

Motive-Congruent Behavior to Regulate Life Stress: Linking Stress, Implicit Motives, and Self-Regulation

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Introduction

Life stress can adversely affect mental and physical health, with responses to and appraisals of stressors varying according to personality traits (Sapolsky, 1994). This study investigated the link between implicit motives and life stress and whether the effect of the affiliation motive (*nAff*) on life stress was moderated by motive-congruent (i.e., affiliative) stress-regulation behavior.

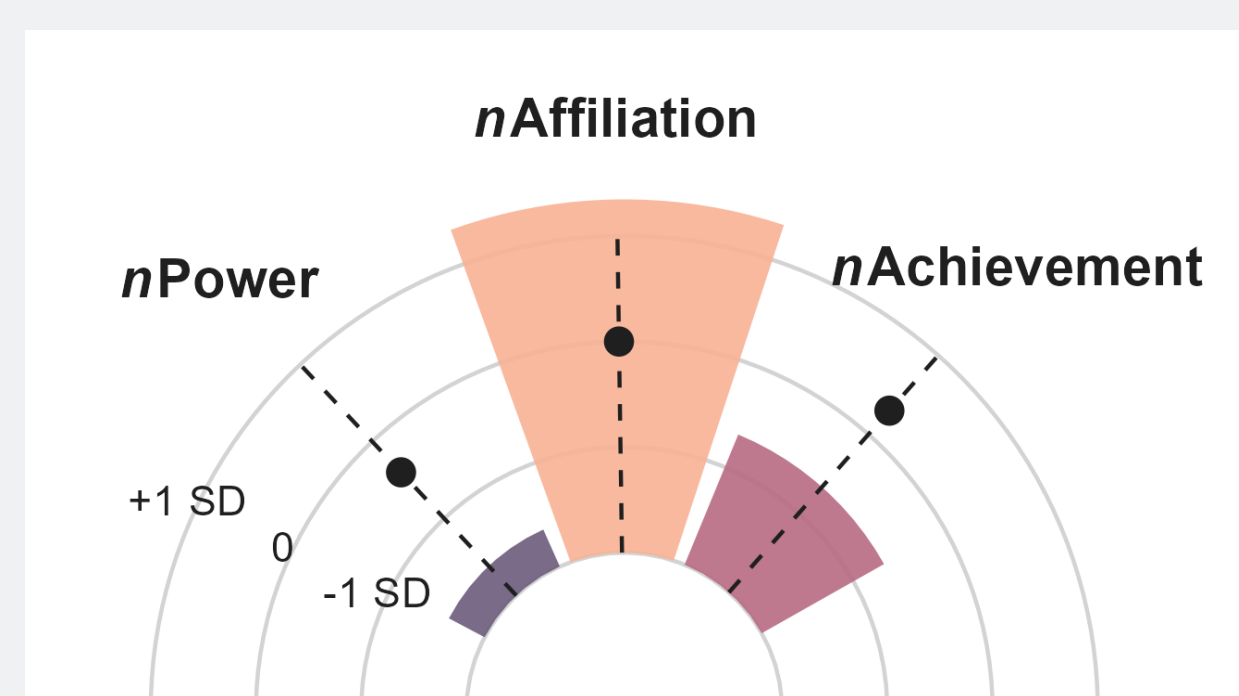


Figure 1 Example motive profile showing relative strengths of the implicit affiliation, achievement and power motive

Implicit Motives & Self-regulation

Implicit motives: Nonconscious preferences for certain classes of incentives that *orient* attention toward specific cue stimuli in the environment and *energize* behavior

- Direct behavior to satisfy personal needs, goals and values
- Generate context-specific behavioral options (Kuhl, 2018; McClelland, 1987)

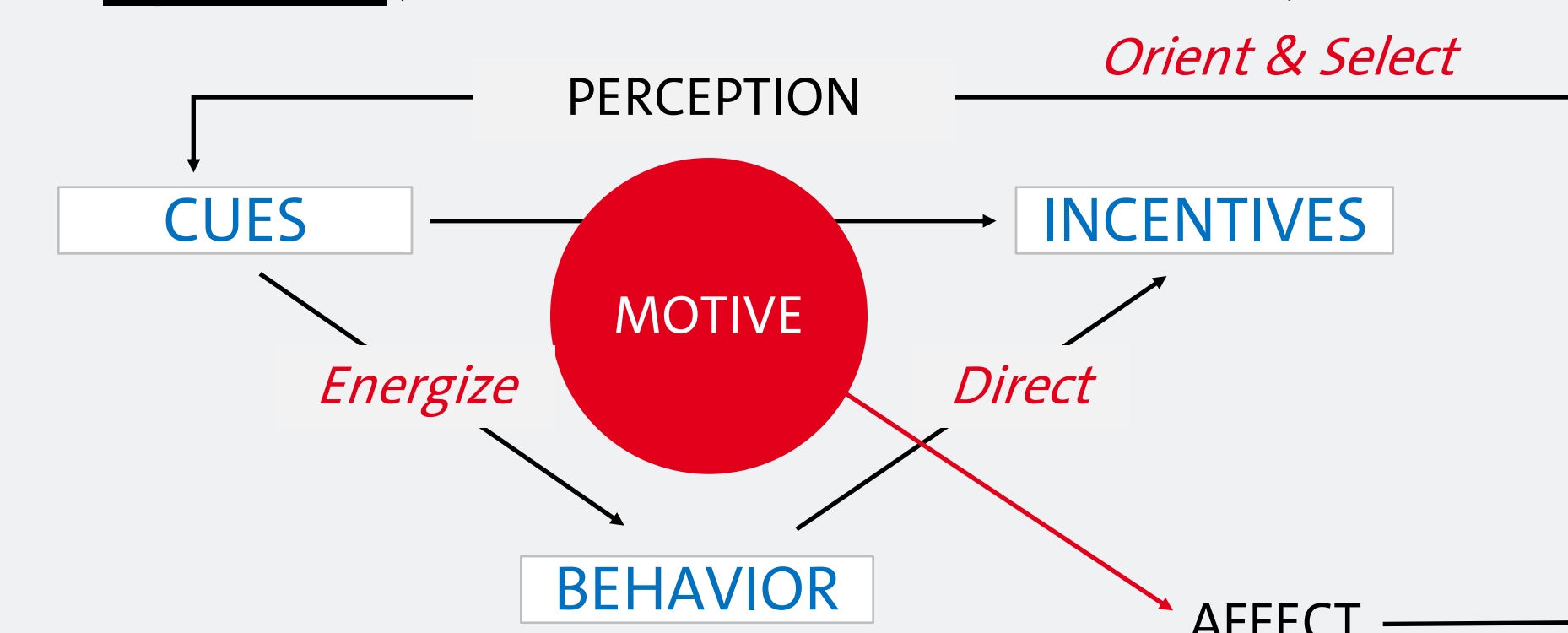


Figure 2 Functions of implicit motives (Schultheiss, 2008)

nAffiliation & Stress

nAff: The need to establish, maintain, or restore positive social relationships with others (Atkinson et al., 1954)

- Buffers the effect of acute psychosocial stress on HPA axis (Wegner et al., 2014)
- High-affiliation individuals show better stress resistance (McClelland, 1989) and maintain better immune system function during stress (Jemmott et al., 1983)
- Congruence between nAff and behavior or environment benefits health outcomes (e.g., well-being, job-burnout) (Brandstätter et al, 2016; Schüler et al., 2008)

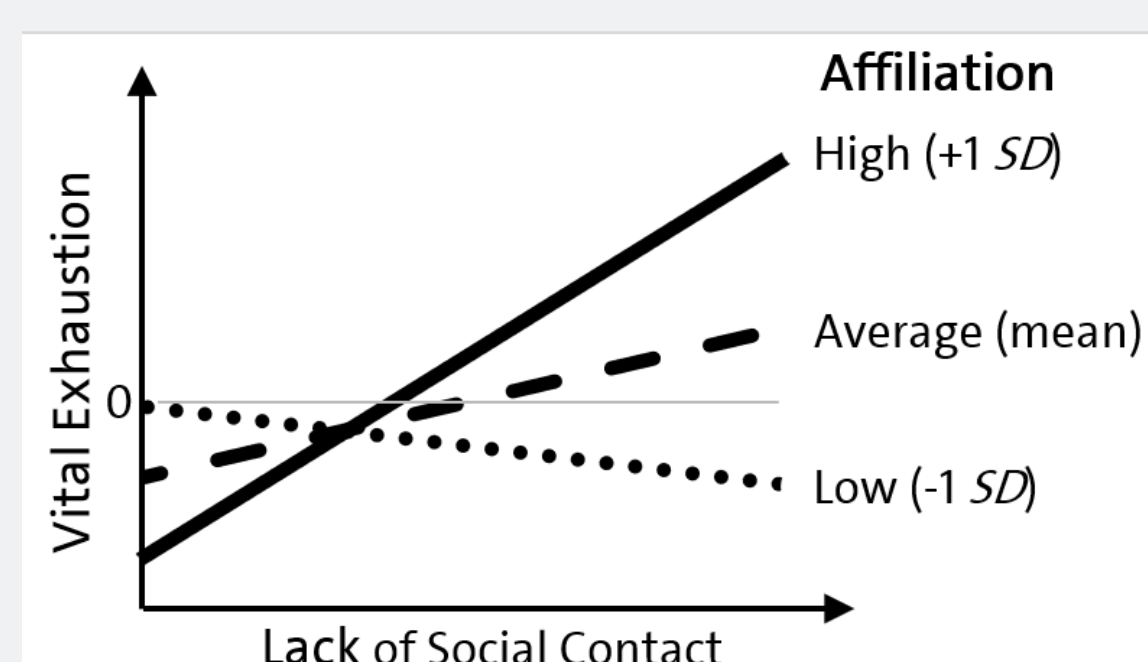


Figure 3 Moderating effect of nAff on the association between lack of social contact and vital exhaustion (adapted from Schoch et al., 2018)

Affiliation under stress: Tend-and-befriend

Tend-and-befriend: Biobehavioral response to stress characterized by **tending** to offspring and **affiliating** with others who provide resources and protection (Taylor et al., 2000)

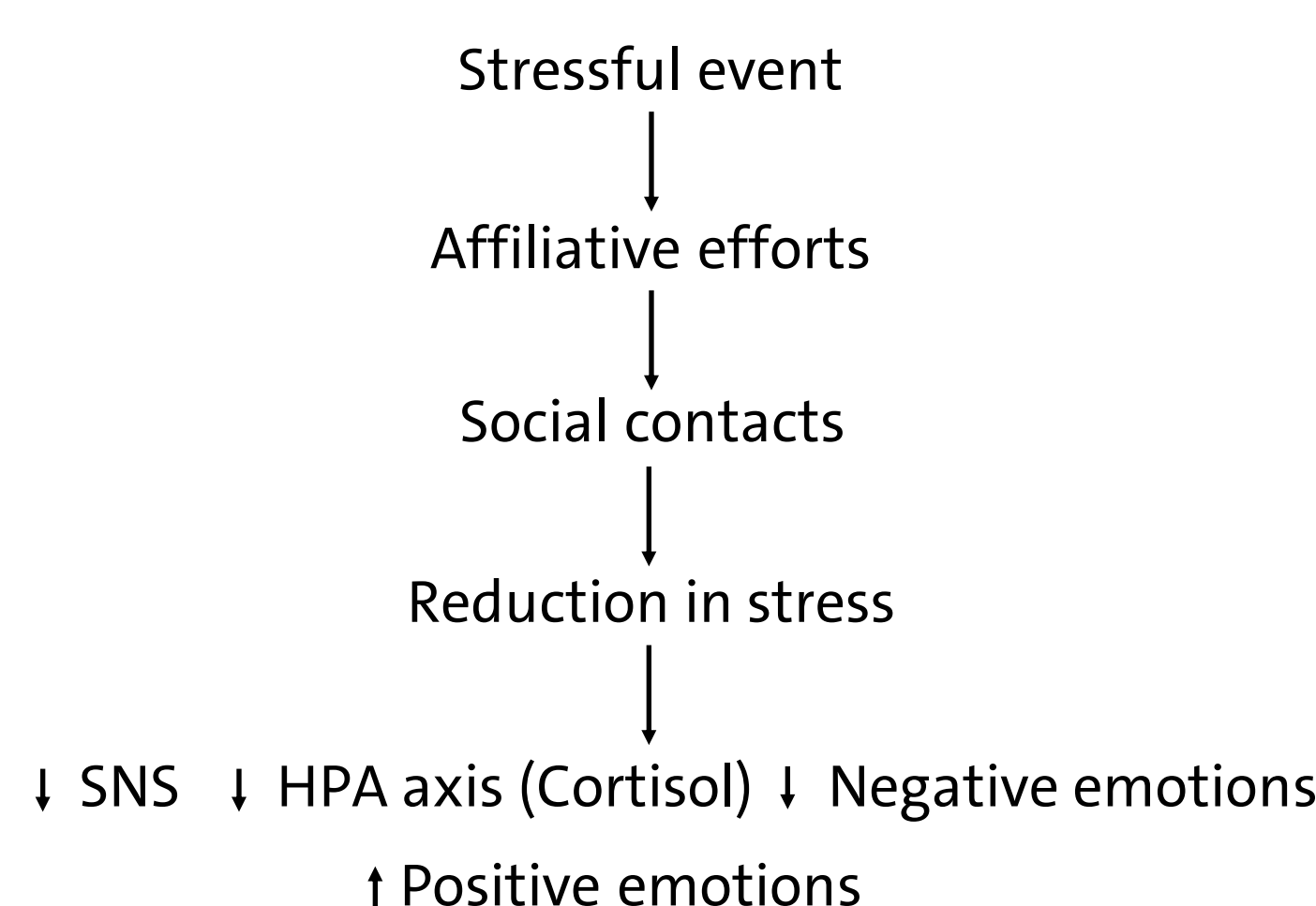


Figure 4 Biological signaling system of tend-and-befriend behavior (adapted from Taylor, 2012)

Research Question

a) Is the stress-buffering effect of the affiliation motive, relative to the achievement and power motive, reflected in lower self-reported life stress, and, b) is this effect amplified by motive-congruent stress-regulation (i.e., tend-and-befriend)?

Methods

Participants

N = 290 health science students and people working in health care
M_{age} = 33.7, **SD**_{age} = 12.43; 77.59 % women

Measures

Implicit motives: Picture Story Exercise (Schultheiss & Pang, 2007; Winter, 1994)

Tend-and-befriend: Tend-and-Befriend Questionnaire (Levy et al., 2019), e.g.,

- “When I’m stressed, I talk to friends to let off steam.”
- “Tending to others helps reduce my stress.”

General life stress: Self-regulation Inventory (SSI-K3, Kuhl & Fuhrmann, 2004)

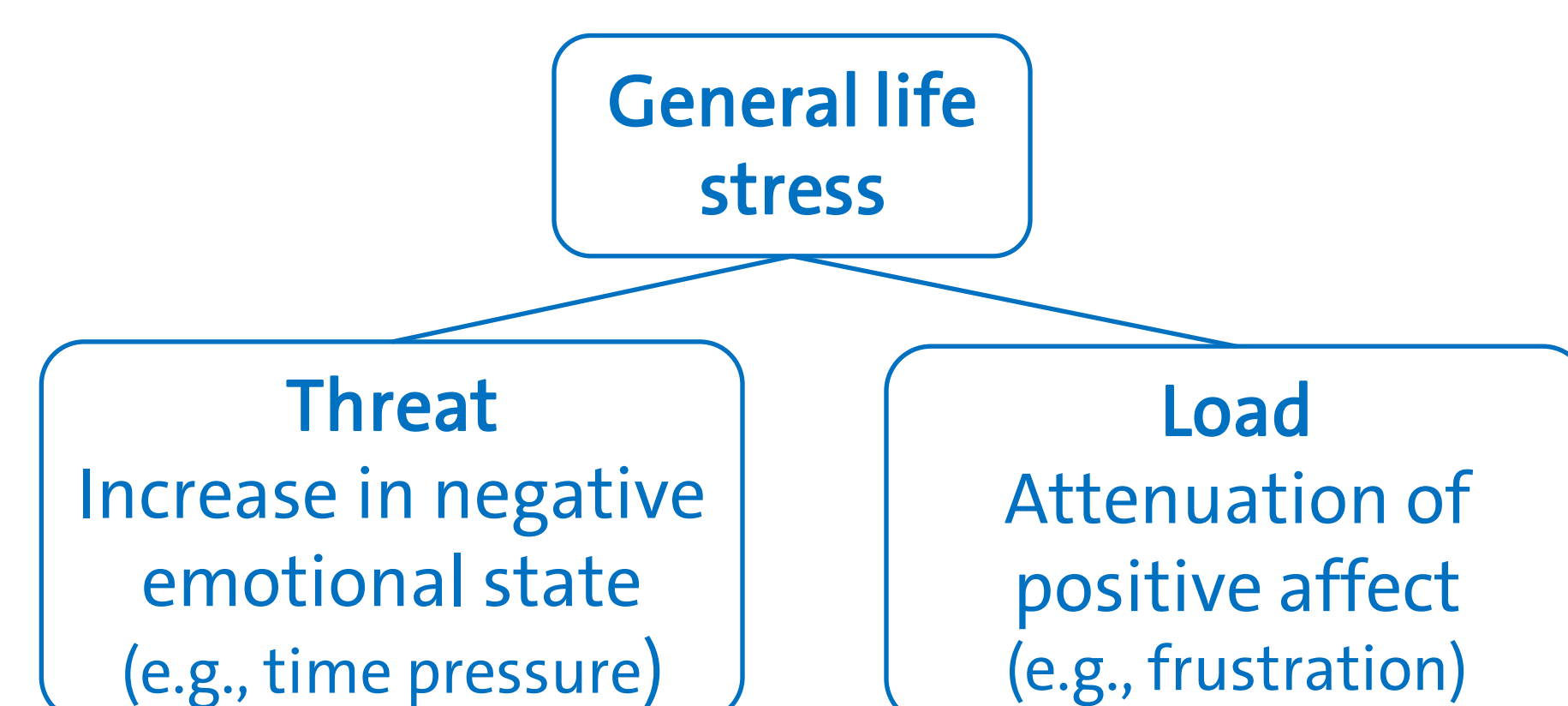


Figure 5 Constitution of general life stress according to the SSI-K3 (Kuhl & Fuhrmann, 2004)



Sample images from the Picture Story Exercise

Analyses

Multiple regression analyses were computed in RStudio to predict self-reported life stress based on implicit motives (*Model 1*) and based on an interaction between *nAff* and tend-and-befriend (*Model 2*), controlling for age and gender in both models

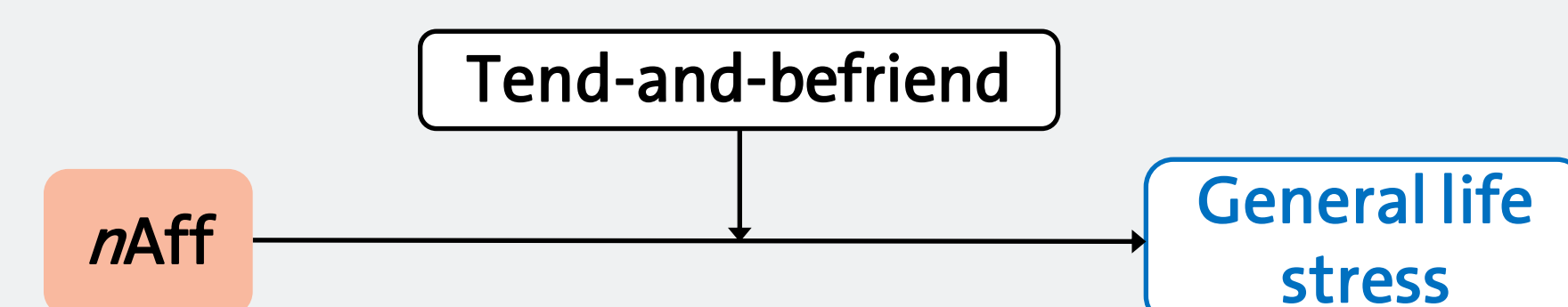


Figure 6 Interaction effect modelled in Model 2

Results

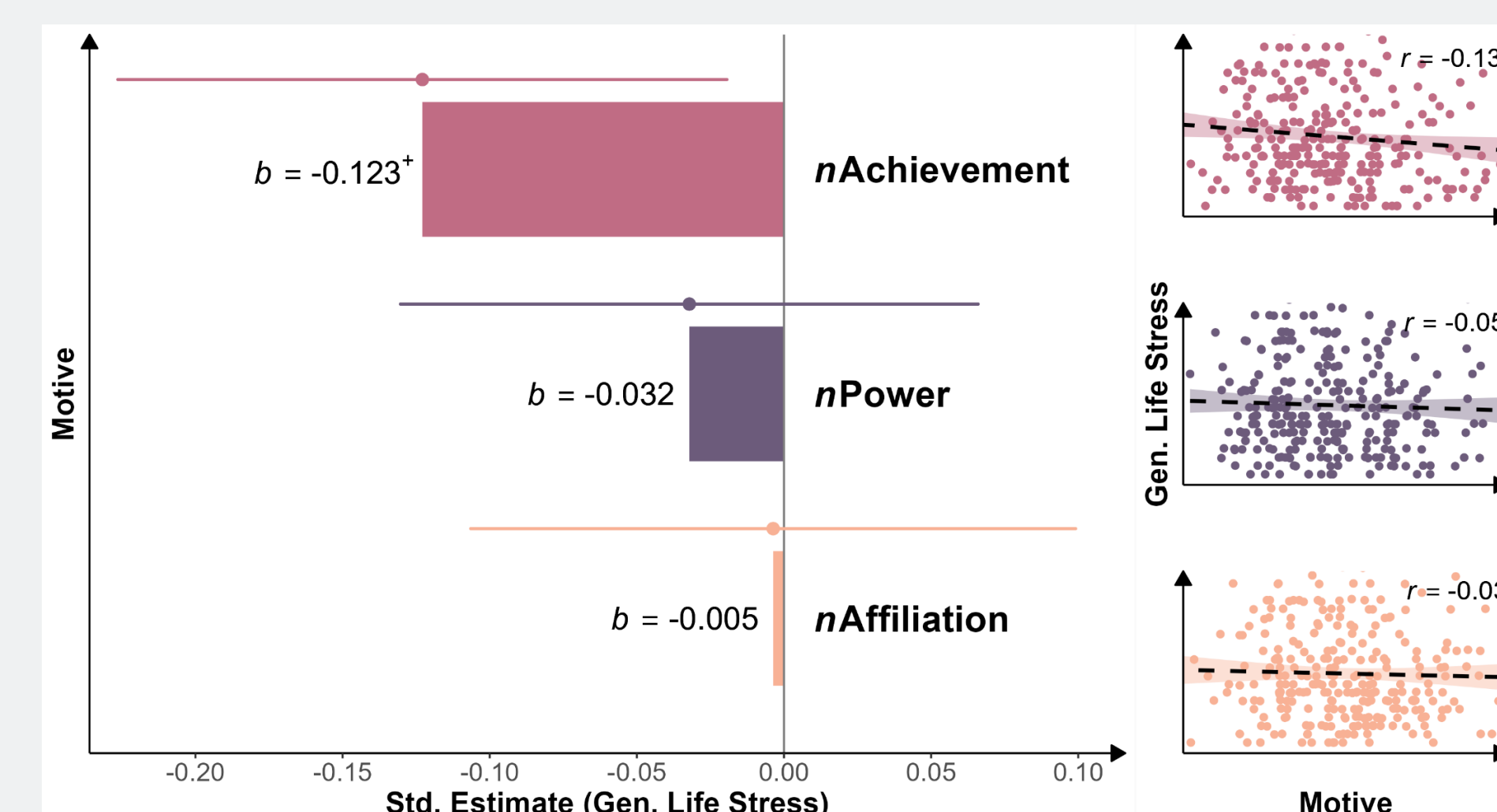


Figure 7 Left: Std. beta weights of Model 1 with 95% CI Right: Association between motives and life stress

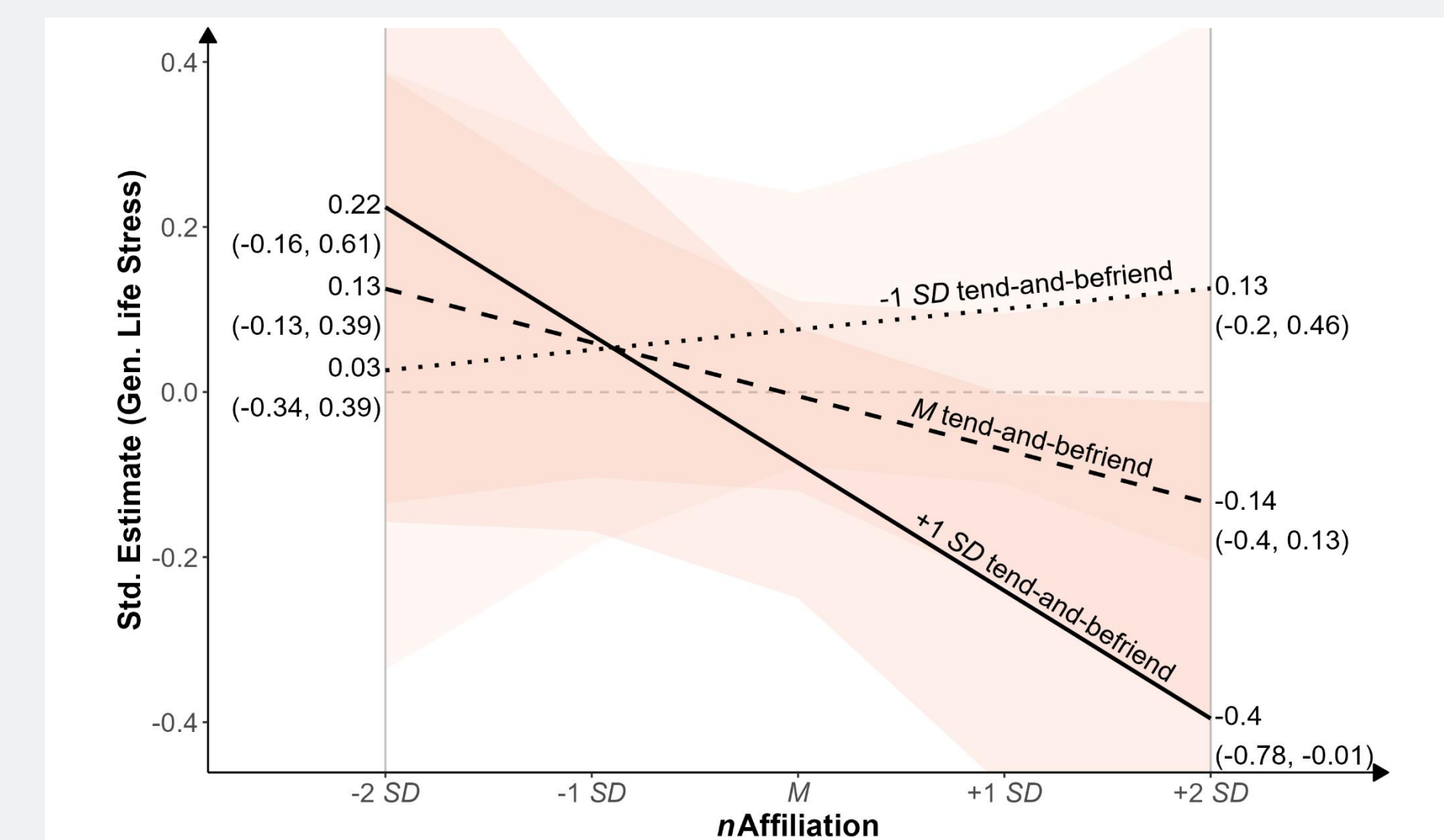


Figure 8 Std. beta weights with 95% CI of Model 2 for low (-1 SD), average (M) and high (+1 SD) tend-and-befriend at -2 SD and +2 SD of nAff

Discussion

nAff alone did not predict lower self-reported life stress but, albeit not significant, high affiliation individuals who affiliate under stress (i.e., tend-and-befriend) reported to experience lower life stress

- *nAff* must be paired with a corresponding motive-congruent behavior to elicit stress-related benefits
- A congruent explicit motive (e.g., Schüler et al. 2008) or volitional components that support behavior in line with the integrated self (i.e., in line with ones motives) under threat (self-access; Kuhl & Fuhrmann, 2004) may be further needed

Future Directions

Investigate which volitional components promote stress-related benefits of tend-and-befriend in affiliation-motivated individuals

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