

Syncing into Love: The Role of Cognitive, Emotional, and Physical Synchrony During Expressions of Gratitude Between Romantic Partners

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BACKGROUND

- Synchronous moments—in which two people temporally converge in their thoughts, emotions, and/or behaviors—are important components of love and connection between romantic partners¹⁻⁴
- Highly positive interactions are critical for moments of love (e.g., expressed gratitude⁵), yet little is known about the presence and role of synchrony in highly positive interactions
- Existing work on synchrony tends to focus on one type of synchrony at a time, limiting our ability to draw conclusions about whether and when different forms of synchrony matter

OBJECTIVE

Examine the relational antecedents and consequences of cognitive, emotional, and physical synchrony during gratitude expressions between romantic partners

METHODS

Participants: 169 cohabitating couples

- M age = 34.9; M rel length = 10.46 years; 171 cis women, 150 cis men, 4 trans men, 13 non-binary

Procedure: Background survey testing global relationship quality. In lab: T1 relationship quality → gratitude conversation (among others) → T2 relationship quality

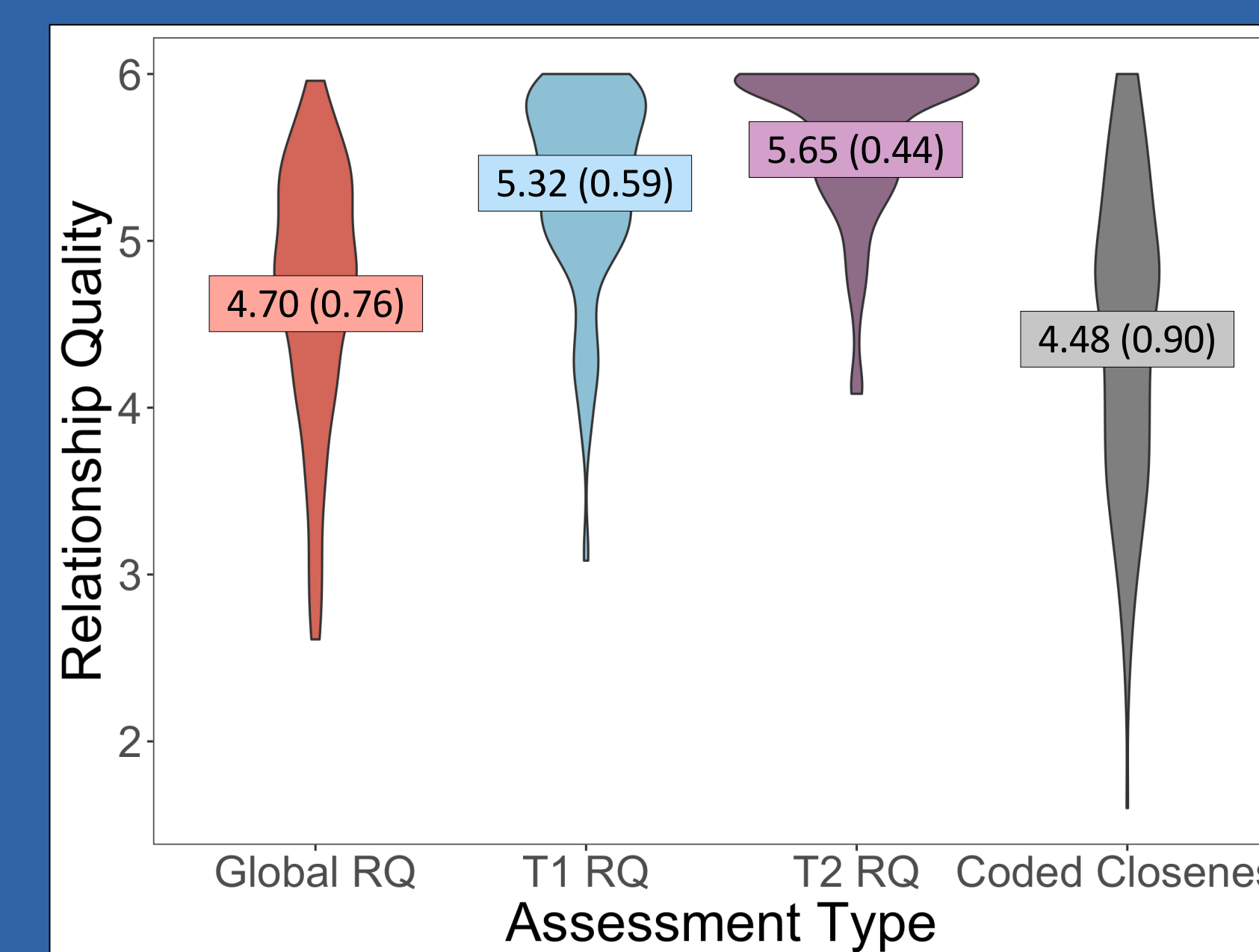
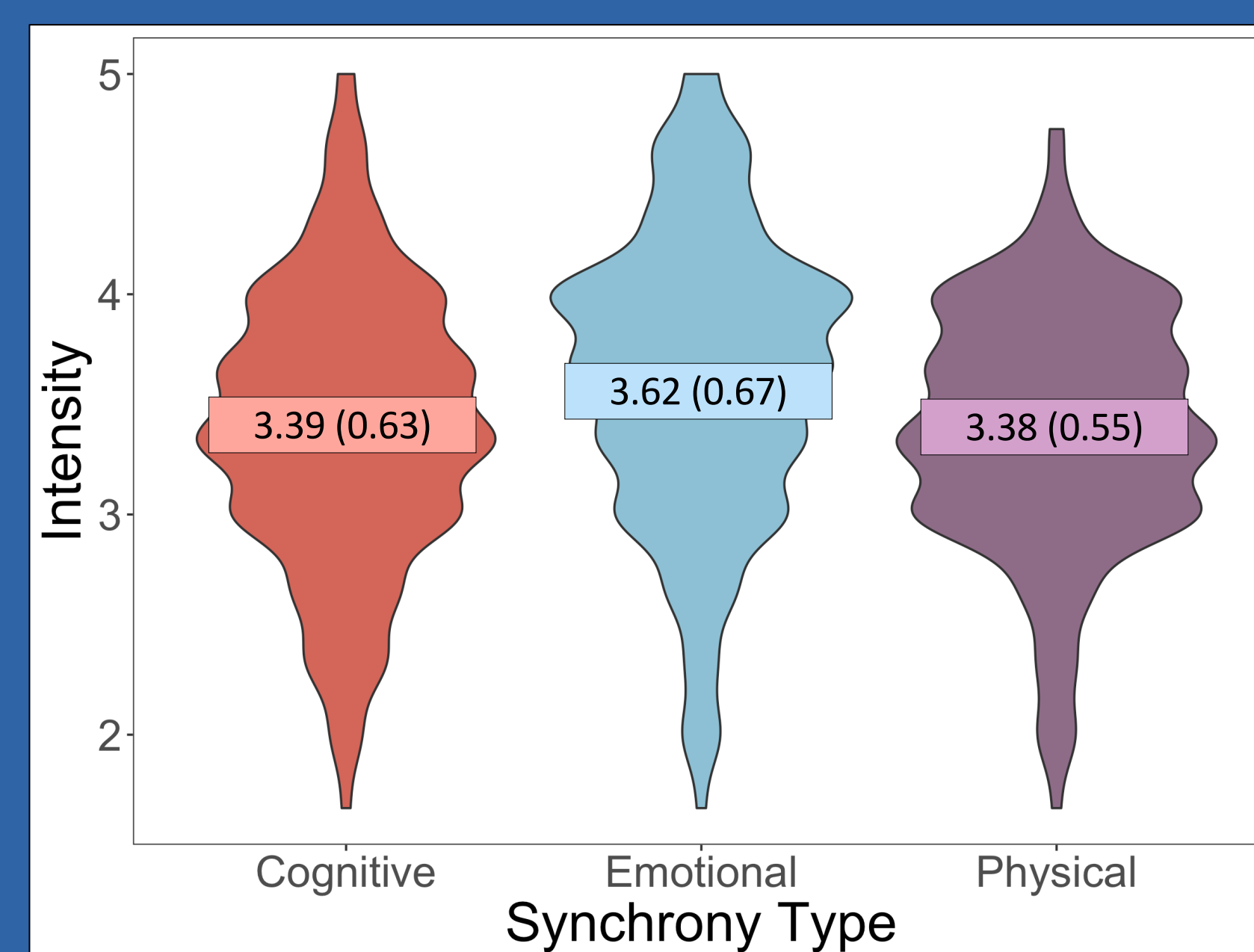
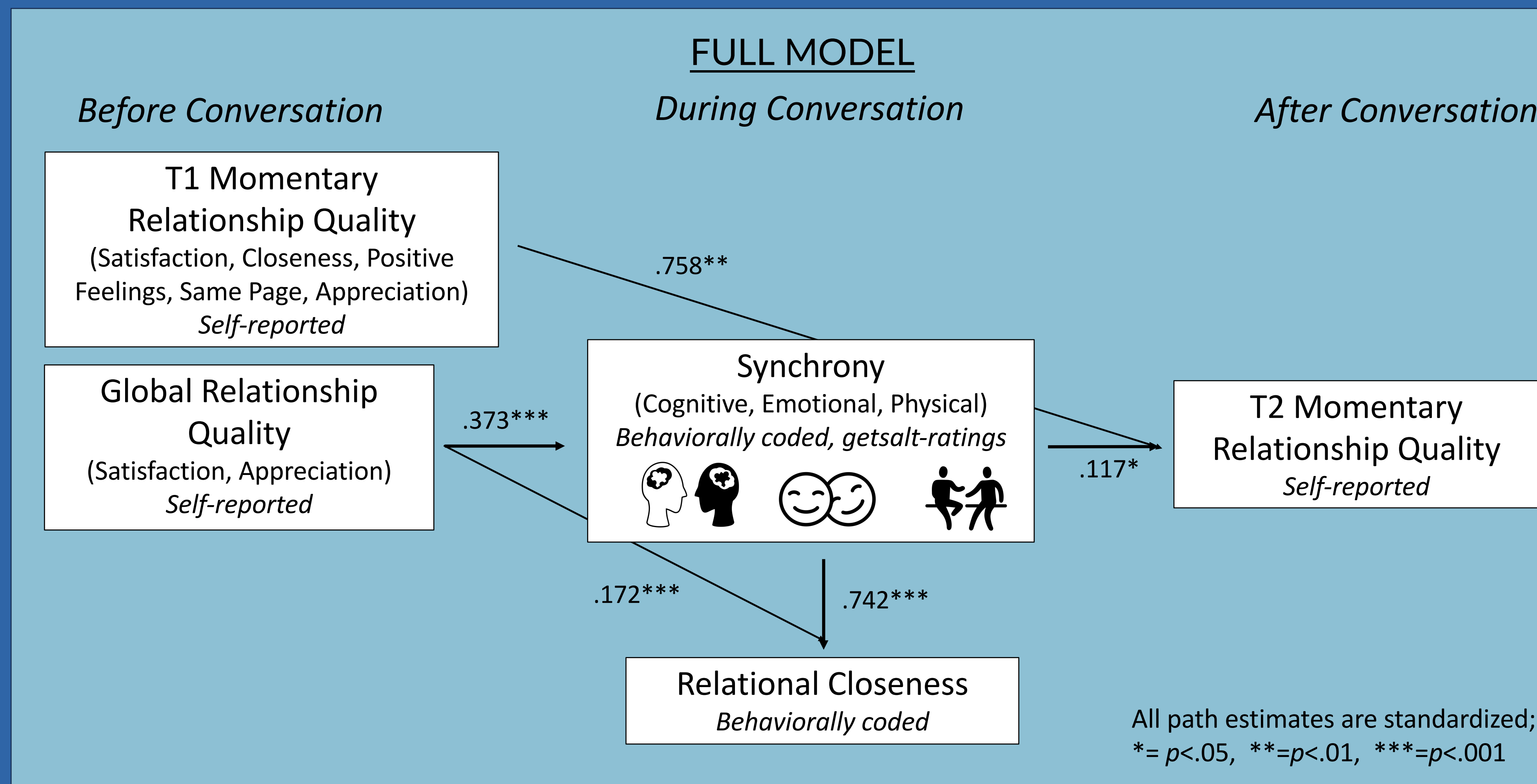
Measures:

- **Global Relationship Quality:** Couples Satisfaction Index⁶ ($\alpha=.97$), Positive Relationship Quality Subscale⁷ ($\alpha=.94$) Appreciation in Relationships Scale⁸ (apprtv $\alpha=.89$, aprtrd $\alpha=.92$)
- **Momentary Relationship Quality:** Face-valid items: satisfaction, closeness, positive feelings towards partner, feeling on same page, appreciation; 1-6 Likert Scale (T1 $\alpha=.92$; T2 $\alpha=.95$)
- **Ratings of Closeness:**
 - "How cohesive, close and connected was the couple?" ($\alpha=.86$); 1-5 Scale (re-scaled for visuals)
- **Gestalt Ratings of Synchrony:**
 - **Cognitive** (i.e., Generalized Shared Reality²): Agreement, finish each other's sentences, riff off ideas ($\alpha=.62-.81$)
 - **Emotional:** Emotions intertwine, fluctuate in tune ($\alpha=.70-.85$)
 - **Physical:** Coordinated body positioning and movements⁹ ($\alpha=.51-.85$); 1-5 Likert Scale

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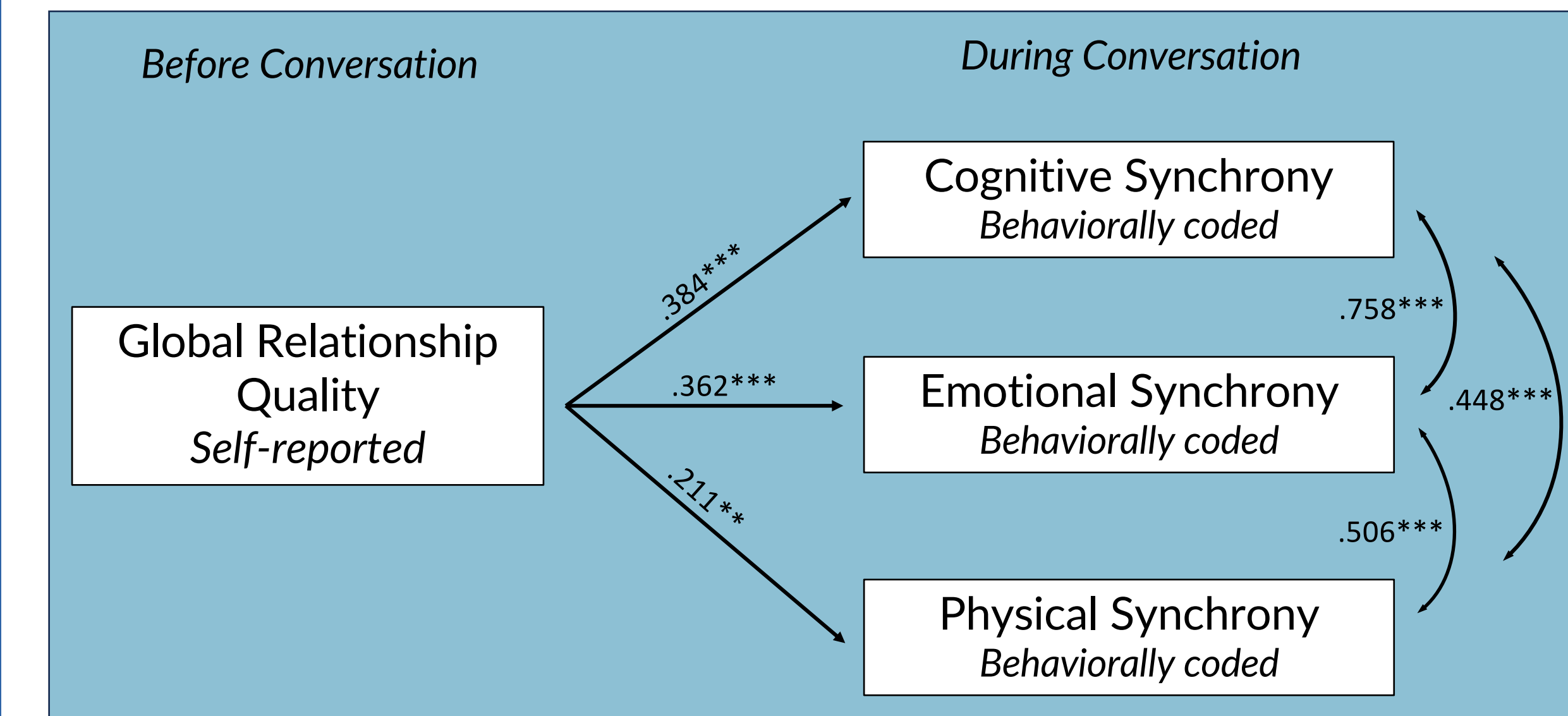
Romantic couples with greater synchrony in their thoughts and emotions during expressions of gratitude experience an increase in relationship quality



Synchrony may play an important role in capitalizing on positive moments between romantic partners

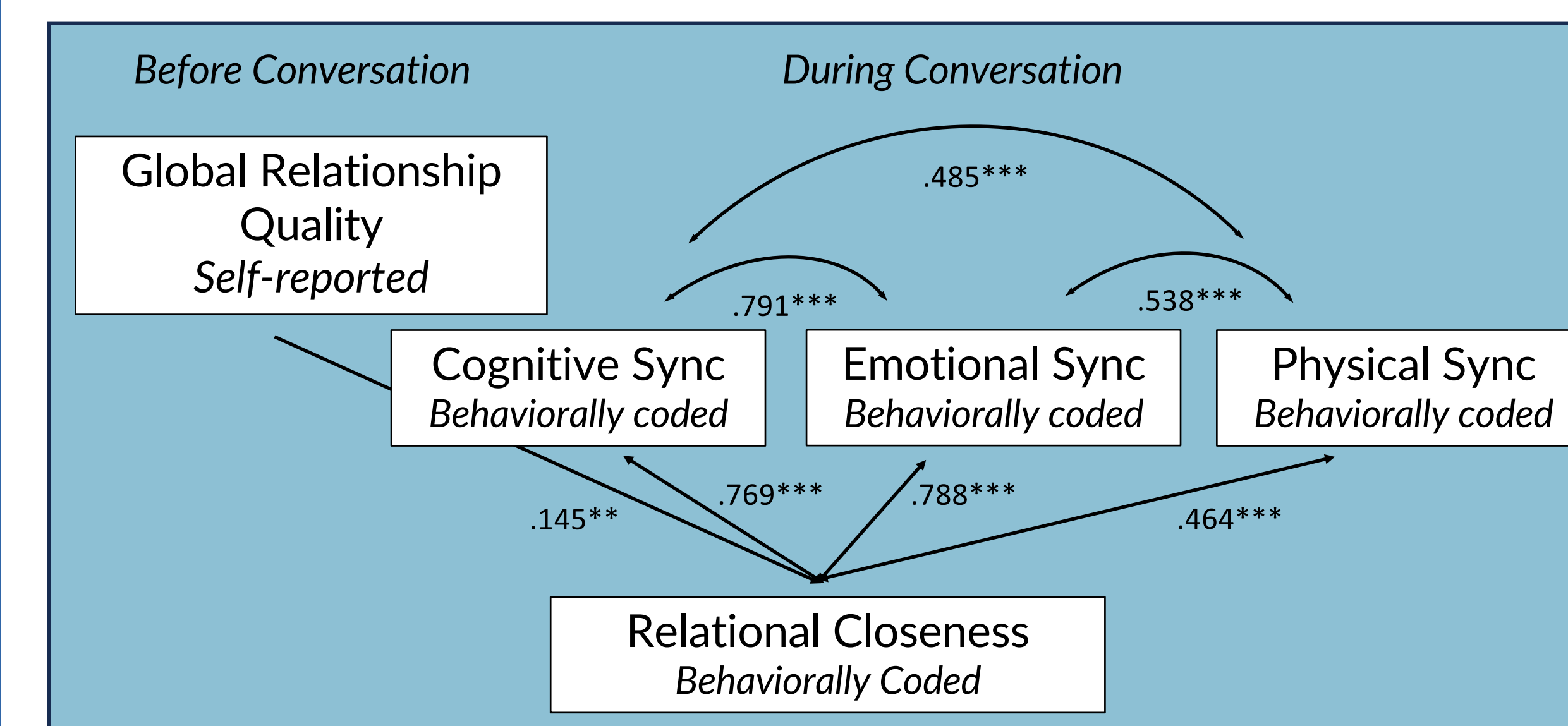
Relational Antecedents of Synchrony

Couples with greater relationship quality showed greater synchrony in their thoughts, emotions, and behaviors during expressions of gratitude



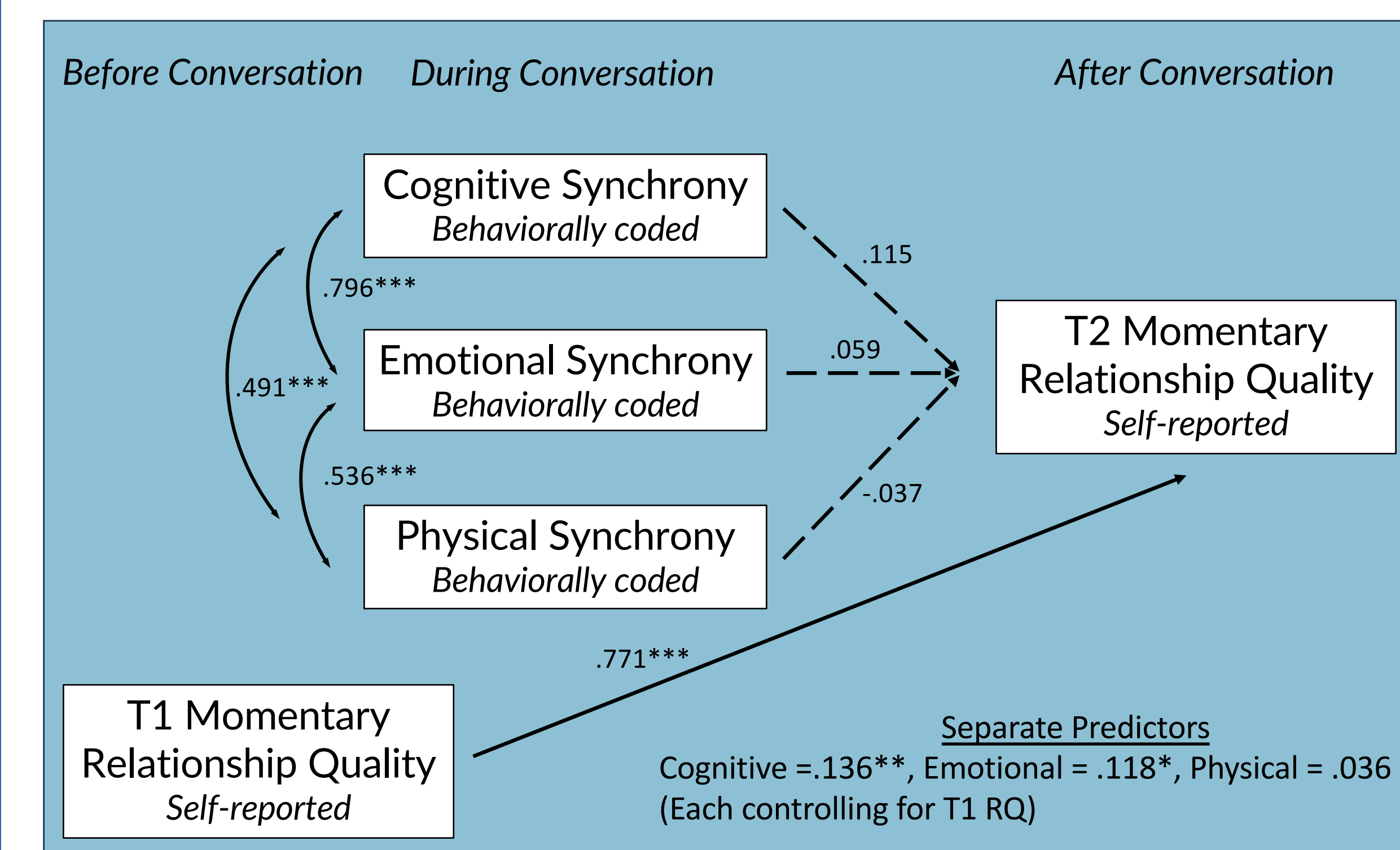
Concurrent Associations with Synchrony

There was a positive association between all types of synchrony and observed closeness



Relational Consequences of Synchrony

Each type of synchrony did not uniquely predict relationship quality, likely due to shared variance. When run in separate models, couples with greater synchrony in their thoughts and emotions (but not behaviors) experienced greater relationship quality following the conversation, controlling for initial levels



CONCLUSION & FUTURE DIRECTIONS

- Synchrony is both a signal of high-quality relationships and may help to promote relationship quality
- Sharing either thoughts or emotions is sufficient to promote greater relationship quality
- In ongoing work, we are exploring whether specific patterns of synchrony during conversation are most predictive of change in momentary relationship quality

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