

# Emotional Synchrony as a Group Bonding Mechanism

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## OVERVIEW

**Objective:** Assessing the effect of emotional synchrony on interpersonal rapport

**Method:** We brought to the lab groups of three to six participants, who did not know each other beforehand. Before engaging in any interaction, participants watched a video clip together with either emotional or non-emotional content. After watching the clip, participants were instructed to tell each other an embarrassing memory.

**Results:** Those who watched an emotional video together reported substantially more liking for each other than those who watched the neutral video (average Cohen's  $d = 0.71$ ). Moreover, participants who reported stronger emotional reactions to the video liked other group members more ( $r = .33, p < .01$ ). Our codings revealed non-significant trends such that participants in the neutral condition were less open, wrote and told less embarrassing stories, and gave less support to group members when listening to each others' stories.

**Conclusion:** These results suggest that emotional synchrony may bring group members closer, even if these emotions originate apart from any group interactions.

## BACKGROUND

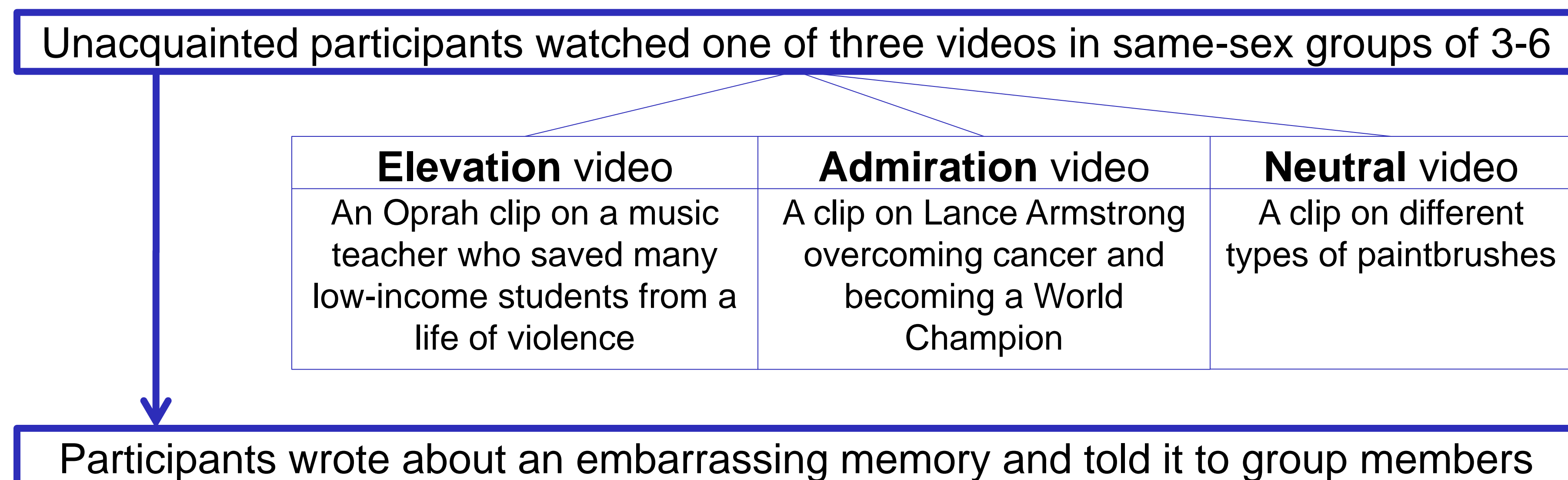
- Multiple lines of research link facial, behavioral, or physiological synchrony to interpersonal rapport (e.g., Bernieri, 1988; Tickle-Degnen & Rosenthal, 1990). However, we don't know about the interpersonal effects of emotional synchrony (i.e., experiencing the same emotions at the same time).
- The current study explored the hypothesis that emotional synchrony—like facial, behavioral and physiological synchrony— will increase interpersonal rapport.
- In this study, emotional synchrony was induced by having groups watch together videos with emotional or non-emotional content. The use of videos allowed us to test whether emotional synchrony will strengthen interpersonal rapport even when the affect originates from outside the group members' interpersonal dynamics, and when affect is isolated from events with actual implications for group members.

## THE STUDY

### PARTICIPANTS:

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

### DESIGN:

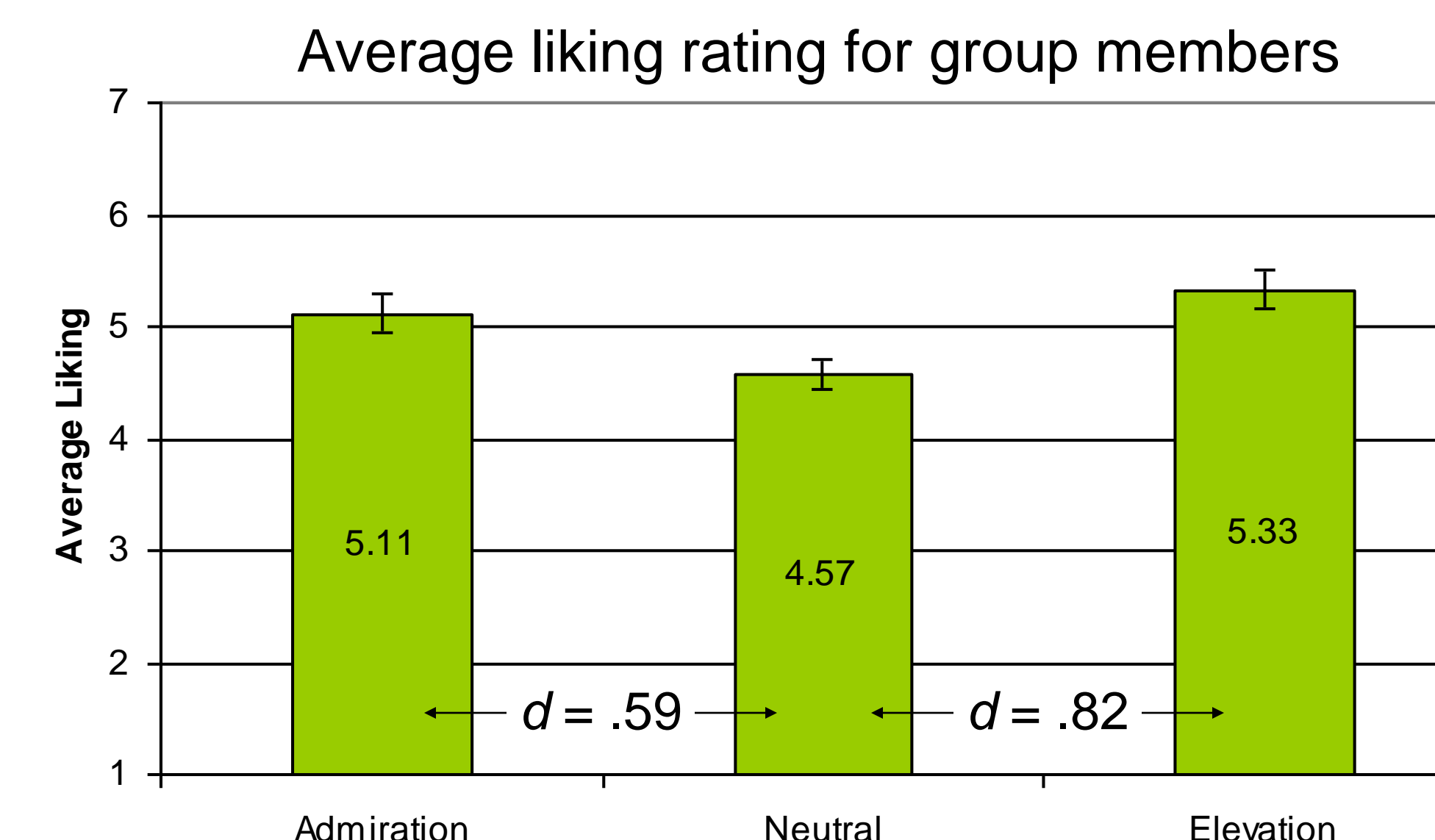


### DEPENDENT MEASURES:

- **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 a participant's liking for each group member

## RESULTS

### Liking for group members

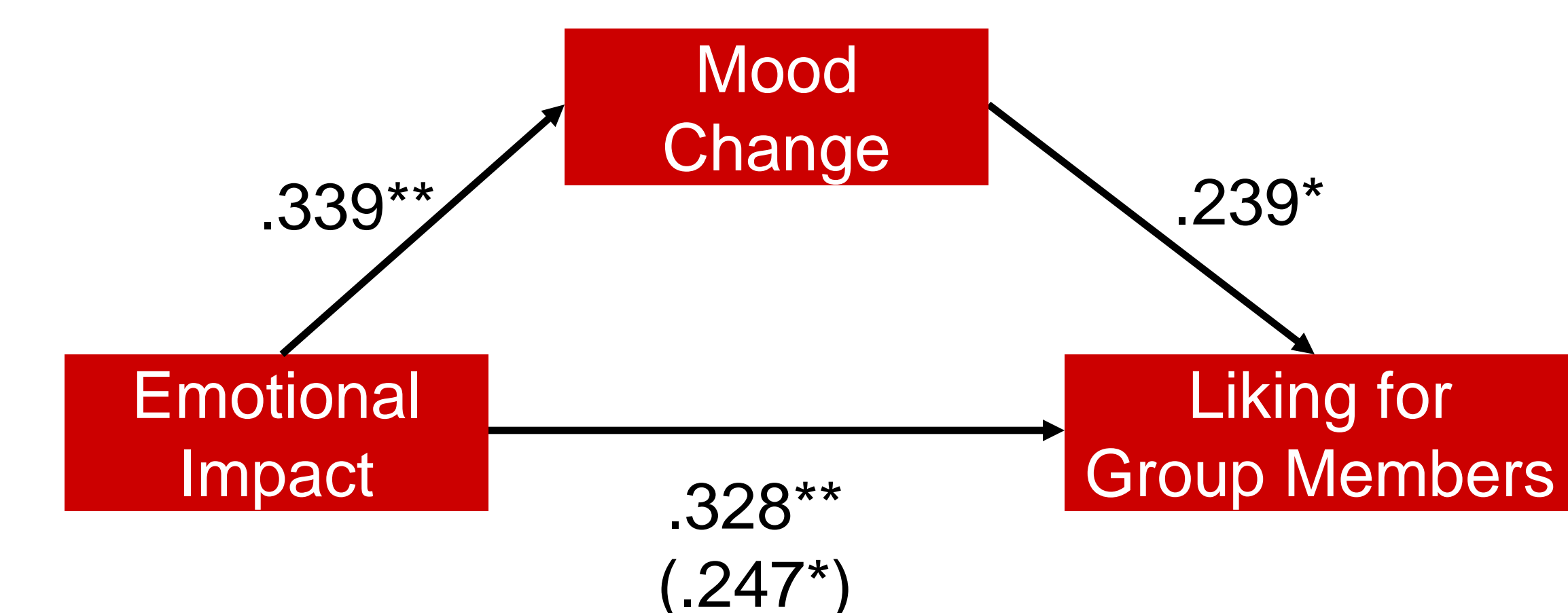


Participants in the positive emotion conditions reported higher liking for each other after the group interaction than participants in the neutral condition ( $F(2, 101) = 6.09, p < .01$ )

- 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 funnier compared to participants in the neutral condition.

### What drives this liking effect?

- The relationship between the videos and subsequent is associated with 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 linked to the mood change participants report after watching the video, and the intensity of their emotional reaction to the video.
- The results suggest that emotional synchrony can create positive group emotions via stimuli that originate from outside of the group's emotional dynamics. The increased liking for group members may in turn pave the way for more pleasant and effective group functioning, as suggested by previous research (Zaccaro & McCoy, 1988)

## REFERENCES

- Bernieri, F. J. (1988). Coordinated movement and rapport in teacher-student interactions. *Journal of Nonverbal Behavior*, 12, 120-138.
- Tickle-Degnen, L., & Rosenthal, R. (1990). The nature of rapport and its nonverbal correlates. *Psychological Inquiry*, 1, 285-293.
- Zaccaro, S. J., & McCoy, M. C. (1988). The effects of task and interpersonal cohesiveness on performance of a disjunctive group task. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 18, 837-851.