Alignment of Affective and Economic Valuations for Positive and Negative Experiences

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Introduction

Purpose:

An "**affect gap**" involving differences in choices for affect-rich vs. affect-poor outcomes has been documented using different types of valuation measures.

Our research compares the alignment of **economic valuations**, in the form of **willingness to pay** to engage or avoid such outcomes, with **affective valuations**, as **emotion ratings**, of positive and negative outcomes.

Our **focus** is the comparisons of which factor(s) have a greater influence on a person:

- **Experiences vs. Monetary Outcomes**
- **Positive vs. Negative Conditions**
- **Low Intensity vs. High Intensity**

Methods

Participants:

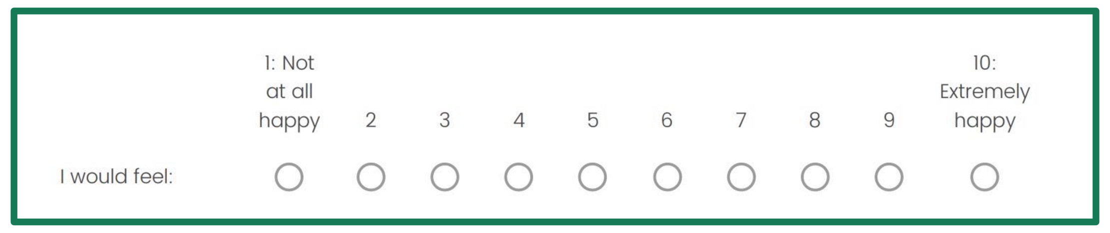
Online survey of 236 USF undergraduates recruited through SONA program.

Design:

- **IVs:**
  1. **Between-Subjects**: **positive** or **negative** outcomes (7 examples of each)
  2. **Within-Subjects:** **experience** or **monetary** outcomes
  3. **Within-Subjects:** **low** or **high intensity**, duration of experiences or amount of money
- **DVs:**
  1. **Willingness to pay (WTP) values, in dollars**
     - WTP to engage in experience (pos. condition)
     - WTP to avoid experience (neg. condition)
  2. **Affect valuations of outcome**
     - Happiness ratings (for positive)
     - Upsetness ratings (for negative)
     - 1-10 Likert rating scale

Example affect valuation item for positive condition:

"How happy would you be if you got to spend a short time with your romantic partner at the beach?"



Results

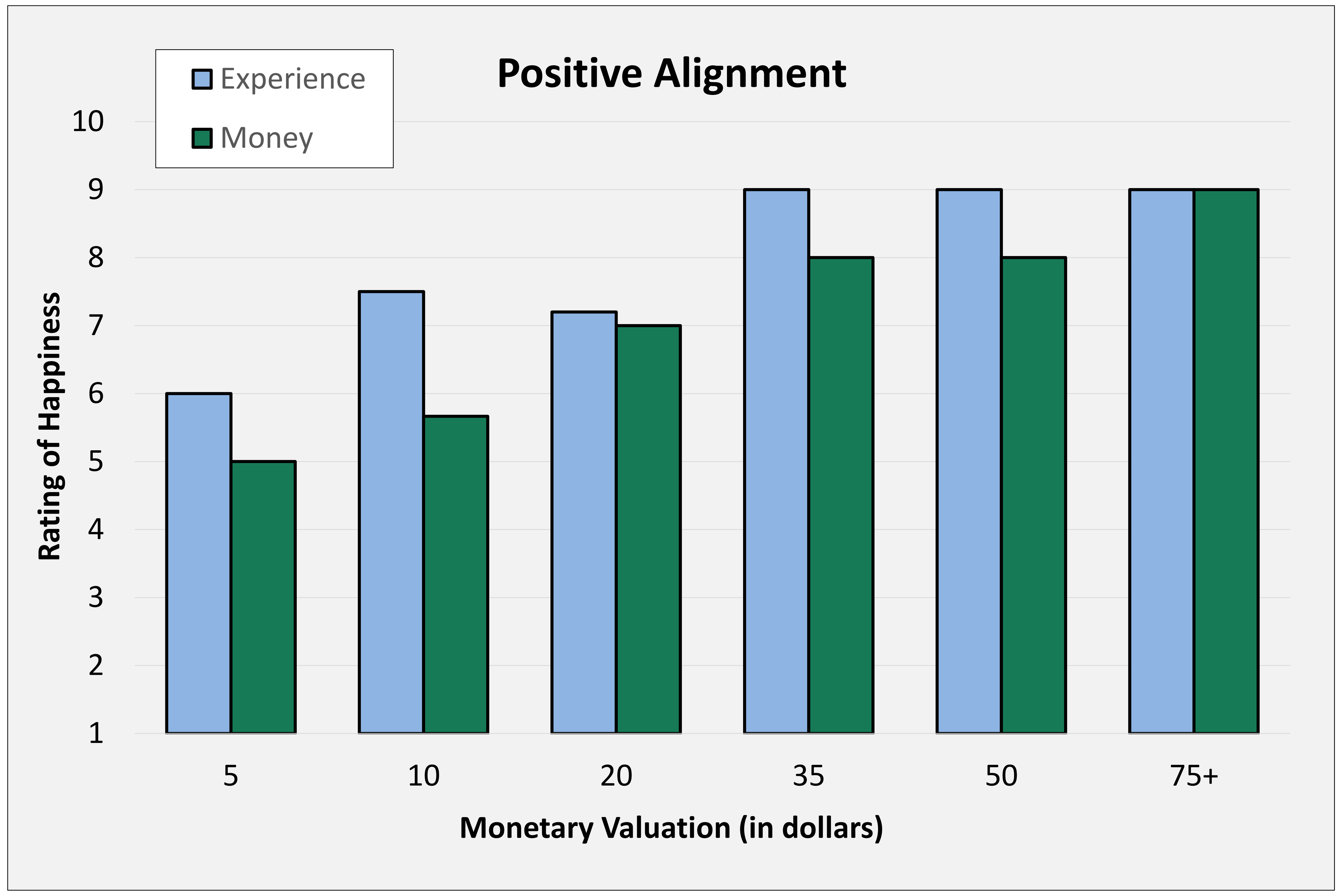


Figure 1:

- Affect ratings of monetary and experience are **close** in value, with a consistent increase in affect as economic valuation increases.
- For **higher** intensity outcomes, affect valuations **leveled off** and became increasingly similar between experience and monetary outcomes.
- **Experience** outcomes were almost always valued with **higher affect** than monetary outcomes, especially in conditions with lower intensity outcomes.

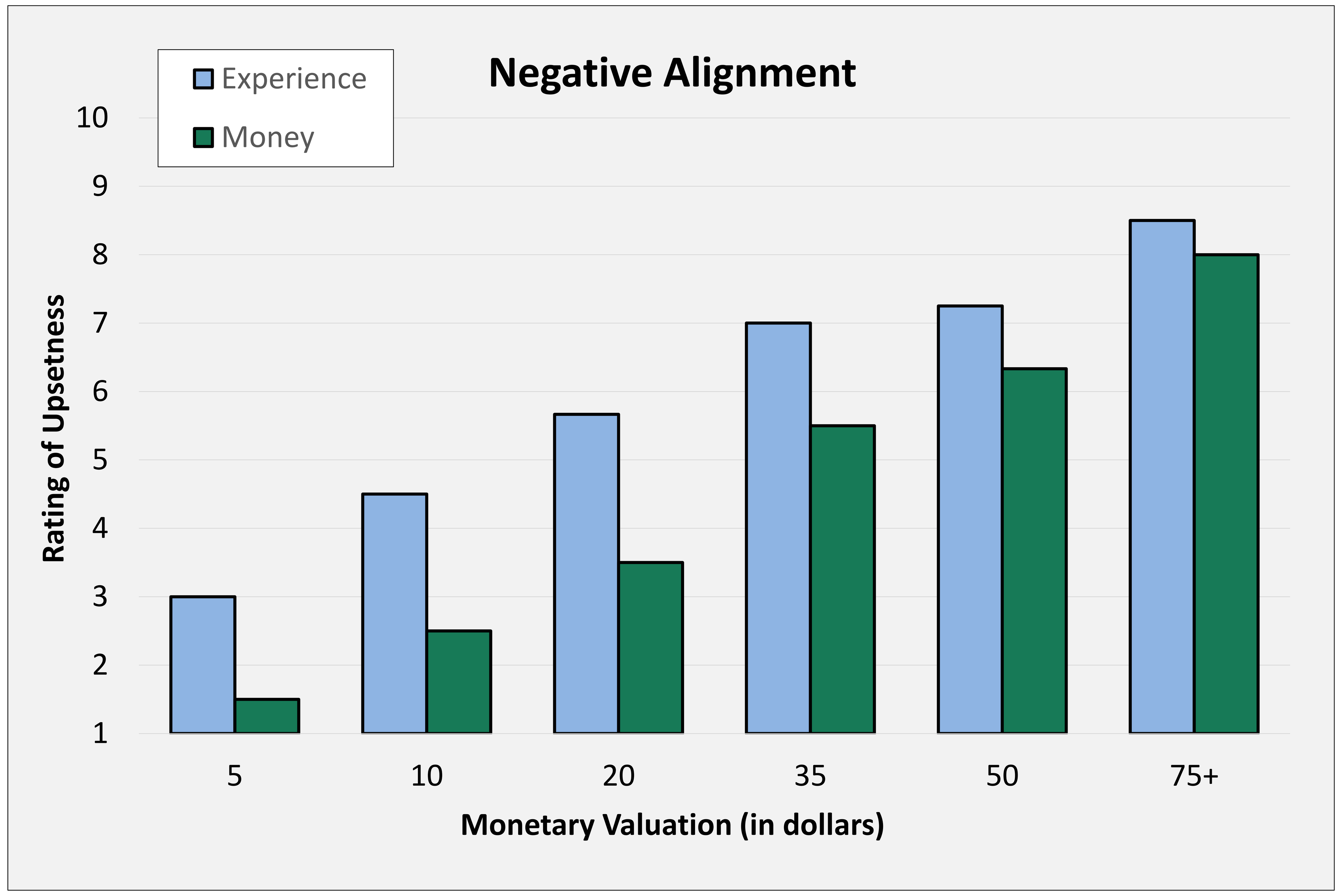


Figure 2:

- As above, affect for negative outcomes is stronger for **experiences** than money, but when the economic valuation increases, the **disparity** becomes **smaller**.
- It took **longer** to reach higher affective values in the **negative** domain compared to the positive domain.
- **Affect valuations** were generally **much lower** in the negative conditions than in the positive conditions, even though monetary equivalents were the same in both domains.

Example Stimuli

Positive	Negative
At the beach	Waiting in line
In favorite city	With a crying child
On a cruise	Experiencing intense hunger
At a theme park	Breathing polluted air

Conclusion

Alignment between **affective and economic methods** for assessing experience versus monetary outcomes needs further investigation.

Our results suggest that there is a **general alignment** of affective and economic valuations, with some differences still present:

- The **qualitative** nature of experiences could explain higher affective values but may also relate to the **unbounded** nature of the WTP measure.
- To our surprise, **negative** outcomes that are economically assigned the same value as positive outcomes yield **lower affect ratings** – which seems to go **against** the loss aversion prediction, which states that losses are felt more intensely than gains. This deserves additional investigation.
- In past literature, monetary outcomes have been considered **affect-poor**; however, our results show that monetary outcomes, especially of greater intensity, **can** be affect-rich.

References

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