

# Satisficing and Life Satisfaction: The Mediation Effect of Optimism



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## Abstract

Beyond their role in finding best solutions, optimization tendencies are also significantly related to life satisfaction; relationships with life satisfaction have been found for maximizing (negative and mediated by regret)<sup>1</sup> and satisficing (positive). However, no attitudinal mediator has been identified for satisficing; the current research examined optimism as a possibility. Six-hundred and twenty-two college students filled out optimization and optimism surveys; as predicted, optimism mediated the relationship between satisficing and life satisfaction. These results indicate regret and optimism have significant influence over the relationships between optimization tendencies and life satisfaction but only at the extremes.

## Introduction

Simon's (1956)<sup>2</sup> theory of satisficing, described the tendency to seek quick, good enough answers rather than invest time and resources searching for the best or optimal answer and argued maximizing is non-adaptive while satisficing is an optimal decision strategy. However, clearly the optimality of either are contextually dependent. Researchers have reported negative associations between maximizing tendencies and life satisfaction, with regret/expectation of regret acting as a mediator. Positive associations have been found between with satisficing and life satisfaction. However, no attitudinal mediator has been identified for satisficing.

### Research Questions:

- Will the Maximization Inventory reveal more about the mediation effect of regret than has been shown in other measures?
- Would optimism serve as a mediator for the positive relationship between satisficing tendencies and life satisfaction?

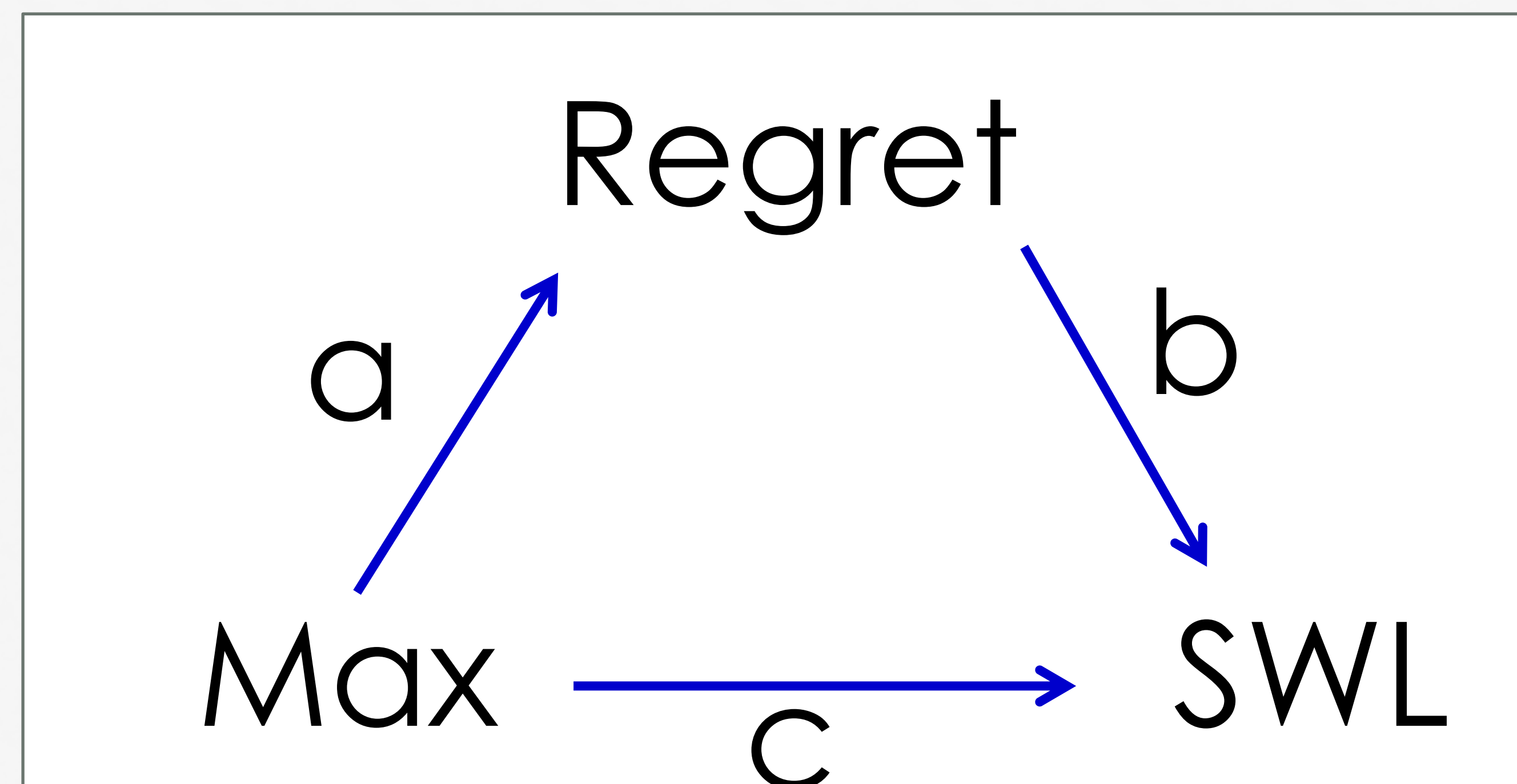


Figure 1. Negative relationship between max and swl mediated by regret.

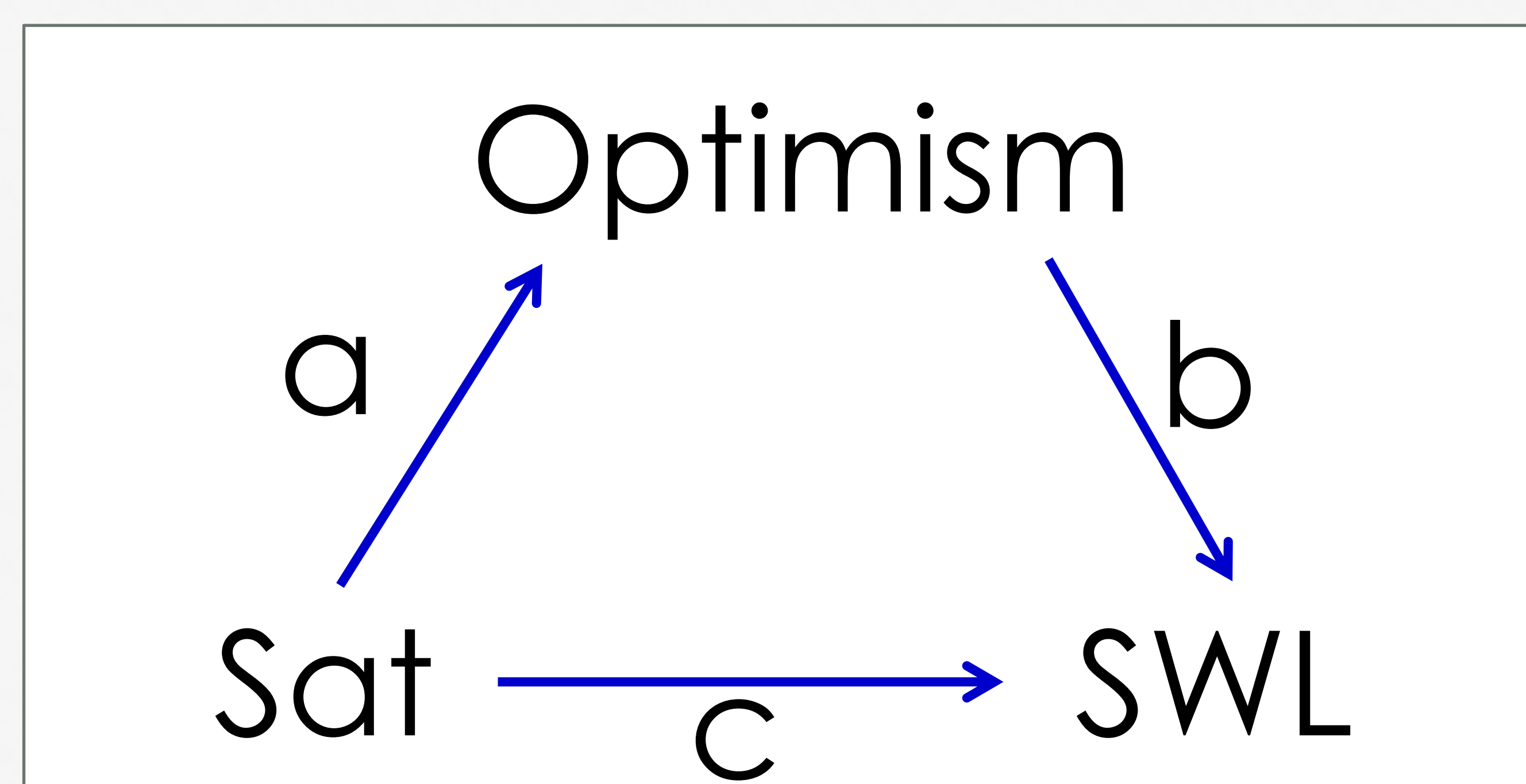


Figure 2. Positive relationship between sat and swl mediated by optimism.

## Methods

Six hundred and twenty-two college undergraduates (426 females and 228 males; ages 18-52; ethnically diverse) were surveyed online regarding:

- Optimization Tendencies (MI)
- Satisfaction with Life (SWLS)
- Optimism
- Regret

## Results

Mediation analyses for three MI subscales (satisficing, decision difficulty, and alternate search) with optimism/regret as mediators are shown in Table 1, with path illustrations shown in Figures 1 and 2.

As predicted decision difficulty and satisficing both showed significant mediation patterns, with regret and optimism; however the effects were driven by highest scorers in both cases. Alternative search scores did not.

## Discussion

These results show a pattern suggestive of an attitudinal mediator in the relationship between decision making strategies and satisfaction with life. Regret (cynicism) may act as suppressor, lowering life satisfaction for people who have great difficulty making decisions. Optimism may have a protective effect on life satisfaction for people who make too many quick, thoughtless decisions. Future research should examine these relationships using Seligman's optimism/cynicism sub-categories of, for clues regarding factors that might promote a more positive attitude in maximizers and facilitate and increase in their life satisfaction and possibly other measures of well being<sup>3</sup>.

Variable	N	Path a	Path b	Path c	Path c'	Path ab
MI-Sat	622	0.23*** (0.04)	0.42*** (0.04)	0.27*** (0.04)	0.17*** (0.04)	0.10*** (0.02)
MI-Sat: L	207	0.17 (0.09)	0.49*** (0.07)	0.25* (0.10)	0.17 (0.09)	0.08* (0.05)
MI-Sat: M	208	-0.08 (0.31)	0.39*** (0.06)	0.18 (0.28)	0.21 (0.26)	-0.03 (0.12)
MI-Sat: H	207	0.47*** (0.14)	0.38*** (0.07)	0.30* (0.14)	0.12 (0.14)	0.18** (0.06)
MI-DD	622	0.25*** (0.02)	-0.25*** (0.06)	-0.06** (0.07)	0.00 (0.03)	-0.06*** (0.01)
MI-DD: L	207	0.22*** (0.05)	-0.23* (0.09)	-0.11 (0.07)	-0.06 (0.08)	-0.05* (0.02)
MI-DD: M	208	0.37*** (0.11)	-0.15 (0.10)	0.11 (0.14)	0.16 (0.15)	-0.05 (0.04)
MI-DD: H	207	0.23*** (0.05)	-0.39*** (0.11)	-0.15* (0.09)	-0.06 (0.09)	-0.09** (0.03)
MI-AS	622	0.09*** (0.02)	-0.29*** (0.05)	0.12*** (0.03)	0.15*** (0.03)	-0.03*** (0.01)
MI-AS: L	207	0.18** (0.06)	-0.33*** (0.09)	0.12 (0.08)	0.17* (0.03)	-0.06* (0.03)
MI-AS: M	208	0.03 (0.14)	-0.24 (0.08)	0.08 (0.16)	0.09 (0.16)	-0.01 (0.03)
MI-AS: H	207	0.05 (0.07)	-0.31*** (0.08)	0.15 (0.09)	0.17* (0.08)	-0.01 (0.02)

\*p < .05; \*\*\*p < .001.