Motivated Advice Seeking:

Are Advice Seekers Trying to Be More Accurate?

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Abstract

Prior research has assumed that people seek advice to improve their decisions. Across seven studies, we identify a different motive: people often seek advice to validate their preferred alternative. Instead of seeking impartial advice, advice seekers choose advisors and solicit advice in ways that are likely to elicit preference-congruent recommendations. We also show that advice seekers judge preference-congruent advice to be more useful, and that receiving preference-congruent advice boosts their confidence in their decision and their satisfaction with the advice they received. In contrast to the prevailing view of advice as a tool to improve decision accuracy, we show that advice seeking is often a motivated process influenced by the advice seeker's desire to obtain preference-congruent recommendations.

Keywords: Advice, Advice Seeking, Decision Making, Judgment

> *I seek the advice that I think I'm going to get. … If I want to indulge in this bad behavior, I call a person I know who regularly indulges in that and is not going to say, "You know better."*
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> —Dax Shepard, *Armchair Expert* (2025)

People frequently encounter difficult decisions with significant consequences. From selecting a career path to making a hiring decision to choosing a spouse, people can incur substantial costs for making a poor choice. Yet, they often lack the information or experience to know what decision to make (Fischhoff & Broomell, 2020; Hofmann et al., 2009; Weick et al., 2005). Given the costs of making poor decisions and the well-documented benefits of advice for improving decisions, it is not surprising that people frequently ask others for advice (Bonaccio & Dalal, 2006; Lim et al., 2020; Locander et al., 1979; Rader et al., 2017; Weick et al., 2005).

Reflecting this idea, existing advice scholarship has conceptualized advice as a process to help advisees make better decisions (Bonaccio & Dalal, 2006; Lim et al., 2020; Rader et al., 2017). In fact, a critical assumption in existing work is that people seek advice to improve their decisions (Rader et al., 2017). This assumption is embedded in the dominant experimental paradigm used to study advice, which measures the extent to which advisees incorporate external input when incentivized to make an accurate estimate (e.g., *how much money is in a jar*, Sniezek & Buckley, 1995).

In contrast to how advice has been conceptualized and studied in prior work, we propose that people routinely pursue a very different motive in addition to accuracy when they seek advice. Specifically, we argue that individuals frequently seek advice to gain reassurance and build confidence in their preferred option. This motive has been overlooked by the advice literature, in part, because of the estimation tasks that scholars have used to study advice. These estimation tasks involve simple predictions with objectively correct answers and low personal stakes (e.g., estimates of the amount of money in a jar or the population of a city; Bonaccio & Dalal, 2006; Rader et al., 2017).

In contrast, many practical dilemmas—such as whether to quit a job, spend money on a vacation, or report a colleague's misconduct—involve complex, emotional, and meaningful trade-offs that lack clear or objective standards with which to gauge accuracy. Because of these trade-offs, some options have greater psychological salience or emotional appeal than others, leading people to develop preferences over their alternatives (Bazerman et al., 1998; Loewenstein, 1996; Trope & Liberman, 2003). For example, people often face decisions where they must decide between options that offer immediate gratification (e.g., quit a job, spend money on a vacation, or avoid reporting a colleague's misconduct) and options that better serve long-term goals (e.g., gain valuable experience, save money, or stop unethical behavior; Bazerman et al., 1998; Loewenstein, 1996; Milkman et al., 2008).

Even when people develop preferences, however, they often lack confidence to make a decision (Fischhoff & Broomell, 2020; Loewenstein, 1996; Tversky & Shafir, 1992). In these cases, people may seek advice not to improve the accuracy of their decision but instead to build confidence in their preferred choice. In some cases, a decision maker's preferred option may be the best option. In other cases, however, a preferred option may reflect an incomplete understanding of the alternatives or simply reflect a short-term desire (e.g., in want-should dilemmas; Bazerman et al., 1998; Loewenstein, 1996; Milkman et al., 2008). In these cases, a motivated process that elicits preference-congruent advice may build confidence without improving decision quality.

In our studies, we investigate *whom* people ask for advice, *how* people ask for advice, and *how satisfied* people are with the advice they receive. We report results from seven studies that investigate advice seeking in incentivized decision tasks as well as real-life dilemmas, including analyses of dilemmas posted on Reddit (a popular online discussion platform). Across our studies, we find evidence that people engage in motivated advice seeking: Advice seekers choose advisors who they believe will give them preference-congruent advice and ask for advice in ways that elicit preference-congruent advice. Moreover, we find that people prefer preference-congruent advice to preference-incongruent advice and find preference-congruent advice to be more useful.

Our investigation makes several novel contributions. First, our work fundamentally advances our

understanding of motivated reasoning. In contrast to prior research that has conceptualized motivated reasoning as an intrapsychic process, we study motivated reasoning as a *social* process. Specifically, whereas prior work has shown that people choose information sources and interpret evidence in motivated ways, we show that people engage in a motivated social process where they co-create information as they gather and elicit it from others in motivated ways. Additionally, in contrast to prior work which has focused on individuals acting alone, we show that other people can play an active role in an individual's motivated decision making: Advisors both recognize advice seekers' preferences and strive to provide preference-congruent advice. Rather than conceptualizing motivated reasoning as an individual decision process, our work shows that motivated decision making is also a powerful social process.

Second, we make an important contribution to the advice literature. This literature has assumed that the purpose of advice is to improve decision quality. We identify an additional motive for advice seeking. We show that people frequently seek advice to receive reassurance and build confidence in a preferred option. By accounting for a preference for gaining confidence and reassurance, we expand our understanding of *why* people ask for advice, *how* people ask for advice, *whom* people ask for advice, and the nature of the advice people *receive*.

Third, in contrast to the substantial advice literature that has focused on advice in estimation and forecasting tasks, we consider many different practical advice contexts. By studying naturalistic advice requests, including advice requests posted in the "r/Advice" subreddit, we gain a far richer understanding of the types of issues that people routinely ask for advice about, how they ask for advice, and what advice they receive in response. Further, by studying advice in practical, consequential dilemmas (instead of numerical estimation tasks), we broaden the scope of advice research and contribute methodologically to the way advice is studied.

Fourth, our investigation highlights the importance of studying advice seeking and advice giving together. A substantial literature has explored advice taking and an emerging literature has investigated advice seeking, but research has not investigated the interplay between advice seeking and giving. Our findings reveal that advice is co-created rather than simply transmitted from advisor to advisee (as it has

been traditionally studied). Our findings underscore the importance of studying advice as a social decision process, and we contribute to the growing advice literature by showing how advisors respond to the cues embedded in advice seekers' requests.

Advice

Consistent with prior work, we define advice as a "recommendation about a course of action that seeks to influence an advisee's future decision making" (Gordon & Schweitzer, 2024, p. 2). Advice can substantially improve decision quality (Larrick & Soll, 2006; Rader et al., 2017; Surowiecki, 2004), and the extant advice literature has broadly assumed that people seek advice to improve their decision accuracy (Bonaccio & Dalal, 2006; Lim et al., 2020; Rader et al., 2017). Reflecting this assumption, a substantial literature has explored advice taking, and specifically, how people rely on the judgments of others to improve the accuracy of their decisions (see Bonaccio & Dalal, 2006 and Rader et al., 2017 for reviews).

The advice-taking literature has used an experimental paradigm known as the Judge-Advisor System to explore the extent to which people rely on other people's advice when accuracy is explicitly incentivized (Rader et al., 2017; Sniezek & Buckley, 1995). In this paradigm, a participant makes an initial quantitative estimate (e.g., an estimate of the population of a city, the number of coins in a jar, the weight of a person), receives an unsolicited estimate from another person (the "advisor"), and then makes a revised estimate. Typically, both the participant's initial and second estimates are incentivized for accuracy. Across different investigations, participants estimate different quantities, receive varying "advice" values, and are given different information about their "advisor" (Rader et al., 2017).

The Judge-Advisor System paradigm is extremely well-suited for studying how people rely on other people's estimates to fulfill accuracy motives. By comparing a participant's initial judgment with their final judgment, researchers can precisely quantify the extent to which an individual incorporates another person's estimate into their own estimate and compare it to an optimal strategy. An important, robust finding in this literature is that people underutilize advice and make less accurate estimates and forecasts as a result (Larrick & Soll, 2006; Rader et al., 2017; Yaniv & Kleinberger, 2000). When making

a second judgment, participants weigh their own, initial estimate more than their advisor's estimate—a phenomenon termed egocentric discounting (Yaniv & Kleinberger, 2000). This finding represents a puzzle, since simply averaging one's own estimate and (an unbiased) advisor's estimate would improve accuracy by cancelling idiosyncratic errors (Clemen, 1989; Larrick & Soll, 2006; Rader et al., 2017; Surowiecki, 2004; Yaniv & Kleinberger, 2000).

Using the Judge-Advisor System paradigm, researchers have also identified a number of key factors that influence when people are more or less likely to rely on others' estimates. For example, people are more likely to incorporate advice from advisors who are more confident and trustworthy (Sniezek & Van Swol, 2001), or who have demonstrated trust in the decision-maker or others (Haran & Weisel, 2025). Additionally, people are less likely to rely on estimates when they themselves feel more powerful (Tost et al., 2012) or when they suspect that their advisor may be intentionally biased (Haran & Shalvi, 2020).

The Judge-Advisor System has enabled us to develop a deep understanding of how people use others' estimates to improve their accuracy. Several factors, however, may limit the generalizability of these findings to how advice works in practice. First, this literature has largely overlooked a critical antecedent to advice taking—advice seeking—and in doing so, failed to consider that advice seekers may be driven by motives other than improving accuracy. Second, a key assumption of the Judge-Advisor System is that the advice people receive is independent from the advice seeker's own estimate and preferences. This second assumption is critical for advice seekers to derive meaningful benefits from using advice (Armstrong, 2001; Clemen, 1989; Rader et al., 2017; Reif et al., 2024; Surowiecki, 2004).

Our work challenges these key assumptions embedded within the Judge-Advisor System literature. First, we show that advice seekers are routinely motivated by the desire for reassurance, a motive different from accuracy. Second, we assert that the advice-seeking process can substantially influence—and potentially bias—the advice people receive. As a result, in practice, the advice-seeking process may fail to improve decision quality as much as prior work has presumed.

Advice Seeking

A growing literature has begun to explore the advice-seeking process. This work has found that advice seekers often struggle to discern advice quality and that advice seekers often select advisors based on characteristics other than their competence, such as their proximity or familiarity (Brooks et al., 2015; Gordon & Schweitzer, 2024; Hofmann et al., 2009; Levari et al., 2022; Porath et al., 2015; Yaniv & Kleinberger, 2000; Zhang et al., 2022). Relatedly, research in strategic management identifies the importance of social networks in advice seeking and shows that CEOs and top management teams often rely on accessible, advantageous, or trusted contacts rather than the most knowledgeable advisors (Alexiev et al., 2010; Cross et al., 2001; Lim et al., 2020; McDonald & Westphal, 2003). Recent work by Reif et al. (2024) investigates *how* people ask for advice and considers the possibility that advice may be biased by the way people elicit it. They find that, in an effort to appear more competent, people often provide anchors when requesting advice.

Interestingly, despite considering the possibility that advice seekers may fail to seek high quality, unbiased advice, these investigations have continued to assume that the primary goal advice seekers pursue when they seek advice is boosting accuracy. We show that this is often not true. Our work builds on prior research that has identified features of advice that advisees find appealing (Dalal & Bonaccio, 2010; Goldsmith & Fitch, 1997; Levari et al., 2022). For example, related qualitative work found that advisees care about whether or not advice is solicited, how informative advice is, and whether or not advice is delivered in a caring way (Goldsmith & Fitch, 1997).

Advice Giving

Importantly, rather than studying advice seeking in isolation, our investigation also considers how advice seekers' motives influence the advice they receive. Specifically, we look at how advisors respond to cues embedded in advice seekers' requests. We build on prior work that has investigated advisors and found that advisors care about the extent to which their advice is used (Ache et al., 2020; Blunden et al., 2019; Zhang & North, 2020) and may have their own self-interested motives for giving advice (Eskreis-Winkler et al., 2018, 2019; Schaerer et al., 2018).

Important, related work has shown that people are attuned to others' emotional needs when they

provide advice and feedback (Haran et al., 2022; Schaerer et al., 2018; Schaerer & Swaab, 2019). For example, Haran et al. (2022) found that, when the risk of misleading an advisee is low, advisors will inflate their expressions of confidence to help the advisee reach a decision. Their findings suggest that advisors may tailor their advice to support an advisee's decision-making process. We build on this generative and important idea and show that advisors both discern advice seekers' preferences and align their recommendations with their assessments of these preferences.

Advice and Confirmation

There are two different motives people can pursue when evaluating evidence and forming beliefs: (1) the motive to be accurate, and (2) the motive to arrive at a specific (typically self-serving) conclusion (Hart et al., 2009; Kunda, 1990). When people are motivated to be accurate, they attend to relevant information, employ deep information processing, and engage in deliberate decision making. In contrast, when people are motivated to arrive at a specific conclusion (e.g., "I am a good person," "The earth is flat"), they often engage in motivated, biased cognitive processes aimed at bolstering a particular belief. In addition to biased information processing, people may also engage in behaviors that reinforce their desired beliefs. For example, rather than objectively processing information, people may selectively search for and attend to evidence that supports a desired belief (*confirmation bias;* Hart et al., 2009; Hill et al., 2008; Nickerson, 1998; Oeberst & Imhoff, 2023).

We build on prior work and conceptualize advice as a motivated social decision process. In contrast to prior work that has focused on solitary information search and cognitive processing, we consider a social and dynamic process that influences not only *whom* people ask for advice, but also *how* people ask for advice, how advice requests are *perceived*, and what advice advisors *provide*. By considering advice as a social and dynamic process, we show that advice is co-created by both motivated advisees and advisors.

As a social process, advice seeking and advice giving are likely to be influenced by impression management (see Ache et al., 2020; Blunden et al., 2019; Brooks et al., 2015; Gordon & Schweitzer, 2024; Zhang & North, 2020). Impression management concerns may influence the advice process in

many ways. For example, when advice seekers disregard advice they are given, they risk damaging their relationship with the advisor who gave it (Ache et al., 2020; Blunden et al., 2019; Zhang & North, 2020). As a result, motivated advice seeking may carry interpersonal risks if advice seekers and advisors are misaligned in their goals for the exchange.

Moreover, previous research on the confirmation bias has found that the desire to reach a particular conclusion can be curbed by activating the motive for accuracy (Hart et al., 2009; Kunda, 1990; Zimmermann, 2020). Specifically, accuracy incentives introduced before belief formation—such as monetary rewards for accurate judgments or the expectation of having to justify a belief—significantly reduce the motive to support a desired belief, and in turn, curb biased cognitive and behavioral strategies (Kruglanski & Freund, 1983; Lerner & Tetlock, 1999; Prior et al., 2015; Zimmermann, 2020).

In the context of decision making (rather than belief-formation), accuracy incentives are typically strong. Consequently, when deciding what choice to make, the motive for accuracy may drive the search for information. If so, people should seek impartial advice, since impartial advice can substantially improve decision quality (Larrick & Soll, 2006; Rader et al., 2017; Surowiecki, 2004). This reasoning aligns with a fundamental assumption in the advice literature, which has presumed that people are motivated to make more accurate decisions when they seek advice.

Even though people face strong interpersonal and accuracy incentives for seeking unbiased advice, we show that, in practice, people systematically seek advice that reinforces their preferred choice. We show that the motivation to reinforce a pre-existing preference shapes both whom people turn to for advice and how they frame their advice requests. This tendency persists even when accuracy incentives are strong.

Trade-offs and Preferences

Unlike the stylized forecast and estimation tasks used in the dominant experimental paradigm in advice research, many of the practical decisions people encounter are complex, consequential, and characterized by trade-offs (Fischhoff & Broomell, 2020; Shaddy et al., 2021; Shafir et al., 1993). For instance, choices such as whether to attend college and whether to renovate a kitchen require a careful

evaluation of the costs and benefits of each option. Decision makers need to consider a broad range of factors, including whether the time and money invested will be worthwhile, the difficulty of completing the task, the risk involved, which option offers greater comfort and meaning, and the potential social consequences of their actions.

Decision makers often face substantial uncertainty regarding which choice is best (Tversky & Shafir, 1992; Shafir et al., 1993). At the same time, some choices are more appealing than others, leading individuals to develop preferences (Bazerman et al., 1998; Fischhoff & Broomell, 2020). In many cases, an individual's preferred option may not benefit them in the long run (Bazerman et al., 1998; Loewenstein, 1996; Milkman et al., 2008). For example, quitting smoking, investing time in professional development, or leaving a toxic relationship may yield better long-term outcomes, but these choices may be aversive in the short-term. When facing short-term versus long-term dilemmas, known as want-should dilemmas, people often develop a preference for the short-term (want) option despite knowing that the long-term (should) alternative would ultimately be more advantageous. Because people facing want-should dilemmas are often aware that their preferences are often at odds with the best choice (Milkman et al., 2008; Bryan et al., 2010), preferences may ultimately play a role in reducing rather than enhancing decision-making confidence.

To facilitate decision making and reduce feelings of uncertainty, people may seek to build confidence in a particular alternative. One effective way to boost decision-making confidence is to receive advice (Heath & Gonzalez, 1995; Patalano & LeClair, 2011; Savadori et al., 2001; Soll et al., 2022). The beneficial effects of advice on decision-making confidence, however, are likely to be moderated by whether or not the advice aligns with the decision maker's preferred option (Hart et al., 2009; Kunda, 1990; Nickerson, 1998). Consistent with this idea, Soll et al. (2022) found that advice that is congruent with a preferred option increases decision-making confidence. Informed by prior work, we postulate the following:

H1: Preference-congruent advice boosts an advice seeker's confidence.

H2: Advice seekers prefer preference-congruent advice.

Decision makers likely benefit from the enhanced confidence associated with preference-congruent advice. Low decision-making confidence can be highly aversive, causing anxiety, fear of regret, and decision-paralysis (Bell, 1982; Lovallo & Kahneman, 2000; Tversky & Shafir, 1992). As a result, people facing challenging decisions will be motivated to build confidence in a decision.

Cross et al. (2001) found suggestive evidence for this in a series of interviews they conducted with managers. At critical points in their project, the managers often turned to their colleagues to validate their proposed solutions. Building on this finding, we postulate that people facing difficult decisions will engage in advice-seeking behaviors to boost confidence. Specifically, we expect people to seek preference-congruent advice.

If decision makers are primarily motivated to improve the quality of their decisions, we expect them to seek out well-informed, unbiased advisors and to request advice in a neutral and objective way. However, if decision-makers are motivated to build confidence in their preferred alternative, we expect them to seek out advisors who they expect will support their pre-existing preference and to frame their advice requests in a way that favors their preferred option. Specifically, we propose that:

H3: When seeking advice, people are more likely to choose an advisor whom they expect to recommend their preferred option.

H4: When seeking advice, people frame their advice request in a way that favors their preferred option.

We suggest that, in practice, the advice-seeking process is often guided by a motive to boost reassurance, rather than a motive to improve accuracy. Of course, people may seek reassurance for an option that is both their preferred option and the best option. However, in other cases, people may seek reassurance for a preferred option that is not the best option.

Overview of Studies

Across six pre-registered studies and one exploratory study, we find that people engage in a motivated advice-seeking process to elicit preference-congruent advice. In Studies 1A, 1B, and 2, participants consider their own highly consequential dilemmas and make hypothetical advice-seeking

decisions. In Studies 1A and 1B, we find that advice seekers choose advisors who they expect to offer preference-congruent advice and frame their advice requests in ways that favor their preferred option. In Study 2, we examine why people seek preference-congruent advice. We find that preference-congruent advice boosts decision confidence and that people think it is more useful than preference-incongruent advice.

In Studies 3A and 3B, we replicate these findings with an incentivized paradigm. We find, once again, that people seek advice that aligns with their preferences and that receiving preference-congruent advice bolsters their confidence. In Study 4, we extend our investigation of how people ask for advice to a naturally occurring advising context. We analyze advice seeking on Reddit and show that when people ask for advice, they do so in a way that systematically privileges one option over the other. Specifically, we show that when people ask for advice, they telegraph a clear preference to potential advisors through cues supplied in the content and framing of their requests. Advisors, in turn, recognize the advisee's preference and strive to provide preference-congruent advice. In Study 5, we show that advisors can accurately identify the option the advice seeker prefers and that advisors are more likely to recommend the option that they think the advice seeker wants.

In several of our studies, participants and Reddit users asked for advice about real-life dilemmas. Table 1 provides examples of advice requests from these studies. For all of our studies, we report all measures, manipulations, and exclusions. For our six primary studies, the sample sizes, hypotheses, conditions, analyses, and exclusion criteria were pre-registered and determined prior to data collection and analysis. Our materials, data, code, and pre-registrations for all studies are posted on OSF.

Study 1B (Prolific)
Hey LB, I was hoping to get some advice on this project I'm working on. As you know I recently became the team lead on the platform team and one of my first tasks is to build out a new data pipeline for one of our clients. We have some existing pipelines that I could just copypasta over and make the adaptations needed to get the project done, but all those existing pipelines aren't very performant or scalable. I've been thinking that we should build out the new pipeline differently, but it'll take a large amount of testing and experimentation to make sure the implementation is right. In the long term though I think it'll make a lot of our work easier. But we've been under a lot of pressure from management recently to just push more product out and I'm worried that we'll start seeing more layoffs. I was hoping to get your take on how I should approach this?

Well my dear I am facing an impossible decision. Due to my injury and ongoing medical bills I am just barely surviving day to day. My parents have helped cover some expenses the last few months but cannot afford to help long term. They offered to cover one final big expense of moving back to wisconsin. Including renting a trailer to have my belongings moved back and transportation for myself and my cats. Then I could live expense free in their basement until I am healed and able to work again. As you know I left wisconsin to escape a toxic cycle I was in with friends and addiction and wyoming has been wonderful for keeping me clean and away from those bad temptations. I fear the strain of living with my parents again (who are both emotionally toxic to each other) will push me off my sobriety cliff and I will end up back in my own ways.
Study 2 (Prolific)
Hey, I've been having a rough time deciding something at work. We have to pick a teammate for this huge, huge upcoming proposal. It's very important for us to win it, as it'll affect the trajectory of my company for the next year. On one hand, we have a partner who we have a history with and have gotten along well with, but their background for this proposal is a little weak. On the other hand, there's another partner who's strong in the area of this proposal, but we don't know them at all and they are rumored to be tough to work with. We can only choose one partner, as the decision is exclusive. Just wondering if you ever faced anything similar, and if you think history and knowing someone you work with is more important than qualifications and credentials, even if the group or people with better credentials are unknown and perhaps difficult? Just looking for some outside opinions, as I've been flipping back and forth between the two in my mind for a week now.
I am trying to figure out if we want a second baby or not. I just turned 34 years old so time is running out for me. And I would want them to be close in age to our first. However, I hated being pregnant and am worried about going through that again. Plus the newborn stage is so hard and takes a toll physically and mentally. Husband wants a second one but he's not the one that will be paying for it physically, mentally, and emotionally.
Study 4 (Reddit)
I am a security guard, and one of the most important things drilled into our heads is "Don't leave your post until your replacement arrives." So to the story, I work overnights (midnight to 10am). In middle of my sleep, around 6:30 pm (I normally sleep from 2pmish-10pmish) I get a phone call from my coworker, Art. He asks if I can come in 2 hours early so he can pick up his daughter from somewhere. I think about it and decide that I can't do it, because 12hrs (plus an hour and 1/2 drive) was not something I wanted to do on 4-5 hours sleep. I tell him no. Fast forward a few hours, I show up at my shift and he is nowhere to be found. The door to the security office is locked. I go around to the back entrance, which is normally unlocked to let managers at the business we guard go through. I am able to get in through it. At this point I am thinking he is in the bathroom, but after 10 minutes, I realize this probably isn't the case. I ask a few people if they have seen Art and they say they haven't seen anyone at the security desk for a little while. I decide to check the cameras. I skim through the camera logs and discover that he left at 11:30. Thirty minutes before I was scheduled to arrive. My first thought is to report him. But, I notice he left a notebook here. It was opened up to a page where he had some goals outlined that basically amounted to getting his life on the right track. SO that coupled with the fact that him leaving may have had something to do with his daughter, makes me hesitant to turn him in. Leaving one's post is a termination level offense. At the same time, there is a very small chance that our supervisor could find out that he left early without me mentioning it. In that case, i could get in trouble for not saying anything. tl;dr: Should I report a coworker (and possible cause him to lose his job) or should I be silent on the issue and hope the supervisor doesn't find out other ways?

My girlfriend (21 female) of 7 months has depression and its effecting our relationship a lot. (im 24 male) We stopped talking for a while because shes going under shit ton of stress and talking to me makes her too emotional(she starts crying and ignore me for days). I haven't heard of her the last six days and i don't even know why. Anyways, few days ago I harmed myself and its been confusing and shitty week for me, but im fine I managed to go to the hospital and get the help I need. Now, that i'm home and collecting my thoughts, is it safe to tell her about what I went through? I feel like it would be a burden on her and she would feel guilty for not being around. Is it normal to crave attention from her? I haven't told anyone that i wanted to kill myself. I told everyone that i had terrible food poisoning and i need to rest for few days. Any advices would be highly appreciated. Thanks

Table 1. Example advice requests from Studies 1B, 2, and 4.

Note: The procedures used in Study 1B and Study 2 were very similar. Participants identified a challenging dilemma they were currently facing, identified someone they knew well, then wrote out how they would ask this person for advice about their dilemma. The Study 4 advice requests were taken from the "r/Advice" subreddit.

Studies 1A and 1B

Studies 1A and 1B explore whom advice seekers ask for advice and how they ask for advice. In these studies, participants consider their own highly consequential dilemmas and make hypothetical advice-seeking decisions involving potential advisors they knew personally. We find evidence that people engage in advice-seeking behaviors aimed at eliciting preference-congruent advice. In Study 1A, we show that advice seekers select advisors that they think are more likely to recommend their preferred choice. In Study 1B, we show that advice seekers frame their requests in ways that favor their preferred choice. Both studies are pre-registered (Study 1A: https://aspredicted.org/jbh2-7b6f.pdf, Study 1B: https://aspredicted.org/fwvb-xvp2.pdf), and we report all measures, manipulations, and exclusions.

Study 1A

Method

Participants. We pre-registered a target sample size of 2400 participants and collected a sample of 2403 participants via Prolific. After pre-registered exclusions, we analyzed a sample of 1984 participants (54.64% female and 44.61% male; M_{age} = 38.83, SD_{age} = 13.03).

Procedure. We asked participants to identify a challenging, unresolved dilemma that they were currently facing. Participants briefly described their dilemma and identified their two options: Option A and Option B. Then, in a randomized order, we asked participants to write down the initials of two people

they know well that were uninvolved in and currently unaware of their dilemma: one person they would ask for advice about their dilemma and one person they would not ask for advice about their dilemma.

We then assigned participants to one of two conditions. They either answered questions about the person they would ask for advice, or they answered questions about the person they would not ask for advice. We asked the same questions in both conditions: How likely they would be to ask this person for advice (1: “Extremely Unlikely” to 7: “Extremely Likely”), which option they thought their potential advisor would recommend, and which of the two options they themselves preferred.

Results

Participants were significantly more likely to ask someone for advice when they thought that person would recommend their preference. See Figure 1. We conducted a two-sample t-test to compare the likelihood that participants would choose someone as their advisor as a function of whether or not they thought they would recommend their preferred option. We found that participants were significantly more likely to ask someone for advice when they thought that the person would recommend their preferred option ($M = 4.61$, $SD = 2.11$) than when they thought that the person would recommend the alternative option ($M = 3.21$, $SD = 2.06$), $t(1982) = 14.85$, $d = 0.67$, $p < 0.0001$.

Additionally, we compared the proportions of participants who predicted their advisor would recommend their preference across the two conditions using a two-proportion z-test. the proportion of participants who predicted their advisor would recommend their preference was significantly higher in the condition where participants considered the person that they were willing to ask for advice ($M = 0.71$) compared to the condition where participants considered the person that they were unwilling to ask for advice ($M = 0.40$), $z = 13.97$, $p < 0.0001$.

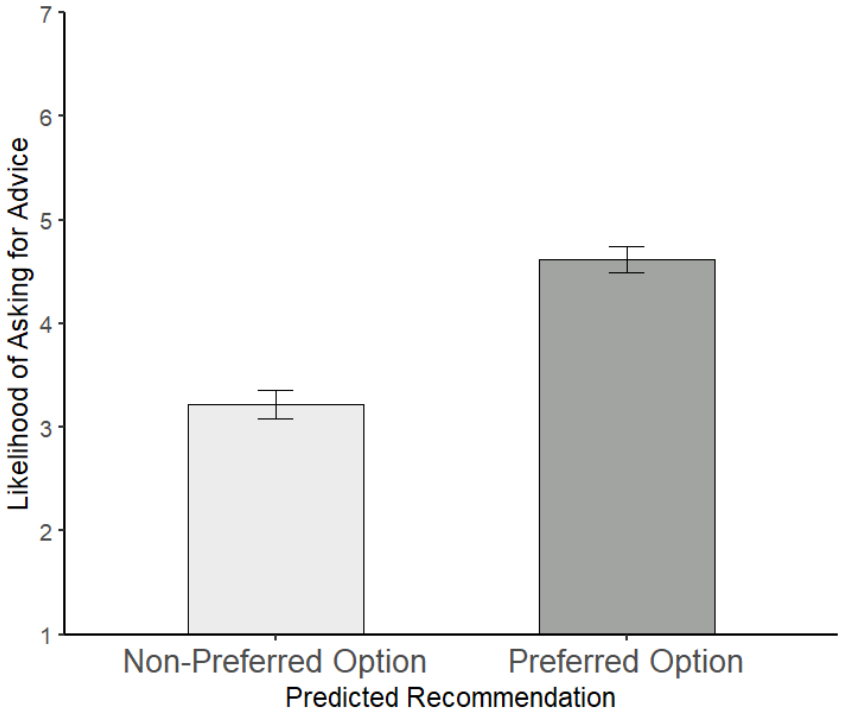

Figure 1. Participants were significantly more likely to ask someone for advice when they thought that person would recommend their preferred option, $p < 0.0001$ (Study 1A).

Note. Error bars indicate 95% confidence intervals.

Study 1B

Method

Participants. We pre-registered a target sample size of 1200 participants and had a final sample of 1205 participants recruited via Prolific. After pre-registered exclusions, we analyzed a sample size of 717 participants (59.27% female and 39.89% male; $M_{age} = 41.63$, $SD_{age} = 13.23$).

Procedure. As in Study 1A, we asked participants to think of a challenging dilemma they were facing at the time of the study. After describing their dilemma and summarizing their two options, participants listed the initials of someone they know who is unaware of (and uninvolved in) their dilemma. We then asked participants to write out how they would ask this person for advice about their dilemma. Refer to Table 1 for examples of advice requests from this study. After writing out their advice request, participants then identified their preferred choice and the strength of their preference.

They also answered several exploratory questions about their dilemma, including its perceived importance and difficulty, whether they had already asked for advice about it, their likelihood of seeking

advice about it in the future, and how much time they had spent considering it. Participants further indicated whether their dilemma had an objectively correct choice, selected the types of trade-offs their dilemma involved from a provided list, and rated how likely they would be to choose each of their two options before and after receiving different pieces of advice.

Following data collection, two independent raters who were blind to our experimental hypotheses coded participants' responses. For each advice request, the raters identified the number of reasons each participant provided for each of the two options, and the text that the participant used to discuss why they should select each of the two options. After completing this task separately, the raters resolved disagreements regarding the number of reasons participants provided for each option through discussion.

Results

Dilemmas

Before analyzing our data, we examined what sorts of dilemmas participants were writing about. We wanted to know (1) whether participants were writing about challenging and personally meaningful dilemmas, and (2) whether participants would be likely to seek and use advice about their dilemma. This step allowed us to verify that participants were identifying genuine dilemmas for which advice seeking was natural. To address these questions, we asked participants several additional questions about their dilemmas, and we report exploratory statistics of their responses below.

First, to assess the importance and difficulty of the dilemmas, we collected ratings from both participants and two independent raters. Participants rated their dilemmas as high in importance ($M = 5.16$, $SD = 1.54$) and difficulty ($M = 4.83$, $SD = 1.49$) on a 7-point scale. The independent raters provided similar assessments, with an average rating of 5.14 for importance ($SD = 0.92$) and 4.68 for difficulty ($SD = 0.94$), also on a 7-point scale. Further, participants had been actively thinking about their dilemmas for a considerable period of time. The median amount of time they had already spent contemplating their decision was six weeks, with a median of five days per week and 60 minutes per day devoted to considering their decision. These findings suggest that participants identified dilemmas that they found to be challenging and important.

Further supporting the idea that the dilemmas were challenging, 66.53% of participants reported that their dilemma did not have a clearly correct solution—that is, there was not an objectively "right" choice that most people would agree on prior to making the decision. We repeated our primary analyses separately for dilemmas with and without a clearly correct choice and found the same pattern of results (see Appendix A). Participants also identified the trade-offs present in their dilemma by selecting among a set of options. See Table 2. The trade-offs participants identified reflect dilemmas that were both consequential and complex (e.g., dilemmas that did not have an obviously correct solution).

Trade-off	**Percent**
One choice is beneficial in the short run while the other is beneficial in the long run.	39.2%
One choice is more comfortable while the other provides greater opportunities/more growth.	38.1%
One choice is more reasonable/practical while the other is more enjoyable.	30.7%
One choice involves significant risk but offers the possibility of a higher reward while the other involves less risk but offers a smaller reward.	25.5%
One choice is beneficial to you while the other is beneficial to someone else/others.	16.5%
One choice is morally right while the other is practically beneficial.	8.5%
Other	2.8%

Table 2. The percentage of participants selecting each of the trade-off options to describe their dilemma.

Note. Participants identified the trade-offs present in their dilemma by selecting from a set of options. Percentages add up to more than 100% because participants could select as many options as they wanted. On average, participants selected 1.61 options out of 7 (SD = 0.94). Participants who selected "Other" were asked to describe what other trade-offs were present in their dilemma.

Our findings also indicate that participants were willing to seek advice and were receptive to using it in their decision-making process. 72.38% of participants reported that they were somewhat likely, likely, or extremely likely to ask someone for advice about their dilemma. After receiving advice, participants also indicated that they would be more likely to select the option recommended to them, regardless of whether it aligned with their initial preference. Specifically, we compared participants' likelihood of selecting an option before and after receiving a recommendation from the person they identified at the beginning of the study. Participants rated their likelihood of selecting each option on a 7-point scale (from 1: Extremely Unlikely to 7: Extremely Likely) before and after imagining that they

received advice recommending each option. (Participants' pre- and post-advice likelihood assessments were separated by other questions, and we randomized the order in which participants imagined that they received the two pieces of advice.)

We found that participants were significantly more likely to select a given option after receiving advice recommending it, whether the recommendation was for their preferred option ($M_{\text{Before Advice}} = 5.30$, $SD_{\text{Before Advice}} = 1.11$, $M_{\text{After Advice}} = 5.48$, $SD_{\text{After Advice}} = 1.23$, $t(716) = 5.27$, $p < 0.0001$) or their non-preferred option ($M_{\text{Before Advice}} = 3.82$, $SD_{\text{Before Advice}} = 1.32$, $M_{\text{After Advice}} = 4.05$, $SD_{\text{After Advice}} = 1.31$, $t(716) = 5.33$, $p < 0.0001$). These results suggest that participants were not only open to seeking out and receiving advice but also using it–even when it contradicted their preference.

Primary Analyses

In their advice requests, participants provided significantly more reasons for selecting their preferred option than their non-preferred option. Similarly, participants used a greater proportion of their advice request to explain why they should select their preferred option compared to their non-preferred option. See Figure 2.

We estimated two linear mixed-effect regression models with participant-level random effects. For the first dependent variable, we used the number of reasons advice seekers gave for a given option. For the second dependent variable, we computed the proportional word count used to discuss why a given option should be selected. Both of our models included a variable indicating whether the option was the participant's preferred option as the independent variable.

Consistent with our prediction, we found that participants provided significantly more reasons in support of their preferred option ($\beta = 0.32$, $z = 4.17$, $p < 0.0001$). On average, participants provided 0.32 more reasons in support of their preferred option (2.76 v. 2.44; $\beta_0 = 2.44$, $z = 39.87$, $p < 0.001$). For ease of interpretation, we report linear mixed-effects regressions in the main text. In Appendix A, we estimate a Poisson mixed-effects regression (a model commonly used for count data) and show that the results are robust.

Additionally, we found that advice seekers used a greater proportion of their words to discuss

why they should select their preferred option ($\beta = 0.04$, $z = 4.89$, $p < 0.001$). On average, participants used 4% more of their total words to discuss their preferred option, (31.6% v. 27.6%; $\beta_0 = 0.27$, $z = 43.64$, $p < 0.0001$). Refer to Tables 3 and 4 for regression models that examine preference strength (from 1: "Somewhat Prefer" to 3: "Strongly Prefer") as a moderating factor.

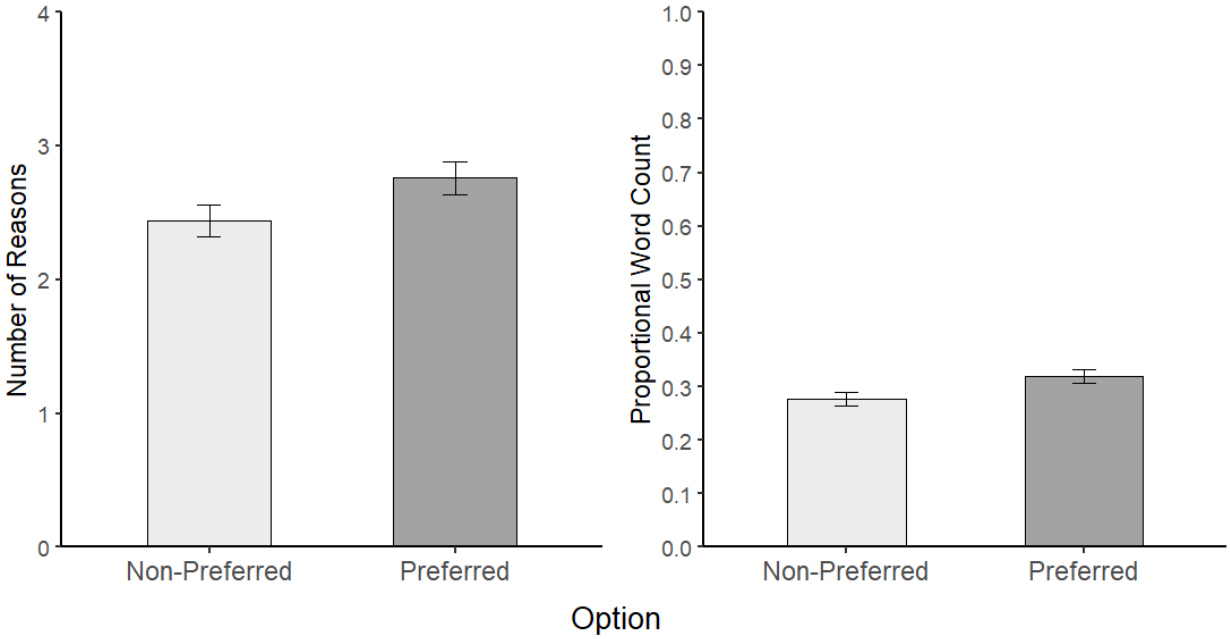

Figure 2. In their advice requests, participants provided more reasons for their preferred option and used more text to explain why they should select it (Study 1B).

Note. Error bars indicate 95% confidence intervals.

Following our pre-registered plan, we tested the robustness of our results for dilemmas that were both very important and challenging. For each dilemma, we had two independent raters rate how important or critical the consequences of the dilemma are. They also rated how difficult it would be to decide what decision to make if they were faced with the dilemma. Both were rated on a 7-point scale (1: "Not at All Important (Difficult)" to 7: "Extremely Important (Difficult)"). Our results were robust to restricting the sample to only those dilemmas for which the average importance and difficulty ratings were both greater than 4. See Tables 3 and 4.

	(1) Number of Reasons	(2) Number of Reasons (Dilemma Importance and Difficulty > 4)	(3) Number of Reasons
Preference (0, 1)	0.321 ****	0.291**	0.261 *
	(0.0763)	(0.0946)	(0.108)
Preference Strength = 2 (Prefer)			0.00358
			(0.137)
Preference Strength = 3 (Strongly Prefer)			-0.289
			(0.172)
Preference # Preference Strength = 2			0.00236
			(0.171)
Preference # Preference Strength = 3			0.345
			(0.214)
Constant	2.438 ****	2.625 ****	2.486 ****
	(0.0612)	(0.0749)	(0.0868)
Observations	1,434	1,030	1,434
Number of groups	717	515	717

Standard errors in parentheses
**** p<0.0001, *** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05

Table 3. Linear mixed-effects regressions predicting number of reasons.

Note. The dependent variable in the models is the number of reasons provided that support the option. Models (1) and (2) include whether the option is the participant's preferred option as the only predictor. Model (3) includes the strength of the participant's preference as well as an interaction between the two variables. While models (1) and (3) are estimated using the entire sample, model (2) is estimated using observations where dilemmas were determined to be highly important and difficult by averaging the ratings of two independent raters. All models include participant-level random effects.

	(1) Proportional Word Count	(2) Proportional Word Count (Dilemma Importance and Difficulty > 4)	(3) Proportional Word Count
Preference (0, 1)	0.0438 ****	0.0342 **	0.0348 **
	(0.00895)	(0.0105)	(0.0127)
Preference Strength = 2 (Prefer)			-0.00114
			(0.0141)
Preference Strength = 3 (Strongly Prefer)			-0.0400 *
			(0.0177)
Preference # Preference Strength = 2			-0.00691
			(0.0200)
Preference # Preference Strength = 3			0.0665 **
			(0.0251)
Constant	0.276 ****	0.289 ****	0.283 ****
	(0.00633)	(0.00746)	(0.00896)
Observations	1,434	1,030	1,434
Number of groups	717	515	717

Standard errors in parentheses

**** p<0.0001, *** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05

Table 4. Linear mixed-effects regressions predicting proportional word count.

Note. The dependent variable in the models is the proportional word count used to talk about why the option should be selected. Models (1) and (2) include whether the option is the participant's preferred option as the only predictor. Model (3) includes the strength of the participant's preference as well as an interaction between the two variables. While models (1) and (3) are estimated using the entire sample, model (2) is estimated using observations where dilemmas were determined to be highly important and difficult by averaging the ratings of two independent raters. All models include participant-level random effects.

Discussion

Studies 1A and 1B offer the first empirical evidence that people engage in motivated advice seeking. In Study 1A, we find evidence that people strategically select advisors who they think are likely to endorse their existing preference. These findings provide support for our third hypothesis. In Study 1B, we find that when people ask for advice, they do so in a heavy-handed way. They provide more reasons for their preferred option, and they use more text in support of their preferred option. Our results were robust to restricting our analysis to dilemmas that were high in importance and difficulty. These findings provide support for our fourth hypothesis.

Study 2

In Studies 1A and 1B, we find evidence that people engage in motivated advice seeking. In Study 2, we build on these findings in two ways. First, we establish that people value preference-congruent advice more than preference-incongruent advice. Specifically, we show that people are more satisfied after receiving preference-congruent advice compared to preference-incongruent advice, and that they perceive preference-congruent advice to be more useful. Second, we show that preference-congruent advice boosts advice seekers' decision confidence. This provides insight into why people value preference-congruent advice and why they are motivated to seek it. This study is pre-registered (https://aspredicted.org/484j-gm8y.pdf), and we report all measures, manipulations, and exclusions.

Method

Participants. We pre-registered and collected a sample of 600 participants via Prolific. After pre-registered exclusions, we analyzed a sample size of 549 participants (56.83% female and 41.71% male;

M_{age} = 39.96, SD_{age} = 13.43).

Procedure. As in Studies 1A and 1B, participants first identified a current, challenging dilemma. Participants described the dilemma and identified the two options. We then asked participants to list the initials of someone they know who was uninvolved in and unaware of their dilemma. Next, we asked participants to write out how they would ask this person for advice about their dilemma. Refer to Table 1 for examples of advice requests from Study 2.

After writing their advice request, participants completed two tasks in a randomized order. In one task, they identified which of the two options they preferred: Option A or Option B. In the other task, they responded to questions about how they would react if the person they identified recommended each of the two options. (We positioned the questions for Option A and Option B on separate pages, and we randomized the order in which we presented these pages.)

For this task, participants imagined that they received advice from their chosen person recommending a given option (either A or B). Participants assessed how satisfied they would be and how confident in their decision they would feel after receiving the advice. They also rated how useful they would find the advice. Each construct was measured using three items (Satisfaction: "How {satisfied, pleased, content} would you feel?", $\alpha = 0.94$; Confidence: "How {confident, secure, assured} would you feel in your decision?", $\alpha = 0.94$; Advice Usefulness: "How {useful, helpful, valuable} is this advice?", $\alpha = 0.93$). Participants rated the items, which were presented in a randomized order between participants, on a 7-point scale from 1: "Not at All" to 7: "Extremely".

Results

Consistent with our hypotheses, we found that participants felt more satisfied and more confident after receiving preference-congruent advice compared to preference-incongruent advice, and they also found preference-congruent advice to be more useful. See Figure 3.

For each dependent variable, we conducted a paired t-test to compare participants' ratings for preference-congruent and preference-incongruent advice. Participants were significantly more satisfied after receiving preference-congruent advice (M = 4.66, SD = 1.41) than after receiving preference-

incongruent advice (M = 3.14, SD = 1.48), t(548) = 21.13, d = 1.00, p < 0.0001. Additionally, participants were significantly more confident in their decision when they received preference-congruent advice (M = 4.55, SD = 1.42) than when they received preference-incongruent advice (M = 3.30, SD = 1.45), t(548) = 18.39, d = 0.81, p < 0.0001. Finally, participants also thought the advice was significantly more useful when they received preference-congruent advice (M = 4.84, SD = 1.27) than when they received preference-incongruent advice (M = 4.00, SD = 1.42), t(548) = 13.84, d = 0.61, p < 0.0001.

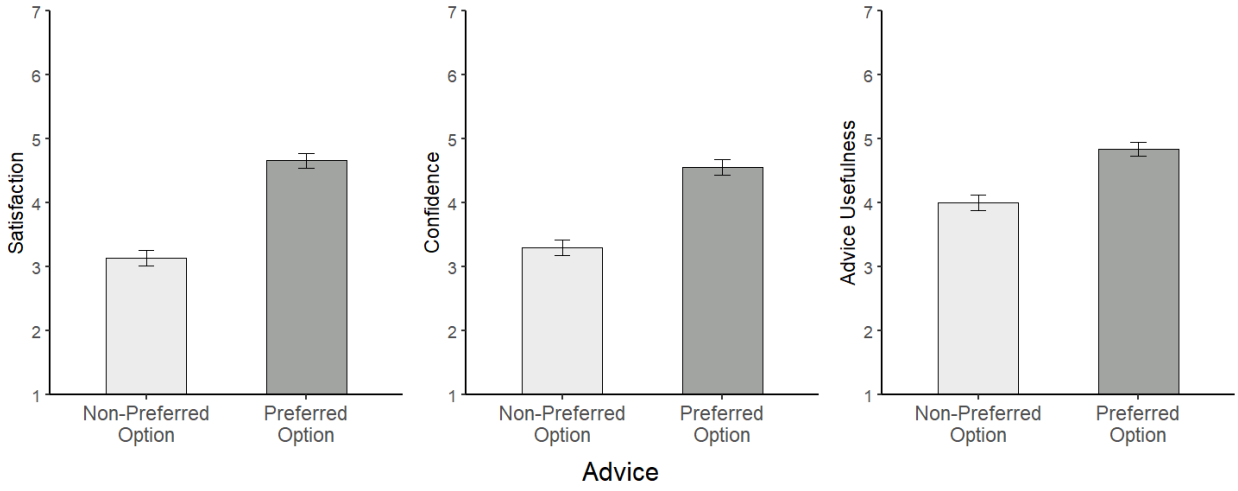

Figure 3. Preference-congruent advice increases satisfaction, decision confidence, and perceived advice usefulness compared to preference-incongruent advice, p < 0.0001 (Study 2).

Note. Error bars indicate 95% confidence intervals.

We also conducted a between-subjects analysis using each participant's response to the first piece of advice they evaluated. Across these analyses, we found the same pattern of results. See Appendix B. In Appendix B we also repeat our analyses separately for participants who indicated their preferred option before and after answering the questions about the two pieces of advice. We again find the same pattern of results.

Discussion

Consistent with our thesis, when participants imagined receiving preference-congruent (as opposed to preference-incongruent) advice, they reported that they would be more confident and more satisfied, and that the advice would be more useful. Results from this study support for our first and second hypotheses and offer insight into why people are motivated to seek preference-congruent advice.

Studies 3A and 3B

In Studies 3A and 3B, we extend our investigation using an incentivized advice-seeking paradigm. Consistent with our finding from Studies 1A and 1B, we find that people (1) select advisors who are likely to recommend their preferred choice, and (2) frame their requests in ways that favor their preferred choice. As in Study 2, we also find that participants perceive preference-congruent advice to be more useful than preference-incongruent advice, and that receiving preference-congruent advice boosts confidence. Both studies are pre-registered (Study 3A: https://aspredicted.org/px4b-y9qj.pdf, Study 3B: https://aspredicted.org/k3bc-btk2.pdf), and we report all measures, manipulations, and exclusions.

Study 3A

Method

Participants. We pre-registered and collected a sample of 800 participants via Prolific (57.27% female and 42.36% male; M_{age} = 40.66, SD_{age} = 13.22). There were no exclusions.

Procedure. In this study, we presented participants with two videos: a TED Talk about how to improve sleep and a compilation of funny cat videos. Participants answered two questions, which we presented in a random order. Participants indicated which video they would prefer to watch and rated the strength of their preference on a 7-point scale (1: “Strongly Prefer Video 1” to 7: “Strongly Prefer Video 2”). In addition, participants selected which video they would watch and answer questions about.

In this study, we randomly assigned participants to one of two conditions. In the Advice-Seeking condition, participants had the opportunity to ask another participant for advice about which video to watch before making their choice. In the No-Advice condition, participants made their choice without the opportunity to seek advice.

In the Advice-Seeking condition, participants saw the profiles of two potential advisors and chose which one to ask for advice. We informed participants that these advisors were randomly-selected participants who had watched the first two minutes of each video. In reality, we created the advisor profiles and advice, and every participant in the Advice-Seeking condition saw the same to advisor profiles.

The advisor profiles included their purported responses to specific questions. We crafted the responses for each advisor to signal a greater likelihood of recommending either the TED Talk about sleep or the funny cat video compilation. Specifically, Advisor A (the "likely TED Talk" advisor) appeared more likely to recommend the TED Talk about sleep, and Advisor B (the "likely cat video" advisor) appeared more likely to recommend the funny cat video compilation. We include the advisor profiles and links to the two videos in the Appendix C.

We conducted a pilot test to confirm that participants perceived the "likely TED Talk" advisor as more likely to recommend the TED Talk and the "likely cat video" advisor as more likely to recommend the cat video compilation. In the pilot study, participants viewed the profile of each of the two advisors and rated, on a 7-point scale, the likelihood that the advisor would recommend each of the two videos. The "likely TED Talk" advisor was perceived as significantly more likely to recommend the TED Talk ($M = 5.96$, $SD = 0.97$) than the "likely cat video" advisor ($M = 2.74$, $SD = 1.32$), $t(98) = 13.90$, $d = 3.39$, $p < 0.0001$. Conversely, the "likely cat video" advisor was perceived as significantly more likely to recommend the cat video compilation ($M = 6.34$, $SD = 0.72$) than the "likely TED Talk" advisor ($M = 3.02$, $SD = 1.19$), $t(98) = 16.93$, $d = 3.39$, $p < 0.0001$. This study is pre-registered (https://aspredicted.org/cz95-sd7j.pdf), and the full procedure and results can be found in Appendix D.

After selecting one of the two advisors, participants received advice from their chosen advisor. The "likely TED Talk" advisor recommended the TED talk, and the "likely cat video" advisor recommended the cat video compilation. After receiving advice, participants selected which of the two videos they would watch. Before watching the video, participants rated how confident they felt in their decision and how useful they found the advice they received (on a 7-point scale; 1: "Not At All" to 7: "Extremely"). Participants then watched their selected video and answered follow-up questions about the video.

Participants in the No-Advice condition selected which video they would watch without having the opportunity to ask for advice. As in the Advice-Seeking condition, participants in the No-Advice condition rated their decision confidence on a 7-point scale before watching the video. Finally, these

participants watched their selected video and answered a series of follow-up questions about it.

Results

Consistent with our preregistered hypotheses, advice seekers were significantly more likely to choose the advisor that was expected to recommend their preferred option. See Figure 4. Participants were also significantly more confident after receiving preference-congruent advice and rated preference-congruent advice as more useful. See Figure 5.

We conducted two-proportion z-tests to look at the relationship between video preference and advisor selection. We found that participants who preferred the cat video compilation were significantly more likely to ask the "likely cat video" advisor for advice (M = 0.78) than those who preferred the TED Talk (M = 0.27), $z = 9.92$, $p < 0.0001$. Conversely, participants who preferred the TED Talk were significantly more likely to ask the "likely TED Talk" advisor for advice (M = 0.73) than those who preferred the cat video compilation (M = 0.22), $z = 9.92$, $p < 0.0001$.

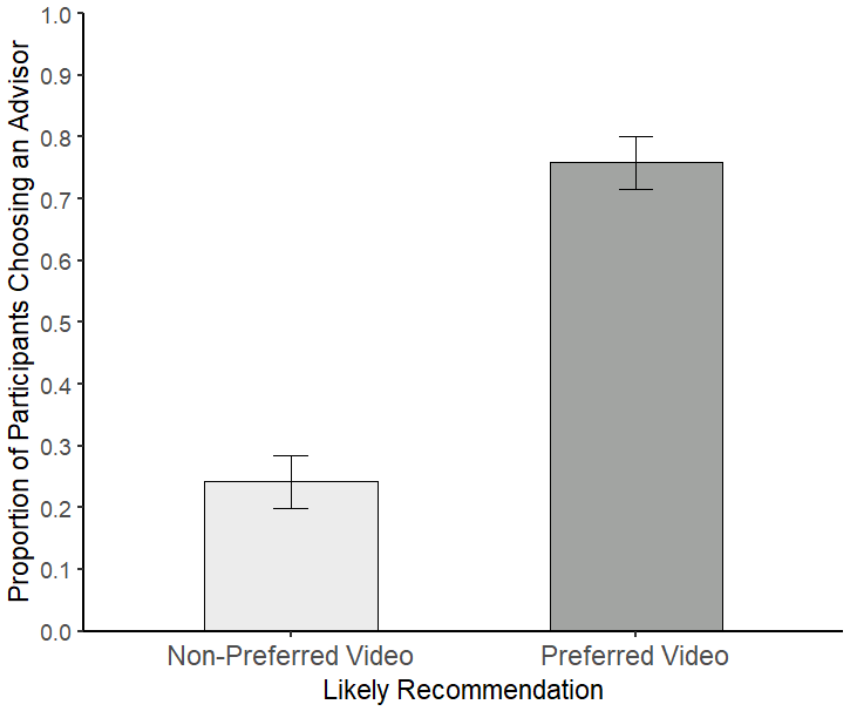

Figure 4. The proportion of participants asking the advisor who was likely to recommend their preference was significantly greater than the proportion of participants asking the advisor who was unlikely to recommend their preference, $p < 0.0001$ (Study 3A).

Note. Error bars indicate 95% confidence intervals.

Next, we conducted a logistic regression to examine the relationship between preference strength and advisor choice. The dependent variable was whether participants selected the "likely cat video" advisor (as opposed to the "likely TED Talk" advisor). The key predictor was preference strength, measured on a 7-point scale ranging from strongly prefer the TED Talk to strongly prefer the cat video compilation, with higher values indicating a stronger preference for the cat video compilation. We found that a greater preference for the cat video compilation significantly increased the likelihood of selecting the "likely cat video" advisor, $\beta = 0.50$, $z = 9.04$, $p < 0.0001$, $OR = 1.64$. Specifically, a one-unit increase in preference strength was associated with a 64% increase in the odds of selecting the "likely cat video" advisor (and a 39% decrease in the odds of selecting the "likely TED Talk" advisor).

Next, we examined whether receiving preference-congruent advice boosts decision confidence and whether participants perceive preference-congruent advice to be more useful than preference-incongruent advice. (Our analysis of decision confidence was exploratory and not pre-registered. In Study 3B, we replicate these findings using a slightly different study design.)

We conducted two-sample t-tests to compare decision confidence between participants who received preference-congruent advice, those who received preference-incongruent advice, and those who did not receive advice. We found that participants reported feeling significantly more confident in their decision after receiving preference-congruent advice ($M = 6.12$, $SD = 1.01$) compared to no advice ($M = 5.76$, $SD = 1.34$), $t(702) = 3.91$, $d = 0.30$, $p < 0.0001$, and compared to preference-incongruent advice ($M = 5.17$, $SD = 1.51$), $t(395) = 7.10$, $d = 0.83$, $p < 0.0001$. Moreover, participants reported significantly less confidence in their decision after receiving preference-incongruent advice than after not receiving advice, $t(497) = 3.81$, $d = 0.43$, $p = 0.0001$.

Finally, we conducted a two-sample t-test to compare perceived advice usefulness between those who received preference-congruent advice and those who received preference-incongruent advice. We found that participants who received preference-congruent advice ($M = 4.76$, $SD = 1.70$) thought the advice was significantly more useful than those who received preference-incongruent advice ($M = 3.52$, $SD = 1.79$), $t(395) = 6.13$, $d = 0.72$, $p < 0.0001$. Additional analyses for Study 3A can be found in

Appendix E.

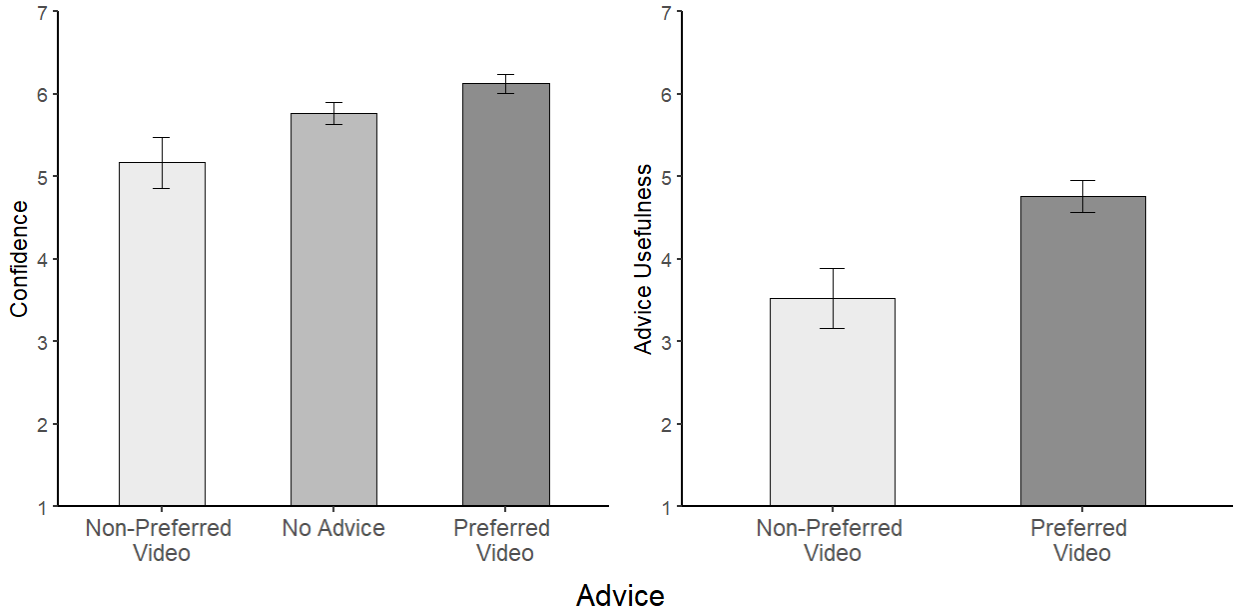

Figure 5. Preference-congruent advice increases decision confidence compared to preference-incongruent advice and no advice, and it is perceived as more useful than preference-incongruent advice, $p < 0.001$ for all comparisons (Study 3A).

Note. Error bars indicate 95% confidence intervals.

Study 3B

Method

Participants. We pre-registered a target sample size of 800 participants and collected a sample of 801 participants via Prolific. After pre-registered exclusions, we analyzed a sample size of 743 participants (53.58% female and 46.02% male; $M_{age} = 40.73$, $SD_{age} = 14.08$).

Procedure. The procedure for this study was similar to the procedure we used for Study 3A. Participants were introduced to two videos: a TED Talk on how to improve sleep and a compilation of funny cat videos. Then, in a randomized order, they indicated their preference (and strength of preference) and selected a video to watch and answer questions about. As in Study 3A, we randomly assigned participants were to either an Advice-Seeking condition or a No-Advice condition. The procedure for the No-Advice condition was identical to the procedure used in Study 3A. However, the procedure for the Advice-Seeking condition differed from the procedure used in Study 3A. Rather than choosing between two advisors, participants were paired with a single advisor, and we asked them to compose an advice

request to send to that advisor.

We informed participants in the Advice-Seeking condition that they had been randomly paired with another participant who had watched the first two minutes of both videos. We told participants that they would have the opportunity to ask this person for advice about which video to watch. As in Study 3A, however, the advisor was not a real participant.

To create their advice request, participants selected and arranged statements from a set of seven statements. Participants selected between one and seven statements and arranged them in whichever order they preferred. One statement was a neutral request for advice ("Which video should I watch?"). The remaining six statements provided reasons for selecting one of the two videos. Three of the statements contained a reason for selecting the cat video compilation, and three of the statements contained a reason for selecting the TED Talk. The reasons were designed not to provide the advisor with new information. See Table 5 for the list of statements.

Cat Video Compilation	TED Talk	Neutral
The funny cat videos would be more entertaining.	The TED talk would be more informative.	Which video should I watch?
Cat videos are lighthearted and amusing.	TED talks are practical and educational.	
The funny cat videos would provide comic relief.	The TED talk would provide tips for improving sleep.	

Table 5. The seven statements used to create advice requests in Study 3B.

Note. The statements are organized into columns according to whether they provided a reason for selecting the cat video compilation, provided a reason for selecting the TED Talk, or were neutral and did not provide a reason for selecting either video.

After composing their advice request, participants sent it to their advisor and received a response with their advisor's recommendation. The advice that a participant's advisor gave was determined by the relative number of reasons for the two videos included in the advice request. Specifically, if participants provided more reasons for one video than for the other, we provided participants with advice that recommended the video for which they had provided more reasons. If they provided an equal number of reasons for the two videos, we randomly recommended one of the two videos.

Results

Consistent with our pre-registered hypothesis, participants provided significantly more reasons for their preferred video than their non-preferred video in their advice requests. See Figure 6. Additionally, as in Study 3A, receiving preference-congruent advice boosted advice seekers' confidence and was perceived as more useful than preference-incongruent advice. See Figure 7.

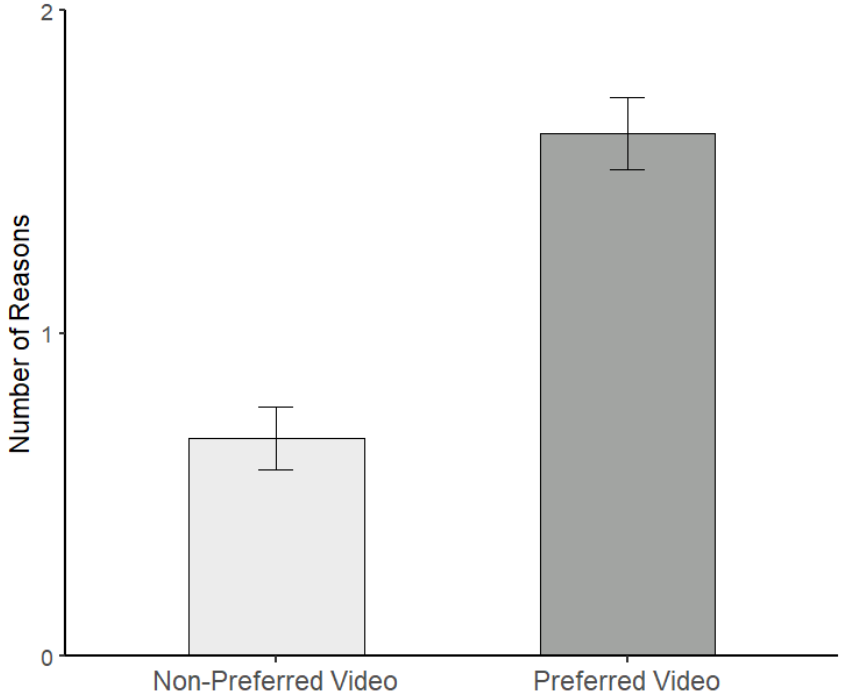

Figure 6. Participants included significantly more reasons for selecting their preferred video than their non-preferred video in their advice requests, $p < 0.0001$ (Study 3B).

Note. Error bars indicate 95% confidence intervals.

First, we estimated a linear mixed-effect regression model with participant-level random effects. The dependent variable was the number of reasons in the advice request for a given video. The independent variable indicated whether or not the video was the participant's preferred video. Consistent with our prediction, participants provided significantly more reasons in support of their preferred video ($\beta = 0.94$, $z = 15.64$, $p < 0.0001$). On average, participants provided 0.94 more reasons in support of their preferred option than their non-preferred video (1.61 v. 0.67; $\beta_0 = 0.67$, $z = 12.65$, $p < 0.0001$). In Appendix F, we show that the results are robust to a Poisson mixed-effects regression. In Table 6, we examine preference strength (from 1: "Somewhat Prefer" to 3: "Strongly Prefer") as a moderating factor.

	(1) Number of Reasons	(2) Number of Reasons
Preference (0,1)	0.944****	0.416***
	(0.0603)	(0.116)
Preference Strength = 2 (Prefer)		-0.185
		(0.141)
Preference Strength = 3 (Strongly Prefer)		-0.401**
		(0.133)
Preference # Preference Strength = 2		0.326*
		(0.153)
Preference # Preference Strength = 3		0.965***
		(0.144)
Constant	0.675****	0.910****
	(0.0533)	(0.107)
Observations	744	744
Number of groups	372	372

Standard errors in parentheses
**** p<0.0001, *** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05

Table 6. Regressions predicting number of reasons.

Note. The dependent variable in the models is the number of reasons provided that support a given video. Model (1) includes whether the option is the participant's preferred option as the only predictor. Model (2) includes the strength of the participant's preference as well as an interaction between the two variables. Both models include participant-level random effects.

For participants who provided an equal number of reasons for both videos, we hypothesized that the first reason in their request would signal their preferred video. To test this, we conducted a one-proportion z-test to assess whether the proportion of participants in this group whose first reason supported their preferred video was greater than 0.5. Consistent with our prediction, among participants who provided an equal number of reasons for the two videos, the proportion whose first reason supported their preferred video was significantly greater than 0.5, (M = 0.66, p = 0.0001).

Next, we examined participants' decision confidence and their perceptions of advice usefulness. Consistent with our pre-registered analysis plan, we conducted two-sample t-tests to compare decision confidence and perceived advice usefulness across different groups of participants. Participants who received preference-congruent advice reported significantly greater decision confidence (M = 6.12, SD = 1.14) than participants who did not receive advice (M = 5.77, SD = 1.29), t(643) = 3.58, d = 0.29, p = 0.0002, and participants who received preference-incongruent advice (M = 5.03, SD = 1.58), t(370) =

7.30, d = 0.86, p < 0.0001. Additionally, participants who received preference-incongruent advice reported lower decision confidence than those who received no advice, t(467) = 4.82, d = 0.55, p < 0.0001. We also found that preference-congruent advice was perceived as significantly more useful (M = 4.39, SD = 2.01) than preference-incongruent advice (M = 2.81, SD = 1.72), t(370) = 6.94, d = 0.82, p < 0.0001. Additional analyses for Study 3B can be found in Appendix F.

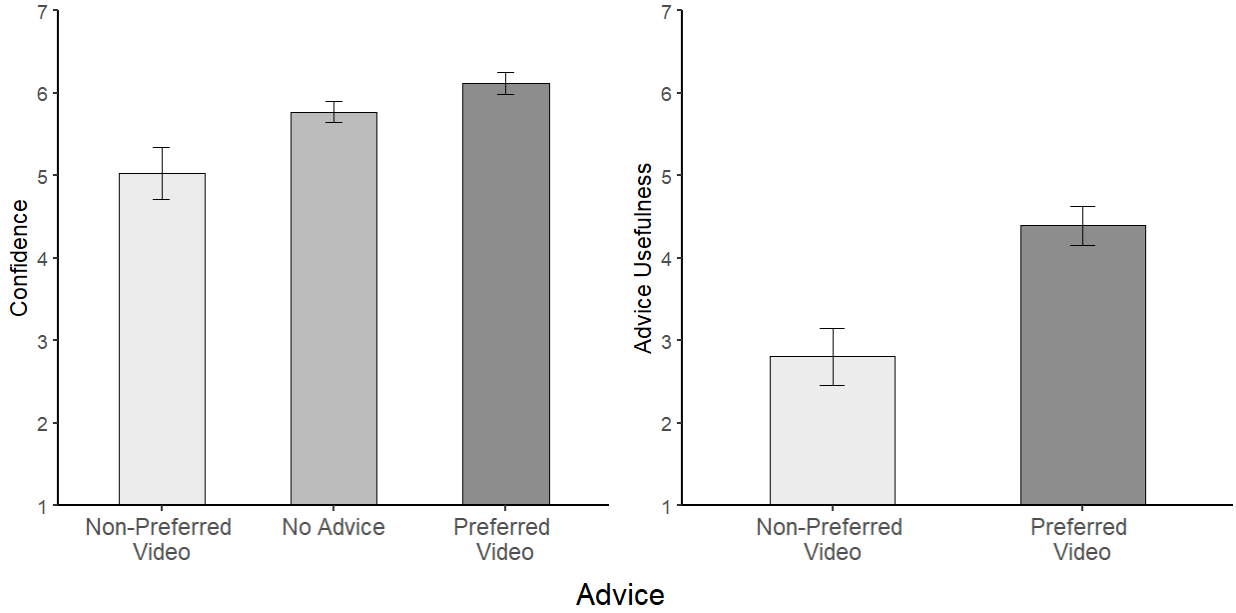

Figure 7. Preference-congruent advice increases decision confidence compared to preference-incongruent advice and no advice, and it is perceived as more useful than preference-incongruent advice, p < 0.001 for all comparisons (Study 3B).

Note. Error bars indicate 95% confidence intervals.

Discussion

In an incentivized decision context, we find that people engage in motivated advice seeking. In Study 3A, we show that advice seekers select advisors who are likely to recommend their preferred choice. In Study 3B, we show that advice seekers provide more reasons supporting their preferred choice when asking for advice. These findings provide additional support for our third and fourth hypotheses.

We also find that advice seekers are motivated to receive preference-congruent advice. Not only did participants view preference-congruent advice as more useful, but those who received preference-congruent advice also report greater confidence than those who received preference-incongruent advice or no advice at all. These findings provide additional support for our first and second hypotheses, offering

insight into why people seek preference-congruent advice.

Study 4

Studies 1 through 3 investigate the advice-seeking process using controlled experiments. In Study 4, we examine how people ask for (and give) advice in a naturally occurring advising setting. Specifically, we analyze advice requests posted on a popular online forum. The primary goal of this study was to document motivated advice seeking in a natural advice context. This study was exploratory and not pre-registered.

Method

Data Source. In this study, we analyze advice requests posted on Reddit, a popular online platform where users discuss topics in interest-based communities called subreddits. On this platform, users create posts that consist of a title and content, which can contain text, images/video, a link, or a poll. Users can also comment on others' posts. We use the term "post" to refer to content that is posted independently to a subreddit, and we use the term "comment" to refer to replies to existing content. Comments can be replies to posts or to other comments. Both posts and comments can receive upvotes and downvotes by other users, and a user's reputation is tracked using a score called karma. Each subreddit has its own moderators who are volunteer users who help manage the subreddit by setting and enforcing rules and ensuring that discussions stay on topic.

We collected our data from the "r/Advice" subreddit. (Subreddit names begin with "r/", followed by the topic of that subreddit.) The "r/Advice" subreddit is a Reddit community designed for users to seek and receive advice from other users. The "r/Advice" subreddit is a large community, currently with approximately 1.3 million members (as of Jan. 31, 2025).

Dataset. We collected a sample of 300 randomly selected posts discussing dilemmas, posted during an approximately ten-year period, from the subreddit's creation (June 26, 2008) through October 2018. We excluded posts that were not true dilemmas (e.g., users who were deciding between multiple options), resulting in a final sample of 266 posts. We collected all of the comments replying directly to those 266 posts. This yielded 732 comments, and after excluding comments written by the user who

wrote the original post, we ended with a sample of 722 comments.

Procedure. To focus on advice-seeking dilemmas, we took several steps. First, we identified all posts posted on the "r/Advice" subreddit between the subreddit's creation (June 26, 2008) and October 2018 that included "Should I" at the beginning of the title. We then randomly sampled 300 of these posts.

Second, we had three independent raters read each of the 300 posts and create a list of the options that the poster stated they were deciding between in their advice request. After completing this task independently, the raters resolved disagreements through discussion. We then excluded all posts in which the advice seeker was deciding between more than two options, resulting in a final sample of 266 posts.

After identifying advice-seeking dilemmas, we took several steps to prepare the data for analysis. First, we had three independent raters independently code each post for the number of reasons the advice seeker provided for each of the two options in their dilemma.

Second, we recruited participants via Prolific (Preference-Judges). Each participant read one of the 266 advice requests and judged which of the two options they believed the advice seeker preferred. We targeted a sample of 2,660 participants (10 participants per advice request) and received responses from 2,665 participants. Thirteen participants did not provide a judgement, so we analyzed data from the 2,652 participants who did (52.07% female and 47.59% male; M_{age} = 40.77, SD_{age} = 13.75).

Finally, to investigate advice, we identified all the comments that replied directly to the 266 posts in our final dataset. We started with 732 comments, but we then excluded comments that were written by the user who wrote the original post. Our final sample was 722 comments. Two independent raters coded each comment to identify which of the two options in the advisor (commenter) recommended. After completing the task separately, the raters resolved disagreements through discussion (the initial agreement rate was 77.46%). (See Table 1 for examples of advice requests in our sample.)

Results

First, we analyzed how people asked for advice. On average, advice seekers discussed a total of 5.89 reasons across their two options (SD = 3.34). We conducted a one-sample t-test to test whether there was a difference between the number of reasons advice seekers provided for their two options. We found

that the absolute difference between the number of reasons for each of the two options was significantly different from zero ($M = 1.91$, $SD=1.84$; $t(265)=16.86$, $d = 1.03$, $p<0.0001$). On average, advice seekers provided 1.91 more reasons in favor of one option over the other.

We next tested whether advice seekers asked for advice in a way that revealed an obvious preference. We did this by analyzing the consensus of the Preference-Judges. Specifically, we conducted a one-sample t-test to test the null hypothesis that the proportion of Preference-Judges who guessed each of the two options as the advice seeker's preference was the same (i.e., to test the null hypothesis that there was a lot of disagreement among the Preference-Judges about which option the advice seeker preferred). We found that the absolute difference between the proportions of Preference-Judges selecting each of the two options was significantly different from zero ($M=0.48$, $SD=0.29$, $t(265)=27.15$, $d = 1.66$, $p<0.0001$), meaning that there was a consensus among Preference-Judges regarding which option the advice seeker preferred. The mean difference between the proportions of Preference-Judges selecting each of the two options was 0.48, meaning that, on average, 74% of Preference-Judges agreed on that the majority-selected option was the advice seeker's preference.

Next, we turned our attention to the comments to investigate how advisors respond to a request for advice. We conducted a paired t-test to evaluate whether advisors' comments recommended the option that the majority of Preference-Judges identified as the advice seeker's preference. As expected, a greater proportion of the comments recommended the advice seeker's preference (as identified by the Preference-Judges) ($M = 0.43$, $SD = 0.40$) compared to the alternative option ($M = 0.32$, $SD = 0.39$), $t(215) = 2.25$, $d = 0.28$, $p = 0.0128$. See Figure 8. (In the 21 cases where the number of Preference-Judges selecting the two options was equal, the number of comments supporting each of the two options was not significantly different, $t(20) = 1.10$, $p = 0.285$).

Next, we tested whether or not advisors were more likely to recommend the advice seeker's preferred option when their preference was more obvious. To do this, we tested whether greater consensus regarding the advice seeker's predicted preference (as identified by the Preference-Judges) predicted a greater proportion of advice (measured using comments) recommending the advice seeker's preferred

option. Specifically, we regressed the proportion of comments recommending the option identified as the advice seeker's preference by the Preference-Judges on the proportion of Preference-Judges selecting that option. Consistent with our prediction, the greater the proportion of Preference-Judges who identified an option as the advice seeker's preferred option, the greater the proportion of comments recommending that option ($\beta = 0.68$, $t(214) = 3.39$, $p = 0.001$). In other words, when the advice seeker's preference was more apparent to Preference-Judges, a greater proportion of advisors recommended the identified preference.

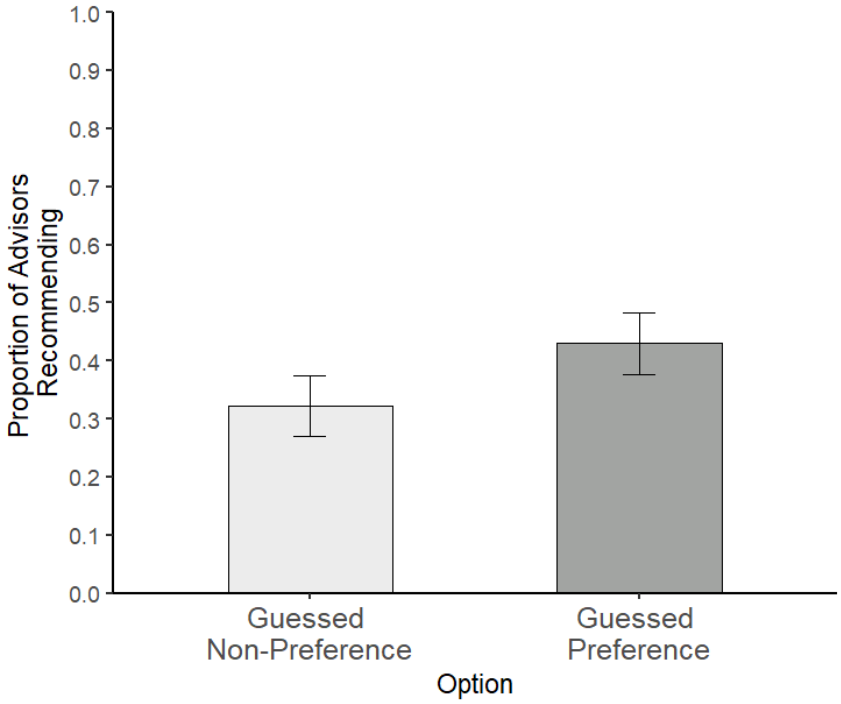

Figure 8. A greater proportion of Advisors (measured by comments) recommended the advice seeker's predicted preference (as determined by Preference-Judges), $p = 0.0128$ (Study 3).

Note. Error bars indicate 95% confidence intervals.

Discussion

In this study, we analyzed advice seeking and advice giving on an online platform. We find evidence that people ask for advice in ways that favors one of their two choices. Specifically, when seeking advice about a dilemma, advice seekers provide more reasons for one of the two options, and they telegraph an obvious preference to observers. Furthermore, advisors are far more likely to recommend the advice seeker's preferred option (as determined by Preference-Judges) than the alternative. This finding

also suggests that the way people ask for advice may successfully elicit preference-congruent advice. Consistent with this idea, when people were more certain about what the advice seeker's preference was (measured using the agreement among Preference-Judges), advisors were more likely to recommend that option. The results of this study indicate a pattern of advice seeking similar to that observed in Studies 1B and 3B, extending our findings to a naturally occurring context.

Study 5

In our final study, we shift our attention to advisors. In this study, we analyze advisors' responses to the advice requests from Study 1B. In this study, we test (1) whether or not advisors are able to infer advice seekers' preferences from their advice requests, and (2) whether or not advisors give advice that aligns with what they think advice seekers prefer. We also link inferred preferences and advice with advice seekers' actual preferences. This enables us to further test whether advice seekers ask for advice in a biased way, revealing their preference and eliciting preference-consistent advice. This study is pre-registered (https://aspredicted.org/sqsp-35fv.pdf), and we report all measures, manipulations, and exclusions.

Method

Participants. In accordance with our pre-registration plan, we collected 1966 participants via Prolific. After pre-registered exclusions, we ended up with a sample of 1800 participants (51.44% female and 47.78% male; M_{age} = 39.88, SD_{age} = 12.76).

Procedure. We chose a random sample of 100 advice requests written by participants in Study 1B. In this study, we randomly assigned participants to be either an Advisor or a Guesser. Advisors read one of the 100 advice requests and decided which of the two options they would recommend to the advice seeker. Guessers read one of the 100 advice requests and guessed which option the advice seeker preferred. Guessers received a $0.05 bonus if they guessed the advice seeker's preference correctly. Both Advisors and Guessers completed the other role's task after completing their task.

For each advice request, we recruited exactly nine participants in the role of Advisor and nine participants in the role of Guesser. (We chose the number nine to ensure an odd number, and hence a

majority, for our analysis.)

Results

We first tested whether or not recipients were able to guess advice seekers' preferences. We conducted a one-sample t-test to test whether the mean proportion of Guessers who correctly guessed their advice seeker's preference across the advice requests was significantly greater than chance. We found that the mean proportion of Guessers who correctly identified their advice seeker's preference was significantly greater than 0.5 ($M = 0.63$, $SD = 0.26$; $t(99) = 4.89$, $p < 0.0001$). On average, Guessers were correct around 63% of the time.

Next, we tested whether Advisors are more likely to recommend the option they think their advice seeker prefers. We tested this hypothesis in three different ways. First, we conducted a within-subjects analysis to see whether participants recommended the option that they thought the advice seeker preferred. We conducted a one-sample t-test to test whether the mean proportion of participants who recommended the option that they thought their advice seeker preferred across the advice requests was greater than chance. We found that the proportion of participants who recommended the option they thought the advice seeker preferred was 0.70 ($SD = 0.13$), a proportion that was significantly different than 0.5, $t(99) = 15.00$, $p < 0.0001$. This result was robust to analyzing to the sample of Guessers and the sample of Advisors separately (Guessers: $M = 0.76$, $SD = 0.15$, $t(99) = 16.93$, $p < 0.0001$; Advisors: $M = 0.64$, $SD = 0.19$, $t(99) = 7.40$, $p < 0.0001$).

Next, we conducted two between-subjects analyses to test whether advisors try to recommend advice seekers' preferences. First, we conducted a paired sample t-test to evaluate whether more Advisors recommended the option guessed by the majority of Guessers compared to the other option. Consistent with our prediction we found that significantly more Advisors recommended the option guessed by the majority of Guessers ($M = 5.58$, $SD = 2.29$) compared to the option guessed by the minority of Guessers ($M = 3.42$, $SD = 2.29$), $t(99) = 4.72$, $d = 0.90$, $p < 0.0001$. This means that, on average, 2.16 more Advisors (out of 9) recommended the option that the majority of Guessers predicted to be the advice seeker's preference. See Figure 9. In Appendix G, we find additional support for our results by

conducting an exploratory one-proportion z-test.

Next, we wanted to understand whether a greater consensus among Guessers predicted a greater consensus among Advisors. We regressed the number of Advisors recommending the option selected by the majority of Guessers on the number of Guessers guessing that option. Consistent with our prediction, the greater the number of Guessers who guessed the majority prediction, the greater the number of Advisors who recommended that option ($\beta = 0.67$, $t(98) = 4.18$, $p < 0.001$). In other words, when there was greater consensus regarding the advice seeker's preference, more Advisors recommended that option.

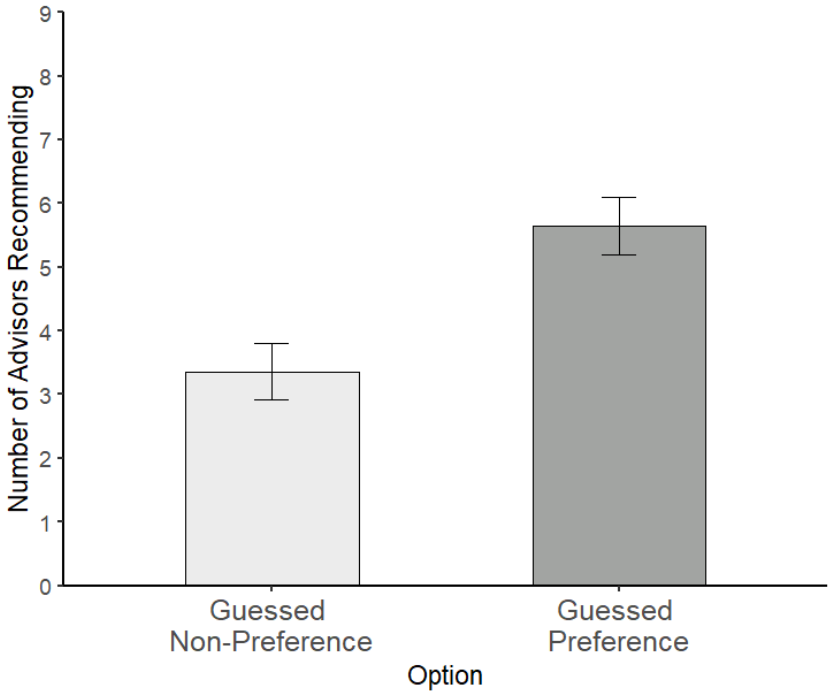

Figure 9. Significantly more Advisors (out of 9) recommended the option predicted to be the participant's preferred option by the Guessers, $p < 0.0001$ (Study 5).

Note. Error bars indicate 95% confidence intervals.

Next, we wanted to see whether the intention to recommend an advice seeker's preferred option translated into actually recommending their preferred option. We found that Advisors were significantly more likely than chance to recommend their advice seeker's preference ($M = 0.58$, $SD = 0.26$; $t(99) = 3.17$, $p = 0.001$). Additionally, when more Guessers correctly guessed the participant's preference, more Advisors who recommended that option ($\beta = 0.47$, $t(98) = 4.96$, $p < 0.001$).

Finally, we pre-registered that we would also conduct an exploratory analysis to see whether

participants thought that the advice seeker would be happier after receiving advice recommending the option that they recommended compared to the alternative option. Participants rated how happy they thought the advice seeker would be after receiving advice recommending each of the two options. Participants rated both questions on a 7-point scale from 1: "Extremely Unhappy" to 7: "Extremely Happy". We conducted a paired t-test, and consistent with our hypothesis, we found that participants thought that receiving advice recommending the option they recommended would make the advice seeker significantly happier ($M = 4.93$, $SD = 1.31$) than receiving the alternative advice ($M = 4.05$, $SD = 1.40$), $t(1799) = 16.26$, $p < 0.0001$.

Discussion

In this study, we find that advisors are able to guess advice seekers' preferences from their advice requests. This finding provides further evidence that people ask for advice in a motivated way, lending additional support to our fourth hypothesis. Additionally, advisors not only align their recommendations with their predictions of advice seekers' preferences, but more often than not, they actually recommend advice seekers their preferences. Moreover, when the advice seeker's preference is easier to guess or more widely agreed upon, more advisors recommend that option. This means that the more transparent an advice seeker is, the more likely they are to get recommended their preference. Our findings reveal that advisors play an active role in advice seekers' motivated processes and that motivated advice seeking does, in fact, elicit preference-congruent advice.

General Discussion

For organizations, groups, and individuals, success hinges on the ability of people to make effective decisions. Reflecting the importance of decision making and the robust finding that advice significantly improves decision accuracy, a substantial literature has investigated advice. An implicit assumption in this prior work is that people seek advice to improve the quality of their decisions. In fact, the dominant experimental paradigm that scholars have used to study advice presumes that advisees use the advice process to make more accurate decisions.

In our investigation, we study advice seeking and show that people routinely engage in a

motivated advice-seeking process. Across seven studies, we demonstrate that rather than seeking advice in an impartial and objective way, people seek preference-congruent advice. Specifically, people choose advisors and ask for advice in ways that elicit preference-congruent advice. In our investigation, we employ diverse methods—including incentive-compatible decisions, naturally occurring advice exchanges, and hypothetical advice seeking about consequential real-world dilemmas—to provide robust evidence of motivated advice seeking.

Our findings make several important theoretical contributions. First, we fundamentally advance our understanding of motivated processes by shifting the focus from individual cognition to social interaction. Prior work has conceptualized motivated processes as intrapersonal, studying how people maintain their existing beliefs through the ways they select and interpret information. In contrast, we examine motivated processes in the interpersonal context of advice, showing how people engage with others to build confidence in their preferred decisions. In addition to finding evidence for motivated advisor-selection, we find evidence for motivated advice-construction. Specifically, advisees and advisors co-create advice in ways that reflect and reinforce advice seekers' preferences. Moreover, by showing that advisors attempt to provide preference-congruent advice, we demonstrate how others can play an active role in shaping and reinforcing motivated decision making. The process of eliciting preference congruent advice may be especially consequential, as advice exchanges are uniquely positioned to yield tailored, actionable recommendations that may instill a heightened sense of confidence and directly shape decision making.

Second, in contrast to the prevailing assumption in the advice literature that people seek advice to improve decision accuracy, we show that people often seek advice to build confidence in an existing preference. This finding advances our theoretical understanding of how people ask for advice, whom they ask for advice, and why they ask for advice. Further, by demonstrating that advisors are likely to give advice that is consistent with the advice seeker's preference, we expand our understanding of the type of advice people are likely to receive. In doing so, our investigation identifies an important and novel way in which advice may bias decision making. If an advice seeker's initial preference is for an inferior option,

they may elicit preference-congruent advice that builds their confidence but not improve their decision accuracy.

Third, we broaden the scope of advice research by studying advice seeking about practical dilemmas that people commonly face. Rather than studying advice in stylized settings, we consider a broad set of advice contexts. Our investigation includes analyses of advice requests posted to the subreddit "r/Advice," an online discussion platform that allows people to seek advice from other users. One of the key insights from our investigation is that the context and nature of advice requests is very different from how much of the advice literature has studied advice. Rather than trying to improve the accuracy of forecasts or estimates, people are often wrestling with complex career, workplace, and personal matters, such as whether or not to quit a job, report a colleague, or move to a new city. Further, in asking for advice, we find that advisees telegraph their preferences in ways that elicit preference-congruent advice rather than unbiased recommendations.

Fourth, our work provides a generative foundation for studying the interplay between how people ask for advice and what advice people provide. In contrast to the rich literature that has investigated advice taking in isolation, we know almost nothing about the inter-related decisions of advice seeking and advice giving. Our findings reveal that advice is not passively received but instead co-constructed by both the advisee and the advisor. By demonstrating that advice seeking is a social, dynamic, and motivated process, we provide a foundation for future research to explore both how people ask for advice and how advice requests elicit different types of advice.

Our findings also inform a number of practical implications. First, for advice seekers, our findings underscore the importance of recognizing underlying motives when asking for advice. Before seeking advice, advisees should ask themselves what their underlying motivation is. If accuracy and better decision making is the primary goal, advice seekers need to take particular care in both how they ask for advice and whom they ask for advice. To fully realize the powerful benefits of advice, it is important to ask for advice in an unbiased way. One prescription is to seek advice from credible advisors—including those who may be less likely to endorse a favored option. In our studies, even as participants revealed that

they would be less likely to seek advice from an advisor who might endorse an option they disliked, they also reported that they would value this advice.

Second, our findings suggest that receiving unbiased advice may be difficult. Advisees may unknowingly ask for advice in a biased way. As a result, organizations may benefit from using a structured process to elicit unbiased advice. This can include creating an advice-seeking template, guiding employees to use a neutral frame as they detail their options, and seeking input from a diverse set of advisors. Organizations can also foster an impartial advice-seeking culture. For example, by cultivating an environment of candid feedback and an environment in which employees feel comfortable both seeking and providing objective guidance, organizations may help individuals and groups make better decisions.

Limitations and Future Directions

Across our studies, we identify motivated advice seeking as a robust phenomenon, but many open questions remain. For example, to what extent are advice seekers aware of their motivated advice seeking? Similarly, if advice seekers are made aware of their preference and tendency to seek preference-congruent advice, how would that change how they ask for advice? Our findings also suggest that advisees who receive preference-congruent advice will build confidence in their preferred alternative. We call for future work to explore this process and to link these findings with the broader confidence literature.

We also call for future work to explore potential moderators and boundary conditions of motivated advice seeking. In practice, advice seeking is subject to search costs and different degrees of accuracy incentives. Future work can examine how people trade off convenience and accuracy against a desire for reassurance.

We also call for future work to expand our investigation of advice giving. While our findings suggest that advisors frequently recommend the option that they think the advice seeker prefers, it remains unclear whether they do so intentionally. Future work should explore the extent to which advisors discern advice seekers' underlying motives and preferences and how these inferences influence the advice they give.

In contrast to how advice has been studied in the Judge-Advisor system, advice in practice is usually a social experience. This raises important questions about what relational outcomes follow from the motivated advice-seeking process. For example, how do advice seekers view advisors who give them preference-incongruent versus preference-congruent advice? Additionally, if an advisor detects that an advice seeker wants confirmation rather than objective guidance, how does this impact their perception of and relationship to the advice seeker? Advisors care about the extent to which their advice is used (Ache et al., 2020; Blunden et al., 2019; Zhang & North, 2020)—do they also care about the extent to which an advice seeker wants their actual opinion?

Our investigation also underscores how little we actually know about advice. For example, we know very little about when and how people ask for advice, how advice improves or harms relational outcomes, and how relational dynamics such as power influence the advice process. Perhaps most importantly, our work also demonstrates the importance of studying advice as a social and dynamic process. We call for future research to explore the interplay between advice seeking, advice giving, and advice taking.

Conclusion

For advice to improve decision accuracy, advice needs to be impartial and objective. In practice, we show that the advice seeking process is rarely either impartial or objective. Instead, advice seeking is often a motivated process that elicits preference-congruent advice. As a result, rather than boosting accuracy, advice may build unfounded confidence.

Materials, data, code, and online appendices are available on OSF at the following link:

https://osf.io/u4km8/?view_only=9683f846670748d9873114414bebfeea

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