Psychology of Gender: A Focus on Gender-Related Traits and Mental Health

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Two pervasive sex differences: relationships and health

1. Women have more support available and provide more support than men

2. Men have higher rates of mortality than women, BUT women have higher rates of morbidity than men (which includes depressive symptoms)

   Many sex differences appear during adolescence - a peak time of gender-role socialization

Bakan's 1966 "Duality of Human Existence"
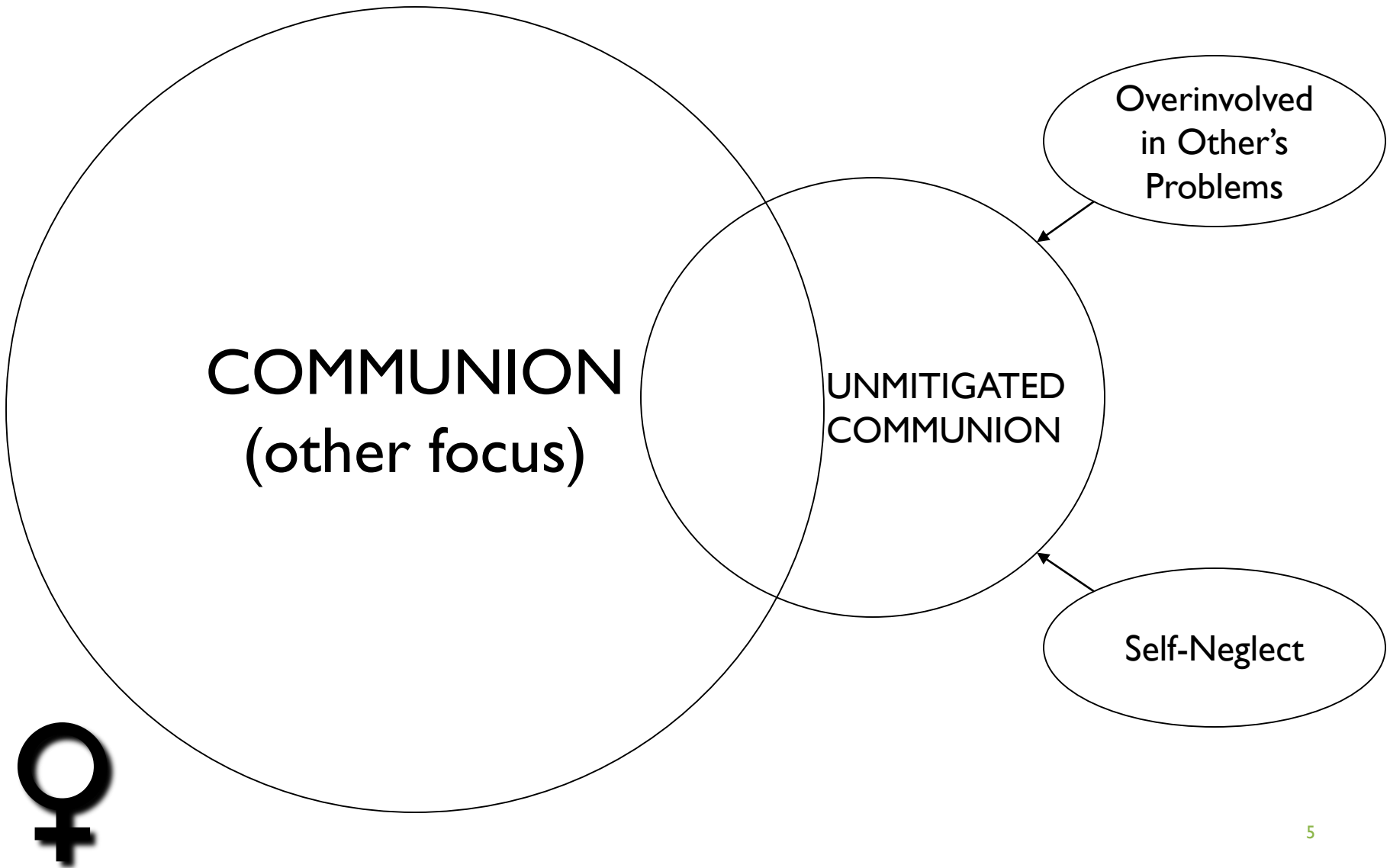
agency

communion

Gender-Related Traits

Agency

- ❖ **A focus on self**
- ❖ Self-protection
- ❖ Self-assertion
- ❖ Form separations
- ❖ Individual actions
- ❖ Individual initiative
- ❖ Self-control
- ❖ Self-direction
- ❖ Competence
- ❖ Mastery

Communion

- ❖ **Focus on other**
- ❖ Contact
- ❖ Openness
- ❖ Relationships
- ❖ Connections
- ❖ Collective actions
- ❖ Supportive environment
- ❖ Group activities
- ❖ Attachment

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COMMUNION (other focus)

UNMITIGATED COMMUNION

Overinvolved in Other's Problems

Self-Neglect

Women's Social Role

- Social network double-edged sword:
  - ❖ Provides support and potential to reduce stress
  - ❖ Provides people to take care of

- "Nurturant Role Hypothesis" *(Gove & Hughes, 1979)*
  - ❖ caretaking → fatigue & illness
  - ❖ exposure to communicable disease
  - ❖ when sick, prevents taking care of self

Unmitigated Communion Scale

1. I always place the needs of others above my own
2.* I never find myself getting overly involved in others' problems
3. I can't say no when someone asks me for help
4. Even when exhausted, I will always help other people
5. I often worry about others' problems

* = reverse score

Source: Helgeson and Fritz (1998)

Implications for Relationships & Health

	Communion	UC
Provides support	X	X
Receives support	X	
Social skills	X	
Psychological distress		X
Noncompliance		X
Poor adjustment to disease		X

Mechanisms

1. Relationship stressors
2. Responsive to relationship stressors

Differential exposure vs. vulnerability

3. Self-neglect

4. Low self-esteem/poor body image
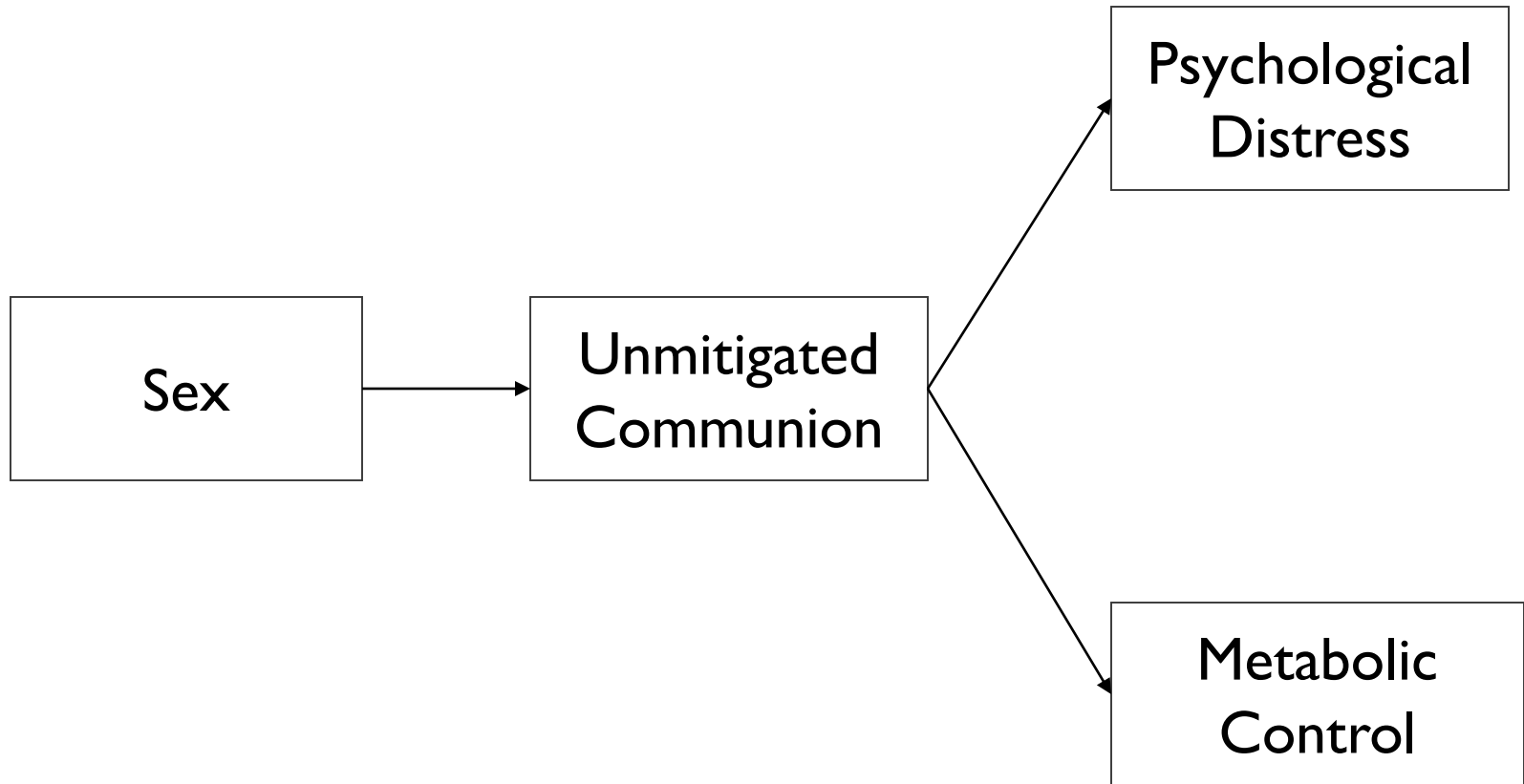5. Reliance on others for self-worth and control
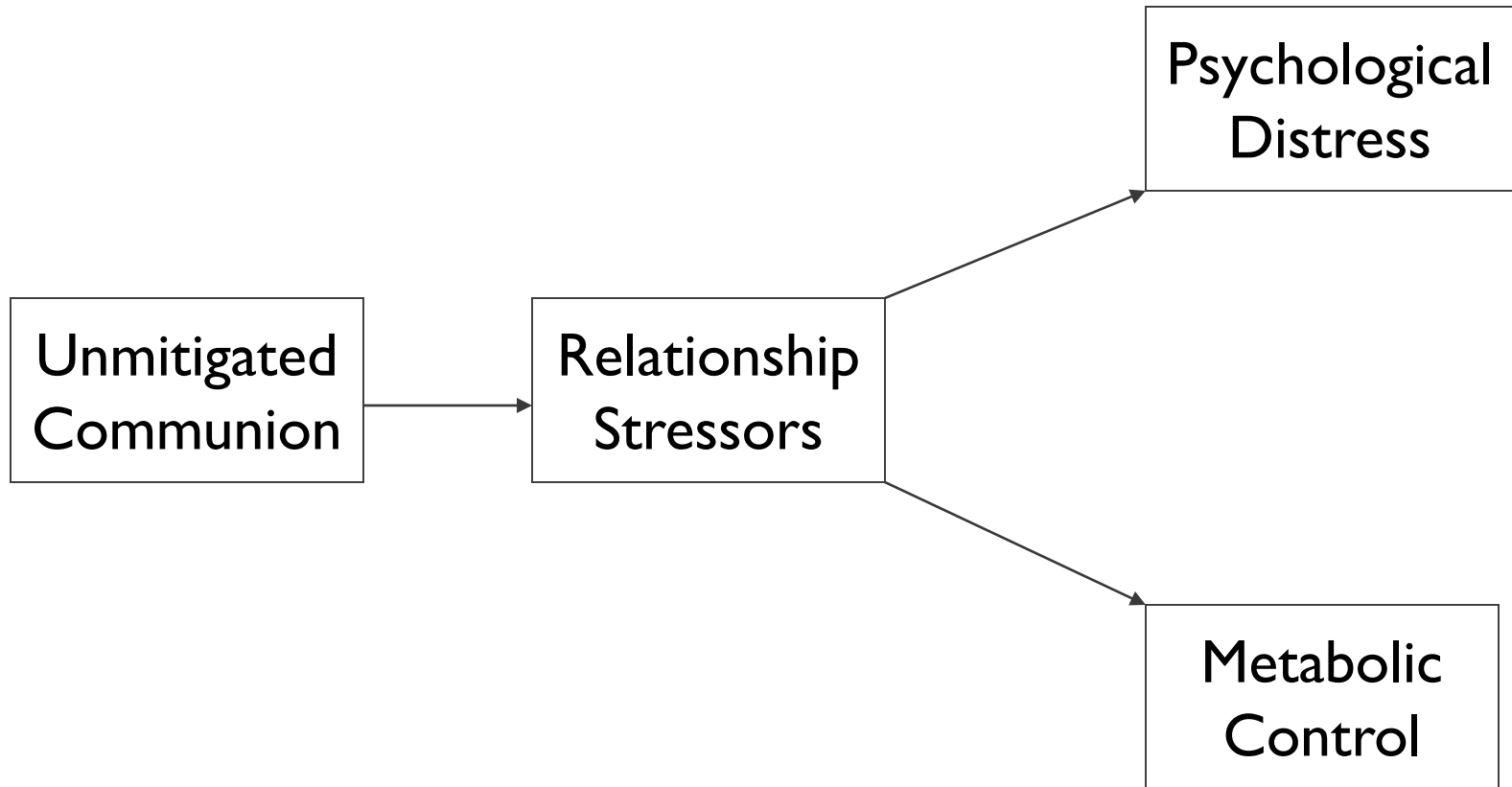
Adolescents with Type 1 Diabetes

- *n* = 43
- ages 13-17
- T1 interview
- T2 interview (4 months later)

Helgeson & Fritz (1996)

Adolescents with and without Type 1 diabetes

- 132 diabetes; 131 controls
- Average age 12 at enrollment
- Followed for 5 years

Helgeson & Palladino (2012)

Concurrent Multi-Level Models: Coefficients and Standard Errors

	Parent Relationship	Friend Support	Friend Conflict
Intercept	4.04 (.21)***	2.66 (.21)***	.87 (.20)***
Age	-.02 (.01)	.07 (.01)***	.04 (.01)**
Social Status	.00 (.00)	.00 (.00)	.00 (.00)
BMI	-.01 (.00)+	-.00 (.00)	-.01 (.00)*
Puberty	-.02 (.02)	-.03 (.02)	-.01 (.02)
Sex	.11 (.06)*	-.50 (.06)***	.12 (.05)*
UC	-.08 (.03)*	.12 (.03)***	.09 (.03)**
UA	-.10 (.03)**	-.01 (.03)	.27 (.03)***
Agency	.08 (.03)*	.05 (.03)	-.00 (.03)
Communion	.11 (.03)**	.20 (.03)***	-.07 (.03)*

Note: UC = unmitigated communion; UA = unmitigated agency; + $p < .10$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Source: Helgeson & Palladino (2012)

Concurrent Multi-Level Models: Coefficients and Standard Errors

Depression	Anger	Self-care
1.16 (.08)***	1.08 (.23)***	4.30 (.31)***
.01 (.00)	.08 (.01)***	-.10 (.01)***
.00 (.00)	-.00 (.00)	.00 (.00)
.00 (.00)*	-.00 (.00)	-.01 (.01)
-.00 (.01)	.03 (.02)	.03 (.02)
-.10 (.02)***	-.16 (.05)**	-.04 (.07)
.08 (.01)***	.15 (.04)***	.03 (.04)
.02 (.01)	.21 (.03)***	-.10 (.04)**
-.03 (.01)*	.07 (.04)	.07 (.05)
-.07 (.01)***	-.12 (.04)**	-.00 (.06)

*Note: UC = unmitigated communion; UA = unmitigated agency; + $p < .10$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$*

Source: Helgeson & Palladino (2012)

Longitudinal (lagged) Multi-Level Models: Coefficients and Standard Errors

	Parent Relationship	Friend Support	Friend Conflict
Intercept	1.42 (.18)***	1.20 (.16)***	1.09 (.17)***
Baseline outcome	.62 (.03)***	.60 (.03)***	.41 (.03)***
Age	-.01 (.01)	.04 (.01)***	.02 (.01)
Social status	.00 (.00)	.00 (.00)	.00 (.00)
Puberty	-.02 (.02)	.00 (.02)	.02 (.02)
Sex	.06 (.03)+	-.24 (.04)***	.11 (.04)***
UC	-.06 (.03)*	.02 (.03)	.06 (.03)*
UA	-.03 (.03)	-.07 (.03)**	-.01 (.03)
Agency	.02 (.03)	.09 (.03)**	.06 (.03)
Communion	.08 (.03)*	.02 (.03)	-.14 (.03)***

*Note: UC = unmitigated communion; UA = unmitigated agency; + p < .10; * p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001*

Source: Helgeson & Palladino (2012)

Longitudinal (lagged) Multi-Level Models: Coefficients and Standard Errors

	Depression	Anger	Self-care	HbA1c
Intercept	.77 (.08)***	1.50 (.21)***	1.52 (.28)	2.40 (.65)***
Baseline outcome	.34 (.03)***	.22 (.03)***	.63 (.04)***	.71 (.04)***
Age	.00 (.01)	.05 (.02)**	-.04 (.01)**	-.06 (.04)
Social status	.00 (.00)	-.00 (.00)	.00 (.00)	-.01 (.01)*
Puberty	.01 (.01)	-.01 (.02)	-	-
Sex	-.07 (.02)***	-.18 (.05)***	.01 (.04)	-.01 (.11)
UC	.03 (.01)*	.05 (.04)	-.11 (.03)**	.25 (.10)*
UA	.03 (.01)+	.09 (.04)*	-.02 (.03)	-.03 (.10)
Agency	-.03 (.01)*	.03 (.04)	-.02 (.04)	.10 (.12)
Communion	-.02 (.01)	-.09 (.04)*	.09 (.04)*	-.23 (.11)*

*Note: UC = unmitigated communion; UA = unmitigated agency; + p < .10; * p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001*

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Source: Helgeson & Palladino (2012)

Are UC individuals more *affected* by relationships?

Laboratory Studies

- Exposed to person who self-discloses problem
  - ❖ Study 1: Friend
  - ❖ Study 2: Stranger

Intrusive thoughts about problem

	Study 1	Study 2
Unmitigated Communion	.46 **	.35 *
Communion	.24	.08

Source: Fritz & Helgeson (1998)

Daily Diary Study (EMA) of College Students

- 41 college students

- phone interviews nightly for 2 weeks

- measured on a daily basis:

  - Interpersonal conflict

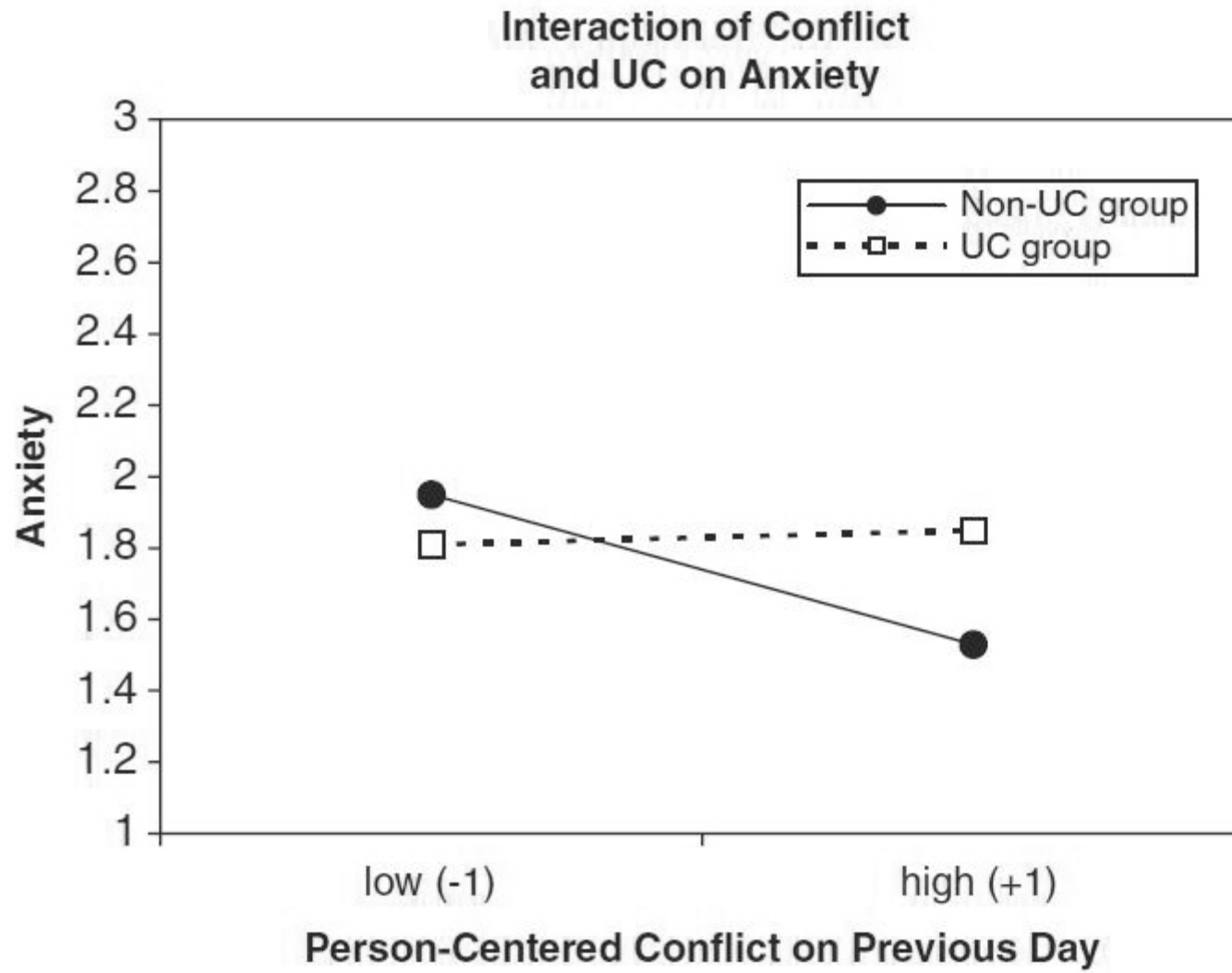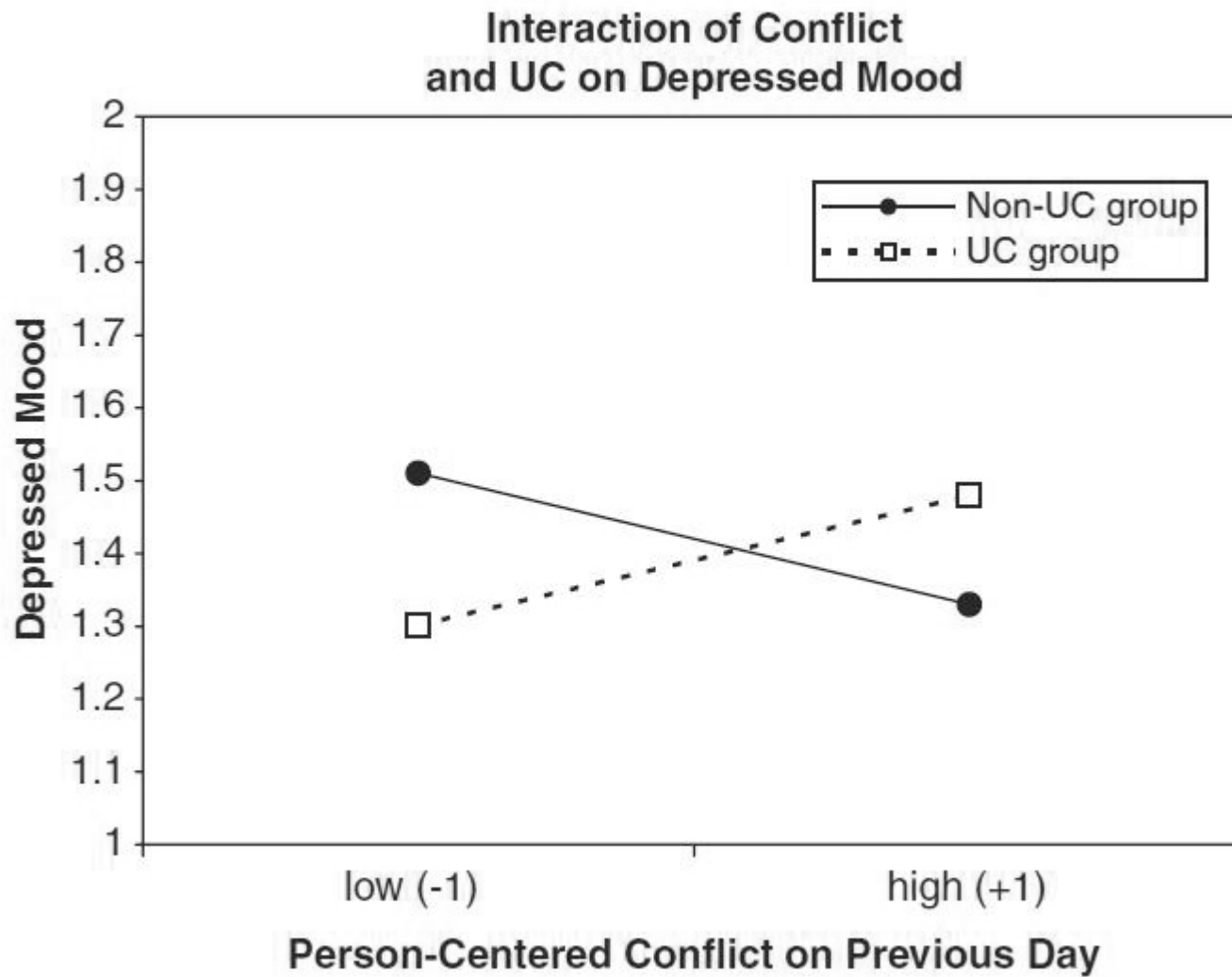 - Mood (anxiety, depression)

  - Self-esteem

Hypothesis 1:

interpersonal conflict related to increased anxiety and depression and decreased self-esteem

Hypothesis 2:

relations stronger for UC than non-UC individuals

Interaction of Conflict and UC on Anxiety

Source: Reynolds et al. (2006)

Interaction of Conflict and UC on Depressed Mood
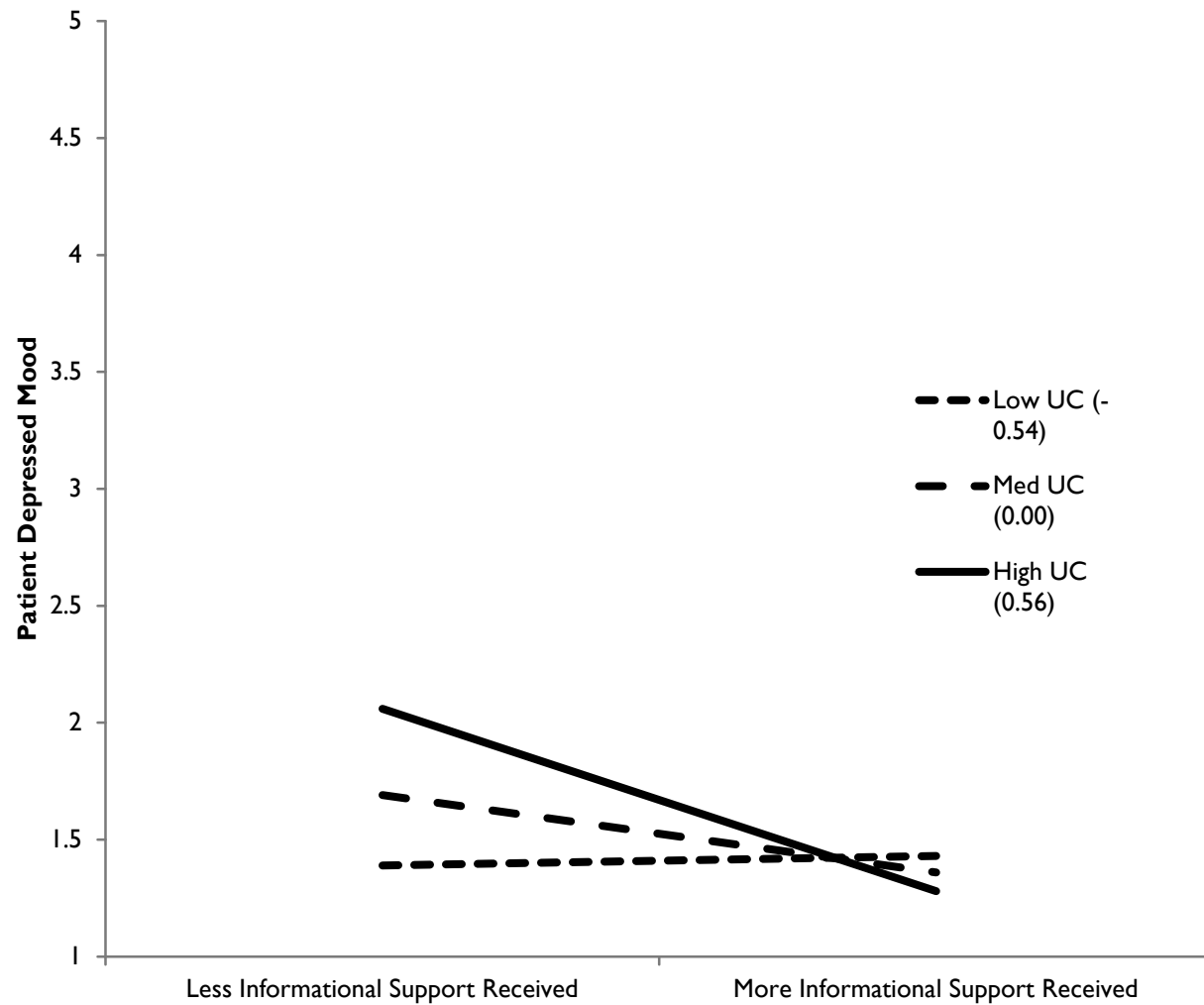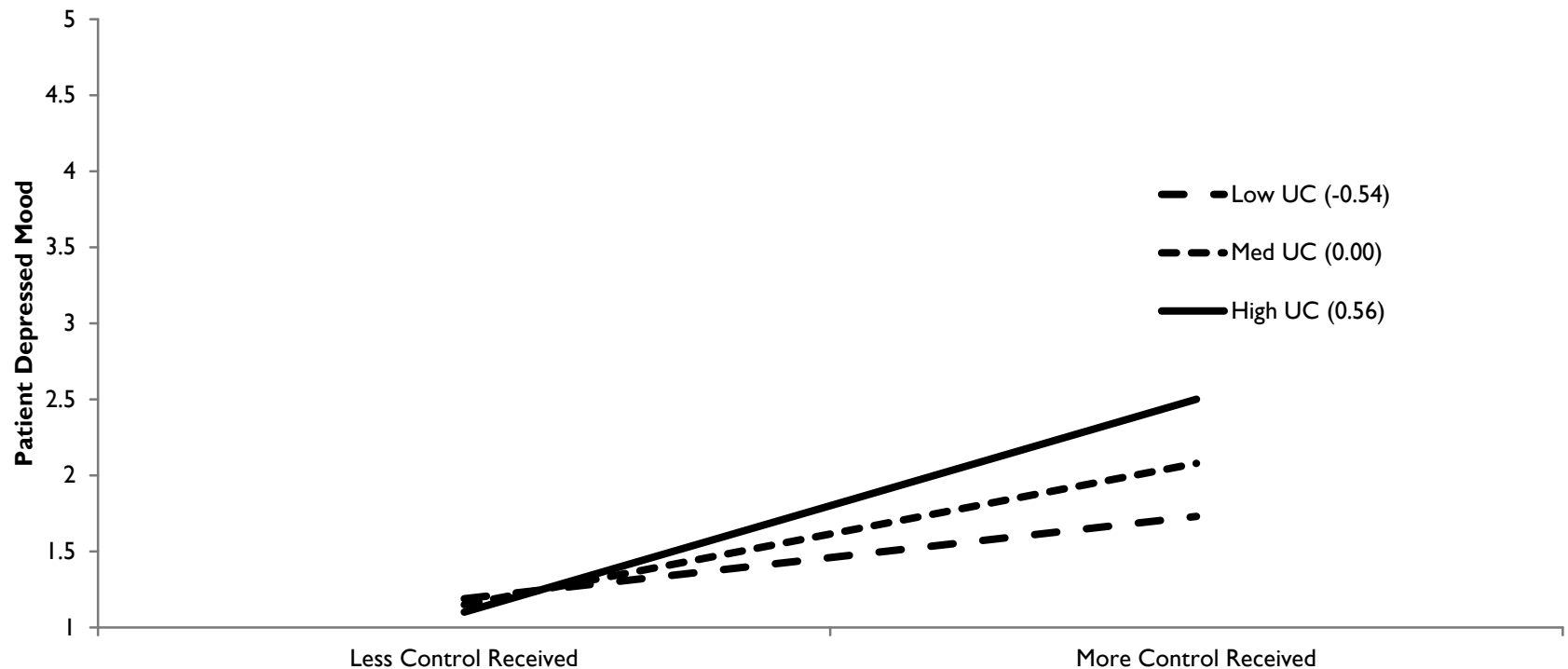
Source: Reynolds et al. (2006)

Adults with Type 2 Diabetes and Partners

- one person was recently (last 5 years) diagnosed with type 2 diabetes

- Partnered (married or living together)

- half Caucasian; half African American

- EMA: daily diary study for 14 days

- $n = 70$

Source: Helgeson, Mascatelli, et al., 2016

Source: Helgeson, Mascatelli, et al. (2016)

Perceiving partners as controlling was related to poor mood for all- but especially patients who scored high on UC

Source: Helgeson, Mascatelli, et al. (2016)

Communal Motivations: A Meta-Analysis

Communal Motivation:

"motivation to care for the welfare of others and desire that others will be similarly caring for one's own welfare"

- Focused on maximizing joint outcomes

Unmitigated Communion Motivation:

- Maximizing partner's outcomes without consideration of one's own outcomes

Le et al., 2017

Personal Well-Being

	k	N	*r*	Q
Communal motivation	16	6181	.12***	25.81*
UC motivation	26	4901	-.06***	28.27 n.s.

Understanding Self-Neglect:
Why People Don't Ask For Help When They Need It

	Communion	UC
Asking is a sign of weakness	-.15+	.00
Burden to others	.21*	.36***
Others can't help anyway	-.13	-.09
Others don't want to help	.13	.25**
Asking annoys people	.24**	.46***

+ *p* < .10. **p* < .05. ***p* < .01. ****p* < .001.

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Source: Helgeson & Fritz (2000)

UC over the lifespan

Little attention to lifespan:

Followed gender-related traits from ages 12-16

❖ UC: increased in girls and decreased in boys
❖ Communion: no change (F > M)
❖ Agency: sex differences decreased with age
             females increased
             males same

Source: Helgeson & Palladino (2012)

Culture and UC

Little attention to culture, race/ethnicity

❖ Are there cultural differences in the value of orientations toward others vs self?

❖ Are there cultural differences in the way an other-orientation is construed?

MANY MANY THANKS!!!

Grant Support:

    R0I CA61303   breast cancer

    R0I DK60586   children, adolescents, young adults

                        with and without type 1 diabetes

    R0I DK095780   couples in which one person has type 2 diabetes

Many students and staff at CMU