

Psychological Capture: The Feeling of Being Taken

A Theoretical and Empirical Investigation; Principle Investigator: Jean Rehani, Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Ravi Thiruchselvam

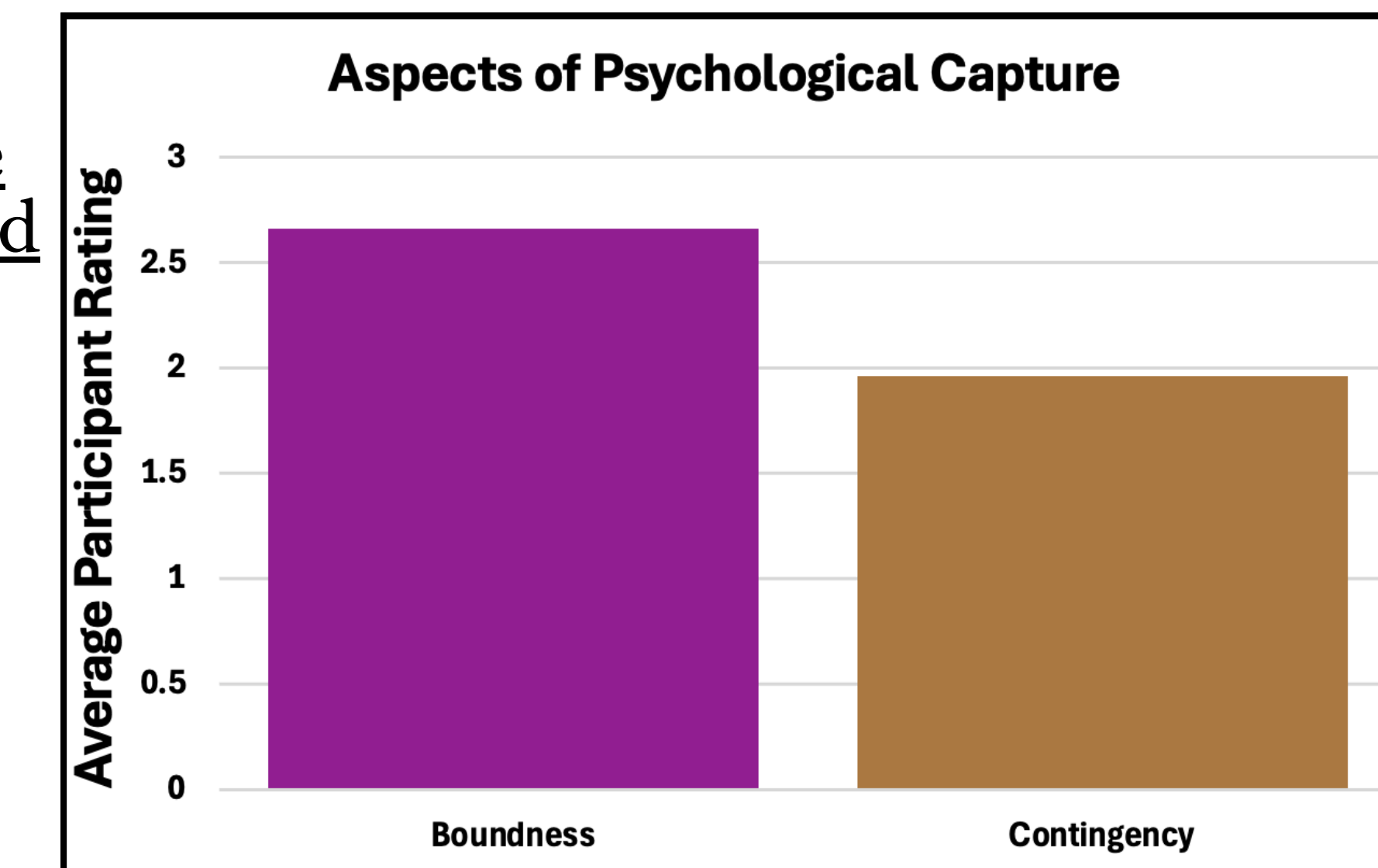
Background

- We commonly observe descriptions of being “**taken**” by something or someone in daily life and pop culture.
- Despite this, there has been little meaningful investigation into the validity of this supposed feeling state.
- In our research, we ask whether these folk linguistic descriptions refer to a valid and meaningful psychological state--which we call **Psychological Capture**

- Goal-directedness:** Contexts which Capture is classically positive seem to have Capture as not only in line with one’s aim, but a part of the aim itself, and the opposite is reflected in the negative.
- Contingency:** Objects/events have a relatively stable objective importance in our lives, but when we are captured, our feelings seem to feel more contingent on the object/event.
- What may drive up the salience of contingency: **psychological distance from the object/event**, the **presence of cues or distractions**, and **trait differences in things like rumination**.

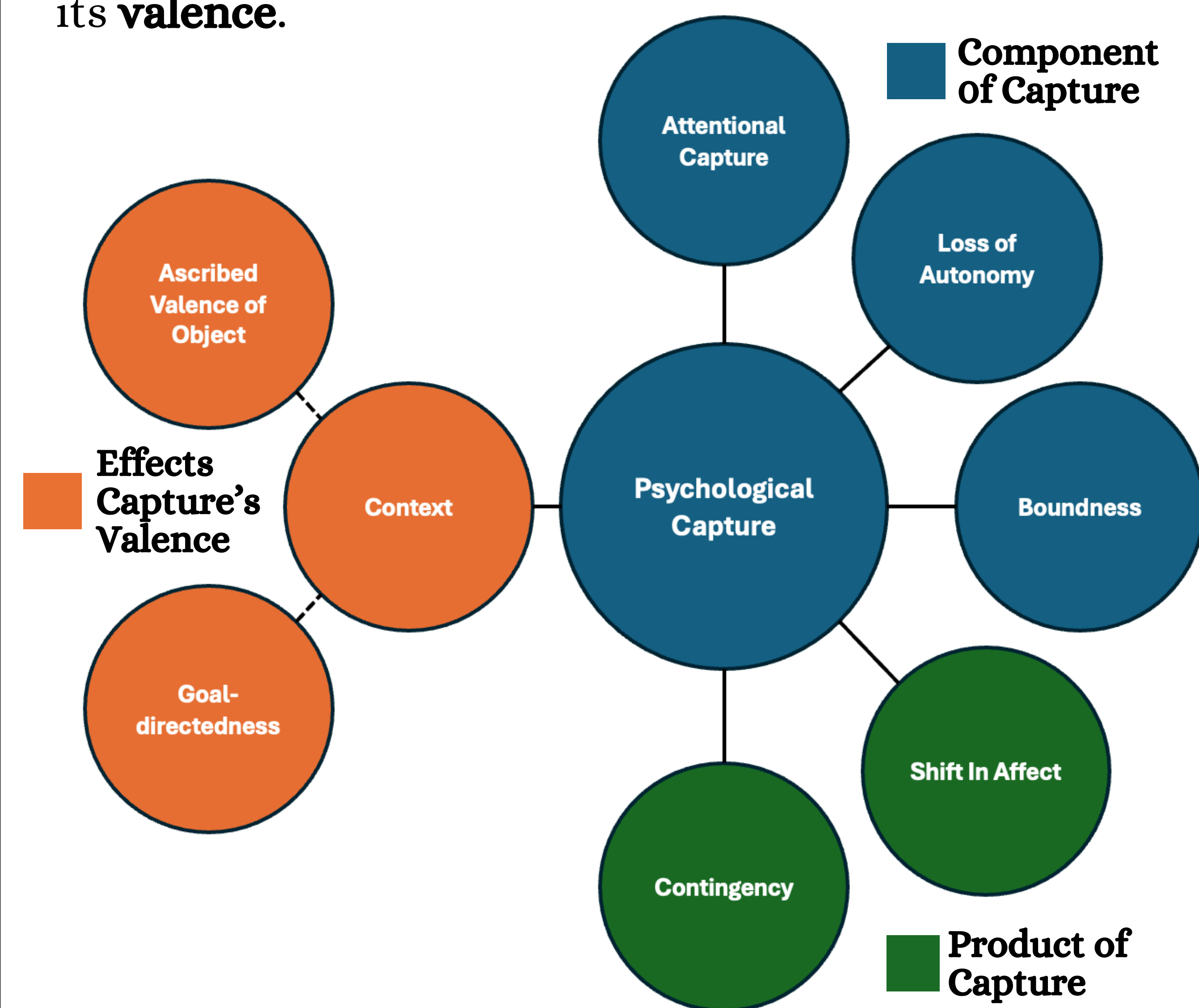
Figure 3. Bar Graph of Capture Statement Agreement Ratings

- Participants rated changes in (feelings below) when *captured*.
- Boundness:** “Your sense of being held in or bound by something.”
- Contingency:** “Your sense that your feelings depend on something else.”
- T-tests reveal that people reported feeling significantly bound and contingent while captured.**



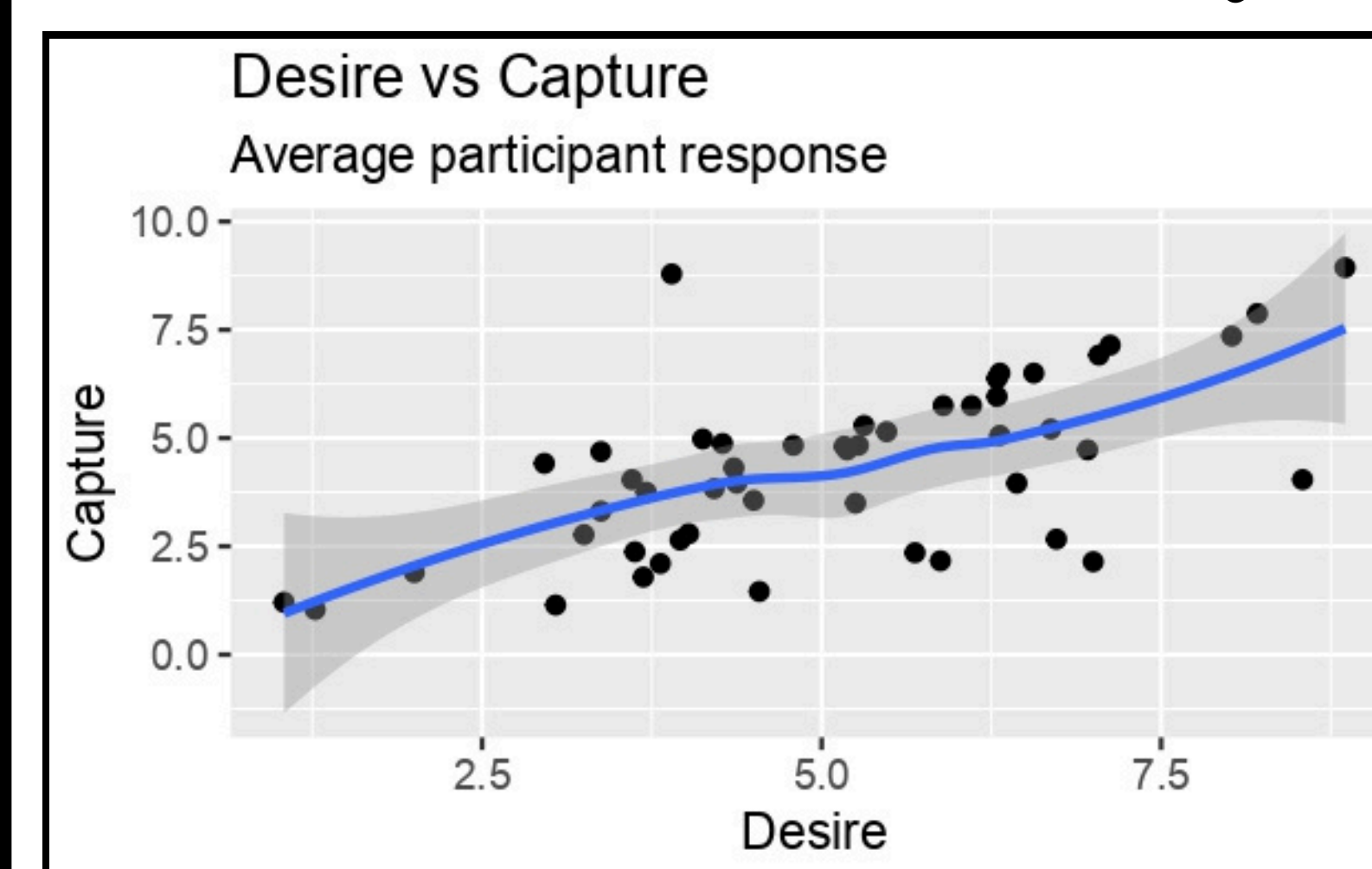
Theoretical Review

- Psychological Capture:** The feeling of being constricted, bound, or held in by something.
- Capture is **made up of** (at least) attention narrowing, a reduced ability to control thoughts, and feeling bound to something outside oneself.
- We predict it can **produce a shift in how pleasant or unpleasant we feel**, and make us feel as though our feelings depend on something else.
- The **context** and particularly whether we **aim at the Capture, view the object positively/negatively**, effects its **valence**.



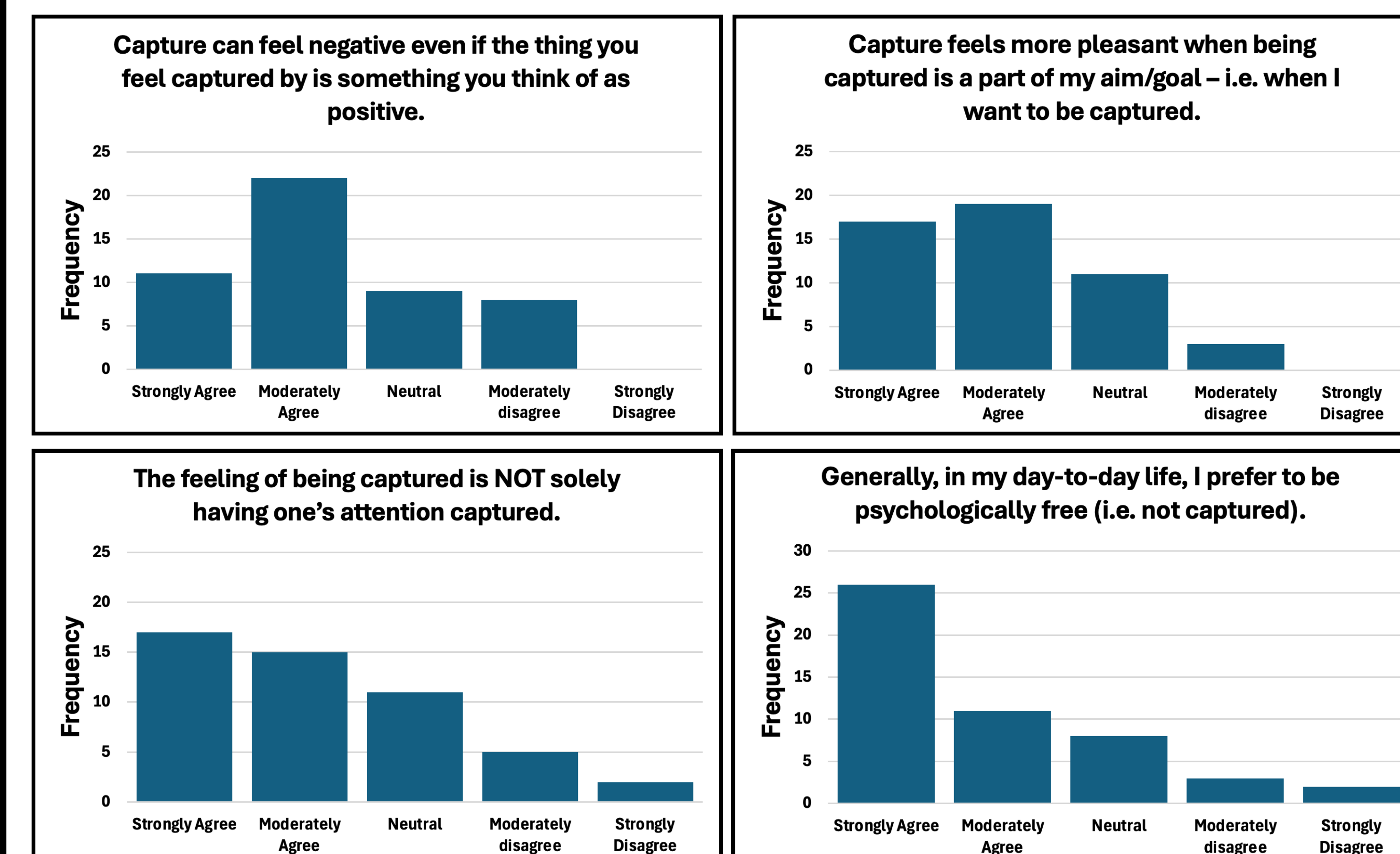
Preliminary Empirical Support

Figure 1. Scatterplot of Self-reported Desire and Capture In a Monetary Gains Task.



- Correlation analysis found a significant positive relationship between self-reported Capture and desire on a trial-by-trial basis.**
- This indicates that **when people feel desire they also seem to feel psychologically captured**.

Figure 2. Distribution of Survey Capture Question Responses



Participants more often strongly or moderately agreed on all 4 questions. Chi-square analyses indicated significant deviation from at chance distribution.

Future Directions

- Empirically investigate how **different contexts** of Capture affect its experience - i.e. in art, romantic attraction, desire.
- Use **bottom-up qualitative approaches** to understand how Psychological Capture operates in people’s minds in a less structured format.
- Compare with **Attentional Capture tasks** (e.g. Additional Singleton) to see if Psychological Capture is really different.
- Investigate its relationship with **trait decentering** and whether that influences the intensity and valence of Capture.
- More **rigorous empirical investigation** of factors and influences.

Significance

- Would **elucidate a ubiquitous affective experience** that is largely unexplored in the academic literature, and make a meaningful extension on the existing literature regarding attentional capture and decentering.
- Helps **contextualize our understanding desire**, and what contributes to how it is subjectively felt.

Acknowledgments

This project comes off the back of all of the time and guidance Professor Ravi Thiruchselvam provided me throughout our research. His unique perspective was **essential** to all of the ideas presented here, and his contributions cannot be overstated.