



Bias in Perceiving Emotional Intensity: Evidence for Systematic Overestimation

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Background

While research has extensively mapped how people identify others' emotions, understanding how people perceive emotional intensity remains limited.

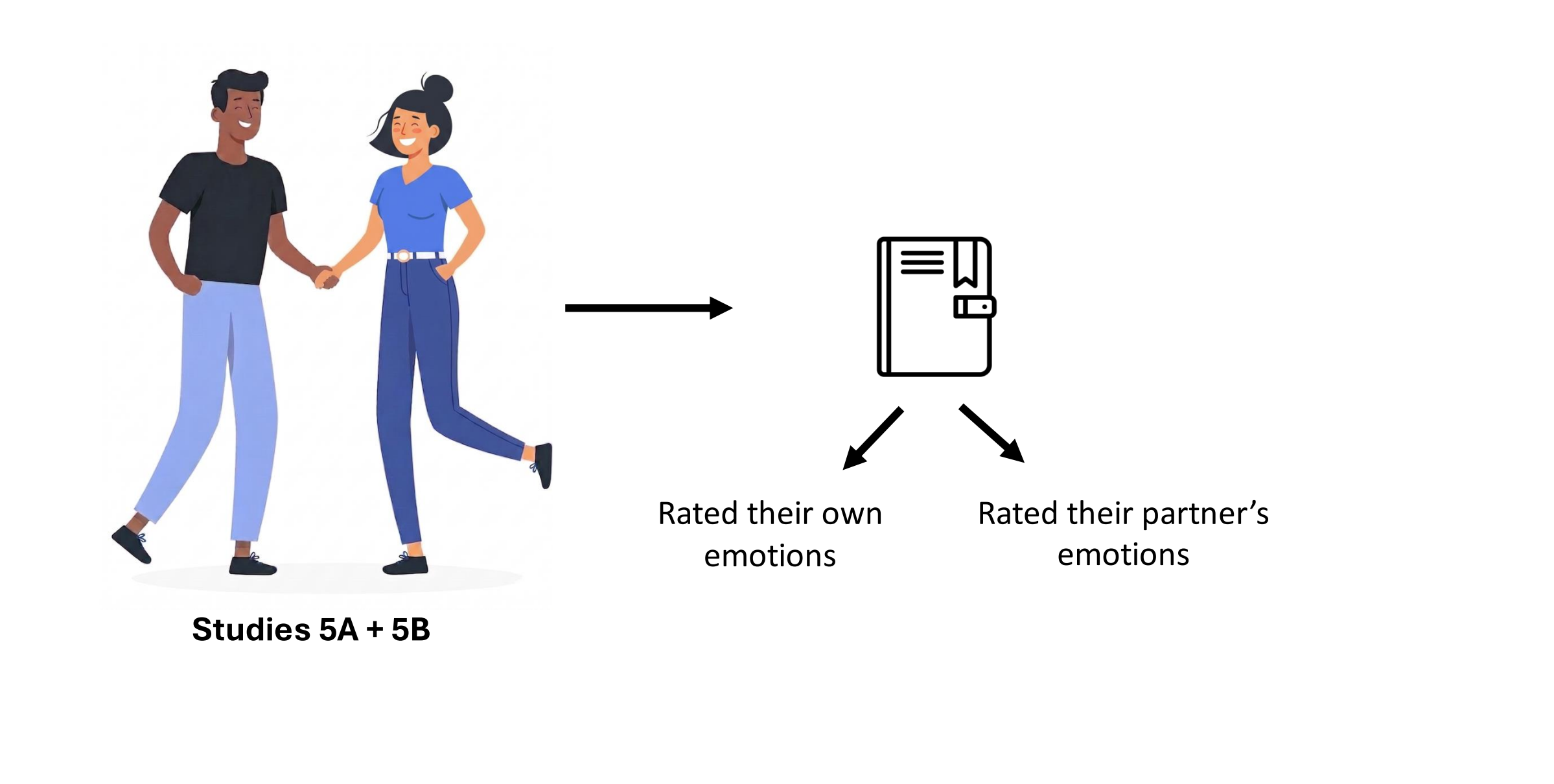
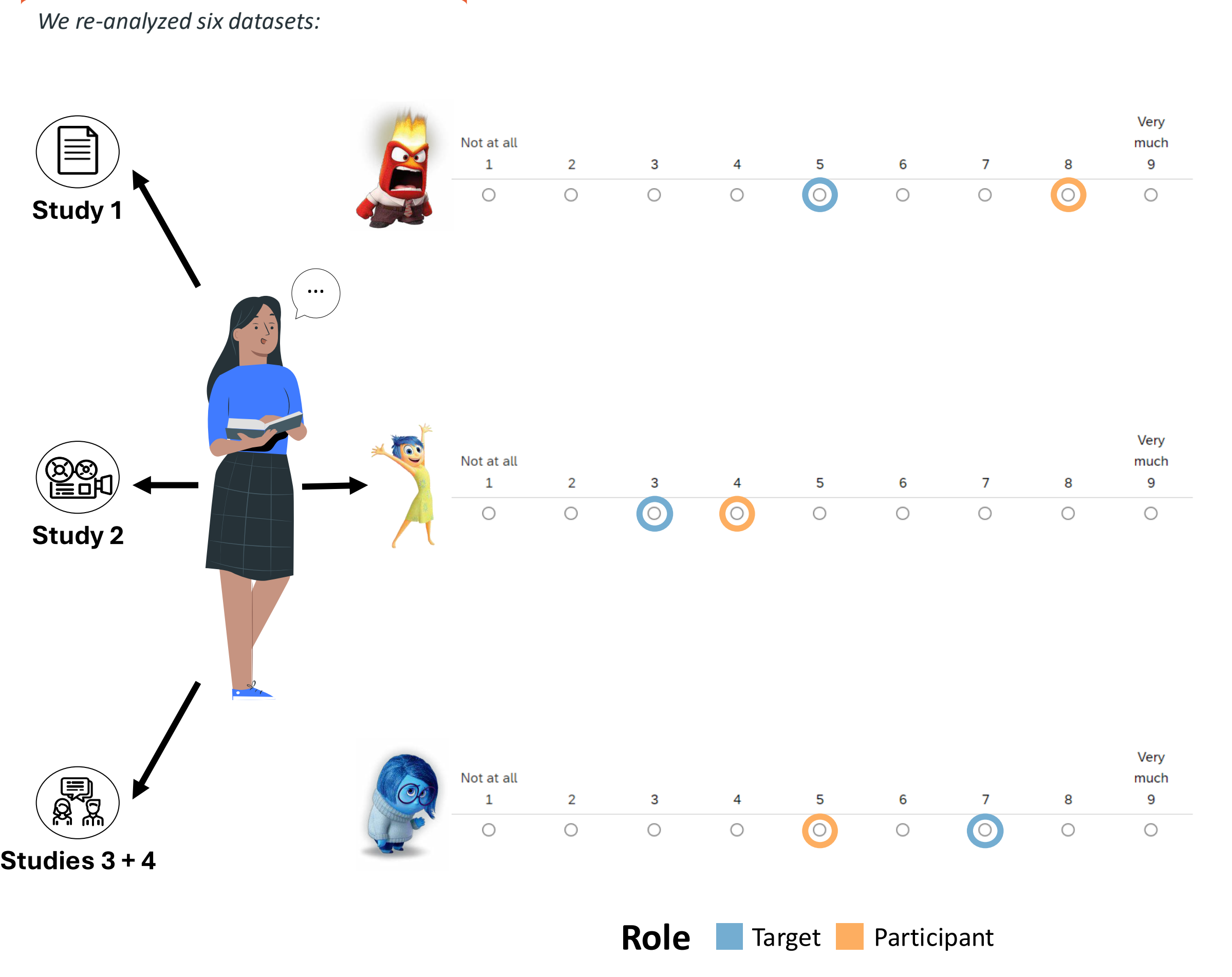
Aim

This research examines how accurately people perceive the intensity of others' emotions and whether there exists a systematic bias toward overestimating or underestimating how strongly others feel.

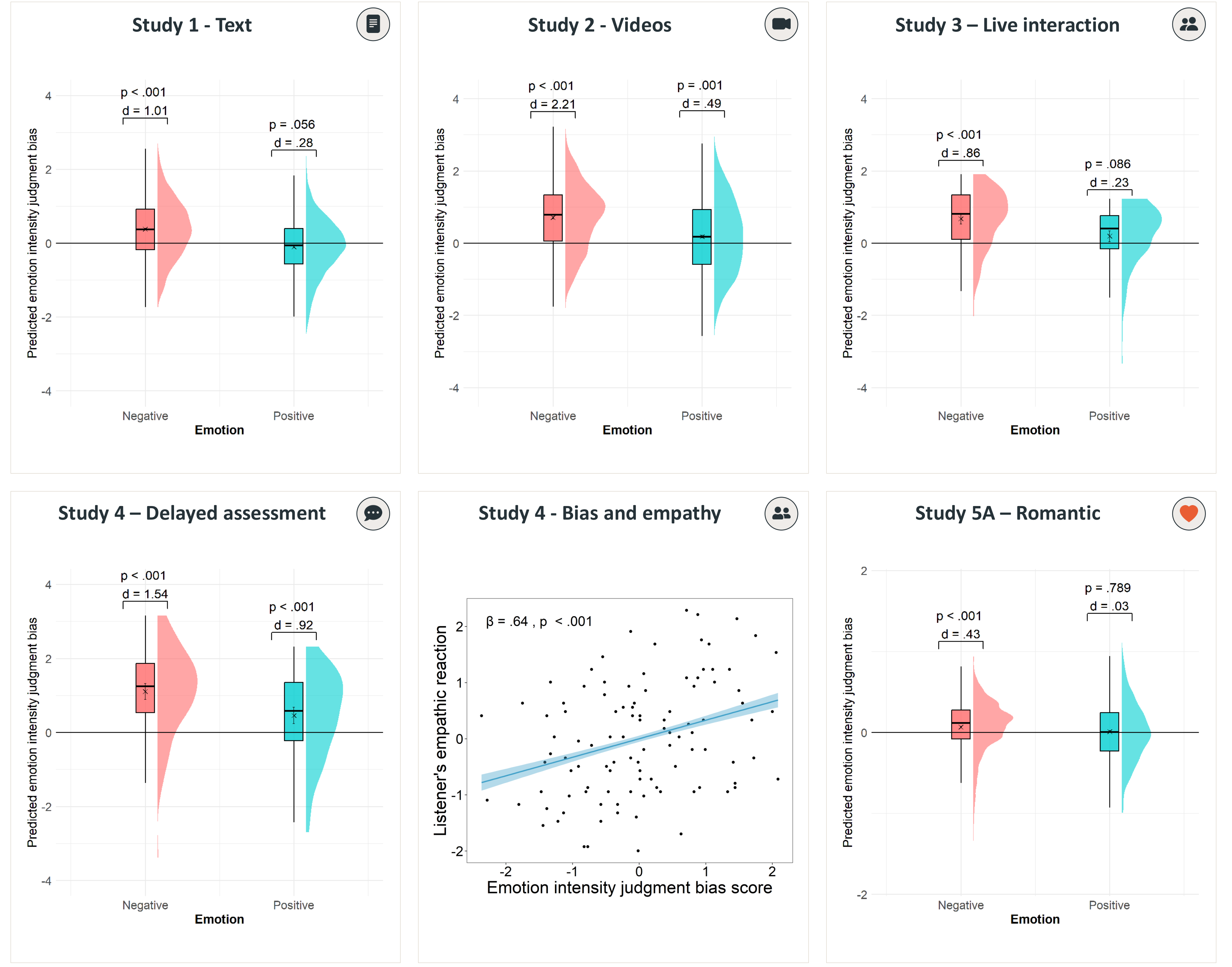
Participants

- **Study 1:** 201 participants (MTurk; 40.30% females)
- **Study 2:** 1222 participants (Panel View & iPanel; 53.36% females)
- **Study 3:** 230 participants (115 pairs; general population; 74.78% females)
- **Study 4:** 216 participants (108 pairs; general population; 77.78% females)
- **Study 5A:** 200 participants (100 couples; general population; 50.00% females)
- **Study 5B:** 160 participants (80 couples; general population; 50.00% females)

Tasks

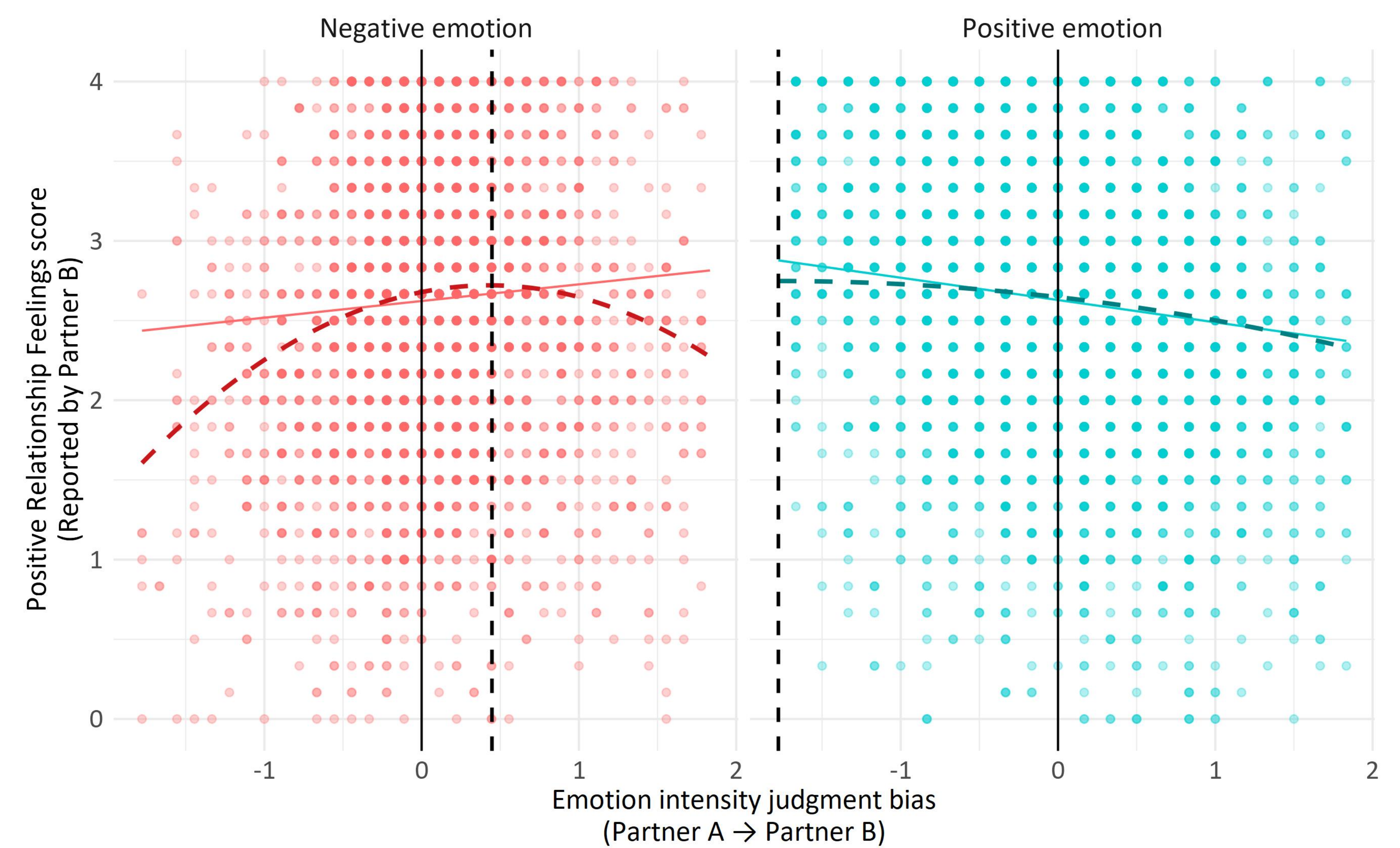


Results



Study 5A – Bias and relationships satisfaction

In couples, moderate overestimation of a partner's negative emotions predicts higher relationship satisfaction; the inverse trend appears for positive emotions.



Conclusions

- We demonstrate that people consistently overestimate the intensity of others' emotions, particularly for negative emotions. This overestimation effect persists across text-based interactions, recorded videos, and live conversations, and is found for both strangers and romantic partners.
- Overestimation may serve adaptive functions: for strangers, overestimation predicted a higher empathic response; for romantic relationships, moderate overestimation of negative emotions predicted higher relationship satisfaction.

