

Appearance as a Contingency of Self Worth: A Lab Manipulation



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Contingencies of Self-Worth Theory

Crocker & Wolfe, 2001

- People base self-esteem on different domains
- Outcomes received in contingent domains determine whether self-esteem is high or low



Appearance as a Contingency of Self-Worth

The attractiveness of a face in particular is relevant to perception and behavior.

- Self-perceived facial appearance & self-esteem
 - (Smith, Burlew, & Lundgren, 1991).
- Facial attractiveness & dating, sexual experiences
 - (Wiederman & Hurst, 1998)
- “What is beautiful is good”
 - (Eagly, Ashmore, Makhijani, & Longo, 1991)



Goals of the present study

- CSW research largely correlational
- Goal:
 - provide a lab manipulation demonstrating a causal impact of negative feedback in a contingent domain



The present study

- 2 x 2 between groups factorial design

	Contingent	Non-contingent
Positive Feedback		
Negative Feedback		



The present study

- 2 x 2 between groups factorial design

	Contingent	Non-contingent
Positive Feedback	↑ self-esteem	
Negative Feedback	↓ self-esteem	



Method

- 51 female participants
- Participants completed several pre-test measures
 - Appearance contingency
 - “When I think I look attractive, I feel good about myself.”
 - 1-7 Likert; $\alpha = .63$
 - Trait self-esteem
 - “I take a positive attitude toward myself.”
 - 1-7 Likert; $\alpha = .63$
 - Self-perceived attractiveness
 - “I consider myself to be a physically attractive person.”
 - 1-5 Likert



Method

- Participants run 1 at a time
- Cover story: Investigate how people form first impressions about each other.
- Experimenter took participant's photograph
 - "anonymous peer" rated photo for attractiveness



Method

- Primary dependent variable
 - appearance state self-esteem
 - “I am pleased with my appearance”
 - 1-7 Likert; alpha = .88



Results

- Manipulation check; $t = 3.85$; $p < .001$
 - positive = 3.04; negative = 2.21

- Appearance CSW
 - $M = 5.35$ (.88); $Mdn = 5.60$



Results

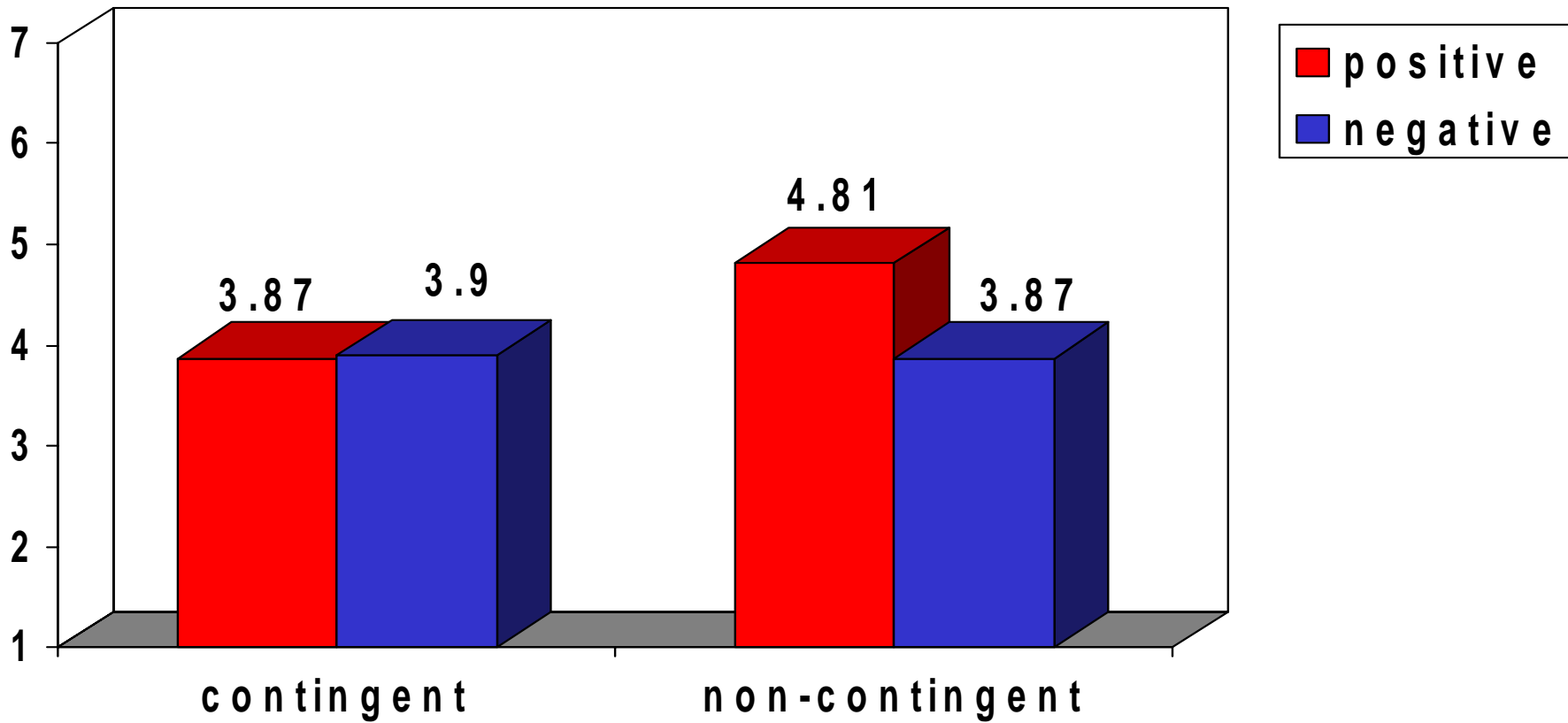
- 2 (contingent/not) x 2 (positive/negative) ANCOVA
 - Covariates: trait self-esteem & self-perceived attractiveness



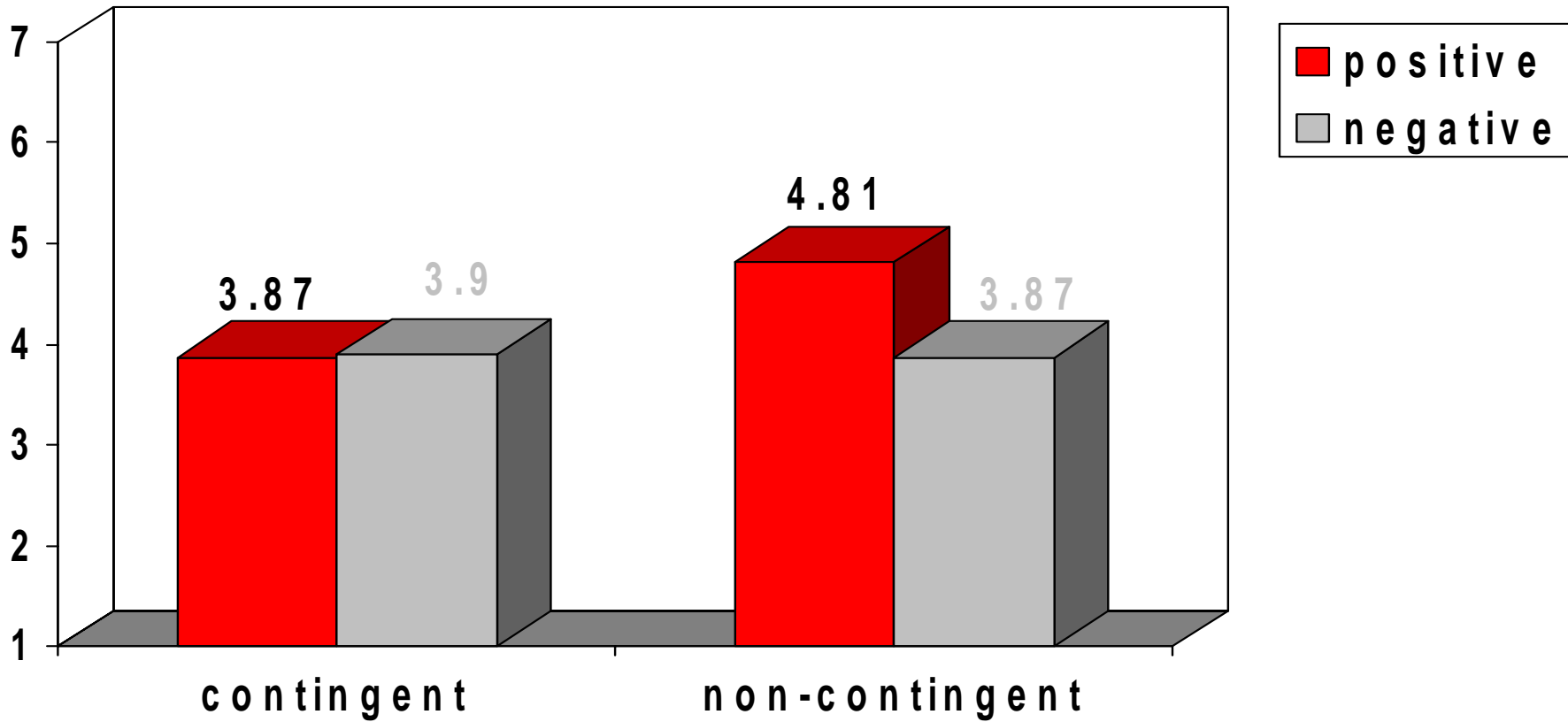
Results

- main effect of feedback
 - $F(1,51) = 3.75; p = .06$
- main effect of appearance
 - $F(1,51) = 3.68, p = .06$
- interaction
 - $F(1,51) = 4.61, p = .04$

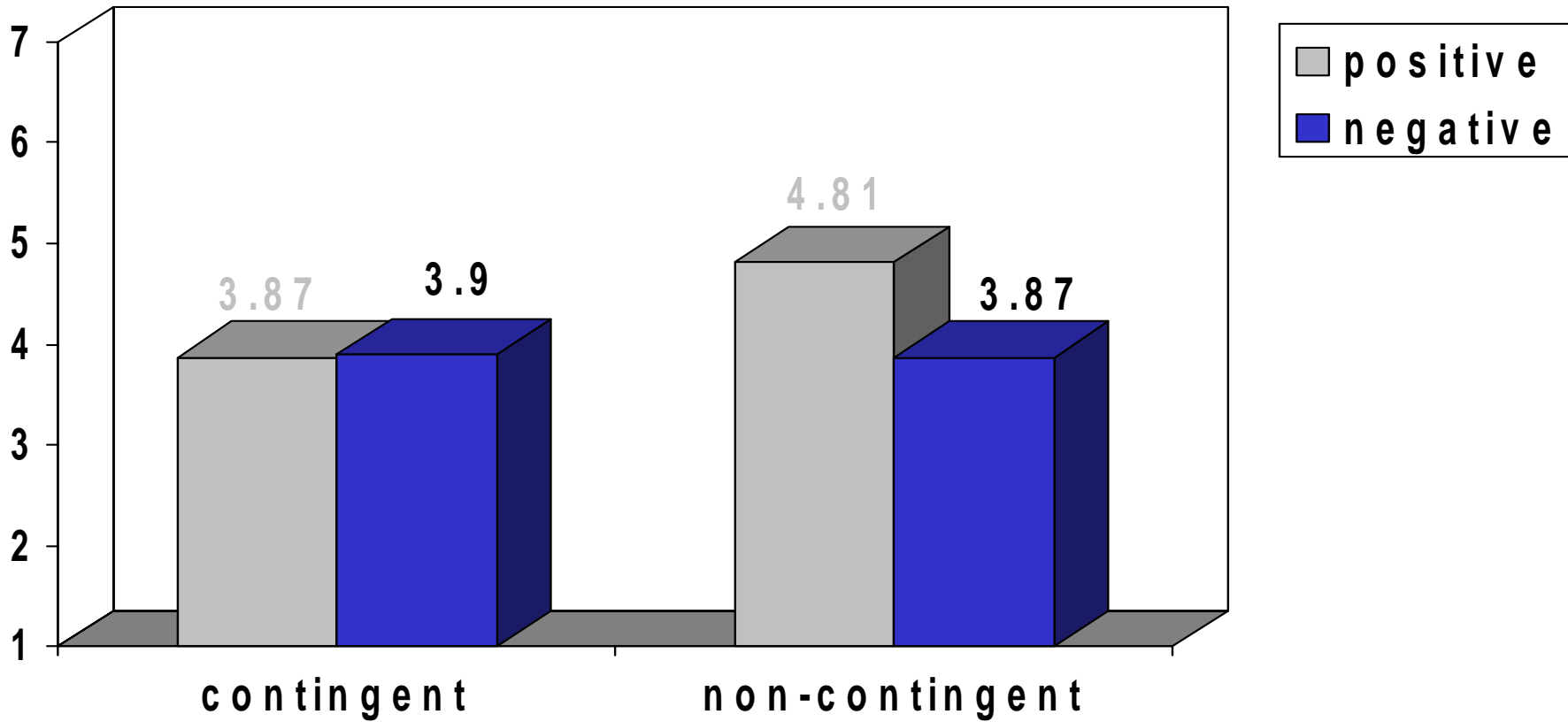
Interaction



Interaction



Interaction





Discussion

- Thought-listing task
 - Administered prior to state self-esteem scale
 - Should show more defensive and/or “low self-esteem” responses