

Introduction

Background

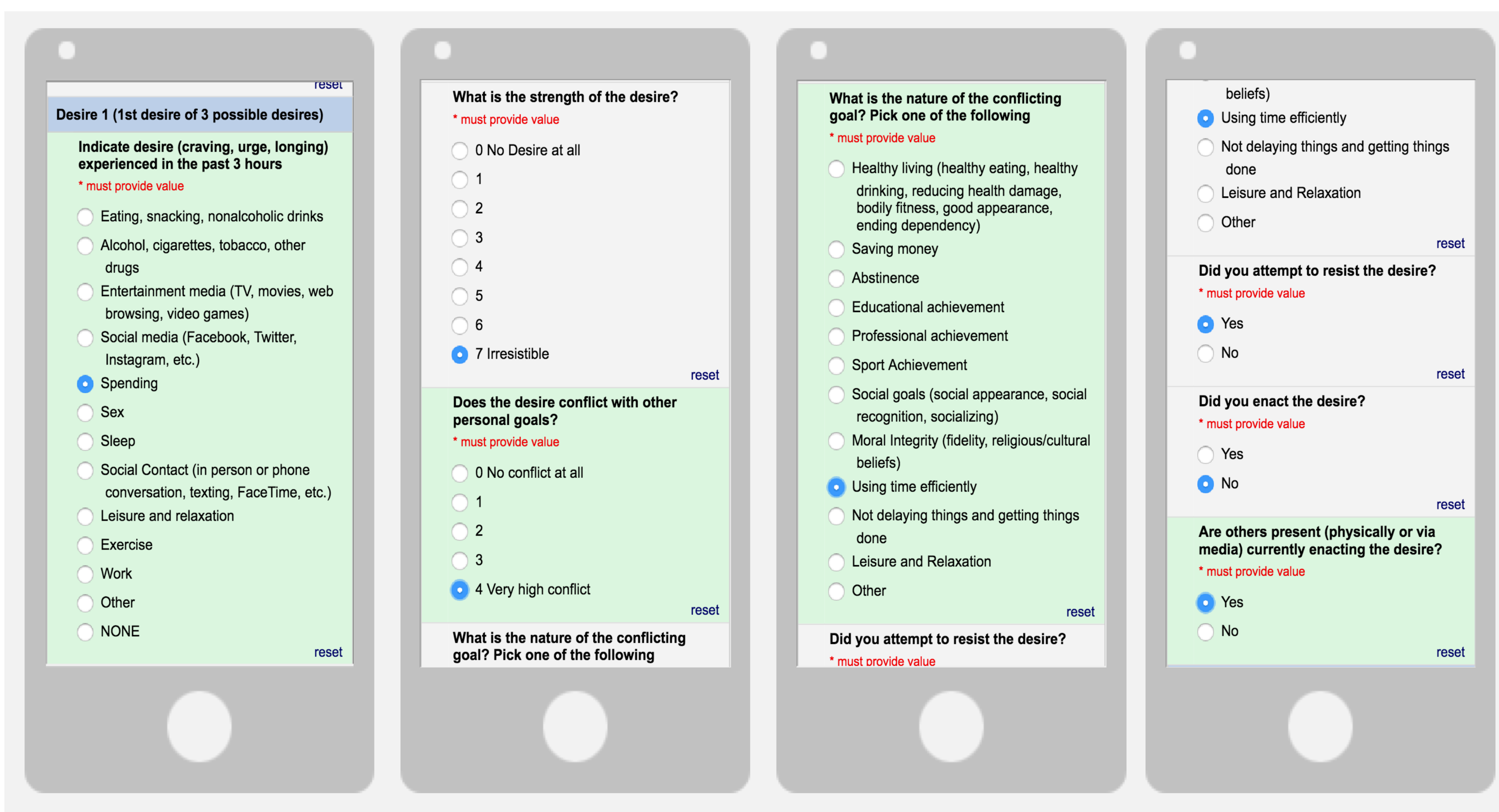
- Older adults report experiencing improved emotional health
- However, there are mixed findings on whether older adults are better at regulating emotion—a hallmark feature of emotional health
- In addition, most research is based on laboratory studies that don't:
 - capture how people regulate their emotions in everyday life
 - consider dynamic fluctuations in emotional states over time
 - explore the relationship among affect intensity, affect instability and regulation ability
 - disentangle global life satisfaction from measures of emotional experience

Research questions

- Q1: Are older adults more emotionally stable? Does this vary based on how satisfied they are with their lives?
- Q2: Do older adults experience emotions more intensely? Does this vary based on how satisfied they are with their lives?
- Q3: Are older adults better at regulating desires in everyday life? Does this vary based on how satisfied they are with their lives?

Method

Experience sampling



Messaged participants 3 times per day for 10 days to gather data about what emotions and desires they were experiencing in daily life

Participants

N = 123 healthy adults
Ages 20–80 ($M_{age} = 41$, $SD_{age} = 15$)
55% female
4% Asian, 1% Hispanic, 9% Black, 86% White

Trait measures

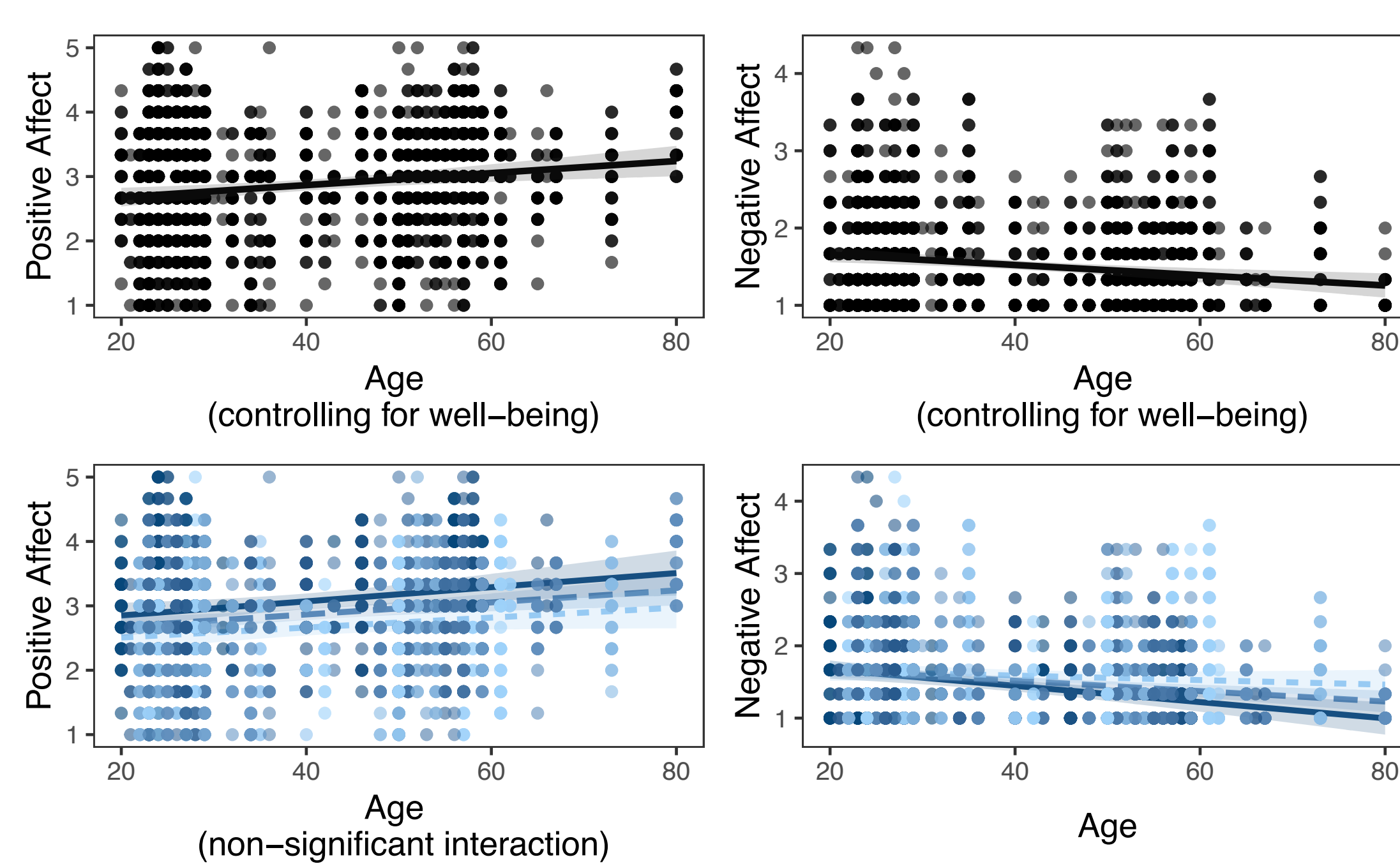
Well-being measured with Satisfaction with Life Scale

Emotional stability measured with RMSSD:

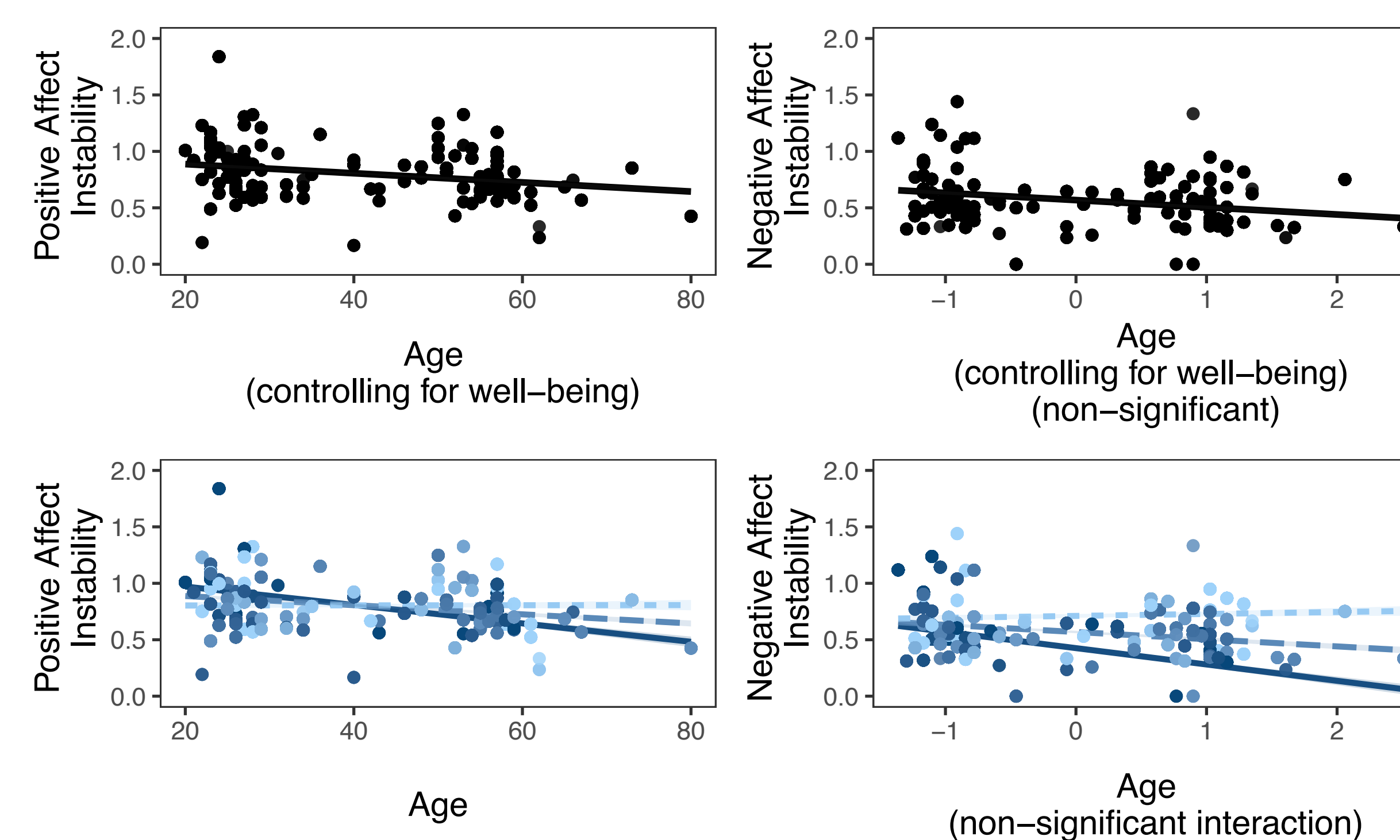
$$RMSSD = \sqrt{\frac{1}{N-1} \sum_{i=1}^{N-1} (RR_{i+1} - RR_i)^2}$$

Results

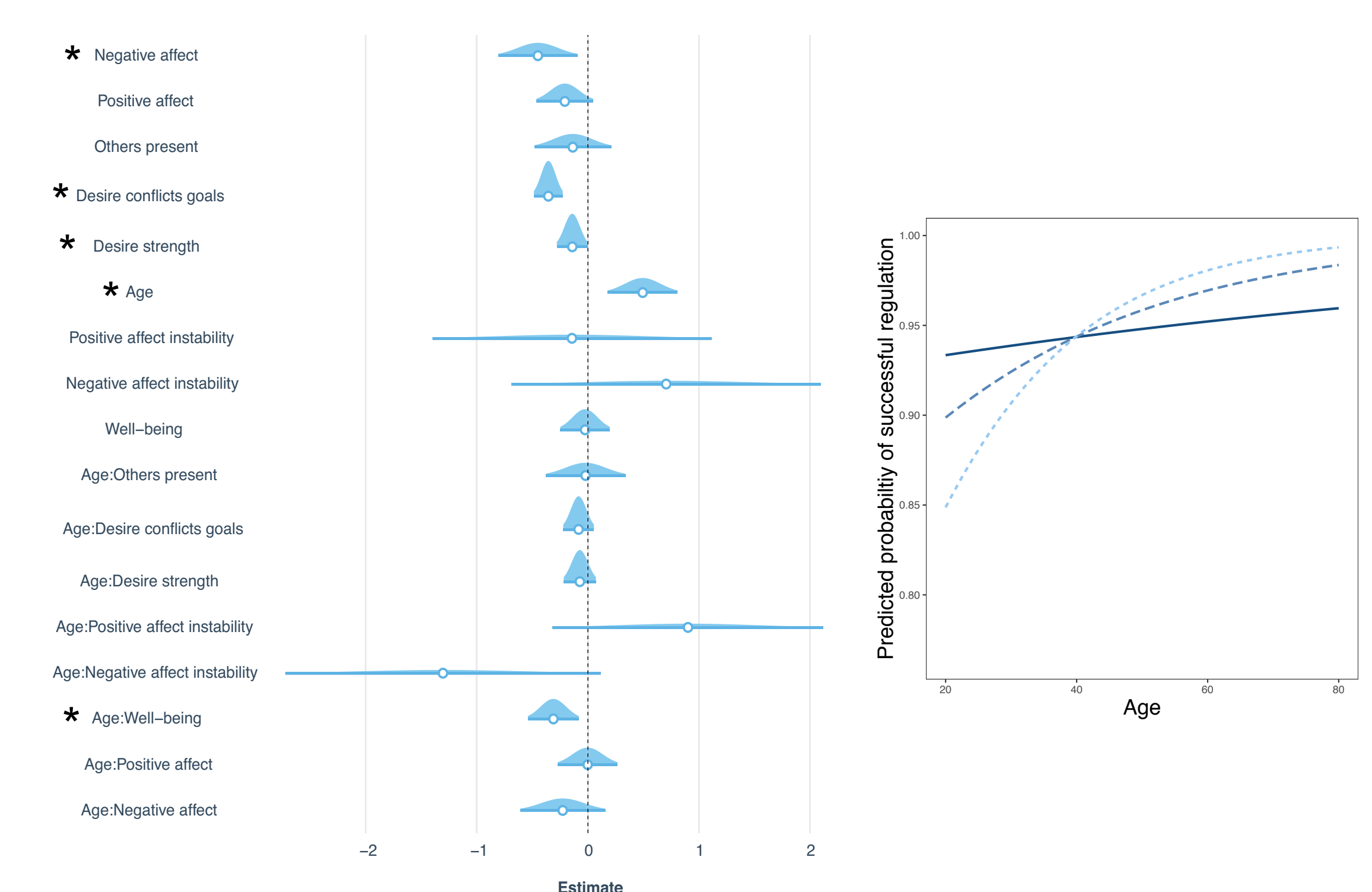
Q1: Older adults are more stable and fluctuate less between affective states



Q2: Older adults experience more intense positive affect and less intense negative affect



Q3: Older adults are better at regulating desires



Conclusions

Affect instability

- Older adults are more stable in their positive experiences, and this relationship is strongest for older adults who are most satisfied with their lives

Affect intensity

- Older adults experience more intense positive affect and less intense negative affect, even after controlling for individual differences in global life satisfaction
- Older adults who are most satisfied with their lives experience the lowest levels of negative affect

Emotion regulation

- Older adults are more successful at regulating desires, irrespective of how satisfied they are with their lives
- Adults are better at regulating desires when they are experiencing:
 - less negative affect
 - more intense desires
 - desires that conflict with personal goals