



The Role of Loneliness and Psychological Flexibility in the Pathway from Romantic Rejection to Depression

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INTRODUCTION

- A large body of research suggests romantic rejection predicts future depressive symptoms, higher levels of distress, and relapse of depression (Ayduk, Downey, & Kim, 2001; Field, Diego, Pelaez, Deeds & Delgado, 2009).
- Over 40% of individuals who had experienced a romantic breakup presented with clinical depression after six months and 12% experienced moderate to severe depression (Mearns, 1991; Monroe, Rohde, Seeley, & Lewinsohn, 1999).
- Emerging research suggests that loneliness is positively associated with depression and other psychopathology (Heinrich & Gullone, 2006; Jaya, Hillmann, Reininger, Gollwitzer, & Lincoln, 2017).
- Psychological flexibility is the ability to fully contact the present moment, including unwanted thoughts and feelings in the service of valued action (Hayes, Strosahl, & Wilson, 2012). Psychological flexibility has been extensively linked to psychopathology (Leahy, Tirch, & Melwani, 2012; Masuda & Tully, 2012; White, Gumley, McTaggart, Rattrie, McConville, & Cleare, 2013).
- Given the established independent relationships among these variables and depression, research into the interactive and conditional effect of depression risk factors is warranted.

PURPOSE

- The purpose of the current study was to examine the conditional and interactive roles of loneliness and psychological flexibility in the context of the relationship between romantic rejection and depression.
- Hypothesis 1: The relationship between breakup distress and depression severity will be stronger among individuals with higher loneliness.
- Hypothesis 2: The relationship between breakup distress and depression severity will be less pronounced in individuals with high psychological flexibility.

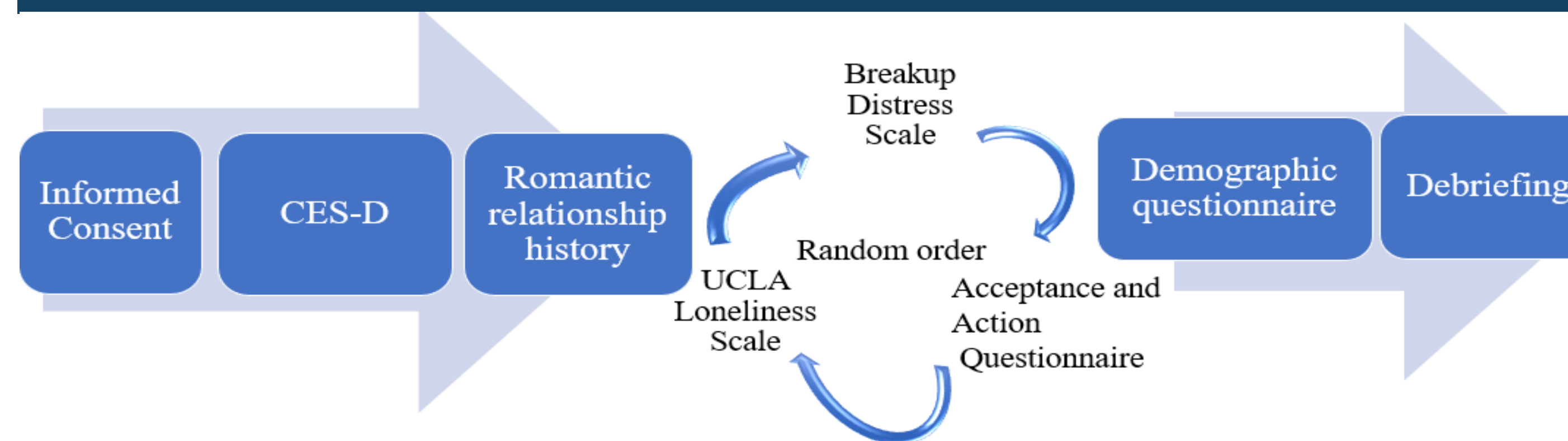
PARTICIPANTS (N =78)

- 54 females, 22 males, and two unspecified biological sex participants were recruited from a Southern Regional University. A total of 108 undergraduates were recruited. Due to missing values in study measures or missing one or more attention questions out of three attention questions, a total of 28 participants were removed from the study (N = 78).
- Mean age = 19.76 ($SD = 2.75$)
- 87.2% Caucasian
- 91% Heterosexual
- Current relationship status:
 - 56.4% Currently single
 - 24.4% Dating exclusively
 - 12.8% Dating casually

MEASURES

- Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale (CES-D; $\alpha = .92$; Radloff, 1977).
- Breakup distress Scale (BDS; $\alpha = .96$; Field, Diego, Pelaez, Deeds, & Delgado, 2009).
- UCLA Loneliness Scale (UCLA Version 3; $\alpha = .94$; Russell, 1996).
- Acceptance and Action Questionnaire (AAQ-II; $\alpha = .93$; Bond et al., 2011)

PROCEDURE



ANALYSIS

- A linear regression model with two moderating variables using PROCESS 2.10 was used for the primary analysis (Hayes, 2013; Model 2).
- IV: Romantic rejection on the Breakup distress scale
- DV: Levels of depression on the CES-D scale
- Moderating Variables: Loneliness on the UCLA scale, UCLA scale measures a sense of loneliness individuals experience, higher scores indicate stronger loneliness. Psychological flexibility on AAQ-II, AAQ -II measures inflexibility, higher scores indicate less psychological flexibility.
- Covariates: Biological sex (Female = 1), strength of commitment to romantic relationship pre-breakup, and sexual orientation (Non-heterosexual = 1) were entered as covariates in the model as previous research has demonstrated that these variables were significantly related to depression scores (Chan, 2017).

RESULTS

- The overall linear regression model was significant and accounted for 66% of the variance in predicting the severity of depression, $F(8, 62) = 15.30, p < .001$.
- The introduction of both interaction terms (UCLA & AAQ-II) accounted for a significant additional proportion of variance in the levels of depression, $R^2\Delta = .06, F(2, 62) = 5.33, p = .007$.

Table 1. Moderated regression predicting depression severity.

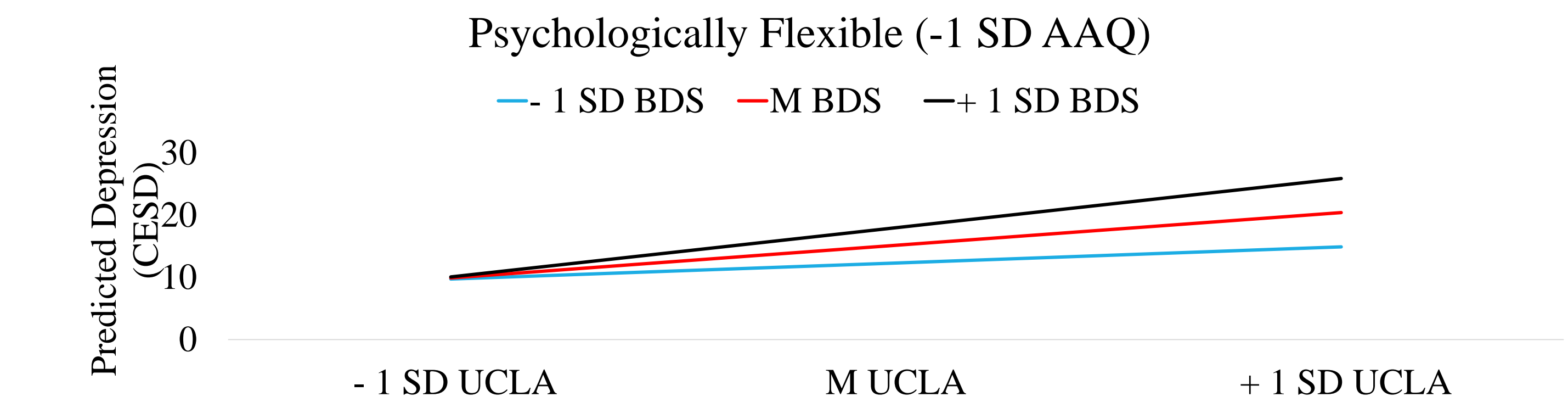
Predictor Variable	B	t	p
Intercept	19.30	3.92	<.001
Biological Sex (Female = 1)	3.16	1.51	.136
Level of Commitment	0.50	0.91	.368
Sexual Orientation (Heterosexual = 1)	-5.85	-1.73	.089
AAQ-II	0.34	3.12	.003
UCLA	0.42	4.81	<.001
Breakup Distress X AAQ-II	-0.02	-3.08	.003
Breakup Distress X UCLA	0.01	2.52	.014

DISCUSSION

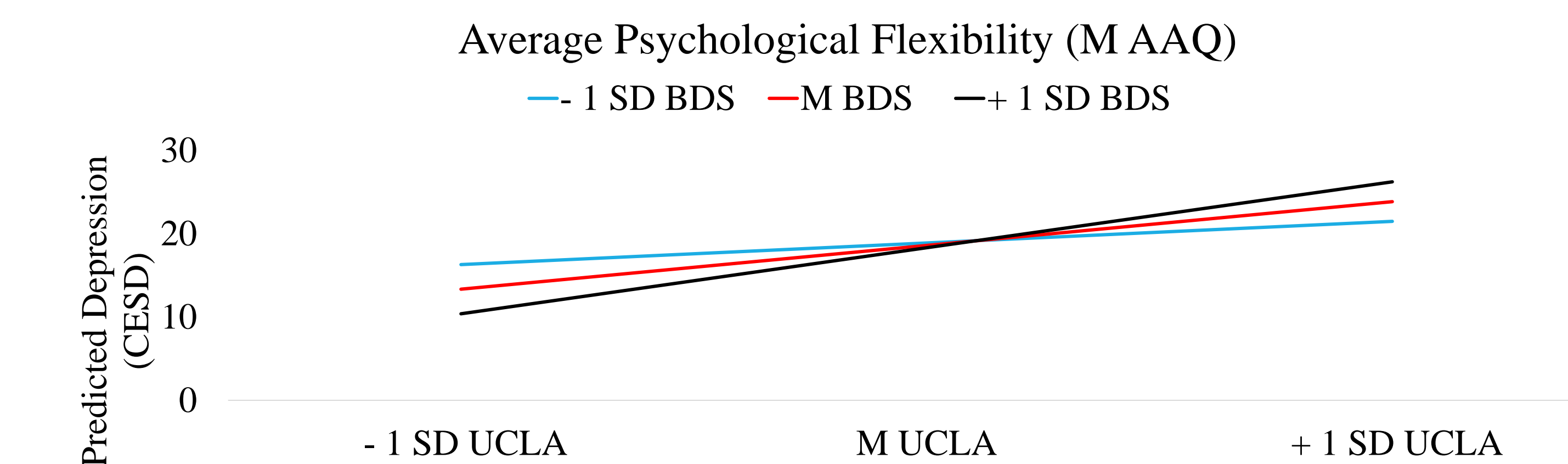
- Findings from this study replicated a large body of studies suggesting that romantic rejection predicted the presence of depressive symptoms.
- The conditional effects of psychological flexibility and loneliness were both the significant predictor of depression in the primary analytic model, such that the more psychologically inflexible and lonelier individuals were, the higher levels of depression they endorsed experiencing.
- The interactive effect of breakup distress and psychological flexibility as well as breakup distress and loneliness moderated the relationship between breakup distress and depression.

DISCUSSION

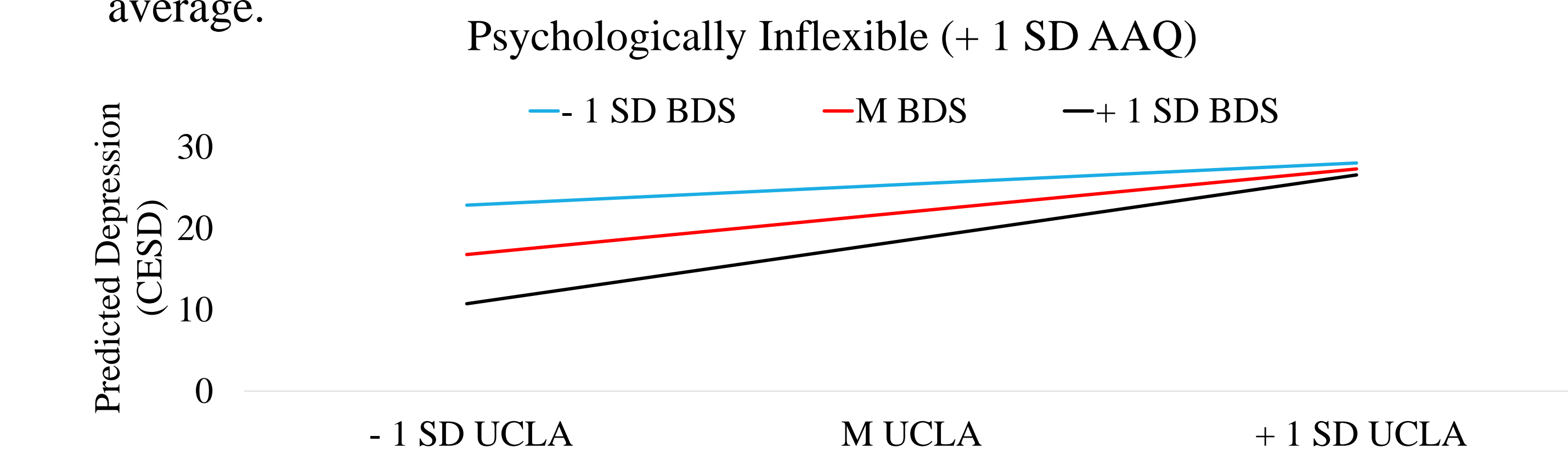
- For psychologically flexible individuals, higher levels of breakup distress significantly predicted higher levels of depression only when loneliness was high.



- For individuals with average psychological flexibility, higher breakup distress predicted significantly lower levels of depression when loneliness was low.



- For psychologically inflexible individuals, higher levels of breakup distress significantly predicted lower levels of depression when loneliness was low or average.



- Future research should conduct longitudinal studies and further investigate the possible explanations for the findings that participants who were highly psychologically inflexible did not experience higher breakup distress and depression as expected. This may have caused by the retrospective recall biases through reflecting back on how participants felt about a previous breakup.
- Future research should collect data from a more diverse sample, as the current sample was disproportionately female, Caucasian, and heterosexual.

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