

Subjective Well-Being and Coping of University Faculty: Who Is Particularly Affected?

Melissa Özsoy¹, Raven Rinas¹, Lisa Kiltz², Markus Dresel¹, & Martin Daumiller¹

¹Department of Psychology, University of Augsburg, Germany; ²Department of Teacher Education, University of Groningen, Netherlands

Subjective Well-being and Coping

Research shows:

- Higher education faculty experience compromised subjective well-being (SWB) (Kinman & Johnson, 2019)
- Decreased SWB threatens their ability to facilitate high quality teaching and to work productively (Kinman, 2014)
- Coping is a crucial resource to overcome challenging working conditions (Mark & Smith, 2011; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984)

Research aim:

- Some faculty members may struggle more than others in terms of their SWB and coping
- Research is needed to understand the extent to which individual predictors are associated with facets of SWB and coping to elucidate inter-individual differences and identify faculty members who are in particular need of support

Theoretical Framework

Subjective well-being (SWB) is conceptualized as a multifaceted construct including cognitive and affective evaluations (Diener et al., 2000)

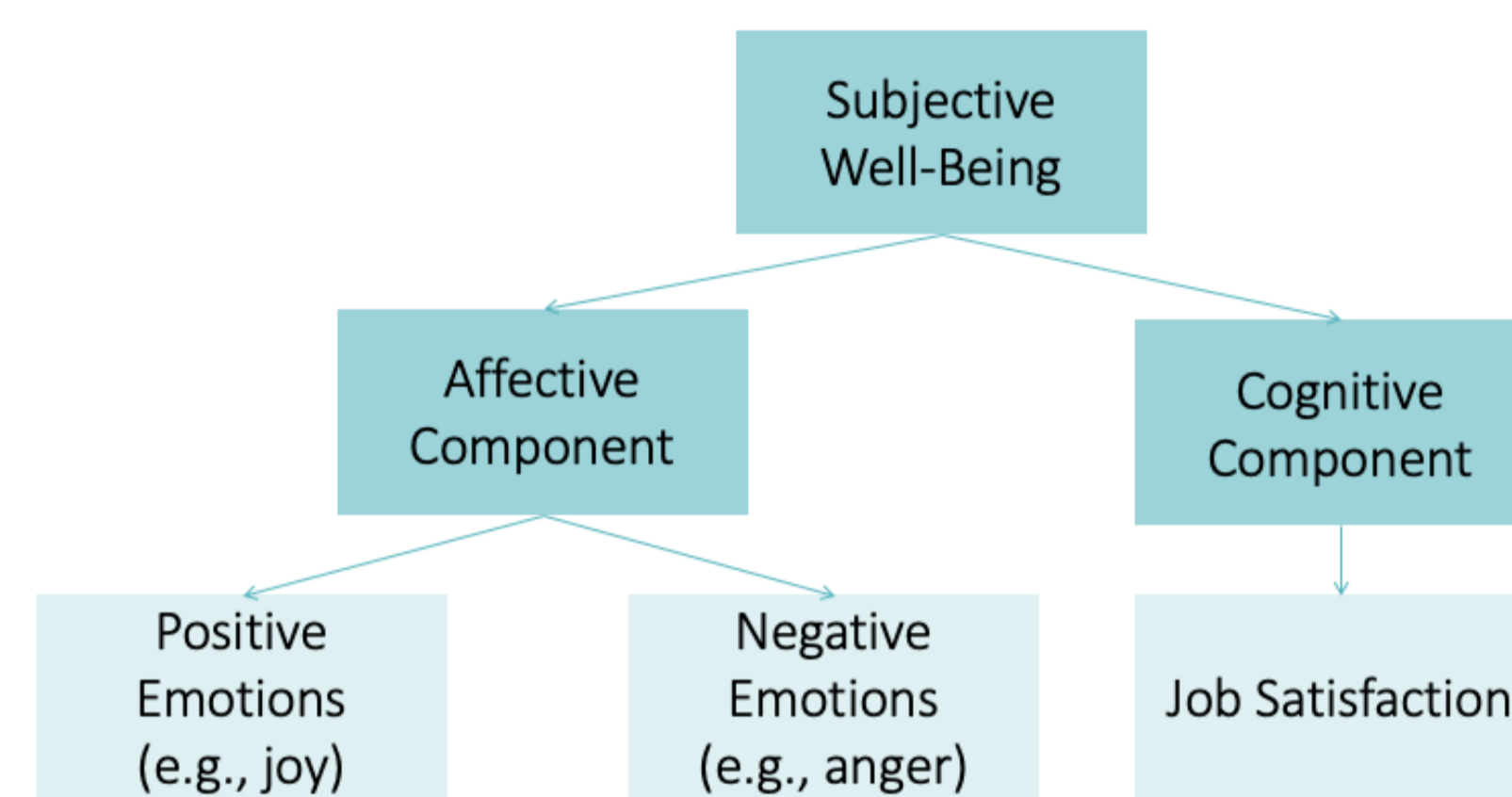


Figure 1. Subjective well-being framework modified from Diener et al. (2000)

Coping (Endler & Parker, 1990)

- Reactions to overcome environmental and psychological challenges in particularly stressful situations (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984)
- Plays a major role in an individual's well-being when confronted with unfavorable or stressful situations

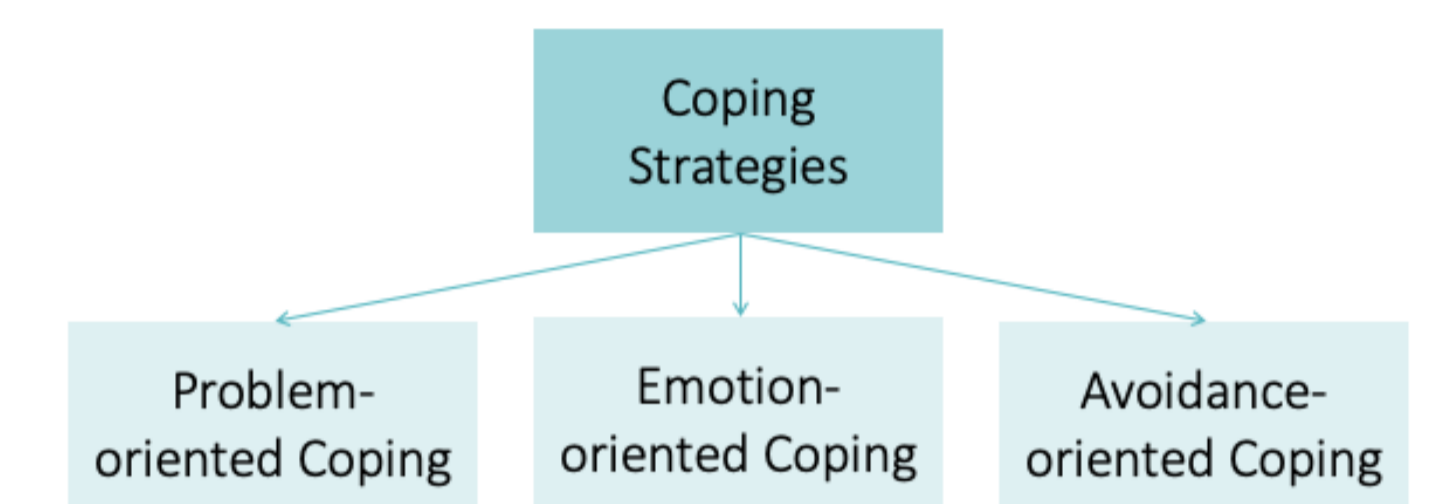


Figure 2. Coping Strategies following Endler & Parker (1990)

Research Questions

Are there differences in coping among university faculty?

Are there differences in SWB among university faculty?

Methods

Participants and procedure: 803 faculty members ($M_{Age} = 42.00$; $SD = 11.23$) from five countries—primarily from Germany—participated in an online survey assessing multifaceted SWB (positive and negative affect, teaching satisfaction), coping strategies (emotion-, problem-, and avoidance-oriented coping), and demographic data

Descriptive Statistics

	M	SD	Min	Max	Skew	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Personal predictors																
[1] Academic position ¹	1.91	0.90	1.00	3.00	0.18											
[2] Gender ²	0.55	0.50	0.00	1.00	-0.19	.21										
[3] Number of courses ³	3.49	1.20	2.00	4.00	0.05	.48	.08									
[4] Number of teaching hours ⁴	7.63	6.08	1.00	40.00	1.51	.38	.13	.63								
[5] Experience teaching ⁵	8.21	5.65	0.50	15.00	0.12	.54	.17	.42	.31							
[6] Experience online-teaching ⁶	1.98	0.56	1.00	3.00	-0.01	-.13	-.05	-.16	-.12	-.19						
Subjective well-being																
[7] Negative affect	1.97	0.69	1.00	4.00	0.78	-.12	-.17	-.01	-.01	-.19	.10					
[8] Positive affect	3.47	0.68	1.00	5.00	-0.58	-.03	-.14	.05	.08	-.01	-.04	-.20				
[9] Teaching satisfaction	3.37	0.59	1.00	4.00	-1.00	.28	.10	.27	.23	.22	-.10	-.25	.24			
Coping strategies																
[10] Problem-oriented coping	3.77	0.84	1.57	5.00	-0.48	.04	-.07	.07	.04	.05	-.06	-.13	.33	.22		
[11] Emotion-oriented coping	1.98	0.84	1.00	5.00	1.00	-.19	-.18	-.12	-.08	-.24	.13	.62	-.21	-.25	-.12	
[12] Avoidance-oriented coping	2.11	0.80	2.00	5.00	0.52	-.15	.20	-.09	-.07	-.21	.08	.31	.06	-.09	.04	.33

Note. $N = 803$. Significant values are bolded. Internal consistency is reported with McDonald's omega (ω).¹Academic position was differentiated between predocs (1), postdocs (2), and professors (3).²Participants could choose between woman (0) or man (1).³Participants were asked to specify how many courses they supervise: 0, 1, 2, 3, 4 or more.⁴Participants were asked to specify how many hours they supervise and how many courses they teach per week.⁵Experience with teaching was differentiated into less than 1 year (transformed to 0.5 years), 1-2 years (transformed to 1.5 years), 2-5 years (transformed to 3.5 years), 5-10 years (transformed to 7.5 years), and 10 or more years (transformed to 15 years).⁶Participants could choose between 0, 1 semester, 2 semesters, or more than 2 semesters. Significant values are highlighted in bold.

Measures

	Sample items	ω	Items	Theoretical range	Source
Subjective well-being					
Positive and negative affect	Stem: "Indicate the extent to which you have experienced each feeling concerning your teaching activities in the past month."				
Positive affect	"Interested"	.84	10	1 (not at all) – 5 (very often)	Watson et al. (1988)
Negative affect	"Distressed"	.86	10	1 (not at all) – 5 (very often)	Watson et al. (1988)
Domain satisfaction facet					
Teaching satisfaction	Stem: "Indicate how much you agree with the following statements when thinking about your role as a teacher over the past month." "The advantages of being a higher education teacher outweigh the disadvantages."	.89	4	1 (strongly disagree) – 4 (strongly agree)	TALIS Survey (2013)
Coping strategies					
Problem-oriented	Stem: "In past month, when I encounter difficult, stressful, or upsetting situations in my teaching activities, I tend to..." "...focus on a problem and see how I can solve it."	.74	7	1 (not at all) – 5 (very much)	Endler & Parker (1990)
Emotion-oriented	"...blame myself for having gotten into this situation."	.87	7	1 (not at all) – 5 (very much)	Endler & Parker (1990)
Avoidance-oriented	"...buy myself something." (Distraction) "...visit a friend, colleague, partner, etc." (Social distraction)	.76	4	1 (not at all) – 5 (very much)	Endler & Parker (1990)

MANCOVAS

	Model 1: Differences in SWB (Wilks $\Lambda = .309$; multivariate $F(3,732) = 545.310$; $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .69$)						Model 2: Differences in Coping (Wilks $\Lambda = .359$; multivariate $F(3,718) = 427.809$; $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .64$)					
	Positive affect		Negative affect		Teaching satisfaction		Problem-oriented coping		Emotion-oriented coping		Avoidance-oriented Coping	
	F	η^2	F	η^2	F	η^2	F	η^2	F	η^2	F	η^2
Academic position	2.182	.01	1.558	.01	6.696	.02	.726	.01	1.679	.01	.432	.01
Gender	15.255	.02	7.629	.01	.291	.01	4.048	.01	8.808	.01	19.128	.01
	F	β	F	β	F	β	F	β	F	β	F	β
Number of courses	1.184	.03	2.479	.05	8.800	.07	.695	.02	1.110	-.04	.000	.00
Number of teaching hours	1.861	.01	.880	.01	.412	.01	.005	.00	.446	.01	.072	.00
Experience with teaching	.041	.01	11.998	-.02	6.071	.01	.199	.01	11.166	-.02	8.217	-.02
Experience with online teaching	2.015	-.06	4.572	.10	1.182	-.04	1.320	-.05	2.270	.08	1.817	.07

Note. $N = 803$. The table shows the results of four MANCOVAs. In the first MANCOVA, the facets of well-being were considered as dependent variables and gender and academic position as independent variables. Number of courses, number of hours, experience with teaching, and experience with online teaching were used as covariates. In the second MANCOVA, coping strategies were used as the dependent variables while the other conditions were retained. The findings regarding SWB remained robust when controlling for differences in coping as well as impairments due to COVID-19. Significant values are highlighted in bold.

Visualization of Differences in SWB and Coping between Gender and Position

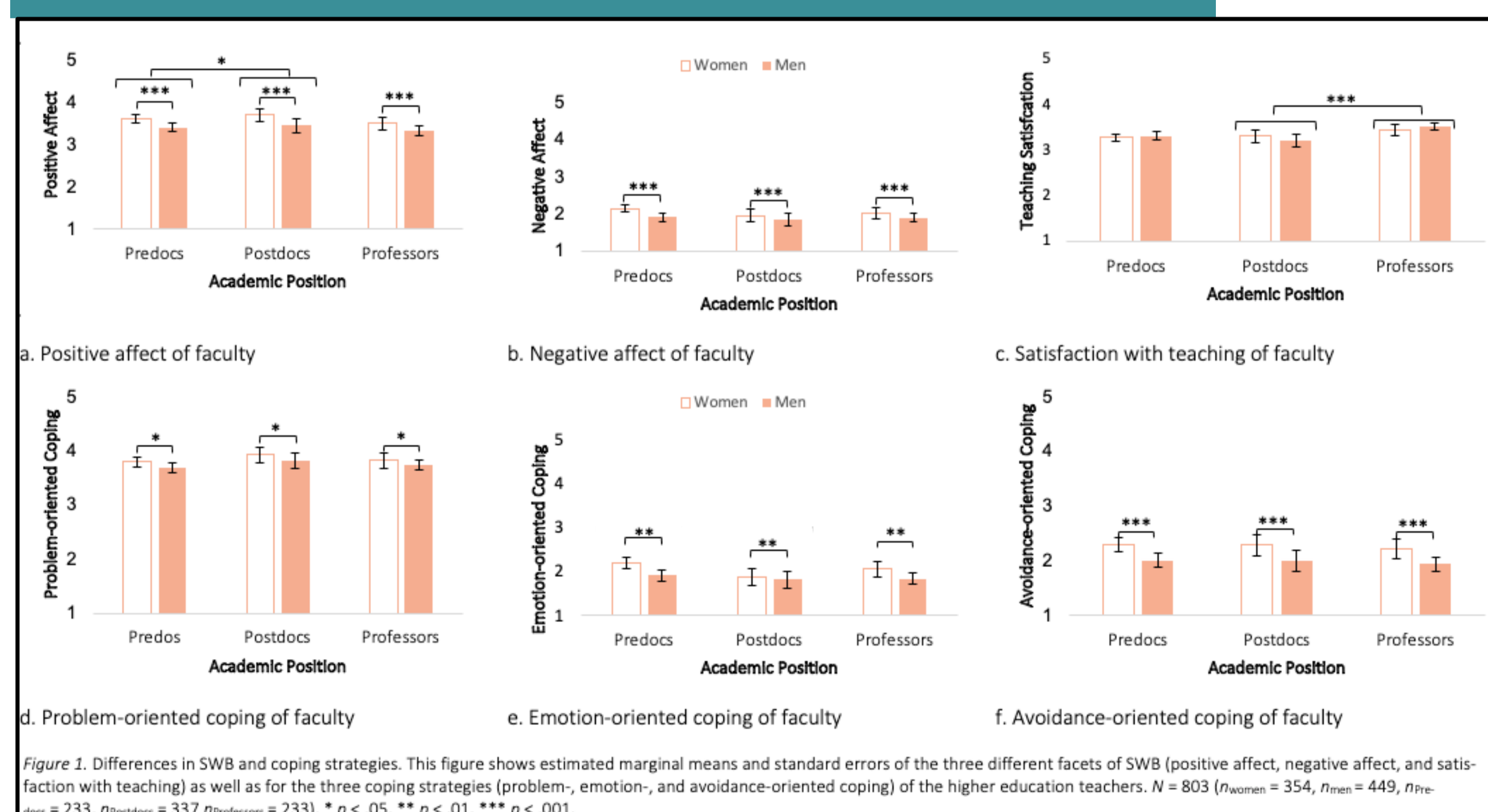


Figure 1. Differences in SWB and coping strategies. This figure shows estimated marginal means and standard errors of the three different facets of SWB (positive affect, negative affect, and satisfaction with teaching) as well as for the three coping strategies (problem-, emotion-, and avoidance-oriented coping) of the higher education teachers. $N = 803$ ($n_{women} = 354$, $n_{men} = 449$, $n_{predocs} = 233$, $n_{postdocs} = 337$, $n_{professors} = 233$). * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Discussion

- Systematic differences in SWB and coping among faculty were found
- Gender differences were identified across all academic positions regarding positive and negative affect and the three coping strategies
- Women experience more positive and negative affect and used more coping
- Low negative affect was found among professors, as well as reduced positive affect and high satisfaction with teaching
- Teaching experience plays an important role in identifying differences in SWB and coping
 - Negatively associated with negative affect as well as well as emotion- and avoidance-oriented coping
 - Positively associated with teaching satisfaction

Take home message:

Women, faculty with little teaching experience, and doctoral students should be prioritized when promoting SWB and effective coping strategies

