

# Reverberation of positive affect in groups: Do positive emotions bind people together?

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## ABSTRACT

In this study we assessed the effect of collectively experiencing positive emotions on subsequent group interaction. Participants first watched a 5-7 minute video in same-sex groups of 3 to 6 people. Two of the videos were meant to elicit positive emotions (admiration and elevation). The other video was emotionally neutral. After watching the video, the group members interacted by telling each other about an embarrassing memory. Participant ratings after the interaction showed that **compared to participants in the neutral condition, participants in both positive emotion conditions were substantially more likely to report liking for their group members and wishing to see them again.** Participants in the positive emotion conditions on average also reported feeling less embarrassed after talking about their embarrassing memories. These results suggest that **collectively experiencing positive emotions may bring group members closer, even if these emotions originate from outside the group.** This finding may have implications for improving organizational functioning.

## BACKGROUND

- Positive emotions have been related to better group performance (Barsade, 2002; George, 1990). Positive mood also is predictive of better group functioning. For example the leaders' positive mood is associated with better group performance (George, 1995) and positive mood at work is associated with more prosocial organizational behaviors (George, 1991).
- These findings indicate the importance of positive moods and emotions for a group's functioning.
- In the current study we explore the possibility that positive moods and emotions will foster group cohesiveness (liking between group members), even if the positive affect originates from outside the group members' interpersonal dynamics.

## THE STUDY

### PARTICIPANTS:

- 104 University of Virginia students (51 females, 53 males)

### DESIGN:

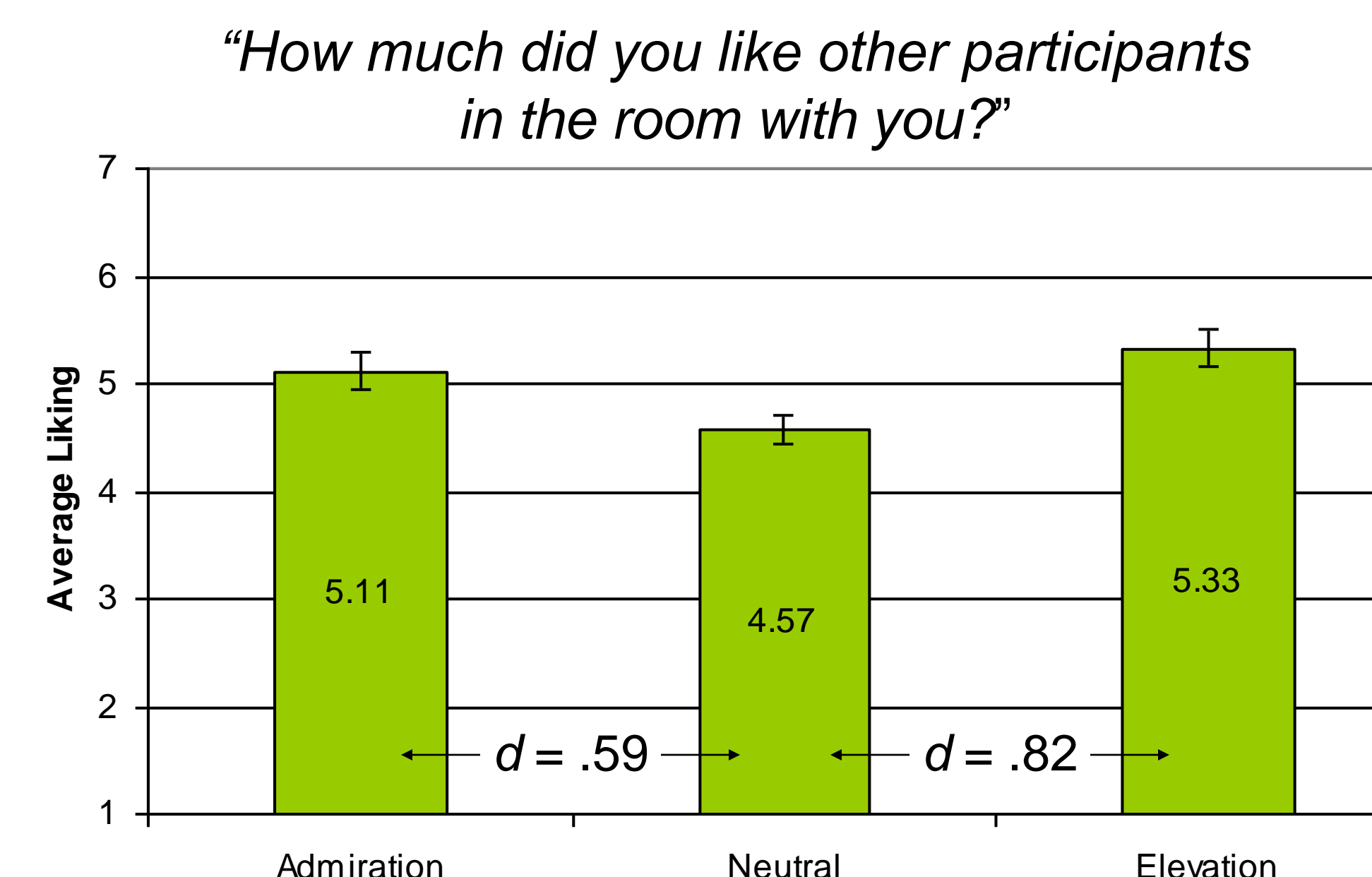
- Participants watched one of three videos in same-sex groups of 3-6:
  - **Elevation** video (Oprah clip on a music teacher who saved many of his low-income students from a life of violence and drugs)
  - **Admiration** video (on how Lance Armstrong overcomes cancer and becomes a World Cycling Champion)
  - **Neutral** video (on different types of paintbrushes)
- Participants wrote about an embarrassing memory and then told it to other group members.

### DEPENDENT MEASURES:

- **MOOD CHANGE:** The difference between self-reported mood before and after the video
- **EMOTIONAL IMPACT:** Participants' response to "How much did this video affect you emotionally?"
- **LIKING FOR GROUP MEMBERS:** The average of how much a participant reported liking each group member

## RESULTS

### Liking for group members

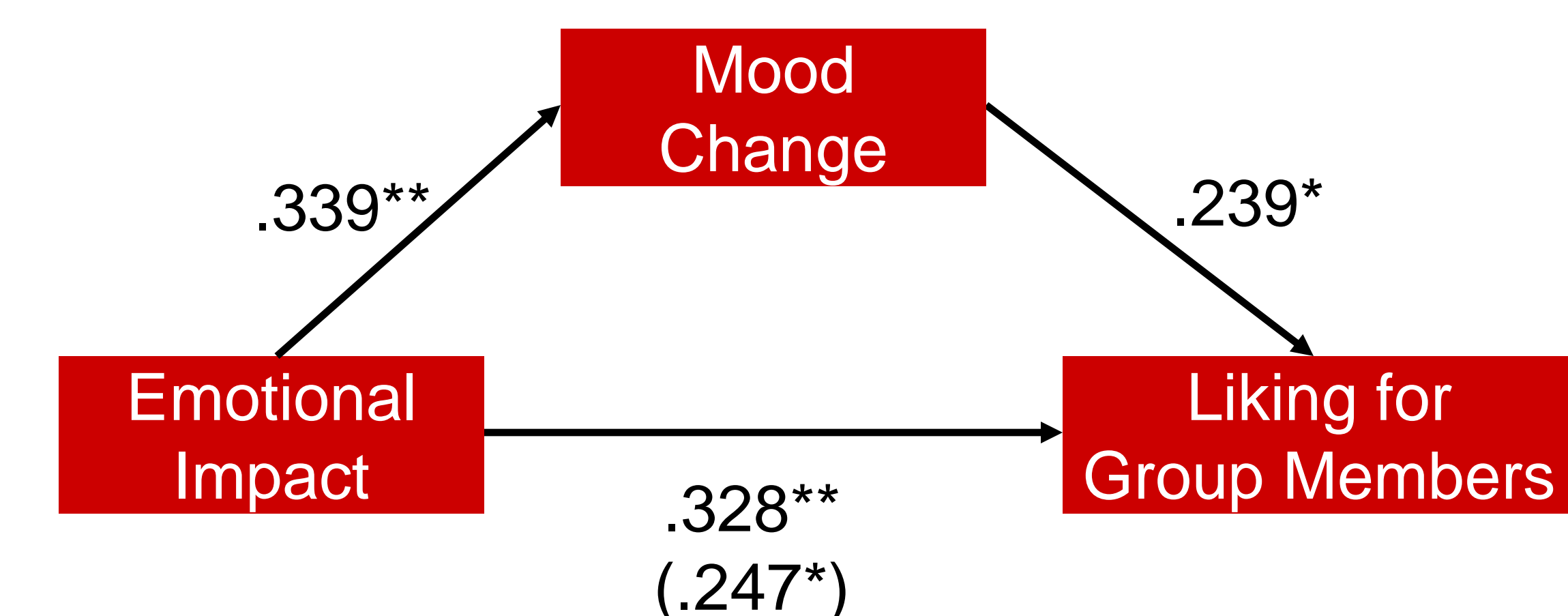


Participants in the positive emotion conditions reported higher liking for each other after the group interaction than participants in the Neutral condition ( $F(2, 101) = 6.09, p < .01$ )

- Participants in the positive emotion conditions reported feeling less embarrassed after talking about their embarrassing memories ( $F(2, 99) = 3.165, p < .05$ ).
- Blind coder ratings of participants' writings and interactions revealed **insignificant trends** in the data such that participants in the positive emotion conditions wrote more embarrassing memories and their accounts were more funny compared to participants in the neutral condition.

### What drives this liking effect?

- The relationship between the videos and subsequent liking effect can be traced to two factors: the intensity of the emotional reaction to the video and mood change in response to the video.



## DISCUSSION

- Our results find a strong effect of collectively viewing a positive emotion inducing video on self-reported liking for group members. In addition, several non-significant trends in behavioral measures suggest that the video made participants more open and their interactions smoother.
- This effect is mediated by the mood change participants report after watching the video, and the intensity of their emotional reaction to the video.
- The results suggest that positive group emotions may be fostered by stimuli that originate from outside of the group's emotional dynamics. These positive emotions and moods may lead to increased liking for group members which in turn might pave the way for more pleasant and effective group functioning, as suggested by previous research (Zaccaro & McCoy, 1988)

## REFERENCES

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