



The Role of Emotions in Self-Other Differences in Risk-Involving Decisions

Ye Dam Yi & Eric R. Stone, Department of Psychology, Wake Forest University



Online Office: <https://wakeforest-university.zoom.us/j/93040016296?pwd=NTBLR1VqRkp1NWRVMS9ocE5ld3BMQT09>

Abstract

Are differential experiences of negative emotions responsible for differences in risk taking in decisions made for the self and others? Does less awareness of potential negative emotions resulting from an unfavorable outcome produce more risk taking in decisions for others? To answer these questions, we presented 1418 MTurk participants with four hypothetical relationship scenarios and induced scenario-specific emotions in half of the participants. Contrary to our hypothesis, emotion induction did not decrease the self-other difference in risk taking. As predicted, the emotion induction increased negative feelings more in surrogate decisions than in personal decisions, resulting in similar levels of negative emotions across decisions made for the self and others. However, positive feelings remained greater for decisions made for others than for the self.

Background

- People make more risk-taking decisions for others than for themselves when there's a social value on risk taking, and make less risk-taking decisions for others when there is a social value on risk aversion (Stone & Allgaier, 2008; Stone et al., 2013).
- However, "high empathy" participants showed this trend to a lesser extent than participants with lower empathy (Petrova et al., 2016).
- Risk as feelings (RAF) theory (Loewenstein et al., 2001) and empathy gap theory (Loewenstein, 1996) state that people make more risk-taking decisions for others than for themselves because they are not able to experience the negative emotions experienced by others.
- It is possible that participants high in empathy do experience the negative emotions of others, thus producing a reduced self-other difference. In contrast, participants with lower empathy do not experience these negative emotions, instead relying on norms to decide in keeping with the social value.

Study Rationale

- If this is the case, we reasoned that increasing people's experienced emotions should have a similar effect as empathy.
- Half of our participants underwent an "emotion induction" manipulation. If the above argument based on RAF and empathy gap theory is correct, then this manipulation should:
 - Increase negative feelings more in the surrogate condition than in the self condition
 - Not impact self-other differences in positive feelings (since there shouldn't be one in the control condition)
 - Combined, these effects should produce a reduced self-other difference in risk taking.

Method

1418 participants assigned to one of 2 (Recipient: self vs. surrogate) X 2 (Manipulation: control vs. emotion induction) conditions

Sample Scenario for Surrogate Condition

Your friend is at a restaurant with some friends. The waiter that has been serving her is attractive and she thinks he has been flirting with her. When she goes to leave, she thinks about putting her name and number down on the check so that he will see it after she leaves. She is a bit embarrassed, however. Your friend is deciding whether to put down her name and number or not to leave them.

Emotion Induction

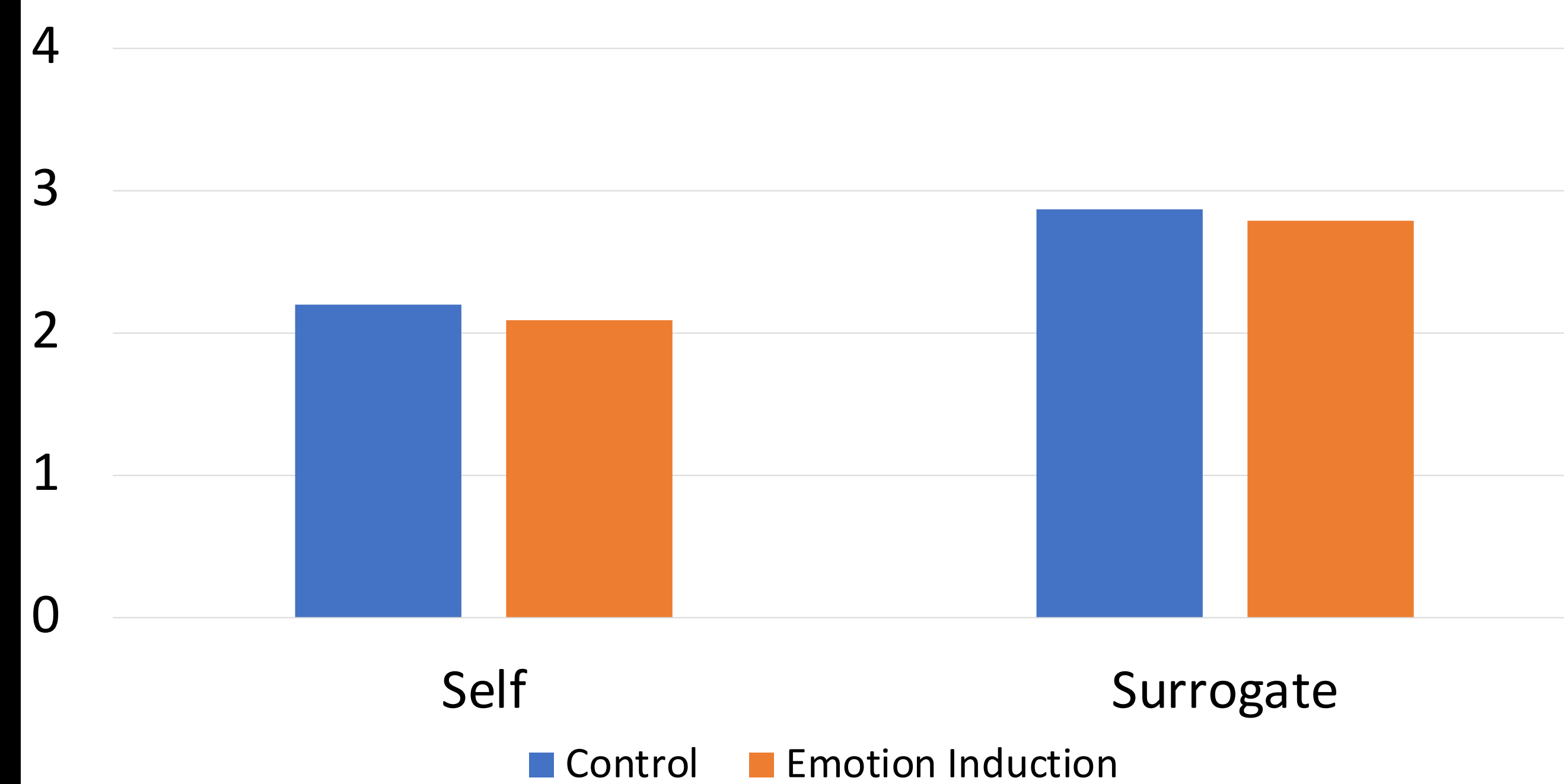
Control	Emotion Induction
Describe décor and object in 3 sentences each	Describe positive and negative feelings in 3 sentences each

What would you decide for your friend?
Put down her name and number
Leave without putting them down

DVs: Number of risky choices across 4 scenarios (0-4), negative and positive emotion ratings

Results

Risk-Taking Levels



- In keeping with previous research, there was a strong self-other difference with more risky decisions for a surrogate, $p < .001$.
- Inconsistent with our prediction, emotion induction did not reduce self-other differences in risk taking, $p = .90$.

References

Loewenstein, G. (1996). Out of Control: Visceral Influences on Behavior. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 65(3), 272–292.

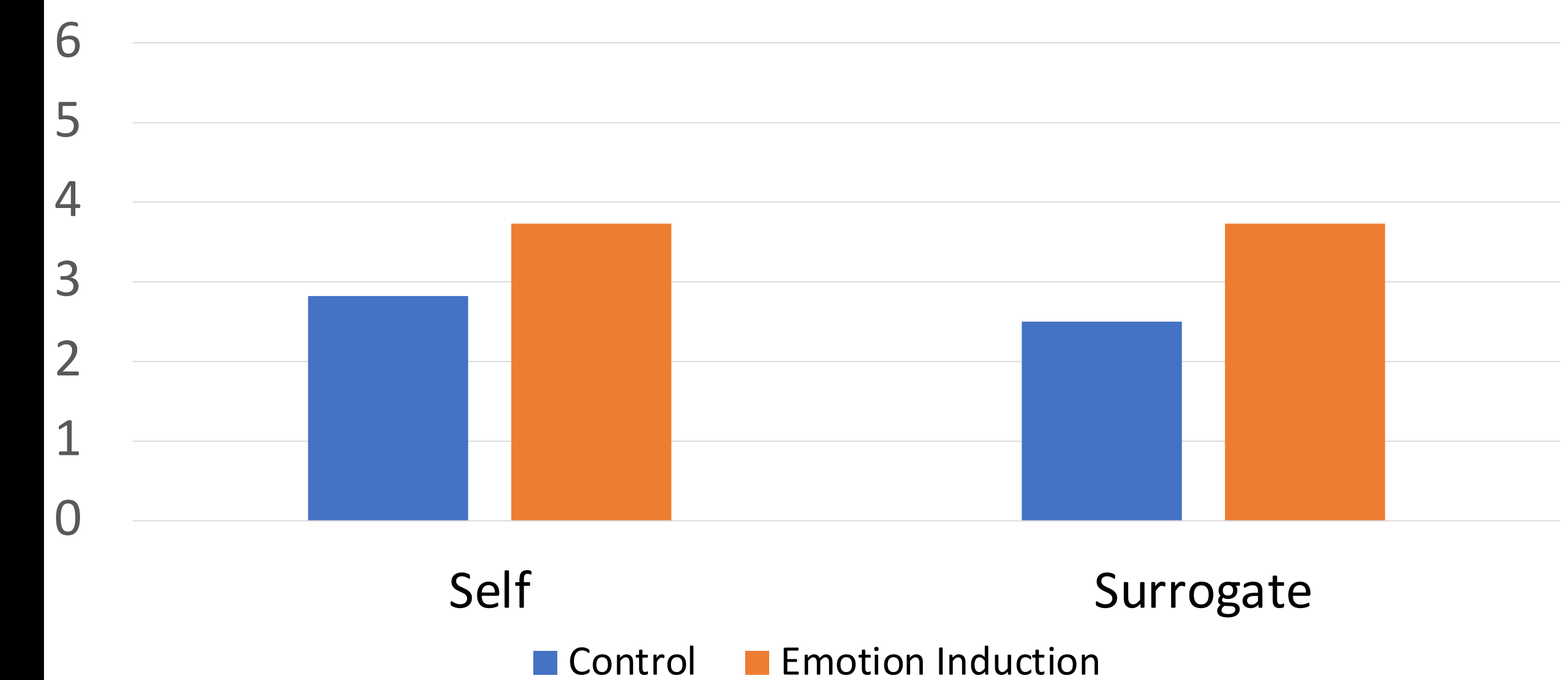
Loewenstein, G. F., Weber, E. U., Hsee, C. K., & Welch, N. (2001). Risk as feelings. *Psychological Bulletin*, 127(2), 267–286.

Petrova, D., Garcia-Retamero, R., & van der Pligt, J. (2016). What Factors Moderate Self-Other Discrepancies in Decision Making? Results from a Vaccination Scenario. *The Spanish Journal of Psychology*, 19, E52.

Stone, E. R., & Allgaier, L. (2008). A Social Values Analysis of Self-Other Differences in Decision Making Involving Risk. *Basic and Applied Social Psychology*, 30(2), 114–129.

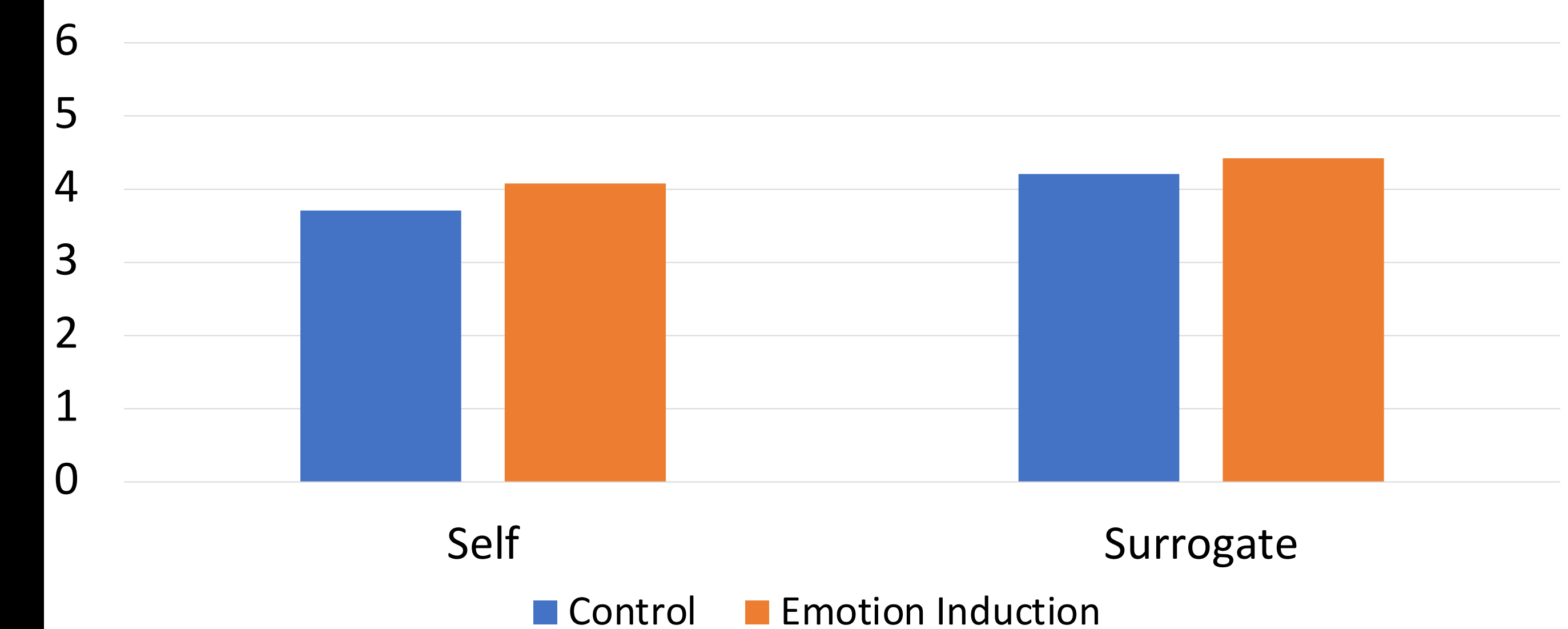
Stone, E. R., Choi, Y., de Bruin, W. B., & Mandel, D. R. (2013). I can take the risk, but you should be safe: Self-other differences in situations involving physical safety. *Judgment and Decision Making*, 8(3), 250–267.

Negative Feelings



- The emotion induction increased negative feelings in both the self and surrogate conditions, but as predicted, this increase in negative feelings was greater in the surrogate condition than in the self condition, $p = .03$.

Positive Feelings



- Regardless of the manipulation, participants actually felt *more* positive feeling for others than for the self, $p < .001$. The manipulation produced an increase in positive feelings, and this increase was consistent between self and surrogate decisions, $p < .001$.

Conclusions

- Although we found the predicted reduction in self-other differences in negative feelings, this reduction did not translate into reduced self-other differences in risk taking.
- We additionally tested mediation to determine to what extent the recipient effect on risk taking was mediated by positive and negative emotions, and found that the direct effect of recipient explained 76% of the effect whereas the indirect effects combined explained only 24% of the effect.
- In combination, these results suggest that while there are self-other differences in negative emotions, these differences have minimal influence on self-other differences in risk taking, at least in situations where there is a strong social value in operation.