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GENT



MANIFESTATIONS OF MORALITY AS

COMMITMENT DEVICES:

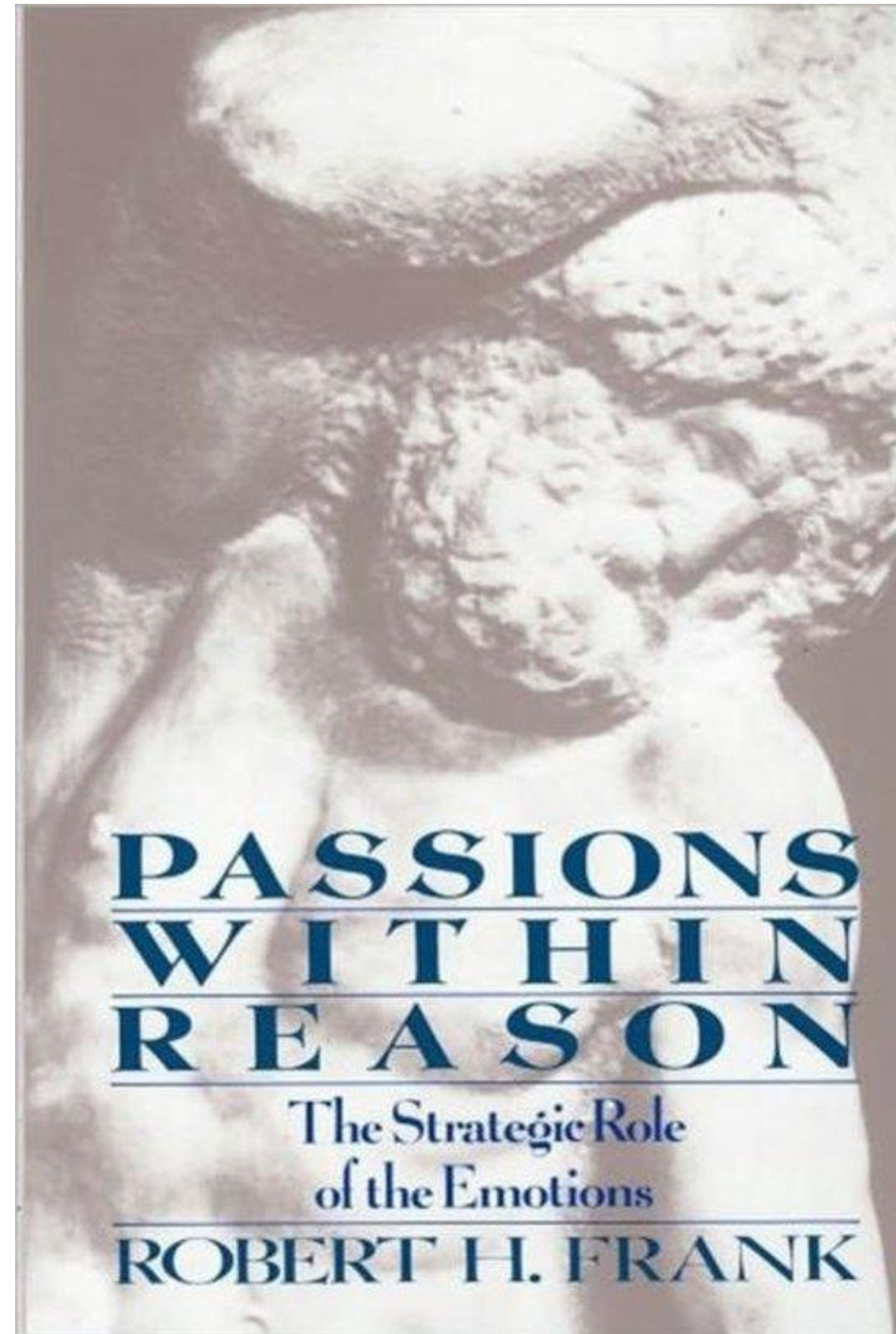
THE CONDITIONAL RELEVANCE OF EMPATHY

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INTRODUCTION

- The role of ***human morality*** in the explanation ***of human cooperative choices***
- ***Cooperation*** = prosocial behavior that benefits others, regardless of whether the actor also benefits in the process (Batson & Powell, 2003; Barclay & van Vugt, 2014)
- ***Morality***
Morality is *about* cooperation (some moral behavior *is* cooperation, many moral phenomena *motivate* people to behave cooperatively)
- Evolutionary informed perspective on morality : analysis on different levels of explanation!!
Ultimate functions:
 - to suppress selfishness and make social life possible (Haidt, 2008)
 - To uphold cooperative, caring, fair communities (Krebs, 2010; Tomacello, 2013)
 - To solve social dilemmas (conflict between self-interest and collective interest) (van Lange et al., 2014)
Proximate psychological mechanisms:
 - a set of evolved psychological mechanisms (Batson, 2000; de Waal, 2009; Haidt, 2012; Krebs, 2011)
 - **Commitment devices** (Frank, 1989; Nesse, 2000)

EMOTIONS AS COMMITMENT DEVICES



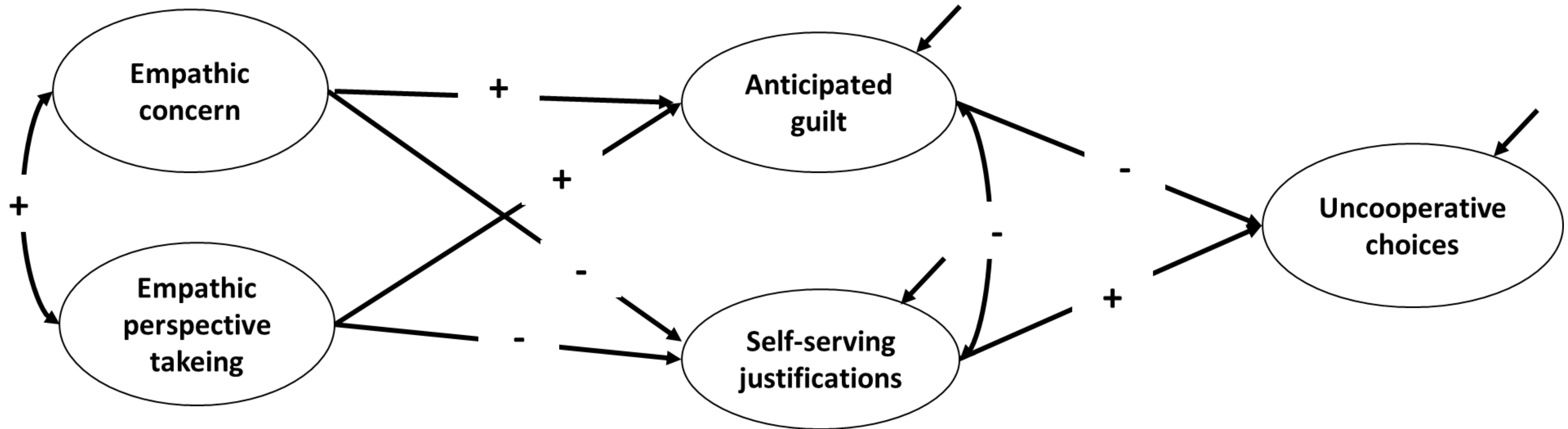
GUILT AND EMPATHY AS COMMITMENT DEVICES

- **Empathy** (=concern about others, the ability to take others' perspective)
 - “Preparedness” for humans’ capacity for morality
(Bloom, 2013; Darwin, 1874; de Waal, 2009; Haidt, 2012; Hume, 1739; Smith, 1759)
 - Promotes prosocial behavior, inhibits antisocial behavior (Jolliffe & Farrington, 2021)
 - Precursor of guilt feelings (Eisenberg, 2000; Hofmann, 2001; Leith & Baumeister, 2008; Tangney, 1991)
- **Guilt**
 - Self-regulatory mechanism making people less likely to engage in behaviors they anticipate feeling guilty for committing (Baumeister et al., 1994; Hofmann, 2000; Tangney et al., 2007)
 - People refrain from cheating, lying, stealing..., not because they fear the consequences of being caught, but because they would **feel bad** if they did so (Frank, 1989)

SELF-SERVING JUSTIFICATIONS

- **The tendency to have biased views regarding the propriety of one's own conduct** (Adam Smith, 1759)
- Sykes & Matza (1957)
- **Self-deception** : active misrepresentation of reality (Trivers, 2002)
- Research shows that **self-deception is widespread** (Feldman, 2018; Frank, 1989; Trivers, 2002)
- Related to **delinquency, alcohol use, gambling, unethical decision making, violence, aggression** (see overview Kiriakidis, 2016)
- Related to **reduced levels of anticipated guilt** (Ring & Kavussanu, 2017)
- **Lack of empathy** is associated with higher levels of self-serving justifications (Delisi et al., 2013)

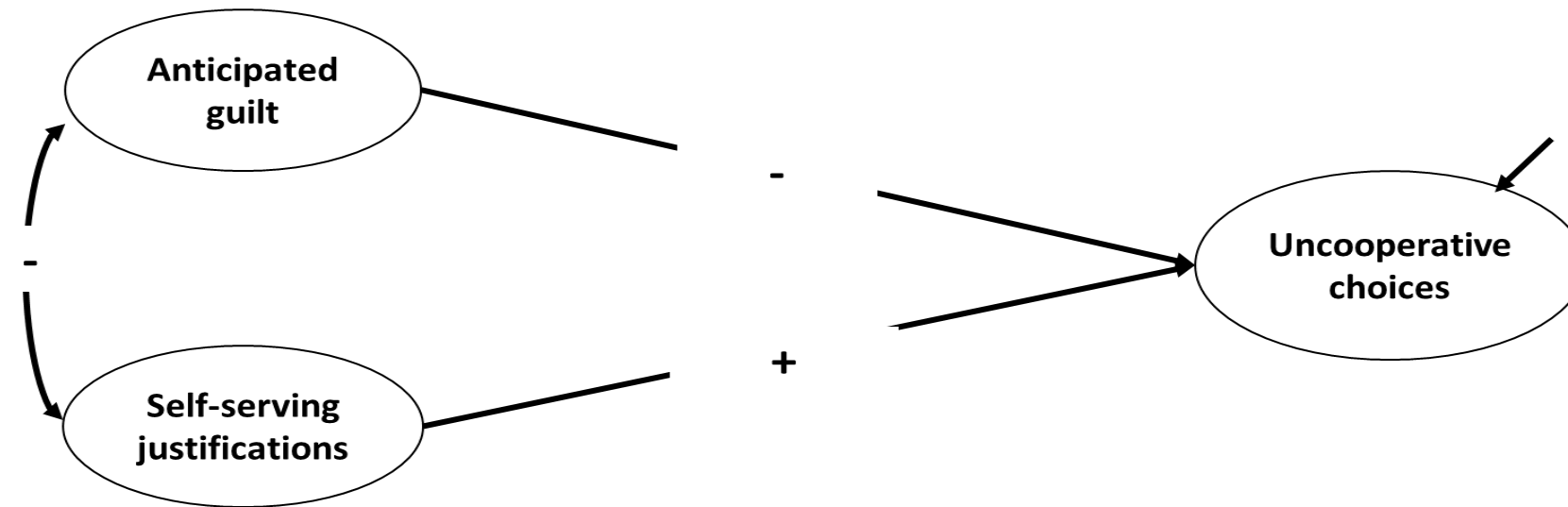
PREVIOUS STUDY



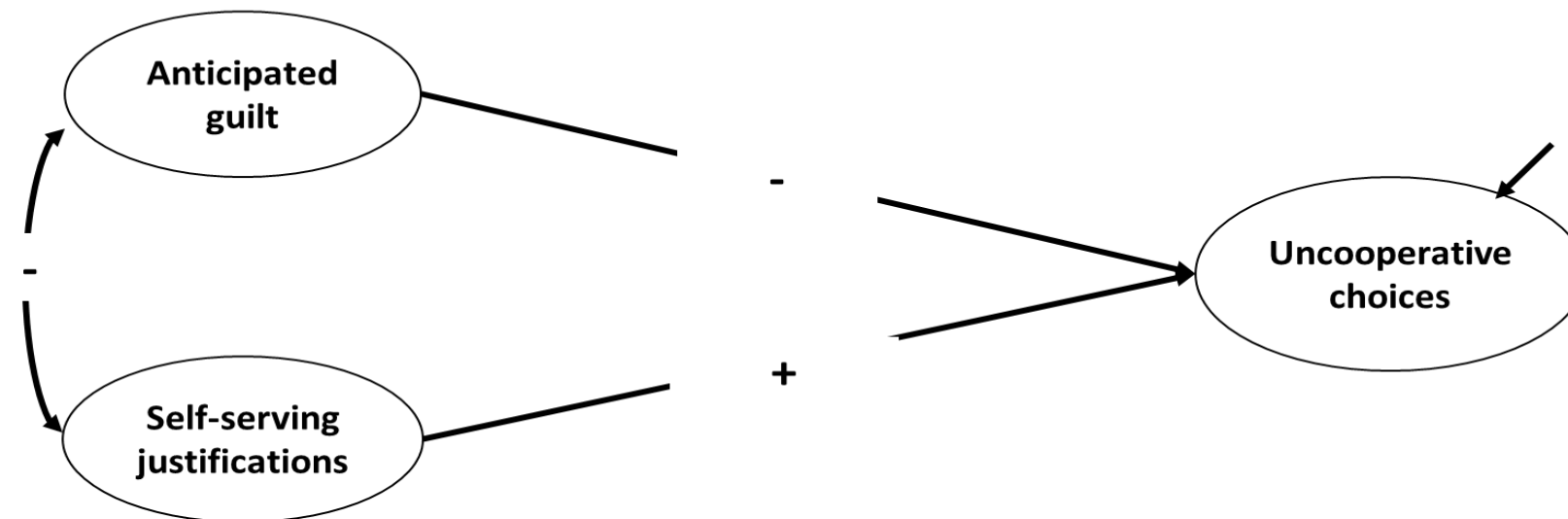
PRESENT STUDY: MULTIPLE GROUPS COMPARISON

Exploration of the role of empathy by simultaneously testing for the effects of anticipated guilt and self-serving justifications in different subgroups

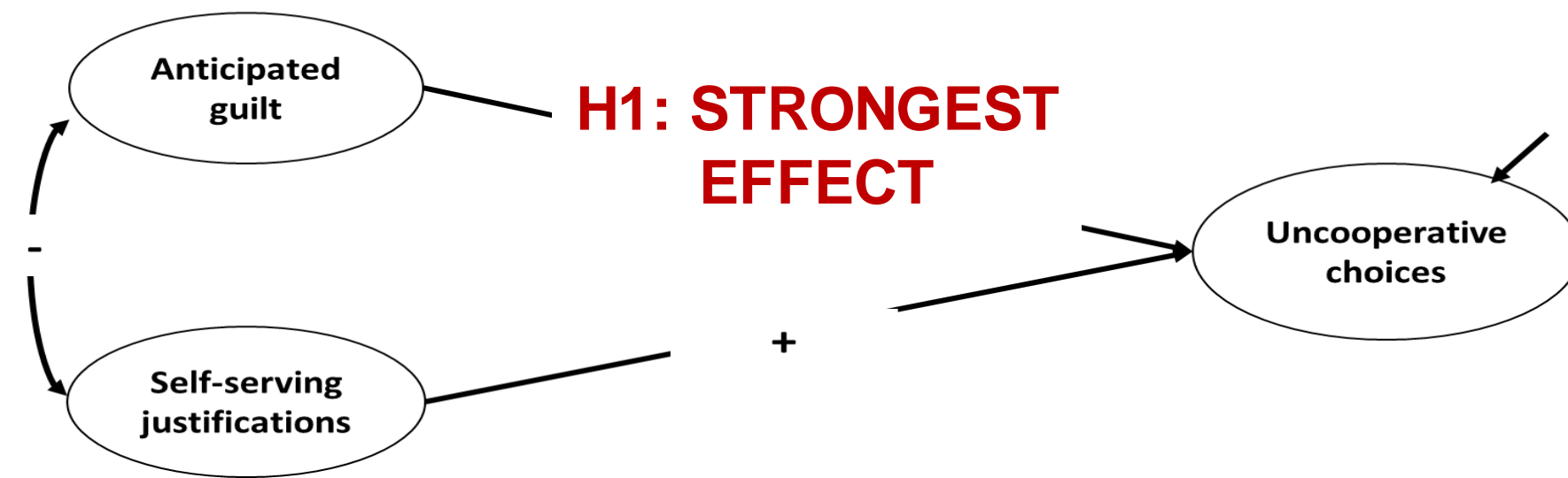
LOW empathic subgroup



MEDIUM empathic subgroup



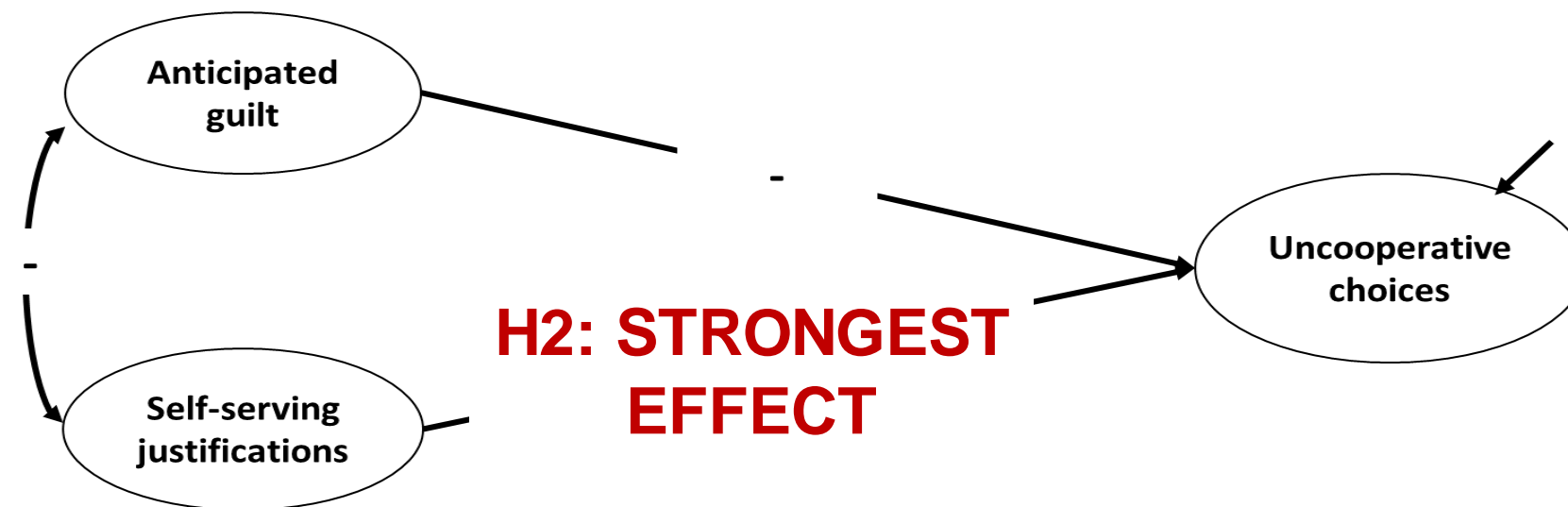
HIGH empathic subgroup



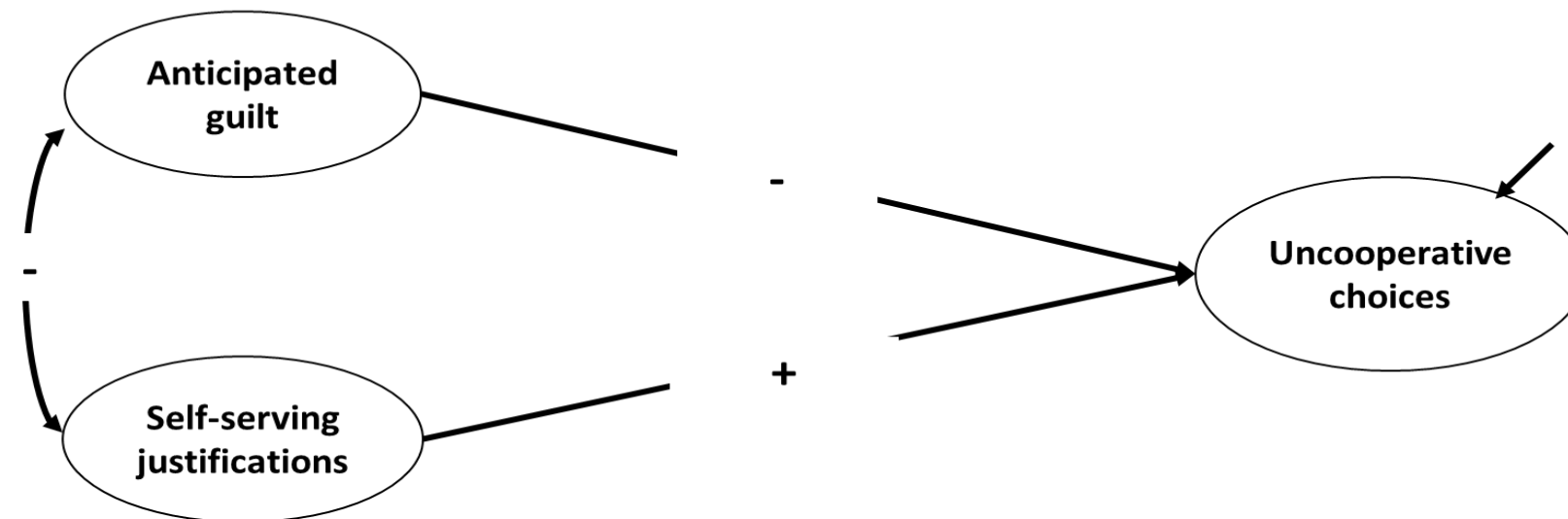
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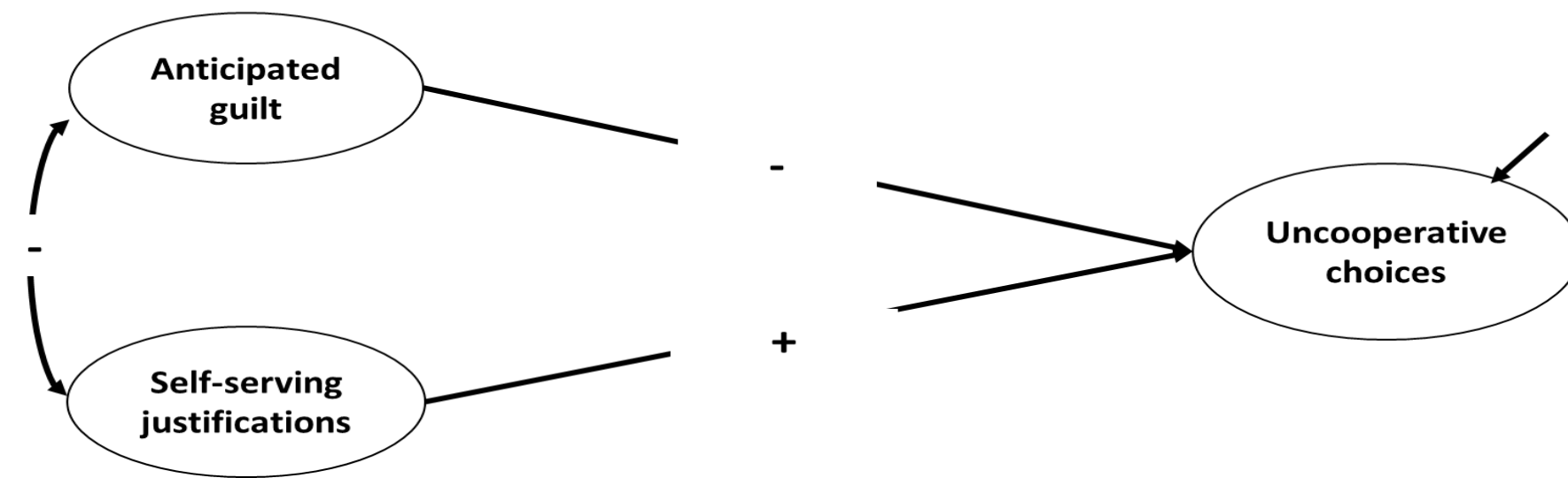
LOW empathic subgroup



MEDIUM empathic subgroup



HIGH empathic subgroup



PARTICIPANTS

- Convenience sample of $n=3817$ adolescent youths in Dutch speaking part of Belgium (in 2019)
- Data collected via online scenario-based survey
- 1/3 male participants
- Mean age = 17.50y ($SD= 5.15$)

MEASURES

ENDOGENOUS VARIABLE: theft by taking

- **Uncooperative choices (2 items)**
 - *How likely is it that you would keep the €50? (very unlikely – very likely).*
 - *How likely is it that you would keep the €200?*

EXOGENOUS VARIABLES

- **Anticipated guilt (5 items)**, Marschall, Sanftner & Tangney, 1994).
 - e.g. *I would feel remorse*
- **Self-serving justifications (2 items)**
 - *Stealing a small amount of money is OK when you consider that there are others who steal a lot of money*
 - *If people are careless where they leave their things, it is their own fault they get stolen*

MODERATOR VARIABLE

- **Empathic concern and perspective taking- index** (IRI, Davis, 1983)

MULTIPLE GROUPS COMPARISON

The sample was divided into three groups based on the z-scores on the *empathic concern* and *empathic perspective taking* index

- Persons whose scores fall 1 *SD* or more below the mean are considered **LOW empathic** ($n=506$)
- Persons whose scores falling 1 *SD* or more above the mean are considered **HIGH empathic** ($n=538$)
- The reminder as **average empathic** ($n=2773$)

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

- SEM
- *Mplus* version 7.11 (Muthén & Muthén, 2012)
- MLR parameter estimates with robust standard errors (robust to non-normality, heteroskedasticity, and dependence) (Kline, 2016)
- Model evaluation (Hu & Bentler, 1999; Marsh et al., 2004; Yu, 2002)

Chi Square	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Smaller is better• Sensitive to sample size
CFI/TLI	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Acceptable >.90• Good fit >.95
RMSEA	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Unacceptable >.10• Good Fit <.06
SRMR	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Good fit < .05

TESTS FOR MEASUREMENT INVARIANCE

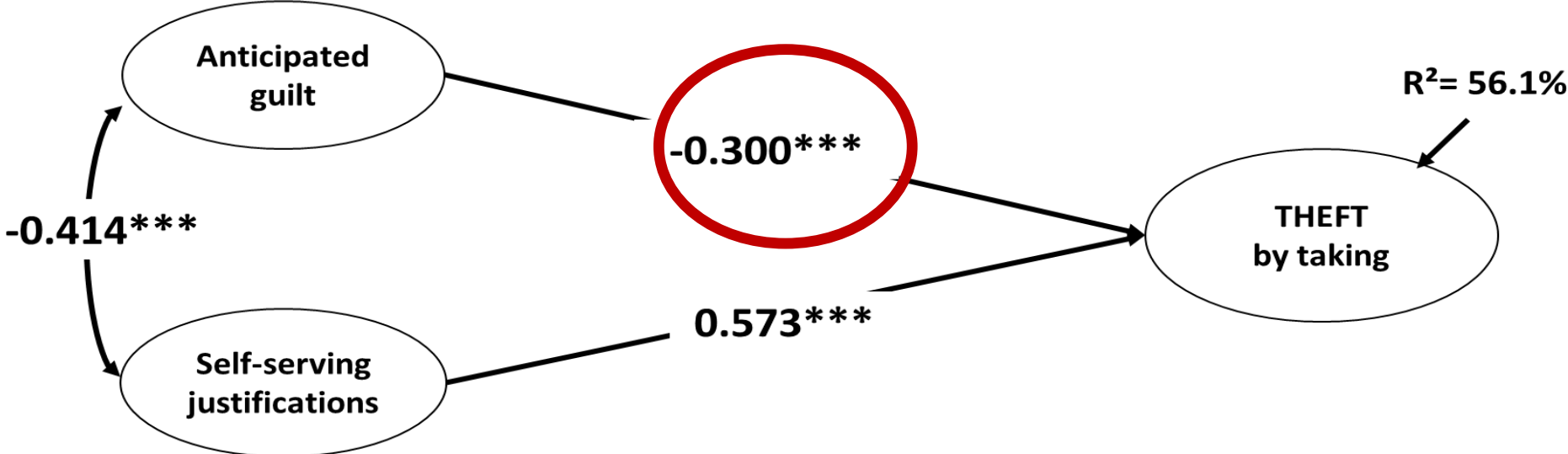
Model	χ^2	df	CFI	RMSEA	SRMR	ΔCFI*
<u>Empathy_low</u> (n=506)	70.966	24	0.974	0.062	0.027	
<u>Empathy_medium</u>	138.710	24	0.983	0.042	0.018	
<u>Empathy_high</u>	47.197	24	0.978	0.042	0.030	
Configural model	250.715	72	0.980	0.044	0.021	
Metric/weak invariance	286.469	84	0.978	0.044	0.035	0.002
Scalar/strong invariance	342.580	96	0.973	0.045	0.035	0.005
Strict Invariance (covariance between exogenous variables constrained to be the same)	361.402	98	0.971	0.046	0.057	0.002
Constrained model	116.256	102	0.971	0.045	0.068	0.009
The change in CFI has been suggested as a better alternative to the Chi-square test (influenced by sample size). Δ CFI: should be less than 0.01. Differences of more than 0.01 indicate non-invariance.						

The baseline model, tested separately in the groups, shows good model fit for each subgroup (CFI > 0.970; SRMR ≤ 0.03).

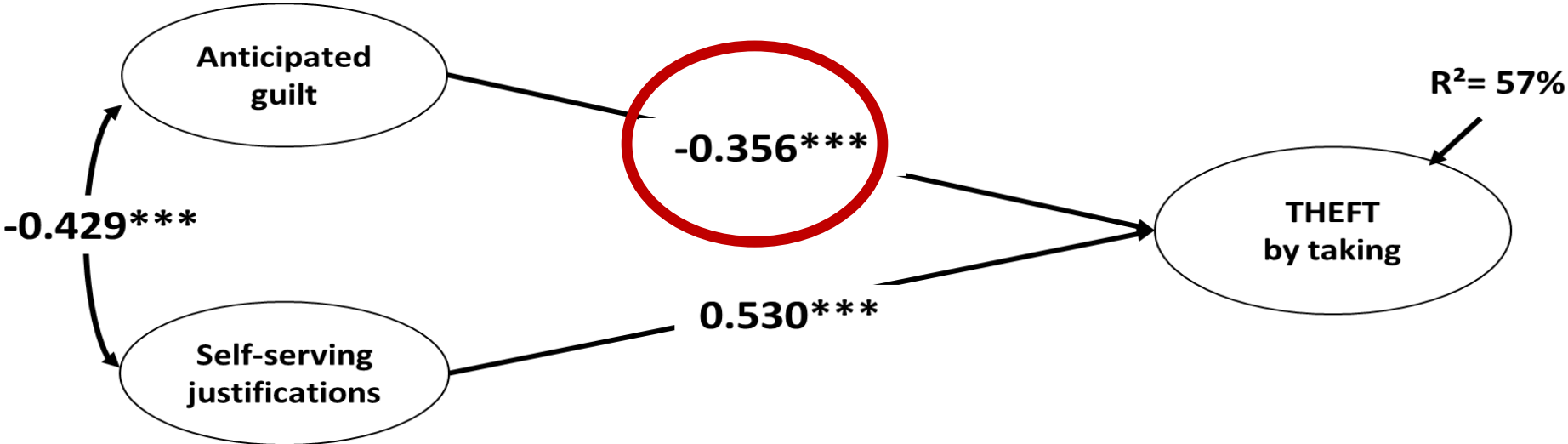
Strong invariance could be achieved.

Constraining the covariance structure of the latent variables equally across the groups estimated an equally good model.

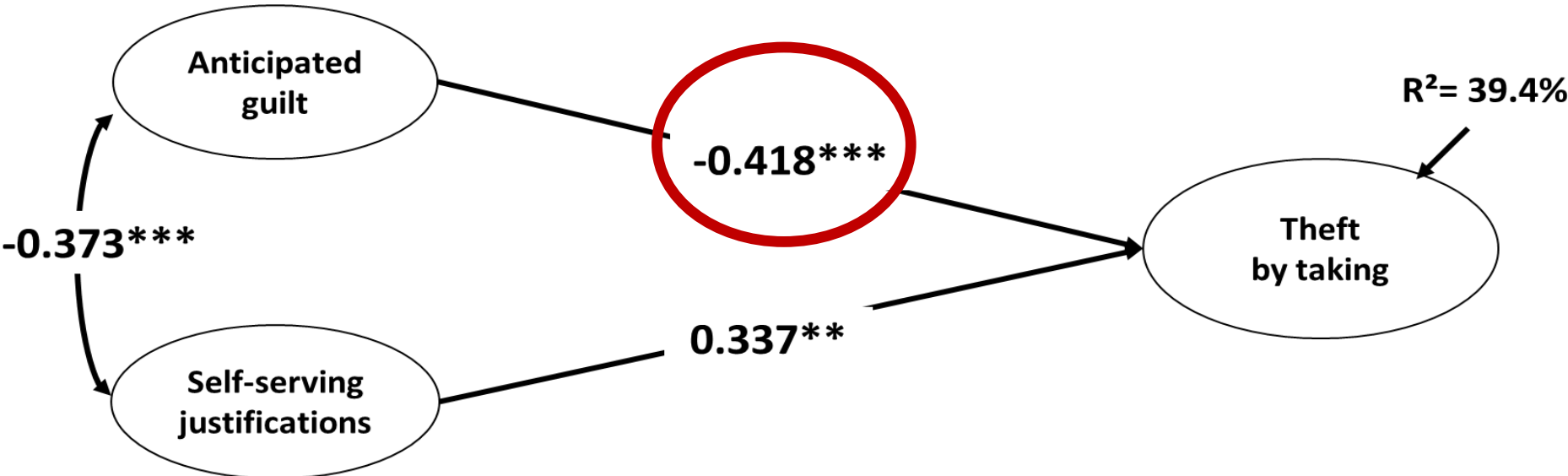
LOW empathic subgroup (n=506)



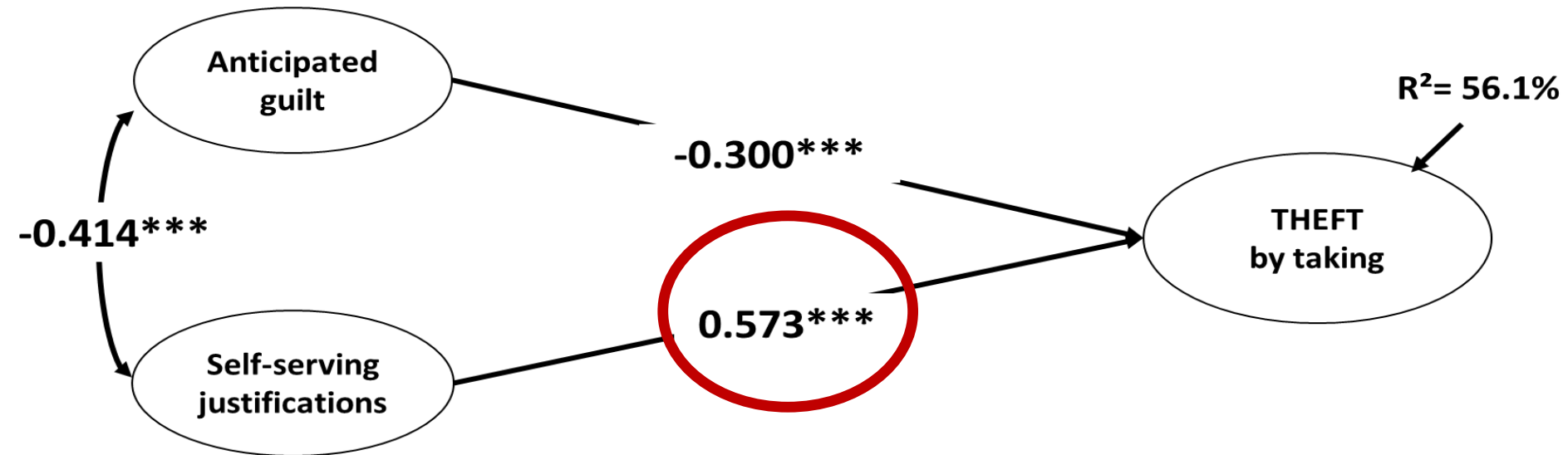
Medium empathic subgroup (n=2773)



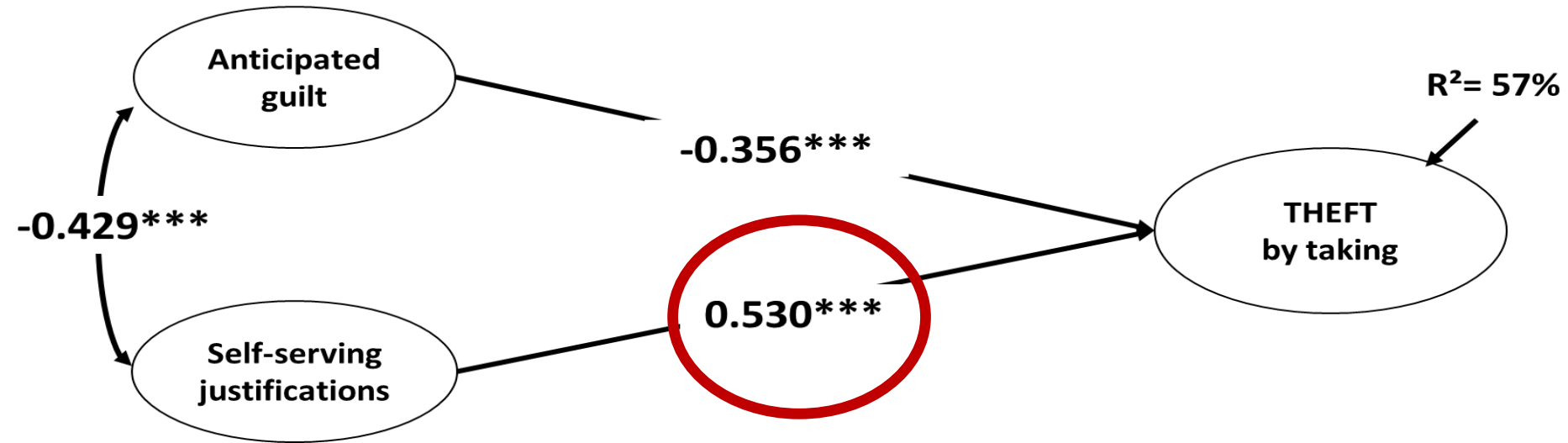
HIGH empathic subgroup (n=538)



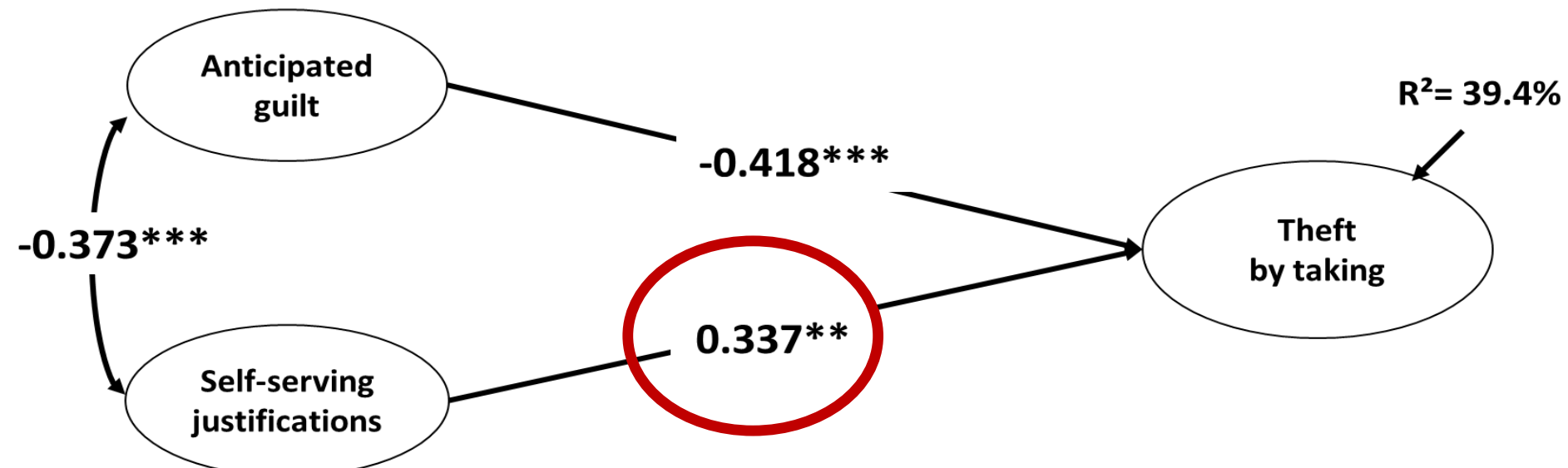
LOW empathic subgroup (n=506)



Medium empathic subgroup (n=2773)



HIGH empathic subgroup (n=538)



HIGHLIGHTS

- A first attempt to examine the moderating role of empathy with the assumptions of varying effects of anticipated guilt and self-serving justifications simultaneously within the method of MGC
- Effect of anticipated guilt increases as levels of empathy increase
- Effect of self-serving justifications decreases as levels of empathy increase

DISCUSSION

- Relation empathy and morality?
- For other outcome variables, other forms of uncooperative behavior? (e.g. violence, aggression...)
- For other moral emotions? (e.g. shame)
- Does the model hold in other samples (e.g. in youthful offenders)
- Using other methodologies?

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