur in a relatively long-term relationship between advisors and advisees.

The current research makes several theoretical and methodological contributions. First, there have been calls for a broader conceptualization of advice and advisors (Cross, Borgatti, & Parker, 2001; Horowitz et al., 2001; Schlosser & Gelso, 2001; Whittemore, Rankin, Callahan, Leder, & Carroll, 2000)—a conceptualization that includes both the social and relational elements as well as the longer-term nature of the advisor-advisee relationship (Brooks, Gino, & Schweitzer, 2015; Snizek & Buckley, 1995). That is, an advisor should not be treated as one who gives only a task-related recommendation in a one-time interaction, but also as one who provides social, emotional support, and feedback on advisees’ decisions and performance through a relatively long-term relationship (Heath & Gonzalez, 1995; Noe, Greenberger, &

Wang, 2002). Drawing on these recommendations, we conceptualize *advisors* as those who not only provide one-time, task-related advice, but also continuously provide psychological support and feedback on performance to achieve a long-term goal, and conceptualize *advisor selection* as the process by which an advisee chooses an advisor to form a long-term relationship.

Second, because of our unique empirical context, a novel dataset from the reality singing competition *The Voice*, we were able to integrate theory relating to prediction errors (Schelling, 1984; Wilson & Gilbert, 2003) by examining actual advisor selection in a high-stakes context. In the competition, artists have the opportunity to select their advisor from a set of coaches. This is an extremely important decision for the artists because advisors provide feedback and advice on multiple issues throughout and even after the competition. Thus, compared with the existing literature in which people have made one-off decisions about advice for the sake of accuracy or small monetary rewards, the current research seeks to better parallel real-life situations in which advisors can shape the careers of advisees. An additional benefit of this empirical context in testing theory related to advice-seeking is that advisees need to consider multiple attributes (e.g., experience, expertise) when selecting their advisor, providing insight into how advisees trade-off between multiple important attributes.

Lastly, by limiting interactions between advisors and advisees, previous work has been unable to examine the effect of behavioral and social cues on advisor selection. The current research addresses the significant impact of these cues on advisor selection, in response to the call for research on linguistic and behavioral contexts in advice exchanges (Bonaccio & Dalal, 2006; Brooks et al., 2015).

### Advisor Selection: Predictions

The selection of advisors can be a complex decision because people often have several options of potential advisors from whom to seek advice and receive feedback (Budesu & Yu, 2007; Noe, 1988). One’s advisor is not always a direct supervisor or manager (Fagenson-Eland, Marks, & Amendola, 1997), and people often informally choose their advisor from diverse members of their groups or organizations (Reagans & McEvily, 2003). For example, undergraduate students often meet with several professors before deciding to commit to a specific advisor for their theses, and newly hired employees tend to get multiple perspectives before following advice from a specific manager in their organization. Thus, when making decisions, people need to consider and weigh different characteristics of prospective advisors, such as their expertise and experience.

Among these characteristics, it remains unclear which factors people rely on in advisor selection, especially when selecting advisors for a long-term relationship, instead of a one-shot interaction. Analogous to the factors that predict one-shot advice-taking, we argue that people predict they would select advisors high on competence-based characteristics that are shown to improve performance, such as expertise, experience, and constructive feedback, while discounting the importance of potential advisors’ expressed positivity toward them. That is, people predict they would seek advice from those who signal expertise in their field (Goldsmith & Fitch, 1997; Jungermann & Fischer, 2005; Sah, Moore, & MacCoun, 2013), have more experience than themselves

(Feng & MacGeorge, 2006; Harvey & Fischer, 1997), and provide honest and constructive criticism (Finkelstein & Fishbach, 2012).

There are two lines of literature to support our hypothesis that people would underappreciate the impact of expressed positivity on their advisor selection. First, research indicates that people have a general belief that expressed positivity is not very helpful for performance. Unlike expertise and experience, people rarely report what they want from advisors is positivity expressed through feedback or compliments (Zenger & Folkman, 2014). People also tend to believe that positive feedback is less helpful than criticism (Trope & Neter, 1994). For example, research has found that, while people recognize receiving criticism would be unpleasant, they are also more likely to report that constructive criticism has a higher informational value, will result in more self-improvement, and will be more helpful in guiding their future task choices, compared with positive feedback (Dweck & Leggett, 1988; Ruttan & Nordgren, 2016; Trope & Brickman, 1975).

Second, when people merely think about and predict their decisions, they often do not have access to the affective impact of being a recipient of expressed positivity in the moment. Thus, it may be easier to discount the effect of positivity on one's decision-making (Zhao, Golde, & McCormick, 2007), leading people to predict that expressed positivity would not be a cue they use to choose someone as an advisor. Our first hypothesis was, therefore, that people predict they would not prioritize expressed positivity as a reason to choose someone as their advisor.

### Advisor Selection: Decision-Making

Which characteristics people actually rely on when selecting their advisors may be an entirely different issue from their predictions about advisor selection. Research has long documented the discrepancies between how people predict they will behave in a given situation and how they actually behave. One important source of this discrepancy is the tendency for people to have little appreciation for how they will respond to future affective states (Gilbert, Morewedge, Risen, & Wilson, 2004; Van Boven et al., 2013). They have difficulty assessing how they will react to future emotional events (Gilbert et al., 2002; Loewenstein, 1996) and the degree to which emotion will influence their future choices (Mellers, Schwartz, & Ritov, 1999). For example, people overestimate their ability to perform embarrassing public performance when they make the estimations for performances that would occur in the relatively distant future (Van Boven, Loewenstein, Welch, & Dunning, 2012). Prediction errors have also been documented in the context of interpersonal selection, such that people's beliefs about what they desire in a romantic partner do not predict their actual partner selection decisions; instead, the decisions are often overwhelmed by feelings of physical attraction (Eastwick & Finkel, 2008). That is, while it is easy for someone to think that they will select a partner who is loyal and dependable, they may end up selecting someone who is unpredictable and spontaneous because of feelings of strong romantic desire.

We argue that people face a similar challenge when predicting how they will respond to positivity expressed by potential advisors. Expressed emotions provide insights into an actor's cognitive appraisals (Barasch, Levine, & Schweitzer, 2016; Frijda, 1987; Lazarus, 1991; Roseman & Smith, 2001), and expressed positivity suggests that the actor has positive feelings toward the self (Folkes

& Sears, 1977; Insko & Wilson, 1977). Because people are strongly motivated to protect their views of themselves as intelligent, good, and virtuous (Higgins, 1987; Steele, 1988; Weiner, 1986), expressed positivity tends to validate these self-views and produce strong positive emotions in recipients (Trope, 1980). People also respond behaviorally toward positivity by choosing those who express positivity not only as their partners and friends (Bernichon, Cook, & Brown, 2003; Rowatt, Cunningham, & Druen, 1999), but also as their colleagues (Rivera, 2015; Van Maanen & Kunda, 1989). That is, expressed positivity affects not only the interpersonal choices in personal contexts, but also the choices made in professional contexts despite the expectation that those choices are supposed to be made objectively by only considering candidates' competence (Moss & Tilly, 2001). Moreover, this tendency to select others who express positivity to the self can be amplified when the positivity is coming from those with higher status (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968), as would most likely be the case with potential advisors.

There is also empirical evidence in support of the notion that people underestimate their reactions to expressions of positivity. For example, people tend to believe that influence tactics such as flattery would not affect them in any way (Leong, Bond, & Fu, 2006). However, when they actually receive flattery, they tend to believe it and like those who flatter them (Byrne, Rasche, & Kelley, 1974; Drachman, deCarufel, & Insko, 1978), even when that flattery is insincere (Chan & Sengupta, 2010). Similarly, while people report that positive feedback is not as helpful as criticism for self-improvement, they often prefer positive feedback to criticism because the former increases the favorability of their self-views (Ruttan & Nordgren, 2016).

Drawing from the literature above, our second hypothesis was that, although people predict they will select advisors based on the factors expected to enhance their performance (e.g., expertise, experience), their actual decisions will be heavily influenced by their emotional response to expressed positivity, leading them to select advisors who express more positivity toward them. No revisions to the hypotheses were made after data collection.

### Overview of Research

We conducted six studies to test our hypotheses. Studies 1 and 2 examined what characteristics people predict they would rely on when selecting an advisor. Study 3 examined actual decisions using the high-stakes context of artists selecting advisors in a reality singing competition called *The Voice*. We tested whether these artists rely on expressed positivity as a cue to select their advisors, despite the predictions that other advisor characteristics are more important. Study 4 addressed a potential alternative explanation for the observed prediction error by manipulating the variance in expertise across advisors. Study 5 examined both predicted and actual advisor selections to test the discrepancy more directly in a single experiment. Finally, Study 6 examined the potential performance consequences of advisors' expressed positivity and expertise. All experiments were preregistered and approved by the Institutional Board Review (IRB) at our respective institutions. Across all experiments, we provide detailed information, such as all the measures, their exact items, and additional analysis results, in the [online supplemental materials](#). All relevant data were used for the analyses.

## Study 1

In Study 1, we examined people's predictions about which characteristics they would rely on when selecting an advisor for their own careers. We hypothesized that people would predict selecting advisors based on competence-based cues (expertise, advising experience) more so than expressed positivity.

## Method

We recruited 151 adults via Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk) service (53 women;  $M_{\text{age}} = 34.25$ ,  $SD = 10.71$ ). A power analysis indicated that this sample size was sufficient to provide adequate power,  $1 - \beta > .80$ , to detect a medium sized effect,  $r = .30$ .

Adapting our design from prior work on prediction errors (e.g., Kawakami, Dunn, Karmali, & Dovidio, 2009; Levine & Cohen, 2018), we asked participants to imagine that they were about to select an advisor to assist with their careers. We then listed four characteristics of advisors that were shown to positively influence advisees' performance in previous work, including expertise (Ragins, 1997), advising experience (Levinson, 1978), personality fit (Allen, Day, & Lentz, 2005), and honest criticism (Sherman & Hartson, 2011), in addition to expressed positivity. Expertise was defined and described as one's advisor being an expert in the advisees' field, advising experience as an advisor having a number of successful advisees in the past, personality fit as an advisor getting along well with the advisee and enjoying their time together, honest criticism as an advisor providing honest feedback about the advisee's performance, and expressed positivity as an advisor expressing that he or she is excited to work with the advisee. We also included an open-ended "other" option in case participants wanted to indicate any other characteristic as important for their predicted selection. The six characteristics were presented in a randomized order. Participants read the descriptions and ranked the six characteristics in order of predicted importance in selecting an advisor.

One potential concern with assessing participants' predictions in this way is that they may simply be responding in socially desirable ways (e.g., perhaps participants think they ought to indicate that a certain characteristic is the most important). Thus, we also asked participants to rate themselves using the Social Desirability scale (e.g., "I am always courteous, even to people who are disagreeable";  $\alpha = .80$ ; Crowne & Marlowe, 1960; Reynolds, 1982). Participants then reported their demographic information, completed an attention filter, and were fully debriefed.

## Results

Given that the key measure involved a ranked variable, we used the Wilcoxon signed-ranks test to test our hypothesis. This test revealed that when predicting their advisor selection, participants ranked expressed positivity significantly lower than the other advisor characteristics. Specifically, participants ranked expressed positivity ( $M = 3.64$ ,  $SD = 1.42$ ) lower than expertise ( $M = 2.54$ ,  $SD = 1.42$ ),  $Z = -5.35$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $r = -.31$ , advising experience ( $M = 3.18$ ,  $SD = 1.43$ ),  $Z = -2.52$ ,  $p = .012$ ,  $r = -.15$ , personality fit ( $M = 3.16$ ,  $SD = 1.34$ ),  $Z = -2.73$ ,  $p = .006$ ,  $r = -.16$  and constructive criticism ( $M = 2.85$ ,  $SD = 1.51$ ),  $Z = -4.04$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $r = -.23$ . The effect sizes ranged from

small to medium. The open-ended "other" option was consistently ranked as the lowest option with only 5% of participants reporting another characteristic to be ranked higher than the listed characteristics (e.g., work ethic). We also tested whether any of the comparisons (e.g., expertise vs. expressed positivity) become non-significant when including the social desirability measure, and they do not ( $ps < .014$ ).

The results support our hypothesis that when predicting how they would select an advisor, people preferred expressed positivity less than the other advisor characteristics. We note that, to ensure that our results were not driven by the use of rank data, we conducted a different version of Study 1 (Study 1B) using the same sample, sample size, and instructions, but using 7-point Likert scales instead of rankings. Specifically, we asked participants to predict the degree to which they would rely on each of the above characteristics on a scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very much*). The results are similar to those of Study 1 and are available in [online supplemental materials](#).

## Study 2

Study 2 attempted to replicate the result in Study 1 in the setting of the reality singing competition, *The Voice*. In Study 1, we asked participants to make predictions about how they would select advisors for their own careers to increase generalizability of our finding. However, given that Study 3 tested people's actual decisions in a specific setting (i.e., *The Voice*), it is possible that some unique aspects about this setting might cause people to systematically (mis)predict the role of expressed positivity compared with when they make predictions about advisor selections for their career. Thus, Study 2 provided participants a context parallel to *The Voice* dataset in Study 3. In Study 2A, we collected data online to ensure a well-powered test of our hypothesis. In Study 2B, we sought to enhance external validity by collecting data in the field with the artists who applied to compete on *The Voice*.

## Study 2A

In Study 2A, we described the context of *The Voice* to online participants and then examined how they predicted they would select an advisor on the show.

## Method

We recruited 148 participants via MTurk service (75 women;  $M_{\text{age}} = 35.00$ ,  $SD = 10.10$ ). As in Study 1, we determined the sample size of each study to provide adequate power,  $1 - \beta > .80$ , to detect a medium effect,  $r = .30$ .

We first described the setting—*The Voice*—and its advisor selection process to participants. Each artist in the competition first auditions to appeal to the four "coaches," their potential advisors.<sup>1</sup> If more than one coach expresses interest in advising the artist, the

<sup>1</sup> For the competition, the person that an artist chooses to work with is called a "coach." We believe that the stated function of a coach on *The Voice* falls under the domains of advisors as we define them in this research. Specifically, the coaches "dedicate themselves to developing their team of artists, giving them advice and sharing the secrets of their success" (quoted from the official website) serving the role of advisors by our definition.



artist decides whom to work with throughout the competition. We then asked participants to imagine that they were a contestant on *The Voice* and told them that we were interested in their thoughts about how they would select their advisor. We then listed the six characteristics of advisors from Study 1 and provided adjusted descriptions of these characteristics to match the context. Expertise was defined and described as an advisor having a great expertise in a type of music the artist performs, advising experience was defined as an advisor having many advisees who won the competition in the past, personality fit as an advisor and an artist getting along well, honest feedback as an advisor providing honest feedback about an artist's performance, and expressed positivity as an advisor expressing he or she is excited to work with the advisee. The six characteristics, including the other option, were presented in a randomized order.

Participants ranked the six characteristics in order of predicted importance of selecting their advisor for the competition. We also measured social desirability with the same scale used in Study 1 ( $\alpha = .81$ ). Participants then reported demographic information, completed an attention filter, and were fully debriefed.

## Results

As in Study 1, the Wilcoxon signed-ranks test revealed that participants ranked expressed positivity lower than the other four characteristics when predicting how they would select a coach in the competition, *The Voice*. Specifically, participants ranked expressed positivity ( $M = 3.58$ ,  $SD = 1.44$ ) lower than the coaches' expertise ( $M = 2.56$ ,  $SD = 1.41$ ),  $Z = -4.96$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $r = -.29$ , personality fit ( $M = 3.16$ ,  $SD = 1.44$ ),  $Z = -2.35$ ,  $p = .019$ ,  $r = -.14$ , and honest feedback ( $M = 2.80$ ,  $SD = 1.37$ ),  $Z = -4.10$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $r = -.24$ . Participants rated expressed positivity marginally lower than importance to advising experience ( $M = 3.21$ ,  $SD = 1.50$ ),  $Z = -1.81$ ,  $p = .070$ ,  $r = -.11$ —perhaps because of similar levels of advising experience across advisors in this context (a point to which we return in Study 3). We also performed within-subject regressions on each comparison (e.g., expressed positivity vs. expertise) with the social desirability measure, which did not change the statistical significance of any of the comparisons. The results of Study 2A are consistent with those of Study 1: Participants predicted that they would be least likely to select an advisor based on expressed positivity.

## Study 2B

The goal of Study 2B was to replicate the above findings with a sample of artists who applied to compete on *The Voice*. Study 2B used a sample and context comparable with Study 3, allowing us to more directly compare the predictions (Study 2B) with the actual selection decisions (Study 3).

## Method

Participants were 37 individuals (23 women;  $M_{\text{age}} = 22.44$ ,  $SD = 7.05$ ) from Chicago and the surrounding area. We originally recruited 66 individuals (42 women;  $M_{\text{age}} = 22.49$ ,  $SD = 7.96$ ) but noticed 29 of them misinterpreted the rank item as a continuous or dichotomous item even though they were asked to rank the importance of advisor characteristics in the survey.

Participants who applied to be a contestant on *The Voice* were approached for participation on their way to the regional audition in Chicago. After agreeing to participate, they were told that we were interested in their predictions about how they would proceed in *The Voice* competition if they were accepted at the regional audition. Specifically, participants imagined they became a contestant on the competition, gave their audition performances, and multiple coaches showed interest in advising them. We then asked them to think about how they would choose their advisor and listed the same six characteristics of advisors from Studies 2A including the other option. Participants then reported demographic information and were fully debriefed.

## Results

As in our previous studies, the Wilcoxon signed-ranks test revealed that participants predicted that they would be less likely to rely on expressed positivity compared with the other four characteristics. Specifically, participants ranked expressed positivity ( $M = 4.14$ ,  $SD = 1.03$ ) significantly lower than expertise ( $M = 2.73$ ,  $SD = 1.54$ ),  $Z = -3.50$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $r = -.41$ , advising experience ( $M = 3.27$ ,  $SD = 1.52$ ),  $Z = -2.22$ ,  $p = .026$ ,  $r = -.26$ , personality fit ( $M = 3.11$ ,  $SD = 1.47$ ),  $Z = -2.88$ ,  $p = .004$ ,  $r = -.33$  and honest feedback ( $M = 2.19$ ,  $SD = 1.29$ ),  $Z = -4.67$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $r = -.54$ . The effect sizes ranged from small to large. Taken together, the results of Study 2B are consistent with those of the previous studies.

## Study 3

Study 3 tapped into individuals' actual advisor selection decisions by testing our hypotheses in the setting of *The Voice*. Comparing with our prediction studies (Studies 1 and 2), we examined the (in)consistency between people's predictions of who they think they would select as an advisor and their decisions of who they actually select. Moreover, previous work has suggested that TV game or reality shows (e.g., *Golden Balls*) can provide an opportunity to investigate high-stakes decision-making with substantial consequences for the participants (List, 2006; Oberholzer-Gee, Waldfogel, & White, 2010; Van de Calseyde, Keren, & Zeelenberg, 2014; van den Assem, van Dolder, & Thaler, 2012).

In *The Voice*, all artists first complete the process of "Blind Auditions" where they perform in front of four coaches, their potential advisors. The auditions are called "blind" because the coaches cannot see the artists when they are performing. Coaches then turn their chairs around and toward the stage if they are interested in advising the specific artist. Once the performance is over, the interested coaches interact with the artist. After the interaction, if more than one coach is interested in advising the artist, the artist decides whom he or she wants as an advisor throughout the competition. Thus, it provides us with a unique and rare naturalistic setting where we can observe the interactions between potential advisees and advisors before advisees select whom they want to have as their advisors, allowing us to test the

relationship between positivity expressed during interaction and advisor selection.<sup>2</sup>

Moreover, this selection of a coach is extremely important for the artists because advisors play a significant role in the competition. Advisors provide advice and feedback to their artists throughout the competition: how to improve their singing, which song to perform, and how to pursue their career in music. Even after the competition, a good relationship with advisors can benefit artists' careers as they can still receive advice and help from the advisors about how to navigate the music industry. Also, artists are seemingly aware of the stakes involved in selecting their advisors, describing the competition as the "opportunity of a lifetime" and acknowledging the decision to select their advisor as "incredibly important" for them. Therefore, the setting allows us to examine people's high-stakes decisions of selecting advisors for their career, which may not be possible to test with laboratory experiments.

Thus, we analyzed artists' decisions about which coach they selected as their advisor and which criteria they relied on when making the decisions. Despite the predictions of how people think they would select advisors in Studies 1 and 2, we hypothesized that they would rely heavily on expressed positivity when actually selecting advisors. That is, expressed positivity would lead to the selection of advisors at rates greater than or equal to other characteristics that people believe to be important (e.g., expertise, advising experience).

## Method

**Sample.** We sampled artists from seasons 1, 2, 3, and 5. First, we chose the earlier seasons because there were fewer differences in terms of reputation among coaches, compared with later seasons when they could potentially gain more reputation of being "good" or "bad" advisors. Second, these four seasons had the identical set of coaches and, thus, provided the same choice set of advisors to the artists, reducing potential confounding effects of having different choice options. Season 4 was not included because it had a different set of coaches.

Among the 284 artists from the four seasons, we included only those artists who had a choice between advisors in our dataset. That is, we included the artists who had more than one coach express interest in advising them. We did not include those who only had one coach expressing interest ( $N = 68$ ) or those who failed to attract any coach ( $N = 92$ ), because those artists had no decision to make. This procedure left us with 119 artists in total (64 women, 53 men, 2 mixed-gender teams;  $M_{\text{age}} = 25.47$ ,  $SD = 8.01$ ; 116 solo artists, three group artists).<sup>3</sup> We then treated each dyad between an artist and a coach who expressed his or her interest in advising the artist as one data point, which left us with 315 dyads between artists and coaches.

**Dependent variable.** Our dependent variable is whether a coach is selected as an advisor by the artist or not. We dummy-coded the selection in each dyad (1 = selected, 0 = not selected).

**Independent variable.** As our main predictor variable, we aimed to thoroughly capture the level of positivity expressed by potential advisors to artists at the auditions by using two indicators of positivity: behavioral and verbal measures.

For the behavioral measure, we asked two coders who were blind to the hypotheses to rate the positivity of each coach's

behavioral reactions to the artists. Each video starts when an artist starts performing for the audition and ends when the artist selects an advisor. The videos were muted to enable the coders to focus only on the coach's behavioral cues without any verbal feedback, which could potentially confound their evaluation of how positive the coach behaved toward the artist. We also instructed the coders to code the positivity only after the coaches turned their chairs toward the artists, because from the artists' perspective, they could only observe the coaches' behavioral reactions once they turned their chairs around. The two coders rated the positivity with two items ("How positively does [a coach's name] behave toward the contestant?" and "How excited does [a coach's name] seem about the contestant?") on a 5-point scale (1 = *not at all positive/excited*, 5 = *extremely positive/excited*). We averaged the ratings from the two items (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .89$ ,  $p = .001$ ) to create a behavioral positivity index. We found moderate interrater reliability,  $r = .64$ ,  $p < .001$ .

For the verbal measure, we first acquired transcripts of the competition and divided the texts by each dyad of artists and coaches. We then used the LIWC linguistic program (Pennebaker, Booth, & Francis, 2007) to quantify the level of positivity in each coach's verbal feedback to the artist. The LIWC program calculates the number of words that belong to their internal dictionary in given texts. The verbal feedback that coaches gave artists was mostly feedback on their performances at the auditions, and it necessarily consisted of comments of (a) how musically talented and skilled the artists were (e.g., "beautiful voice," "amazing gift") and (b) how emotionally affected the coaches were by their performances (e.g., "so much passion," "emotional performance"). Thus, we used the LIWC program's affect dictionary to capture how many affect words each coach used to express positivity toward each artist. We decided to include affect words in both positive and negative categories instead of limiting the scope only to the positive category, because we noticed coaches used words in both affect categories to express positivity to convince the artists to select themselves: how impressed they were by the performance (e.g., "It's *crazy* how advanced you are in a way") and how excited they were to advise the artists (e.g., "I really want to work with you very very *badly*").

Taken together, the artists received and processed the information from both verbal and behavioral sources: how their potential advisors reacted behaviorally and what they said about the performances. Thus, we standardized and averaged the two measures,  $r = .17$ ,  $p = .003$ , to obtain an overall positivity score.

**Control variables.** We included a number of control variables in the model, such as the advisor characteristics shown to be important: coaches' expertise and advising experience.

<sup>2</sup> We also chose this competition to examine high-stakes decision-making outside of the laboratory, because it is a "live" competition where artists have only one chance to perform and make their advisor decisions. The producing team argues that there is no fabrication of the situation given to the artists, saying: "It's not like they shoot one, then there's an hour break where everyone's talking about it and dissecting it. This is live. If you go to a taping of *The Voice* at Universal, it's like a live show. (. . .) they [the artists] walk onstage and it happens."

<sup>3</sup> Five artists who had more than one coach turn around were also excluded because their audition videos were cut, making it harder to code the positivity from the coaches.

First, we measured the level of expertise each coach had in the type of music each artist played by calculating the distance between the genre of the coach and that of the artist. This operationalization draws on research suggesting that there are two dimensions of expertise: general expertise (how much knowledge and skills one has in a given domain, such as popular music in general) and domain-specific expertise (how much knowledge and skills one has within a specific subdomain, such as the Country genre; Haerem & Rau, 2007; Leinhardt & Smith, 1985; Schunn & Anderson, 1999). Previous work suggests that both domain-specific and general expertise are important advisor characteristics (Schunn & Anderson, 1999). We note that this operationalization is also consistent with Studies 1 and 2, where we defined expertise as advisors' expertise in advisees' work (e.g., "your advisor is a great expert in what you do").

Regarding the two dimensions of expertise, in the context of *The Voice*, there was not a high amount of variance in general expertise in music, as all coaches are professional musicians. Therefore, we focused on domain-specific expertise—how much they know about the type of music each artist plays—and calculated the genre overlap as a distance between each coach and artist. Consistent with Kashkooli and Peter Younkin (2013), we defined genre distance as "the degree of audience overlap between two musical genres," and first acquired the genre information of coaches and artists from their profiles on the three major music websites: iTunes, myspace, and last.fm. We then combined the genre information from the three websites while weighing each genre by its relevance.<sup>4</sup> Then we adjusted the genres to fit the 12 genres used in the 2012 Survey of Public Participation in the Arts (SPPA; National Endowment for the Arts, 2012).

This SPPA survey asked 35,735 respondents to identify their preferences and participation in the 12 musical genres. Previous research has suggested that the data offer a comprehensive and nationally representative sample of American musical preferences and has used the data to identify the similarities and relationships between genres (García-Álvarez, Katz-Gerro, & López-Sintas, 2007; Peterson & Kern, 1996). The data provided us with a percentage of respondents who listened to two different music genres, and we calculated the genre distance as 1 (ratio of fans listening both genres). We then multiplied this genre distance with the genres of coaches and artists to obtain the final genre distance between the two, which captured the extent to which the coach had expertise in the type of music the artist performed. For example, one artist performed a song classified as Pop and Classic Rock. With that artist, a coach whose genre was identified as Pop and Classic Rock/Oldies had the closest genre distance (.116) and, thus, had the highest domain-specific expertise in the type of music the artist performs. By contrast, a coach whose genre was identified as Country had the farthest genre distance (.593) and had the lowest domain-specific expertise.

Moreover, we included the coaches' advising experience in the model. To do so, we calculated the number of their advisees who previously won the competition. We also included perceived decision certainty, which was operationalized as the amount of time the coaches took to make their decisions. Specifically, research by Van de Ven, Gilovich, and Zeelenberg (2010) found that the time taken for coaches to turn their chairs toward artists tended to predict the selection. The authors argue that from the artists' perspective, how fast the coaches made their decision to advise the

artists could be read as an indicator of how certain they were in their decision (Van de Calseyde et al., 2014). Thus, we measured the amount of time taken by each coach to turn their chairs.

Lastly, we controlled for the artists' demographic information—specifically their age and gender (1 = male, 0 = female)—in the analysis. The demographic information of the coaches was not included in the main analysis as it was factored in as a fixed-choice set in the analyses.

## Results

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics and correlations for all the variables used in the analysis. We used the McFadden's choice model and conducted an alternative-specific conditional logistic regression analysis with expressed positivity as an independent variable and advisor selection as a dependent variable. As shown in Table 2, the positivity score significantly predicted the selection of advisors,  $b = .77$ ,  $p = .001$ , controlling for all other variables. That is, artists were more likely to choose a coach as their advisor who expressed more positivity than other coaches. Among the other advisor variables, only the expertise of coaches significantly predicted the selection,  $b = 2.55$ ,  $p = .003$ , such that artists were more likely to choose a coach as their advisor who had more expertise in the genre of music they played. Coaches' previous success in advising,  $b = -.44$ ,  $p = .537$  did not significantly predict the selection.

Regarding effect sizes, the standardized regression coefficients indicate that the positivity score predicted selection,  $\beta = .58$ ,  $Z = 3.28$ , even more strongly than expertise,  $\beta = .49$ ,  $Z = 2.99$ . This indicates that for every increase of one standard deviation of expressed positivity, the likelihood of being selected as an advisor increases by a .58 *SD*. We also performed a conditional logistic regression analysis, which produced substantively identical results. These results are available in our [online supplemental materials](#) in addition to regression analyses with each positivity measure as a separate predictor and additional robustness checks.

Taken together, the results provide evidence that supports our hypothesis: Artists were more likely to select a coach as their advisor who expressed more positivity toward them. The results also show the predicted discrepancy with those of Studies 1 and 2 where participants predicted that they would find expressed positivity to be least important when selecting their advisors. While expertise still influenced the selection at comparable levels to expressed positivity, none of the other advisor characteristics predicted the selection. Regarding why advising experience was not a significant predictor of selection, we speculate that in this particular context, the coaches' competition experience might not send as strong of a competence signal to the artists compared with their expertise in a specific music genre.

<sup>4</sup> Each website usually lists more than one genre for each artist or song, and it lists them in the order of relevance (e.g., an artist mostly identified as a R&B singer had "R&B/Soul" listed first, followed by "Pop" and "Rap/Hip-hop"). Thus, we factored this relevance in the genre information by weighing the position of each genre listed: Genre A = (number of genre A mentioned in the first position + number of genre A mentioned in the second position/2 + number of genre A mentioned in the third position/3 + . . .)/total number of sources.



Table 1

*Descriptive Statistics and Correlations in Study 3*

No.	Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1	Selection	0.38	0.49							
2	Expressed positivity	0.00	0.77	0.24**						
3	Expertise	−0.50	0.18	0.24**	0.07					
4	Experience	0.53	0.86	0.05	0.05	−0.06				
5	Decision certainty	−44.07	25.25	0.12*	0.14*	0.03	0.12*			
6	Age	25.23	7.64	0.02	−0.03	0.01	−0.01	−0.05		
7	Gender	0.46	0.50	−0.02	0.03	−0.07	0.06	0.08	0.13*	
8	Number of coaches	2.85	7.67	−0.20**	0.04	−0.03	0.03	0.16**	−0.08	0.10

Note. Decision certainty and expertise measure were reverse coded.

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ .

### Study 4

The primary goal of Study 4 was to address a potential alternative explanation for our results. It is possible that the differential impact of expressed positivity in the prediction (Studies 1 and 2) versus selection (Study 3) studies is not driven by a prediction error, but rather by differing perceptions of the range of expertise. That is, perhaps participants in Studies 1 and 2 were imagining a scenario in which potential advisors vary a great deal in general expertise (e.g., professional musicians vs. beginners in music) and, thus, predicted selecting on expertise rather than positivity. By contrast, in Study 3, all coaches on *The Voice* were professional musicians and, thus, all had high expertise in popular music in general, only with varying levels of domain-specific expertise (e.g., expert in Country genre). Thus, the expertise trade-off between advisors might seem less severe, which potentially encouraged people to rely on expressed positivity instead—a tendency that they may predict when provided with the same information.

Moreover, it is possible that individuals believe a potential advisor who expresses positivity is communicating a higher level

of future investment: how much time and energy the advisor will invest in advising them. When there is a small variance in expertise among advisors, individuals might believe that the increase in future investment could make up for relatively minor decreases in expertise. Advisees may reasonably predict that they would select an advisor based on expressed positivity when they are presented with potential advisors with small variance in expertise.

We address this concern in Study 4 by designing a prediction study in which participants were randomly assigned to either high or low expertise variance conditions. Consistent with our previous studies, expertise was operationalized in terms of both domain-specific (Study 4A) and general (Study 4B) expertise. We hypothesized that participants would be more likely to predict selecting an advisor with higher expertise over one with higher positivity, even if the difference in expertise between advisors is relatively small.

### Study 4A

#### Method

We aimed to recruit 200 participants who identified themselves as singers via MTurk. We retained 203 participants (79 women;  $M_{\text{age}} = 35.81$ ,  $SD_{\text{age}} = 11.15$ ) after excluding those who failed the attention check, as per our preregistered criteria. We analyzed the data both with and without the excluded participants and found similar results.

Participants were first asked to imagine being a Country singer who was a contestant on a competition similar to *The Voice* and having two coaches (Coach 1 and Coach 2) indicate interest in advising them. In the low expertise variance condition, the two coaches were a Folk Rock singer and a Country singer, which represents a relatively close genre distance (Kashkooli & Peter Younkin, 2013). In the high expertise variance condition, the two coaches were an R&B/Soul singer and a Country singer, which represents a relatively wide genre distance.

Drawing on a design from prior research (Ruttan & Nordgren, 2016), to pit expertise against positivity, in both conditions, the coach with lower expertise expressed more positivity than did the coach with higher expertise. Although expertise and positivity can certainly exist within one advisor (as examined in Study 6), these two coaches—a high expertise and low positivity coach and a low expertise and high positivity coach—capture the tension of theo-

Table 2

*Results of Regression Analysis Predicting Selection of Advisors in Study 3*

Variables	<i>B</i>	<i>SE (B)</i>	$\beta$	<i>SE (β)</i>	<i>Z</i>	<i>p</i> >   <i>z</i>
Expressed positivity	0.77	0.23	0.59	0.18	3.28	.001
Expertise	2.55	0.85	0.49	0.16	2.99	.003
Decision certainty	0.01	0.01	0.36	0.20	1.81	.070
Experience	−0.44	0.72	−0.38	0.62	−0.62	.537
Adam: Age	0.03	0.05	0.20	0.41	0.49	.624
Blake: Age	0.05	0.05	0.40	0.41	0.99	.322
Christina: Age	−0.01	0.05	−0.09	0.40	−0.23	.820
Adam: Gender	0.25	0.73	0.12	0.37	0.34	.735
Blake: Gender	−0.26	0.72	−0.13	0.36	−0.36	.722
Christina: Gender	0.76	0.81	0.38	0.41	0.94	.346
Adam: Number	0.68	0.52	0.52	0.40	1.30	.194
Blake: Number	0.23	0.51	0.17	0.39	0.44	.660
Christina: Number	−0.17	0.58	−0.13	0.45	−0.29	.775
Adam: Season	0.41	0.28	0.56	0.38	1.49	.137
Blake: Season	0.44	0.67	0.61	0.93	0.66	.512
Christina: Season	0.14	0.26	0.19	0.36	0.52	.603

Note. McFadden  $R^2 = .49$ ,  $\chi^2 = 155.55$ . Default choice was CeeLo, which is why contestant-level variables are matched with other three choices. Both unstandardized (*B*) and standardized ( $\beta$ ) coefficients are reported.



retical interest between expertise and expressed positivity. To operationalize expressed positivity, we adapted the language of the coaches in *The Voice* data.

The main dependent measure was participants' predicted dichotomous selection of an advisor (Coach 1 or Coach 2). Participants then completed manipulation checks assessing expressed positivity ("How positive do you think Coach X was?") and expertise ("Does Coach X seem to have a high degree of expertise in music, generally?" for general expertise and "Does Coach X seem to have a high degree of expertise in your music genre, specifically" for domain-specific expertise). We also collected exploratory data assessing the potential factors driving participants' predictions, including the expected future investment by the advisor, enjoyment working with the advisor, and feelings of reciprocity (Pillutla, Malhotra, & Murnighan, 2003).

## Results

Indicating that our manipulations were successful, participants rated the expert coach as more of a Country music, domain-specific expert than the positive coach, in both the high and low expertise variance conditions,  $t_s > 10.33$ ,  $p_s < .001$  (see Table 3 for the means, standard deviations, statistical tests, and effect sizes for all measures). Participants also rated the positive coach as significantly more positive than the expert coach,  $t_s > 9.82$ ,  $p_s < .001$ .

Regarding the main dependent measure, participants were more likely to predict selecting the expert advisor over the positive advisor in both the low (63.96%) and high (61.70%) expertise variance conditions,  $\chi^2_s > 5.15$ ,  $p_s < .023$ ,  $w_s > .17$ . There was no effect of the expertise variance manipulation on participants' predicted advisor selection,  $\chi^2(1, N = 205) = 0.11$ ,  $p = .738$ ,  $w = .08$ . The result supports our hypothesis that individuals would still predict selecting an advisor with high expertise over one with high expressed positivity, even there is a small variance in expertise among advisors—as was the case in our Study 3 field data.

We also examined the three exploratory measures of expected investment from the advisors, enjoyment working with them, and perceived reciprocity (see Table 3). First, regarding expected future investment, participants believed that the positive advisor

would be *less* invested in their improvement, and would be *less* likely to facilitate their career than the expert advisor. This result provides initial evidence countering an alternative explanation that advisees are strategically selecting an advisor who expresses positivity because they believe the advisor is signaling a greater willingness to invest in advising them. Moreover, regarding expected enjoyment, participants reported that the positive advisor would be more fun to work with, but did not report that they liked them more. Thus, people are capable of acknowledging the potential affective benefits of working with a positive advisor, but nonetheless still predict they would select an expert advisor with low positivity. Finally, considering perceived reciprocity, participants did not feel more obligated to select the positive advisor.

## Study 4B

### Method

We aimed to recruit 200 participants via MTurk service and retained a total of 216 were retained in the study (79 women;  $M_{\text{age}} = 35.81$ ,  $SD = 11.15$ ) after excluding those who failed the attention check, as per our preregistered criteria. We analyzed the data both with and without these participants and found statistically similar results.

Participants were first asked to imagine meeting with two potential financial advisors that would assist them with their long-term financial planning. While Study 4A operationalized expertise as domain-specific expertise, Study 4B operationalized expertise as general expertise and varied average Return on Investment (ROI) percentages of potential advisors. In the low expertise variance condition, the expert advisor had an ROI of 9% and the positive advisor had an ROI of 7%. In the high expertise variance condition, the expert advisor had an ROI of 15% while the positive advisor had an ROI of 7%. In both conditions, the positive advisor was described as being warm and enthusiastic throughout the conversation, expressing enthusiasm about working together, while the expert advisor was described as being pleasant and happy to work with, but less strongly positive than the positive advisor. Participants then completed the same measures as in Study 4A.

Table 3  
Evaluations of the Coaches by Condition in Study 4A

Measure	Condition							
	Low expertise variance				High expertise variance			
	High positivity <i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )	High expertise <i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )	Paired <i>t</i>	Effect size	High positivity <i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )	High expertise <i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )	Paired <i>t</i>	Effect size
General expertise	5.83 (1.13)	5.86 (1.13)	−0.21	−0.03	6.11 (0.91)	5.84 (1.15)	2.20*	0.26
Domain-specific expertise	3.98 (1.64)	6.15 (1.32)	−10.33**	−1.44	2.83 (1.64)	6.43 (0.92)	−16.60**	−2.68
Expressed positivity	6.21 (1.06)	4.91 (1.26)	9.82**	1.11	6.38 (0.72)	5.07 (1.13)	10.10**	1.37
Perceived excitement	5.77 (1.11)	4.96 (1.38)	5.29**	0.64	5.87 (0.98)	5.11 (1.15)	5.75**	0.70
Perceived fun	5.53 (1.16)	5.02 (1.50)	3.09**	0.38	5.73 (1.12)	5.17 (1.36)	3.73**	0.45
Happiness	5.97 (1.03)	4.94 (1.31)	7.94**	0.86	6.11 (0.82)	5.17 (1.27)	6.15**	0.87
Liking	5.42 (1.15)	5.35 (1.30)	0.49	0.06	5.65 (1.17)	5.40 (1.16)	1.41	0.21
Commitment	5.23 (1.31)	5.63 (1.45)	−2.15**	−0.29	5.35 (1.40)	5.74 (1.18)	−1.98†	0.30
Career facilitation	4.96 (1.29)	5.77 (1.27)	−4.97**	−0.63	4.89 (1.41)	5.77 (1.01)	−4.37**	−0.71
Reciprocity	3.44 (1.83)	3.77 (2.03)	−1.71†	−0.17	3.24 (1.92)	4.18 (2.21)	−4.33**	−0.45

†  $p < .10$ . \*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ .

Table 4  
Evaluations of the Advisors by Condition in Study 4B

Measure	Condition							
	Low expertise variance				High expertise variance			
	High positivity <i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )	High expertise <i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )	Paired <i>t</i>	Effect size	High positivity <i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )	High expertise <i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )	Paired <i>t</i>	Effect size
General expertise	5.22 (1.06)	6.16 (0.79)	−8.99**	−1.00	4.87 (1.06)	5.91 (0.97)	−8.09**	−0.45
Domain-specific expertise	4.94 (1.07)	6.13 (0.94)	−11.08**	−1.17	4.00 (1.26)	5.81 (1.07)	−12.48**	−1.53
Positivity	6.09 (1.09)	4.91 (1.14)	7.26**	1.05	5.88 (1.20)	4.51 (1.10)	8.85**	1.18
Perceived excitement	5.95 (1.06)	4.39 (1.39)	9.31**	1.25	5.56 (1.26)	4.23 (1.35)	7.75**	1.01
Perceived fun	5.67 (1.25)	4.19 (1.44)	7.85**	1.09	5.20 (1.37)	3.78 (1.33)	8.24**	1.04
Happiness	5.82 (1.14)	4.67 (1.25)	7.13**	0.95	5.44 (1.23)	4.42 (1.21)	6.29**	0.83
Liking	5.65 (1.16)	5.07 (1.09)	3.50**	0.51	5.31 (1.20)	4.81 (1.13)	3.06**	0.42
Perceived commitment	5.72 (1.15)	5.77 (1.10)	−0.32	−0.04	5.17 (1.36)	5.53 (1.08)	−2.17*	−0.29
Career facilitation	5.30 (1.08)	6.16 (0.91)	−2.78**	−0.85	4.41 (1.16)	5.76 (1.06)	−9.65**	−1.20
Reciprocity	3.25 (2.00)	3.67 (2.20)	−2.02*	−0.20	2.99 (1.91)	3.55 (2.13)	−2.96**	−0.27

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ .

## Results

See Table 4 for the means, standard deviations, statistical tests, and effect sizes for all measures. In both conditions, the expert advisor was rated as having more general expertise than was the positive advisor,  $t_s > 8.09$ ,  $p_s < .001$ . In both conditions, the positive advisor was rated as significantly more positive than the expert advisor,  $t_s > 7.26$ ,  $p_s < .001$ .

Regarding the main dependent measure, participants in both low and high expertise variance conditions were more likely to predict that they would select the expert advisor over the positive advisor (76.85 and 85.18%, respectively),  $\chi^2 > 31.15$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $w > .18$ . There was no effect of the expertise variance manipulation on predicted choices of advisors,  $\chi^2 (1, N = 216) = 2.44$ ,  $p = .118$ ,  $w = .34$ .

Assessing the exploratory measures, participants again did not anticipate that the positive advisor would be more committed to advancing their goals, and they again expected that the positive coach would be less likely to facilitate their career goals. Moreover, participants reported that the positive coach would be more fun to work with, and that they liked them more. Lastly, participants did not feel more obligated to select the positive advisor. These results again suggest that people do acknowledge potential affective benefits of working with a positive advisor, but that they are not inferring increased commitment, nor do they seem to feel obligated to reciprocate the expressed positivity by selecting the advisor.

Taken together, the results suggest that, even when there is small variance in expertise among advisors, individuals are still more likely to predict that they would select the expert advisor over the positive one. Thus, in a situation closely paralleling our field data in Study 3, we find that people are failing to predict the influence of expressed positivity on advisor selection.

## Study 5

The primary goal of Study 5 was to more directly test whether the discrepancy between prediction and actual advisor selection is indeed the result of a prediction error. That is, when predicting their future decisions, individuals do not adequately forecast the

importance of positivity during in-the-moment advisor selection decisions. To test this idea, we used a well-established paradigm used to assess forecasting errors (e.g., Epley & Dunning, 2000; Gilbert, Pinel, Wilson, Blumberg, & Wheatley, 1998; Kermer, Driver-Linn, Wilson, & Gilbert, 2006) and randomly assigned participants to either a prediction or selection condition. We then compared the relative differences between expressed positivity and expertise: the two characteristics that significantly affected advisor selection in Study 3. We hypothesized that participants in the prediction condition would rely on expressed positivity significantly less than expertise as in our prediction studies (Studies 1, 2, and 4) while those in the selection condition would rely on expressed positivity to an equal or greater degree than expertise, as in the selection study (Study 3).<sup>5</sup>

## Method

We used a different domain for advice that was shown to be associated with career success: interpersonal skills at the workplace (e.g., Côté & Miners, 2006; Wayne & Liden, 1995). As we changed the advisor domain, we first conducted a pretest to ensure the validity of our revised paradigm and measures (see online supplemental materials). For the main study, we recruited 194 full-time employees via MTurk service (90 women;  $M_{\text{age}} = 37.53$ ,  $SD = 10.49$ ). We determined the sample size to provide adequate power,  $1 - \beta > .80$ , to detect a medium effect,  $r = .30$ .

Participants were asked to complete a “Social Skills Assessment Questionnaire” and were randomly assigned to either a prediction or selection condition. Specifically, participants in the prediction condition read the questionnaire with four items assessing their social skills (e.g., “Tell us about a time where you persuaded someone to take your side on an issue.”). They were then told to take a few moments to think about how they would answer each question. By contrast, participants in the selection condition com-

<sup>5</sup> It is possible that in Study 3, the time pressure built in the setting might trigger a sense of urgency in advisees that may increase the likelihood of selecting on expressed positivity. Thus, we attempted to remove the time pressure and ensured participants that they have sufficient time to make their decision, to increase generalizability of our findings.

pleted the questionnaire by writing answers to the four questions (cf., Epley & Schroeder, 2014; Levine & Cohen, 2018; Milkman, 2012).

Participants in both conditions then read about the potential advisors: an industry of professionals dedicated to helping people improve their social skills. They read about potential advisors and their four advising philosophies: expertise, experience, honest feedback, and expressed positivity. They were then asked to rank those potential advisors based on these philosophies. In the *prediction* condition, participants were asked to imagine they would work with one of the potential advisors and rank which advisor they would select in this situation. In the *selection* condition, participants were informed that they were going to be matched with an advisor in real time to give them advice and feedback on their interpersonal skills based on their answers to the questionnaire. We also told them that there were a number of advisors available at the moment; thus, all attempts would be made to match participants with their top choices of coach. We utilized features on the survey platform (e.g., pop-up chat windows, a loading icon) to increase the feelings of realism.

Lastly, participants completed various demographic questions, an attention filter, and a funneled debrief. No participants indicated any suspicion of our design.

## Results

We conducted planned comparisons between expertise and expressed positivity based on our findings from Study 3. To test the two-cell design comparing independent condition differences among dependent measures within conditions, we performed separate Wilcoxon signed-ranks test within each condition (Field, 2005). In the *prediction* condition, replicating previous results in Studies 1 and 2, positivity ( $M = 2.94$ ,  $SD = 1.13$ ) was ranked as significantly less important than expertise ( $M = 2.10$ ,  $SD = 1.03$ ),  $Z = -4.54$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $r = -.30$ . In the *choice* condition, replicating previous results in Study 3, positivity ( $M = 2.63$ ,  $SD = 1.25$ ) and expertise ( $M = 2.28$ ,  $SD = 0.99$ ) were not ranked significantly different,  $Z = -1.62$ ,  $p = .105$ ,  $r = -.12$ .<sup>6</sup>

Taken together, Study 5 attempted to reconcile the results from the prediction studies (Studies 1, 2, and 4) showing that expressed positivity was universally preferred less than other competence-based characteristics, with the results from the selection study (Study 3) showing expressed positivity predicted advisor selection to the slightly greater degree than expertise. The statistical equivalence of expertise and positivity in the *selection* condition, but not the *prediction* condition, provides tentative evidence that this effect is driven by a prediction error whereby individuals do not adequately forecast the power of expressed positivity in shaping advisor selection decisions. Study 5 did not perfectly replicate the effect sizes seen in Study 3, most likely because of the fact that Study 3 consisted of much higher stakes decisions. Nonetheless, we believe Study 5 adds internal validity to our findings by replicating the results in a lower stakes, experimental setting. By putting people into a situation where they were to receive immediate, and perhaps threatening, advice and feedback about a personally relevant domain, we were able to increase their preference for an advisor who would express positivity toward them.

## Study 6

The primary goal of Study 6 was to explore the performance consequences of selecting an advisor on the basis of expressed positivity versus expertise. Throughout Studies 1 through 5, an implicit assumption is that advisor expertise may lead to higher levels of performance (as compared with expressed positivity). In Study 6, we recruited individuals who are interested in improving their singing skills and provided them with advice from advisors with higher (vs. lower) expressed positivity and with higher (vs. lower) expertise, and examined whether there is a difference in the degree of singing improvement between the conditions. The critical outcome measures were participants' improvement in performance and interest in receiving additional feedback from the advisors. Given the lack of evidence in the previous literature regarding the immediate impact of expressed positivity and expertise, we preregistered exploratory, competing hypotheses ([https://osf.io/u3avq/?view\\_only=76632fc7577f4f759c0d1816f5169c89](https://osf.io/u3avq/?view_only=76632fc7577f4f759c0d1816f5169c89)).

## Method

We recruited 195 participants (144 female; 1 unreported;  $M_{age} = 21.74$ ,  $SD = 4.07$ ) from a subject pool at a private university in the United States. We attempted to recruit as many participants as possible per cell in 17 days.<sup>7</sup> Eight participants were removed from the sample because of failure to sing the song ( $N = 3$ ) or poor or lost recording ( $N = 5$ ). To ensure that singing improvement was a relevant goal of participants (e.g., Fishbach, Friedman, & Kruglanski, 2003), we explicitly advertised the study to only recruit individuals who had an interest or experience in singing. Despite the advertisement, 26 participants reported that they "never sing." Thus, we report analyses excluding these participants, but we analyzed the data both with and without the excluded participants and found similar results.

Upon arrival to the laboratory, a research assistant brought each participant to a sound proof laboratory room and started the audio recording. Participants first reported beliefs about their singing skills and performance on the upcoming task, and affective states toward the task (e.g., "nervous," "excited"). Next, participants listened to the song that they would be singing, *Do not Stop Believin'* by Journey (Glee cast version), which is one of the most popular karaoke songs and has been used in previous research on singing performance (Brooks, 2014). Participants sang the first 120 s of the song, until the end of the line: "somewhere in the night." We chose this cut off for the sake of brevity and also because this line represents a challenging, but coachable, vocal

<sup>6</sup> One alternative explanation is that, rather than positivity gaining more prominence during choice, people weigh all factors more uniformly in choices. That is, predictions may be more lexicographically weighted in the direction of those factors that people think they ought to select on (e.g., expertise), but that when people choose, they tend to weight all factors more uniformly. If this were true, we would expect any low-weighted attribute to be given more weight when making a choice. Counter to this possibility, honest feedback—the second lowest ranked attribute in the prediction condition—did not differ in its rankings ( $p = .598$ ) between the two conditions.

<sup>7</sup> We attempted to recruit as many participants as possible per in 10 days. However, one day was canceled because of a snowstorm and one day had poor turnout because of an impending holiday; therefore, we received seven additional days in the laboratory at a later date.



sequence. After the first singing task, participants were told that they would receive feedback about their performance from an advisor. We utilized a timer animation to heighten the realism of the study.

Participants were randomly assigned to one of four advisor conditions in a 2 (expressed positivity: higher vs. lower)  $\times$  2 (expertise: higher vs. lower) between-subjects design. Participants first received the positivity manipulation, which was again adapted from the language used by coaches on *The Voice*. In the higher-positivity condition, participants were told, "Great job. You have a great voice! That was a great rendition of the song. Everyone—certainly myself included—would love to work with you and you have great potential." In the lower-positivity condition, participants were told, "Good job. You have a good voice. That was a decent rendition of the song. With some tweaks you can improve." Next, participants received the expertise manipulation. For the expertise manipulation, we sought advice from professional musicians with different levels of *domain-specific* expertise (as in Study 3 and 4A) and provided this advice to the participants in each condition.<sup>8</sup> In the higher-expertise condition, a professional vocalist provided tips on how to improve performance. In the lower-expertise condition, a professional guitarist provided equivalent advice (see [online supplemental materials](#) for the full feedback, as well as pretest results supporting the effectiveness of these manipulations and ruling out potential confounds). After receiving this feedback, participants were asked to think about what they plan to do differently in the next round and then complete the same singing task.

After the second singing task, participants first rated their interest in receiving further feedback from their advisor. We also asked them to rate their advisor on perceived expertise (general and domain-specific), positivity, affective evaluations (satisfaction and liking), effectiveness (performance improvement and helpfulness), and expected investment. We then assessed beliefs about their performance and skills in singing, affective states during the second singing task, and overall enjoyment with the task.<sup>9</sup> The results of these additional variables are available online ([online supplemental materials](#), p. 12). Lastly, all participants provided demographic information.

## Results

**Manipulation checks.** First, a 2  $\times$  2 analysis of variance (ANOVA) revealed a main effect of our expertise manipulation on perceptions of advisors' domain-specific (singing) expertise,  $F(1, 157) = 25.06, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .14$ . Participants in the higher-expertise condition ( $M = 5.13, SD = 1.17$ ) rated the advisor significantly higher in singing expertise than did participants assigned to the lower-expertise condition ( $M = 4.09, SD = 1.44$ ). Neither the positivity manipulation or the Positivity  $\times$  Expertise interaction effect reached significance,  $F_s < .03, p_s > .866$ . Likewise, a 2  $\times$  2 ANOVA revealed an effect for our positivity manipulation,  $F(1, 157) = 12.69, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .08$ . Those in higher-positivity condition ( $M = 5.94, SD = 1.16$ ) rated their advisor significantly higher in expressed positivity than did those with the lower-positivity condition ( $M = 5.31, SD = 1.09$ ). Neither the expertise manipulation or the interaction effect reached significance,  $F_s < 2.29, p_s > .133$ . These results suggest that we successfully manipulated expertise and positivity.

**Advisor evaluation.** We then analyzed participants' willingness to receive further feedback from their advisor. A 2  $\times$  2 ANOVA then revealed a significant main effect for expertise on willingness to receive further feedback,  $F(1, 156) = 12.99, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .08$ . Participants with advisors with higher expertise ( $M = 5.16, SD = 1.53$ ) reported stronger desires to receive more feedback in the future than those with advisors with lower expertise ( $M = 4.27, SD = 1.56$ ). No other effects emerged,  $F_s < .43, p_s > .516$ .

**Vocal performance.** Two blind coders who were professional singers rated Time 1 and Time 2 vocal performances across the four dimensions—overall quality, pitch, tempo, and enthusiasm—on a 5-point scale ( $-2 = \text{very poor}$ ,  $0 = \text{average}$ ,  $2 = \text{very good}$ ). Interclass correlation coefficient (ICC) for the average measures of the coders demonstrated high reliability for pitch (ICC = .84), tempo (ICC = .77), enthusiasm (ICC = .80), and overall quality (ICC = .81).

We conducted repeated measures 2  $\times$  2 ANOVAs for Time 1 and Time 2 ratings of the four dimensions. No significant effects emerged for pitch,  $F_s < 1.54, p_s > .218$ , tempo,  $F_s < 1.25, p_s > .267$ , or enthusiasm,  $F_s < 1.54, p_s > .216$ . Regarding overall quality, there was a significant effect of advisor expertise,  $F(1, 157) = 4.16, p = .043, \eta_p^2 = .03$ . That is, while participants on average improved over time ( $\Delta$  across all conditions = .22), those with the higher-expertise advisor improved at higher rates ( $\Delta$  high expertise = .30). Expressed positivity and the interaction between expertise and positivity was not significant,  $F_s < .90, p_s > .342$ . While this represents a small effect size, we believe that this is worth interpreting given its within-subjects nature and the fact that vocal performance is not an easy variable to change in a short period of time (Clark & Lisboa, 2013; Watkins & Scott, 2012).

Thus, our results revealed a significant within-participant performance improvement for participants who received advice from an advisor with higher expertise in singing. This represents a key tension between expertise and expressed positivity. While it feels good to work with positive advisors, they might not be most effective in improving performance, suggesting that the prediction error observed in the present work may be costly for performance.

## General Discussion

Nobody pursues goals alone. People seek help and advice from those around them. An advisor who provides support and advice throughout one's career can be particularly beneficial for achieving long-term goals. Despite mounting evidence on the importance

<sup>8</sup> To ensure the validity of our expertise and positivity conditions, we first completed two pretests of this advice. In the first pretest ( $N = 244$ ), we successfully manipulated positivity ( $t(242) = 2.54, p = .012$ ) and positivity was unrelated to perceptions of expertise ( $t(242) = 1.02, p = .310$ ). In our second pretest ( $N = 148$ ), after some revisions to our expertise measures, we successfully manipulated expertise related to singing specifically ( $t(146) = 2.39, p = .018$ ) and expertise was unrelated to perceptions of positivity ( $t(145) = -0.59, p = .432$ ).

<sup>9</sup> Throughout the study we asked various measures multiple times to see if our manipulations influenced participant's perceptions of their performance (e.g., sung well, have high levels of skill, better than average effects, and confidence as a singer). Repeated measures 2  $\times$  2 ANOVAs did not reveal any significant effects for these measures, suggesting that these self-perceptions are not affected by our expertise and positivity manipulations in this dataset.

of having advisors (Gibbons, 2004; Sparrowe, Liden, Wayne, & Kraimer, 2001), little is known about how people select their advisors. We found that the predictions people make about which advisor characteristics they will rely on to make their decisions are often not used in practice. That is, while people tend to predict positivity expressed by their advisors as the least important characteristic to rely on (Studies 1, 2, 3, and 5 *prediction* condition), expressed positivity has a strong influence on their actual decision-making (Studies 4 and 5, *selection* condition). Furthermore, this reliance on expressed positivity may have negative long-term performance consequences (Study 6): Positive advisors may make us feel good, but they may not help us get better.

## Contributions

The findings make several contributions to the advice literature. First, this research responds to numerous calls to broaden the conceptualization of advisors (Cross et al., 2001; Horowitz et al., 2001; Schlosser & Gelso, 2001; Whitemore et al., 2000) by investigating relational aspects of advice-seeking and taking. That is, while previous work has mostly treated advice-seeking and taking as a one-off decision involving minimal or no interaction, we examined how people build a relationship with their advisors. We found that some of the traditional cues that people use for taking an advisor's recommendations in one-time interactions (e.g., experience) are not predictive of choosing an advisor for a long-term relationship.

The current research also contributes to the literature by emphasizing the importance of examining both predictions and decisions in advice-seeking. We found evidence for a mismatch between people's stated preferences and their actual advisor selection decisions, which may be consequential for performance. For example, in Study 6, we created a situation parallel to many of the decisions we observed in Study 3 where contestants select an advisor who expresses a great deal of positivity but has relatively low domain-specific expertise in the type of music they perform. Participants who received advice from an advisor with lower expertise showed reduced performance improvements, compared with those receiving advice from an advisor with higher expertise. This finding is in line with research capturing the tension between gaining critical information that enables long-term improvement and seeking positive feedback that protects oneself from emotional costs (see Sedikides & Hepper, 2009 for review). While people recognize that positive feedback may have less utility for self-improvement, their in-the-moment decisions are often swayed by it (Ruttan & Nordgren, 2016). Therefore, if people rely on expressed positivity in advisor selection to the extent it leads to neglect of other advisor characteristics, they may be making decisions that are costly in the long run.

Moreover, our work highlights the importance of understanding the effect of social cues on advice-seeking decisions. While the traditional paradigms used in the advice research are often limited in their ability to examine social and behavioral cues that advisees may use when choosing advisors, our findings suggest that affective cues in particular can play a significant role in advisor selection. Despite having a wealth of information at their disposal, people tended to choose their advisor based on the expressed positivity from potential advisors. Considering how often important interpersonal decisions (e.g., hiring job candidates) rely on

"soft" criteria such as positive affect (Godart & Mears, 2009; Rivera, 2015), it is important to understand the role of social cues in advisor selection.

Lastly, our results contribute to the related literature on mentorship (Hunt & Michael, 1983; Kram & Isabella, 1985; Ragins, Cotton, & Miller, 2000). Similar to advice literature, mentorship literature has mostly focused on the individual traits of mentors that are associated with healthier mentor-mentee relationships and better performance outcomes (Cohen, Steele, & Ross, 1999; Sansone, Sachau, & Weir, 1989). For example, researchers have examined how mentors' expertise (Ragins, 1997), mentoring experience (Levinson, 1978) and certain personality traits, such as agreeableness and extraversion (Waters, 2004), make them more effective at mentoring. Despite a focus on the consequences of mentor attributes, there has been surprisingly less research on mentor selection. The current work helps bring these two literatures together by broadening the definition of advisor, and by explicating the factors that bring advisees and advisors, and potentially mentees and mentors, together in a long-term relationship.

## Limitations and Future Directions

Despite our multimethod approach, there are limitations with the current research that suggest directions for future research. First, though we found initial evidence that higher expertise was the biggest predictor of performance improvement, future research should examine how different advisor dynamics relate to performance over time. For instance, it could be that positivity has a more distal effect (e.g., via sustained effort over time) that we were unable to capture in our laboratory experiment.

Moreover, we have argued that the inconsistencies in predictions and selections of advisors are driven by a prediction error, whereby participants fail to anticipate the impact of receiving expressions of positivity in-the-moment. There might be some additional factors at play that would be worth investigating further. Perhaps, people also construe the tension between expressed positivity and other characteristics as a want versus should, self-control dilemma. That is, individuals might be aware that they *should* choose competence-based traits, but end up choosing expressed positivity for the immediate pleasure. Predictions are inherently hypothetical, as they involve estimates about what may or may not happen (e.g., Trope, Liberman, & Wakslak, 2007) and, thus, people may anticipate exerting higher self-control when making a hypothetical choice (e.g., Loewenstein, 1996). Future research should examine whether individuals indeed perceive expressed positivity as temptation that would provide a short-term gain, but long-term cost (Hofmann, Schmeichel, & Baddeley, 2012) and whether they experience self-control conflict when choosing an advisor (Hur, Koo, & Hofmann, 2015; Shea, Davisson, & Fitzsimons, 2013).

It may also be interesting to integrate the current work with leader-member exchange (LMX) theory (e.g., Dansereau, Graen, & Haga, 1975). According to LMX, favorable treatment by a leader often leads the followers to feel obligated to "pay back" the leader. It is possible that expressed positivity from a prospective advisor functions similarly, such that advisees feel obligated to reciprocate by selecting them as advisors. In the current research, we did not find evidence of increased feelings of obligation to advisors higher in expressed positivity. We did find mixed evi-

dence that higher positivity advisors were liked more. We note that liking or feelings of positivity toward an advisor still fits with a prediction-error framing. Feelings of positive affect either in general or toward a specific advisor (or feelings of “chemistry” generated by positivity; Eastwick & Finkel, 2008) may still be discounted when making predictions.

Methodologically, we used rank order scales to provide a strong test of how people compare and weigh different characteristics (see the personal values literature for similar justifications; e.g., Reynolds & Jolly, 1980). While this allowed us to pit different characteristics against each other, there is a potential drawback to ranking items: It is difficult to know how participants are encoding the different characteristics. For example, perhaps people imagine a narrower range of positivity than of expertise and, thus, may rank positivity higher when making predictions. This interval question encouraged us to use finer-grained measures of advisor characteristics (Study 3) and manipulate the variance of expertise between advisors (Study 4), and we find that our results generalize across these different measurement approaches. Even when we manipulated the intervals between advisor expertise in Study 4, this had no effect on preferences. This suggests while ranking data may mask some information about preferences, the effect is robust to different ways of assessing advisor preferences.

Finally, another interesting possibility is that these effects are driven by the features of multiattribute choices, or choices where options have more than one attribute that vary in quality (e.g., Einhorn & Hogarth, 1981; Payne, 1982). It is possible that people respond differently to multiattribute choices when making predictions versus making a choice. When people predict how they would select an advisor, they might make predictions that are more lexicographically weighted, whereby few attributes (e.g., expertise) are prominently weighted over others. Whereas when actually selecting, people might make decisions that are more uniformly weighted, in which more attributes are weighed equally (e.g., expertise, positivity, and experience). If this is true, then *all* lower ranked attributes in predictions should achieve more prominence for choice, but only expressed positivity differed between the prediction and selection conditions in Study 5, which suggests that affective cues will uniquely be given more weight in selection. Nonetheless, future work exploring decision weights among attributes under conditions of predictions versus choice could shed more light on this possibility.

### Implications for Advisors and Advisees

This research has practical implications for both potential advisors and advisees. First, managers hoping to advise or collaborate with their ideal candidates might benefit from using the strategy of expressing positivity about their abilities and potentials. Although expertise and experience are important cues in one-time advice scenarios and in performance, this research suggests expressing positivity, through offering genuine compliments or communicating enthusiasm for working together, can further attract the desired candidates especially during in-the-moment decisions. While explicit persuasion tactics such as reciprocity and social proof have been well examined (see Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004 for review), expressed positivity may serve as a powerful, and perhaps more subtle, form of persuasion in the interpersonal context. This is not to say that expertise does not matter, and ideally this research

suggests that advisees should be high in both expertise and positivity, especially during recruitment. Moreover, this research serves to inform potential advisees about the affective impact of expressed positivity, which can potentially guide them away from more qualified or appropriate advisors in the moment. Given the prediction-behavior gap documented in this research, advisees should consider specific choice architecture nudges (e.g., checklists, preranking of choices) to keep their decision-making in line with their long-term goals.

### Summary

“I just had to go with my heart, and when he said he felt so blessed and honored that I was here, and that was just where I wanted to go,” said Michelle Brooks Thompson, an artist competed on *The Voice*, explaining how she made her choice. The current research highlights the disconnect between predictions about what makes someone a good advisor and actual decisions about whom to select as an advisor: Advisor selection heavily relies on positivity expressed by advisors, but most people do not see its impact when predicting their choices. That is, despite having a wealth of information about potential advisors, oftentimes choosing whom to seek advice from comes down to a simple question: Does this person seem happy to have me?

### Context

The authors developed the idea by observing the theoretical and practical gap: how we praise the importance of having a good advisor, without much understanding of how we actually choose one. Among academics, when the National Science Foundation asked the “breakthrough” scientists what the most important factor for their success was, the answer was almost uniformly the “intimate association with a great inspiring teacher.” Then, how do people choose this important figure? The authors examined beliefs and decisions about advisor selection, based on expertise in self-regulation and prediction errors. The first listed author has examined self-control conflicts between short-term pleasures and long-term goals, upon which this work builds to investigate the conflict between positivity and competence signals from advisors. The second listed author has published work on how people navigate the tradeoffs in processing self-threatening feedback that enables long-term improvement versus avoiding short-term emotional costs. This work extends this tension to a relational domain. The third listed author has published work showing how goals and emotions drive relationship formation. This work extends our knowledge of microprocesses individuals use when choosing relationship partners.

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