

# Fear of intimacy: Vulnerability or protective factor for reactions to social ostracism?

Daniel W. M. Maitland, Ph.D

**BGSU** BELONG. STAND OUT. GO FAR.  
CHANGING LIVES FOR THE WORLD.



# Disclosures

Project completed with time freed up via the following funding:

NIGMS:1R16GM150756-01

**BGSU** BELONG. STAND OUT. GO FAR.  
CHANGING LIVES FOR THE WORLD.



# Loneliness



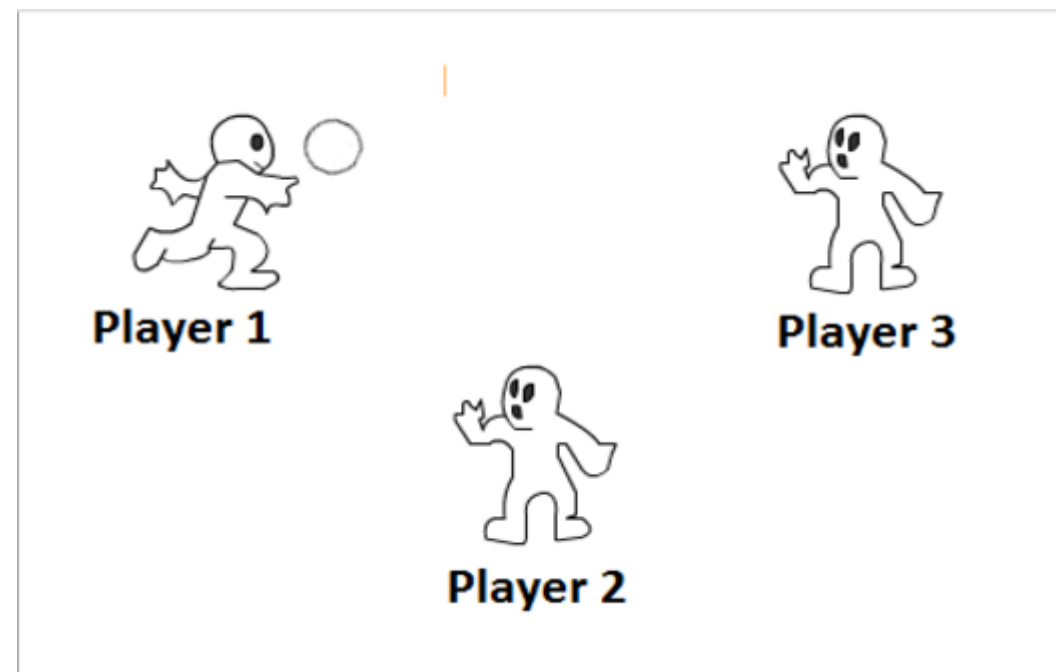
- Loneliness has a significant impact on physical and mental health
- As of 2010 up to one third of all adult's report feeling lonely
- The modal American reports having no one they can share feelings with
- Those age 18-30 report the most loneliness with the average individual in that age group being lonely
- Social ostracism can be a meaningful contributing factor to the development of loneliness

# Fear of intimacy, ostracism, and loneliness

- Fear of Intimacy
  - Willingness to engage in behaviors that result in close relationships
    - Involves vulnerability
  - May be essential to the development of loneliness when in contact with others
- Ostracism
  - Being ignored and excluded
    - Predicts the development of loneliness
  - Painful emotional experience, but little to no research on the impact when people are unwilling to engage in closeness generating behaviors

# Cyberball

- Designed by Williams and Jarvis (2006)
- 2D online computer-based game
- Designed to experimentally manipulate social exclusion
- Deception



# Goals and hypotheses



- Assess how fear of intimacy and loneliness impact reactions to social inclusion and exclusion
- Lonely individuals and those higher in fear of intimacy will report more adverse reactions to social exclusion than those reporting average or low levels of loneliness and fear of intimacy
- No difference based on loneliness or fear of intimacy will be reported for individuals who do not experience social exclusion

# Conditions



- Between subjects design
- All participants randomized equally
- 2 conditions
- Inclusion condition
- Exclusion condition
- Survey of predictors before cyberball game
- Brief questionnaire of reaction after cyberball game

# Measurement



- UCLA Loneliness Inventory version 3 (IV)
- Fear of Intimacy Scale (IV)
- Momentary Impulsivity Scale (DV)
- Stress and coping single item assessments (DV)



# The current study –Analysis



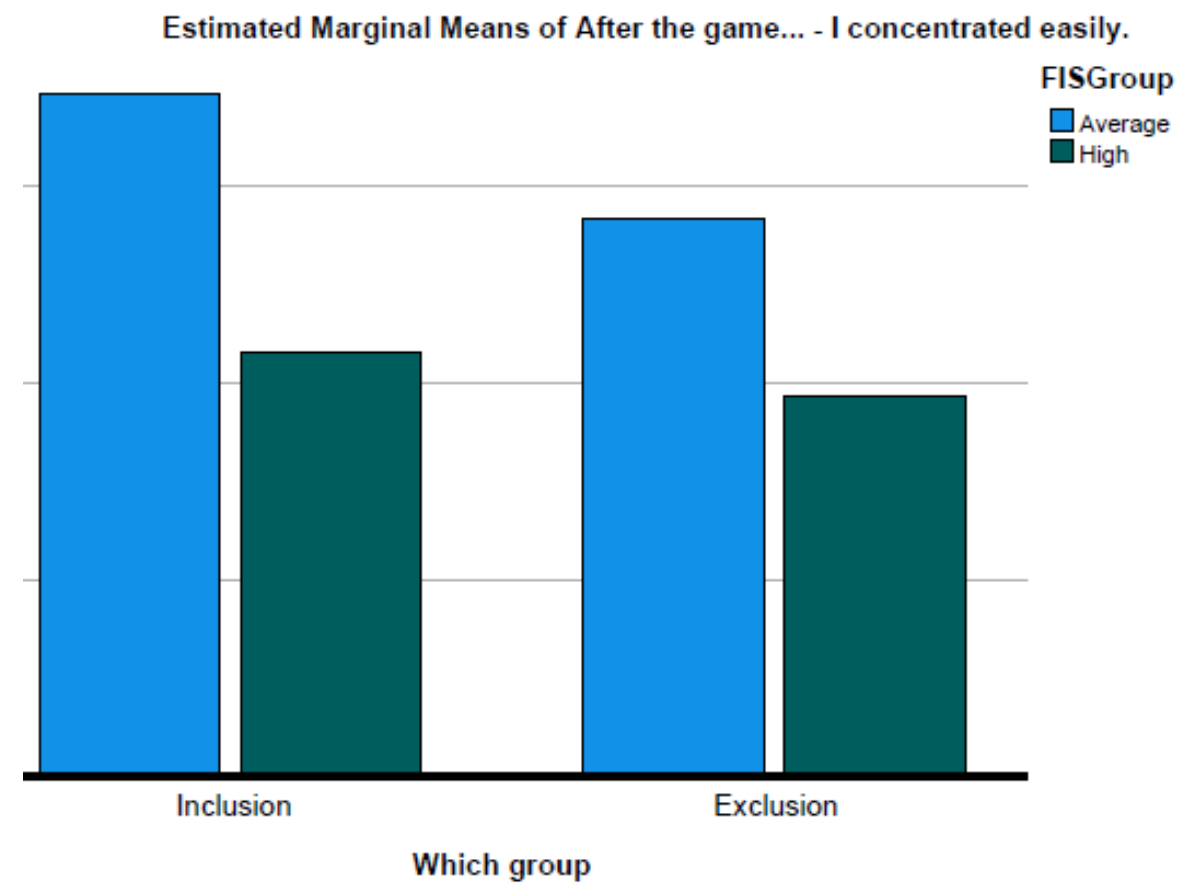
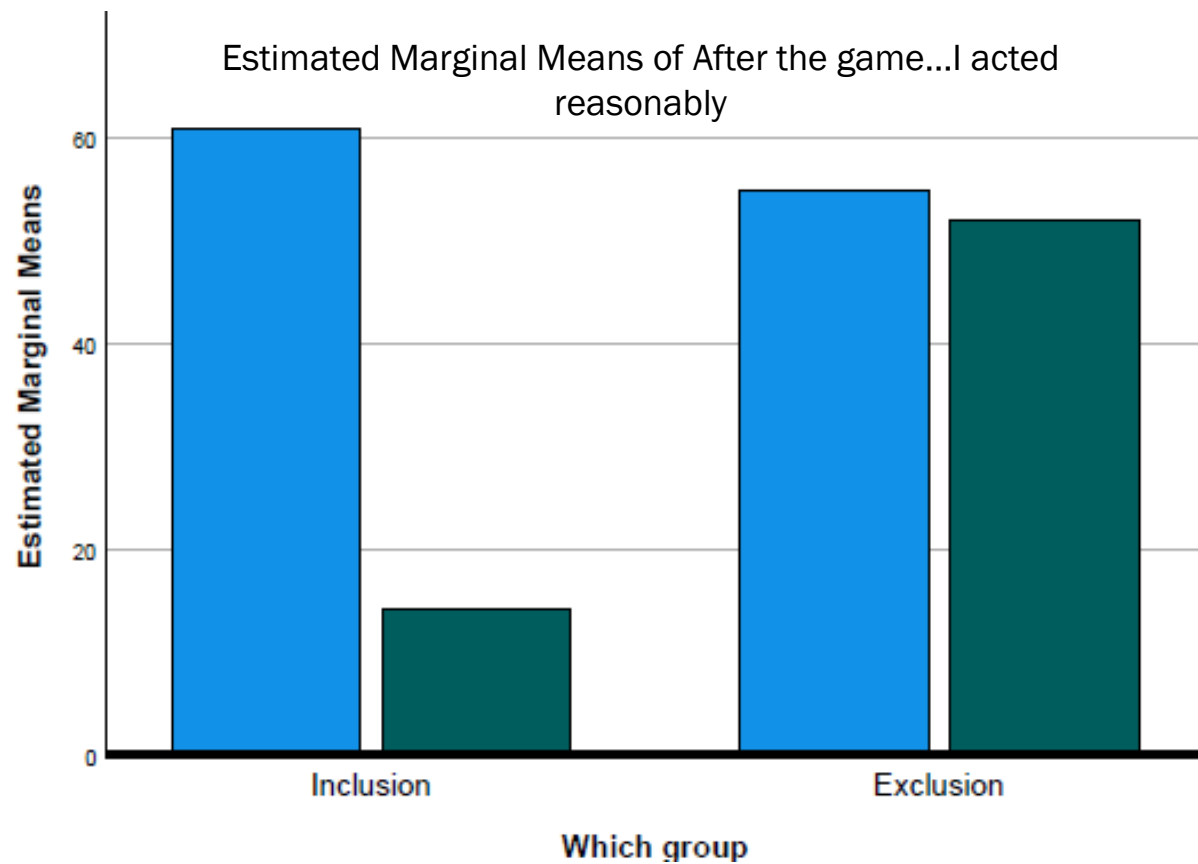
- Repeated measures ANOVA
  - Between group by condition
  - Between group by Fear of Intimacy **OR** Loneliness
    - 1 SD below mean for high group compared to all others

# Participants

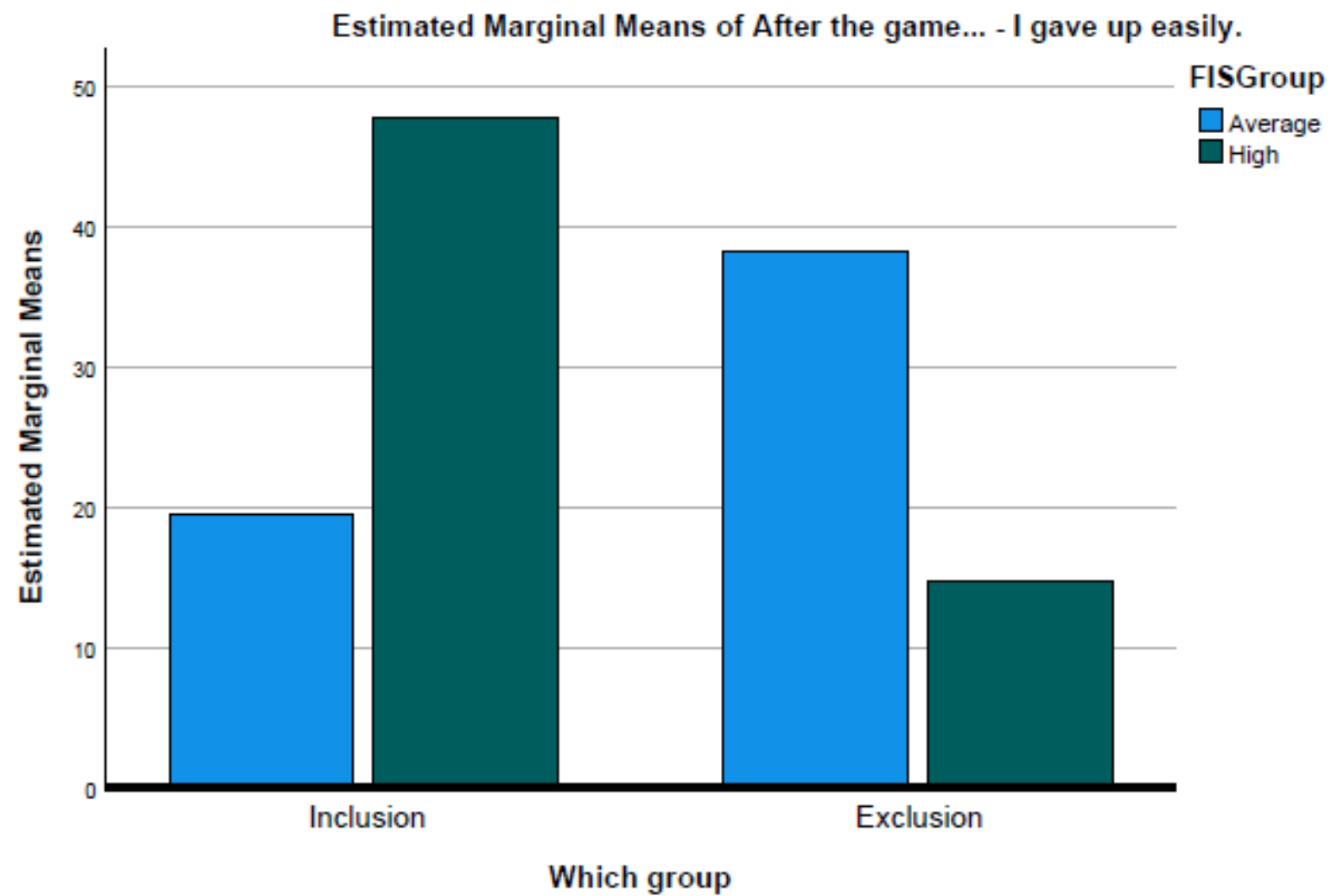


- 118 Enrolled in the study
- 79 provided valid response
- Avg Age 19.62 (2.23)
- 58 Identified as Female, 16 Male, 4 Nonbinary, 1 Agender
- 7 identified as Hispanic/Latino
- 68 identified as white, 3 black, 2 Asian, 3 multiracial, 3 declined to identify
- 18 reported high levels of fear of intimacy
- 30 reported high levels of loneliness

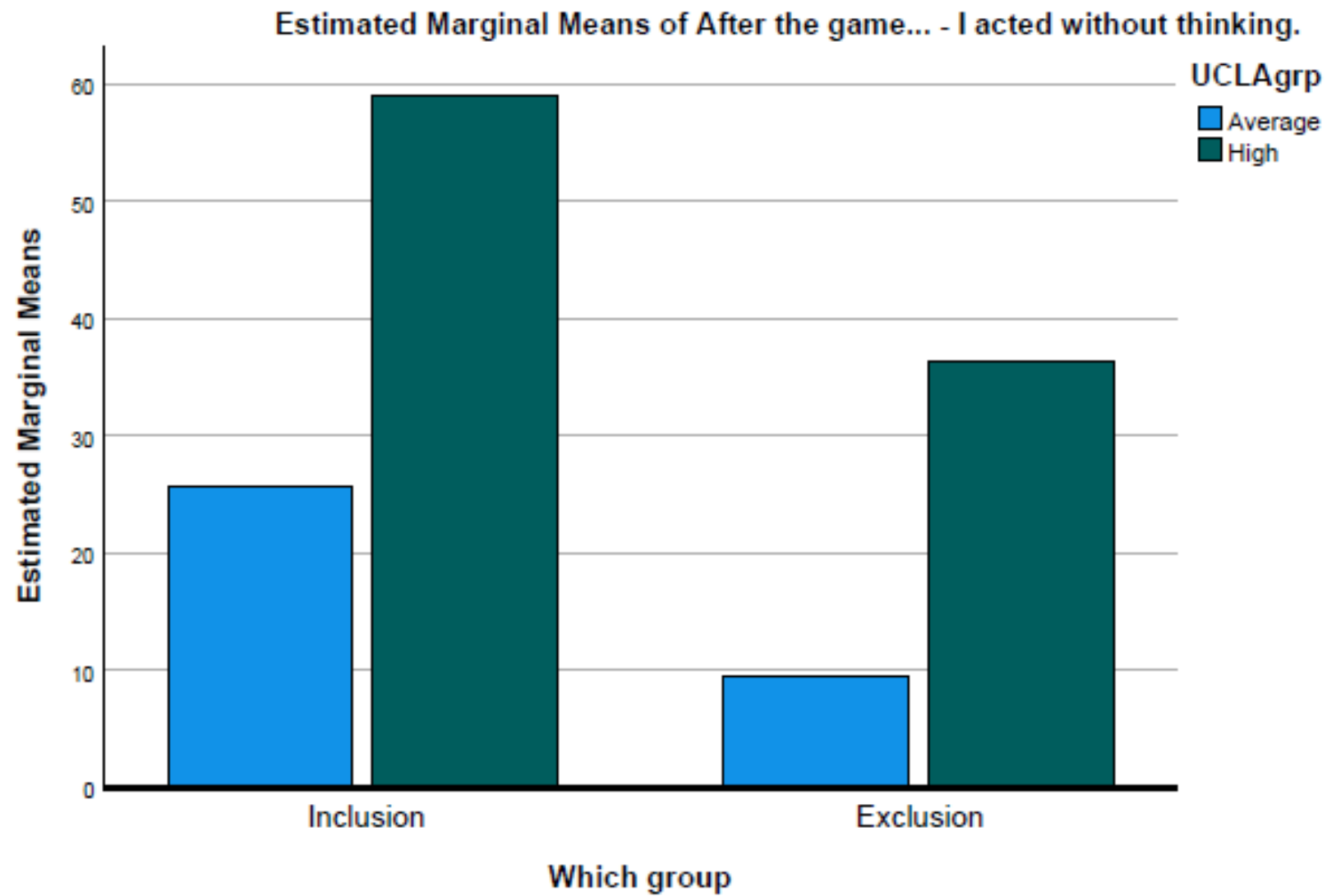
# Results – Main effect FIS



# Results – FIS Interaction



# Results – UCLA Main effect



# Discussion



- Fear of intimacy predicted participants feeling like they could act reasonably and concentrate after the game
- UCLA predicted impulsivity after the game
- Only interaction effect was condition x FLS prediction of giving up easily
  - Overall, no major difference due to exclusion
  - Surprising interaction effect may reflect experiential avoidance

# Limitations & future directions

- Small sample size
  - Did not recruit for deficits in social functioning
  - Not everyone responded to every DV question
- Is cyberball appropriate for the sample?
  - Frequently given to kids instead of emerging adults
- Question timing gives limited opportunity for outcomes
- Can this be replicated using a different experiment? An in person exclusion task

PSYCHOTHERAPY RESEARCH OR STUDY OF

Thank you

PROSOCIAL

danmaitland@gmail.com

Researchgate:

<https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Daniel-Maitland>

CONNECTION, INTIMACY, AND LONELINESS