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Relational Aggression in College Students: Associations with Emotion Regulation, Sleep, Social Anxiety, and Psychopathy

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RELATIONAL AGGRESSION IN COLLEGE STUDENTS:

ASSOCIATIONS WITH EMOTION
REGULATION, SLEEP, SOCIAL ANXIETY,
PSYCHOPATHY, AND SPITEFULNESS

Charlotte Mensen

WHAT DO YOU THINK OF WHEN YOU
THINK OF AGGRESSION?

Physical Aggression

Verbal Aggression

Anger

WHAT IS RELATIONAL AGGRESSION?

- Aggression that attempts to harm others through the manipulation of relationships, reputation, and status.
- Reactive Relational Aggression
 - In response to a threat or “on the spot”.
- Proactive Relational Aggression
 - Premeditated or thought out in advance.

INITIAL RESEARCH ON RELATIONAL AGGRESSION

- Boys = Physical Aggression
- Girls = Relational Aggression
- Nonaggressive children more prosocial, less lonely, and less depressed than relationally aggressive children.

RELATIONAL AGGRESSION IN EMERGING ADULTHOOD

- Associated with peer rejection, antisocial personality characteristics, and low prosocial behavior.
- Relationally aggressive women suffer from more social-psychological issues compared to relationally aggressive men.

FOCUS ON WOMEN

- Associations with...
 - Exclusivity
 - Hostile Attribution Bias
 - Borderline Personality Disorder
- Relational Victimization
- Resort to relational aggression due to fear of being victimized.

RELATIONAL AGGRESSION AND DIFFICULTIES IN EMOTION REGULATION

- The ability to recognize and accept your emotions as well as being able to regulate and control them.
- Those who are less able to regulate their emotions have been shown to have more anxiety and depression, especially within women.
- Associated with reactive relational aggression.

RELATIONAL AGGRESSION AND SLEEP

- Limited research on sleep and relational aggression.
- Lack of sleep is known to cause increased emotion regulation difficulties as well as aggression.
- Indirectly associated through increase in poor mental health.

RELATIONAL AGGRESSION AND SOCIAL ANXIETY

- The fear of negative evaluation and avoiding interaction with others.
- Relationally aggressive individuals have been shown to be more socially anxious.

RELATIONAL AGGRESSION AND PSYCHOPATHIC PERSONALITY TRAITS

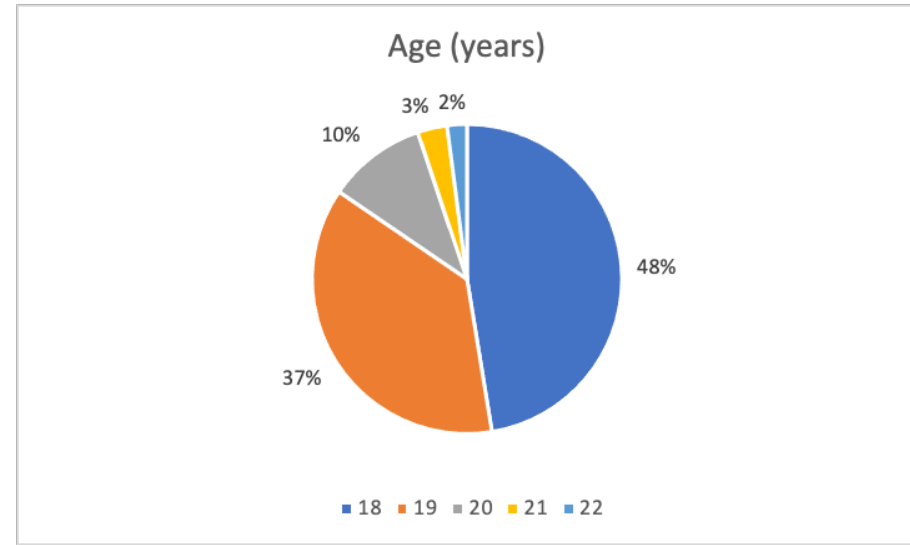
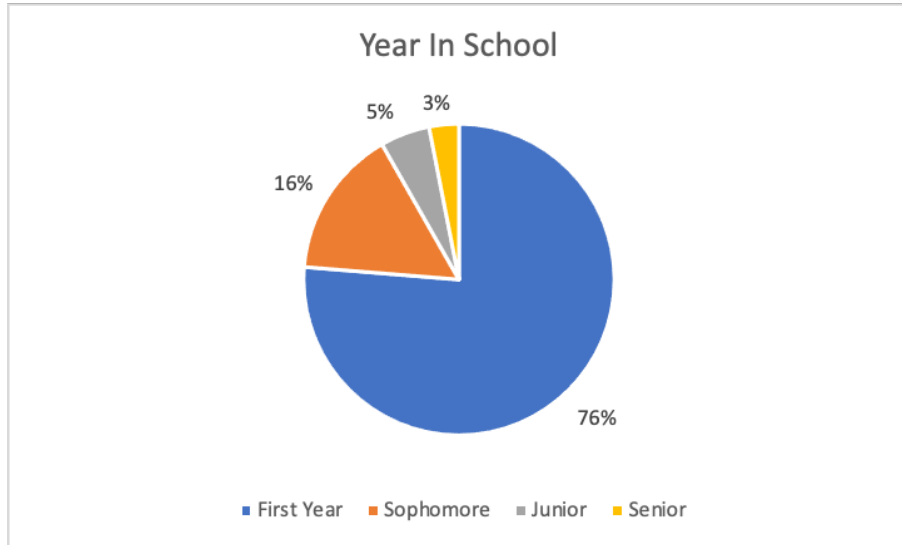
- Psychopathic individuals engage in goal-directed behavior while having a disregard for other's rights and feelings.
- Defining characteristics of psychopathy include lack of empathy, impulsivity, thrill seeking, callousness, manipulativeness, egocentricity, little to no remorse, and deception.
- Relational aggression has been found to be associated with borderline personality disorder characteristics.

RELATIONAL AGGRESSION AND SPITEFULNESS

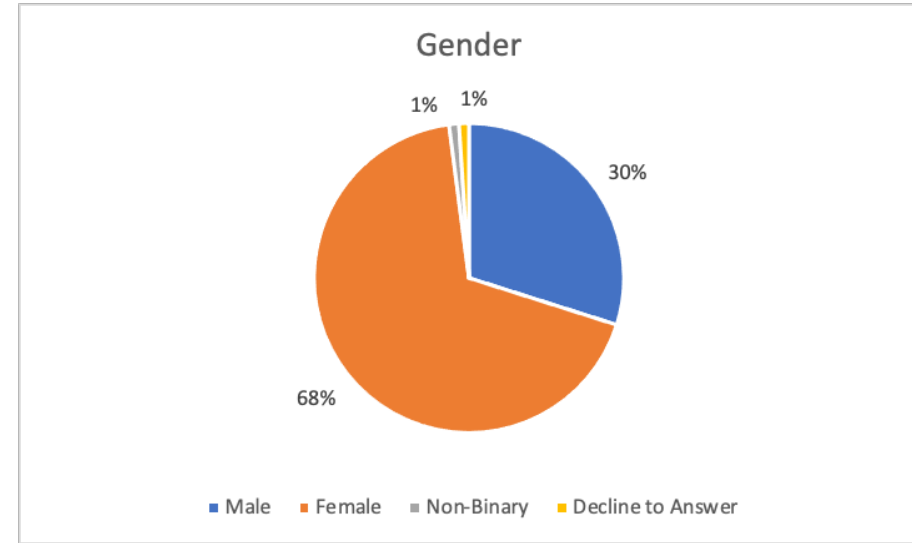
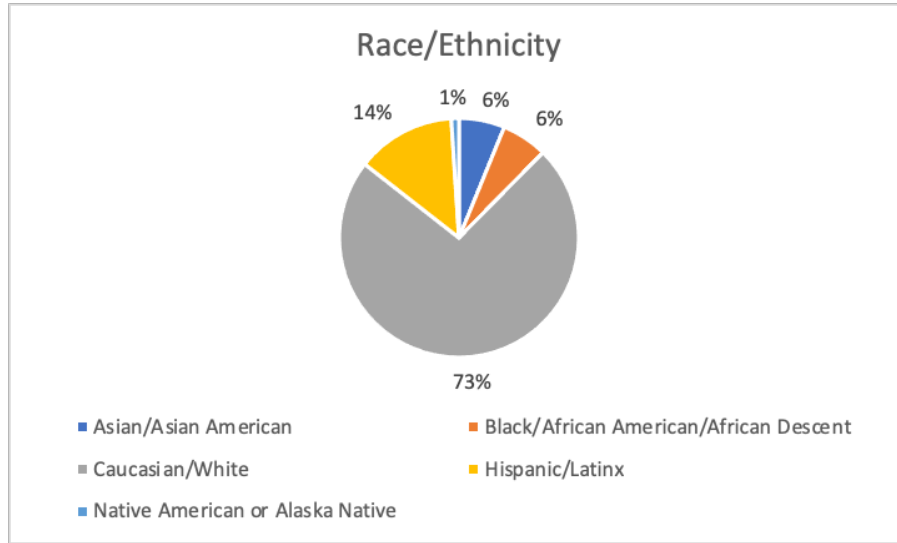
- Willingness to incur a cost to oneself in order to harm or disadvantage others.
- Currently no published research on relational aggression and spitefulness.
- Unpublished research by Dr. Laura Sinville (2021)
 - Found a strong positive correlation

PROCEDURES

- Recruited participants through PRIA.
 - Approximately 309 PSYC 111 students took the prescreen, of which 116 participated in study.
 - Self-Report of Aggression and Social Behavior Measure (SRASBM)
 - $M = 18.90, SD = 5.97$
 - Used cutoffs approximately 1 SD above and below the mean for the relational aggression subscale.
- Online survey assessed multiple self-report questionnaires, including the SRASBM.



PARTICIPANTS ($N=97$)



PARTICIPANTS (N=97)

PARTICIPANTS ($N=97$)

Female High Relational Aggression: ($n = 31$)

Female Low Relational Aggression: ($n = 35$)

Male High Relational Aggression: ($n = 17$)

Male Low Relational Aggression: ($n = 12$)

MEASURES

- Self-Report of Aggression and Social Behavior Measure (SRASBM)
- Difficulties in Emotion Regulation (DERS)
- Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale (DASS-21)
- Pittsburgh Sleep Quality Index (PSQI)
- Social Interaction Anxiety Scale (SIAS)
- Social Phobia Scale (SPS)
- Positive and Negative Affect Scale (PANAS)
- Levenson Self-Report Psychopathy Scale (LSRPS)
- Spitefulness Scale

RELATIONAL AGGRESSION AND GENDER

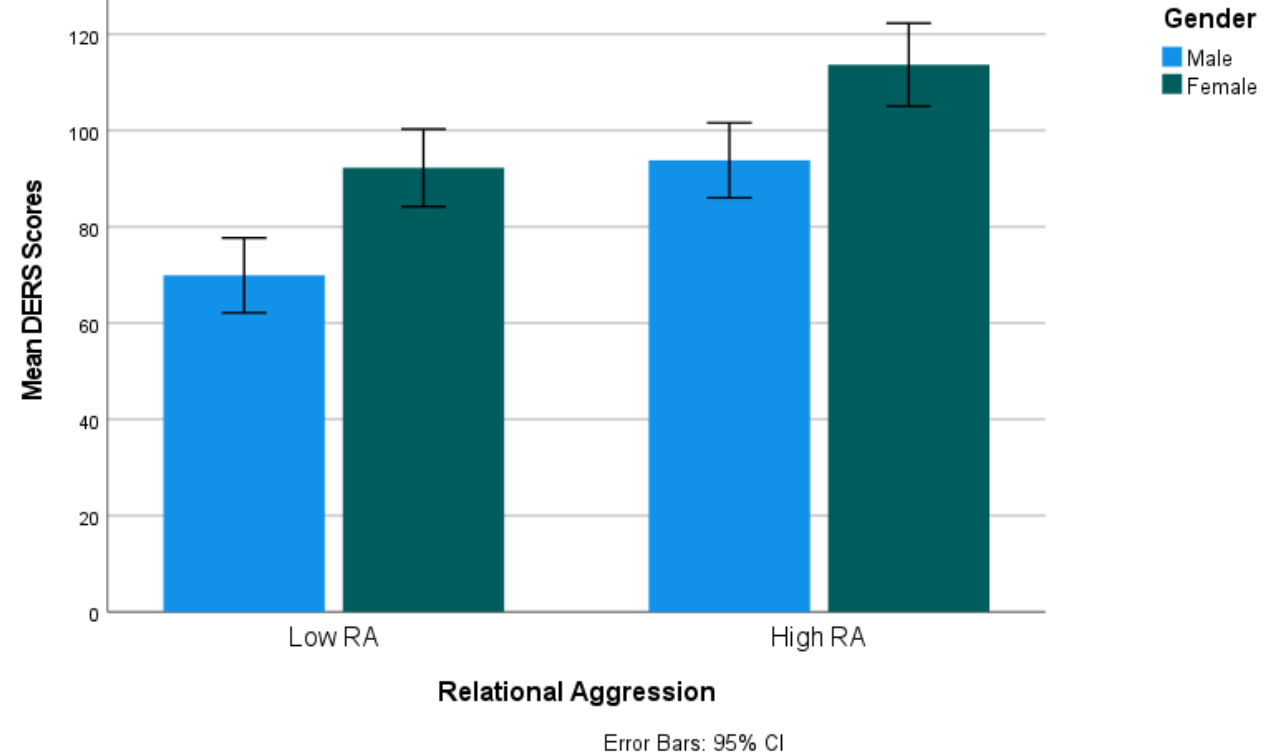
- We expected to find gender differences in that women would have more psychological issues associated with relational aggression than men.
- Currently exploratory, although we will continue to collect data and hopefully get more male participants in upcoming semesters.
- Our primary focus was on relational aggression; however, we explored the role of gender associations with our other variables.
- 2x2 between-subjects ANOVA

HYPOTHESIS 2: RELATIONAL AGGRESSION AND EMOTION REGULATION

- Relational aggression will be associated with (a) deficits in emotion regulation.
- Relational aggression will be associated with (b) negative affect, while (c) having no significant association with positive affect.
 - Positive Affect: Life satisfaction
 - Negative Affect: Distress and low coping mechanisms
- Measures used:
 - Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale (DERS)
 - Positive and Negative Affect Scale (PANAS)

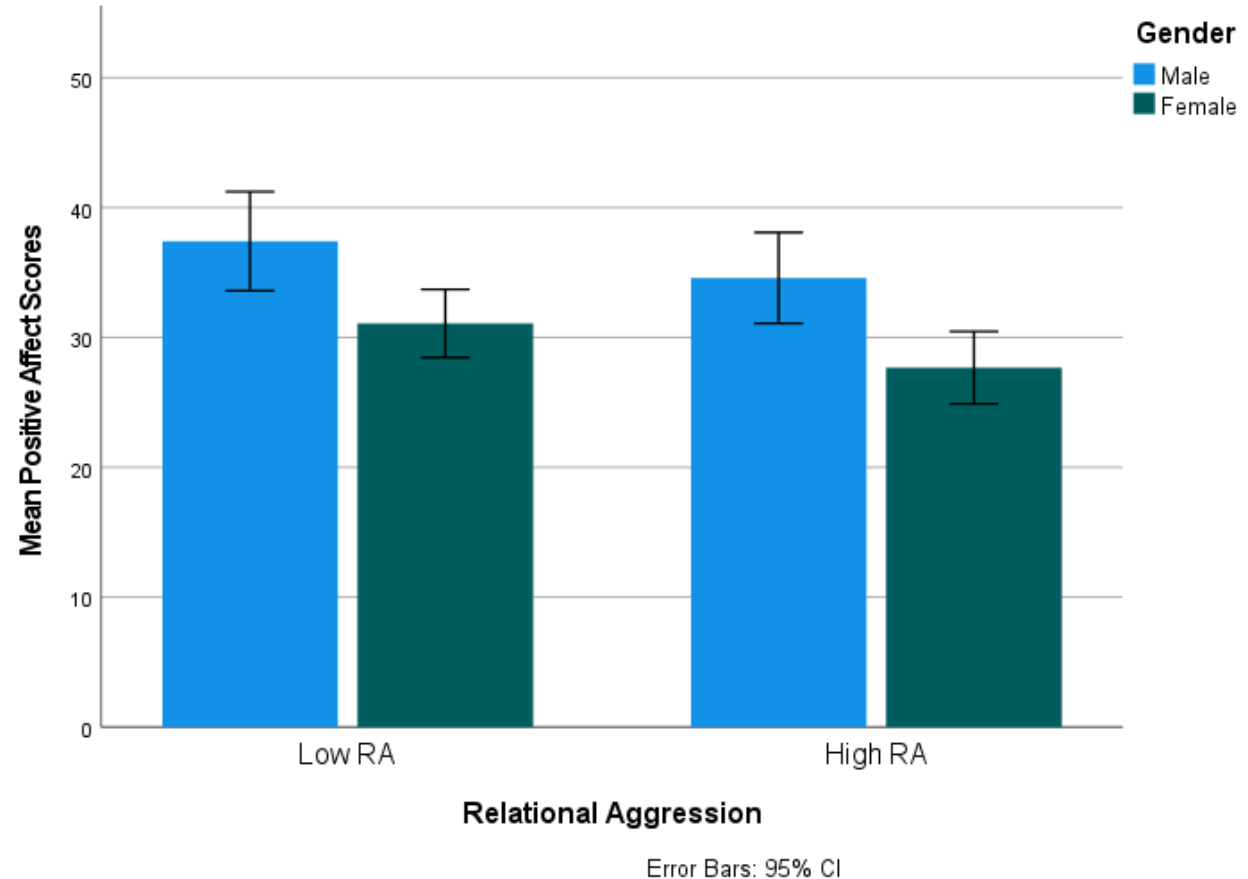
RESULTS: DIFFICULTY IN EMOTION REGULATION

- The interaction between RA and gender was not significant for difficulties in emotion regulation, $F(3, 91) = .07, p = .79, \eta_p^2 = .001$, observed power = .058
- There was a significant main effect for RA, $F(3, 91) = 22.69, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .20$, observed power = .997
- There was a significant main effect for gender, $F(3, 91) = 19.66, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .18$, observed power = .992
- Difficulties in emotion regulation could cause one to act more relationally aggressive.
- Women have more difficulties in emotion regulation compared to men.



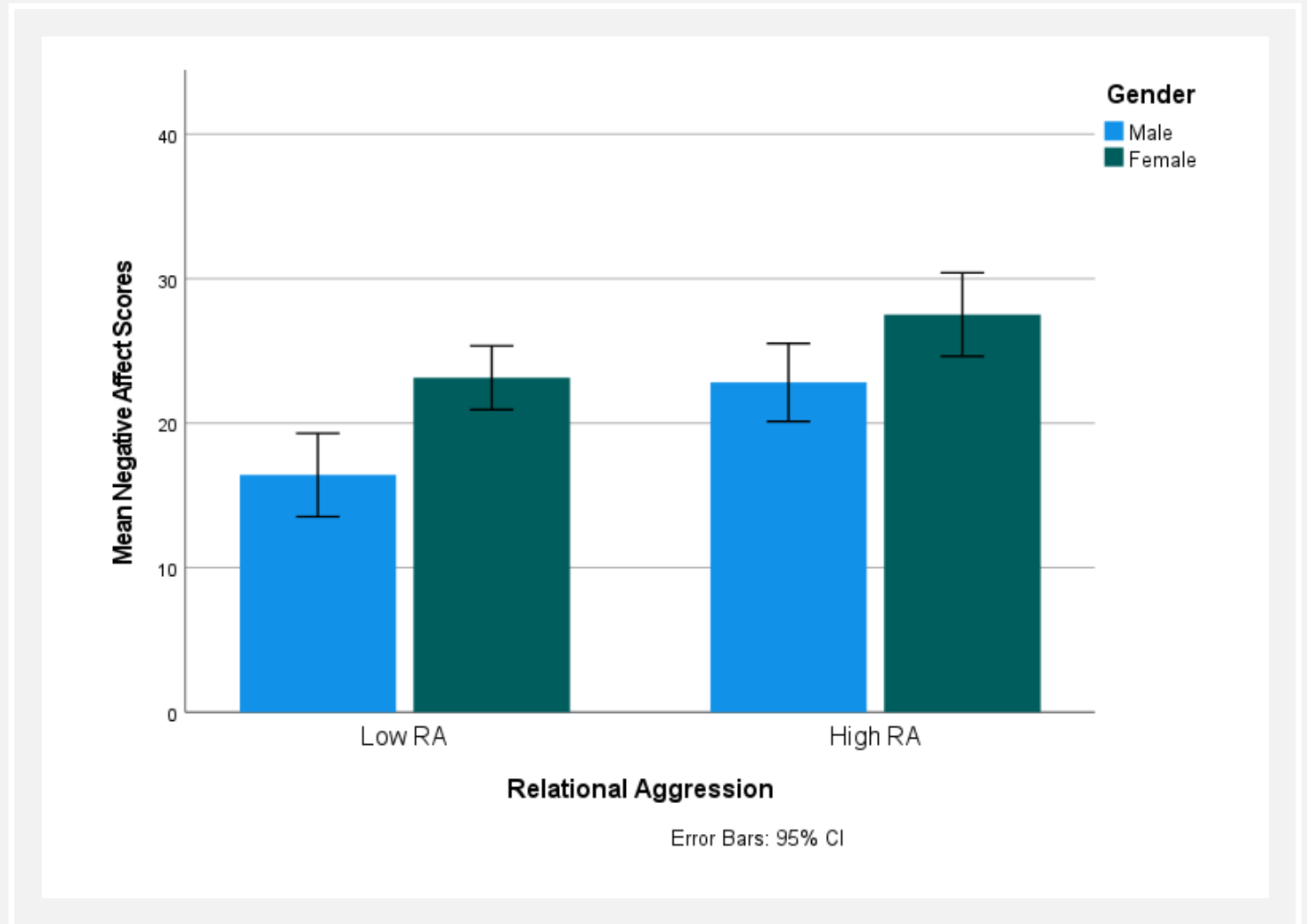
RESULTS: POSITIVE AFFECT

- The interaction between RA and gender was not significant for positive affect, $F(3, 91) = .03, p = .86, \eta_p^2 = .00$, observed power = .05
- There was not a significant main effect for RA, $F(3, 91) = 3.59, p = .06, \eta_p^2 = .04$, observed power = .47
- There was a significant main effect for gender, $F(3, 91) = 16.19, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .15$, observed power = .978
- Relationally aggressive individuals do not have lesser positive affect.
- Men have a higher positive affect than women.



RESULTS: NEGATIVE AFFECT

- The interaction between RA and gender for negative affect was not significant, $F(3, 91) = .47, p = .49, \eta_p^2 = .005$, observed power = .10
- There was a significant main effect for RA, $F(3, 91) = 13.24, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .13$, observed power = .949
- There was a significant main effect for gender, $F(3, 91) = 14.85, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .14$, observed power = .968
- Relationally aggressive individuals have more negative affect.
- Women have more negative affect than men.

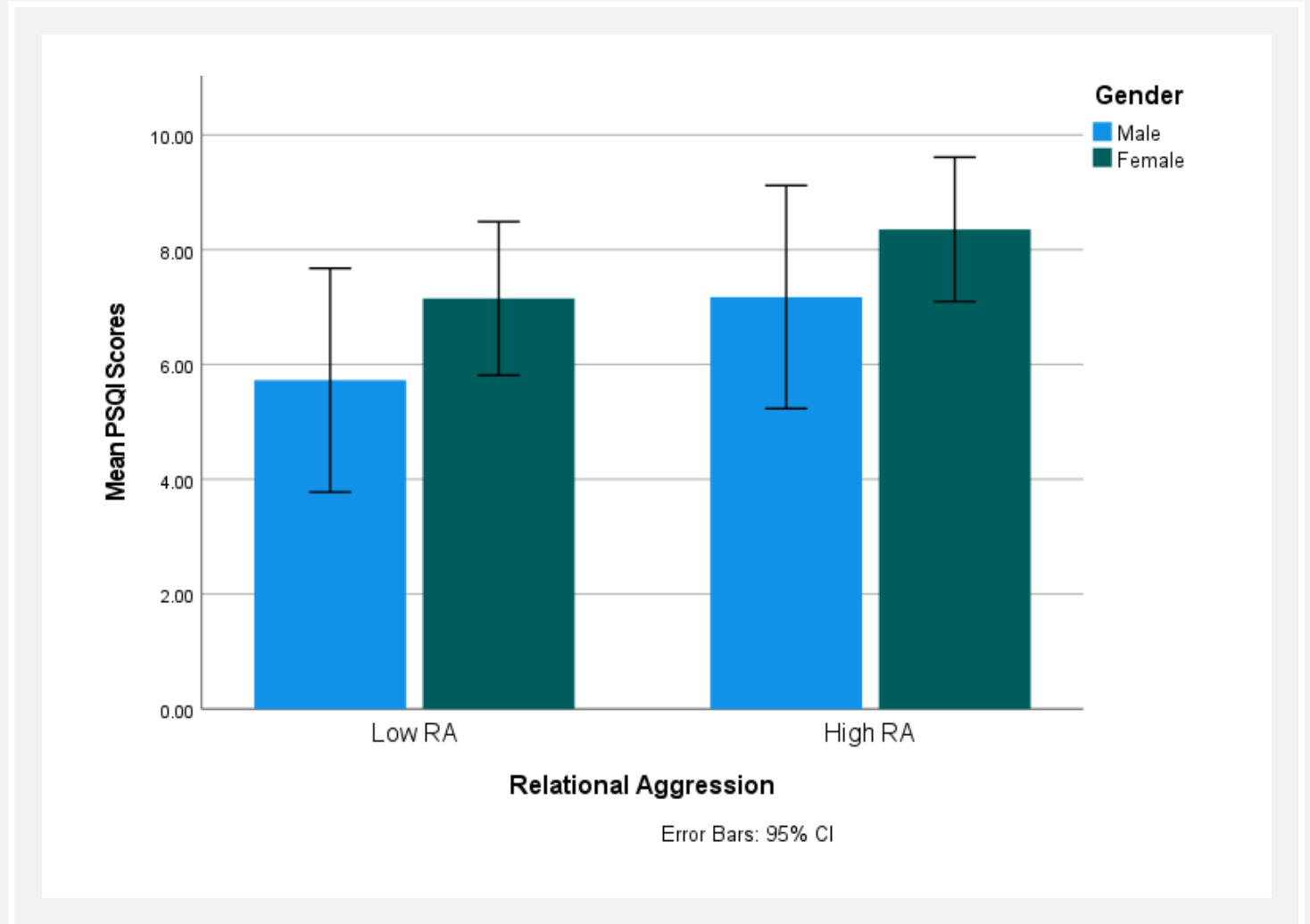


HYPOTHESIS 3: RELATIONAL AGGRESSION AND SLEEP

- Relational aggression will be associated with (a) deficits in sleep quality and quantity.
- Measure used:
 - Pittsburgh Sleep Quality Index (PSQI)

RESULTS: SLEEP

- The interaction between RA and gender for sleep was not significant, $F(3, 91) = .02$, $p = .88$, $\eta_p^2 = .00$, observed power = .05
- There were no significant main effects for RA, $F(3, 91) = 2.60$, $p = .11$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$, observed power = .36
- There were no significant main effects for gender, $F(3, 91) = 2.50$, $p = .12$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$, observed power = .35
- RA not shown to be associated with sleep difficulties.
- No gender differences.

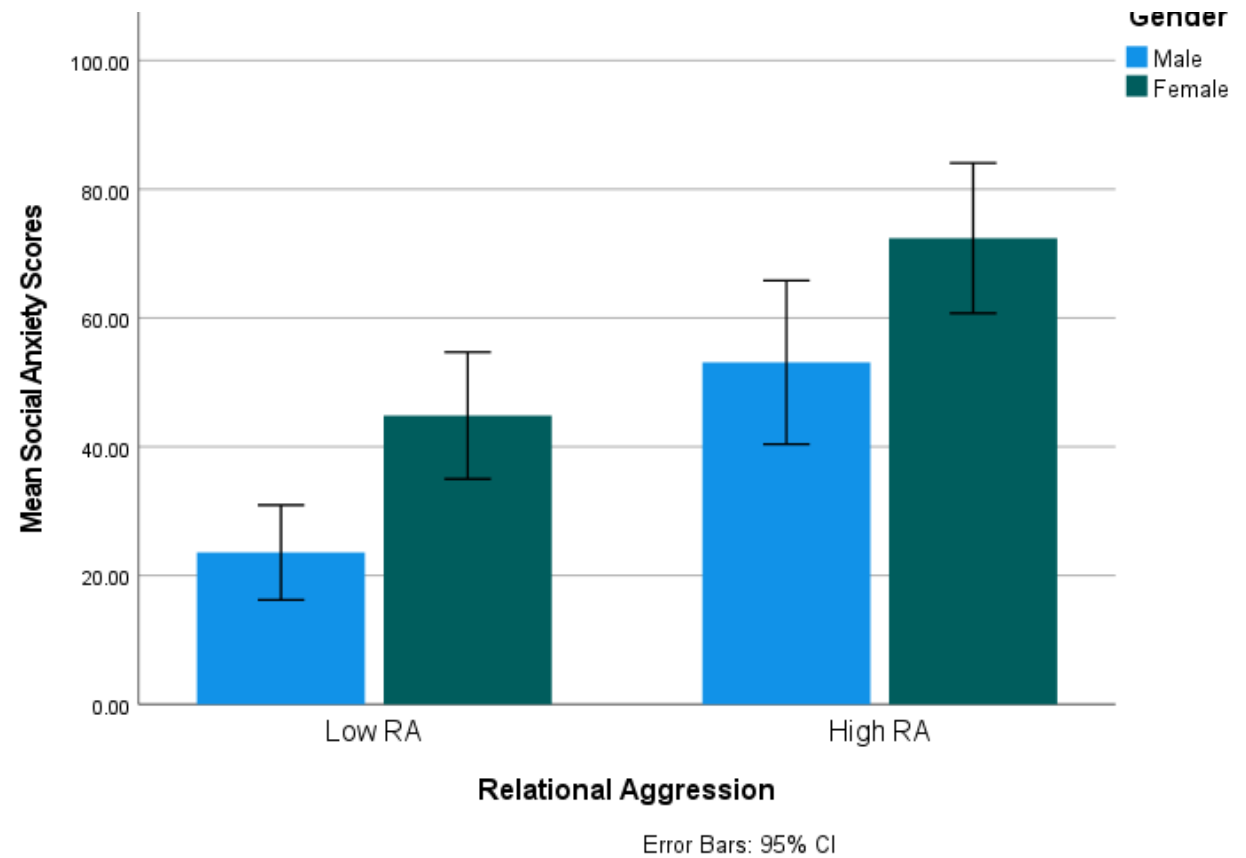


HYPOTHESIS 4: RELATIONAL AGGRESSION AND SOCIAL ANXIETY

- Relational aggression will be associated with (a) increases in social anxiety characteristics and (b) increased depression.
- Measures used:
 - Social Interaction Anxiety Scale (SIAS)
 - Social Phobia Scale (SPS)
 - Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale (DASS-21)

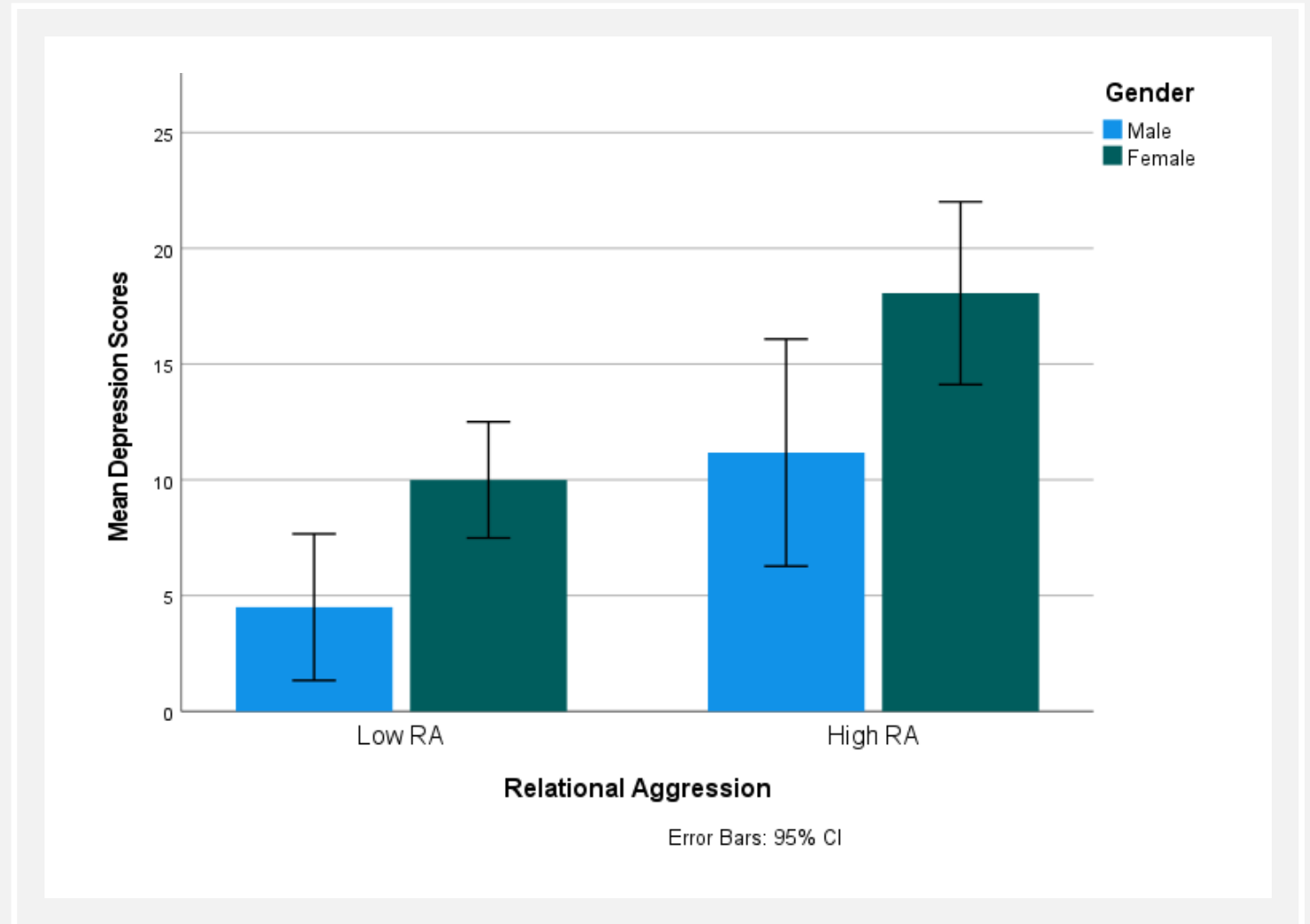
RESULTS: SOCIAL ANXIETY

- The interaction between RA and gender for social anxiety was not significant, $F(3, 91) = .03, p = .88, \eta_p^2 = .00$, observed power = .05
- There was a significant main effect for RA, $F(3, 91) = 21.02, p = <.001, \eta_p^2 = .19$, observed power = .995
- There was a significant main effect for gender, $F(3, 91) = 10.62, p = .002, \eta_p^2 = .10$, observed power = .897
- Relationally aggressive individuals are more socially anxious.
- Women are more socially anxious than men.



RESULTS: DEPRESSION

- The interaction between RA and gender for depression was not significant, $F(3, 91) = .12, p = .73, \eta_p^2 = .001$, observed power = .06
- There was a significant main effect for RA, $F(3, 91) = 13.87, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .13$, observed power = .958
- There was a significant main effect for gender, $F(3, 91) = 9.80, p = .002, \eta_p^2 = .10$, observed power = .872
- Relationally aggressive individuals are more depressed.
- Women are more depressed than men.

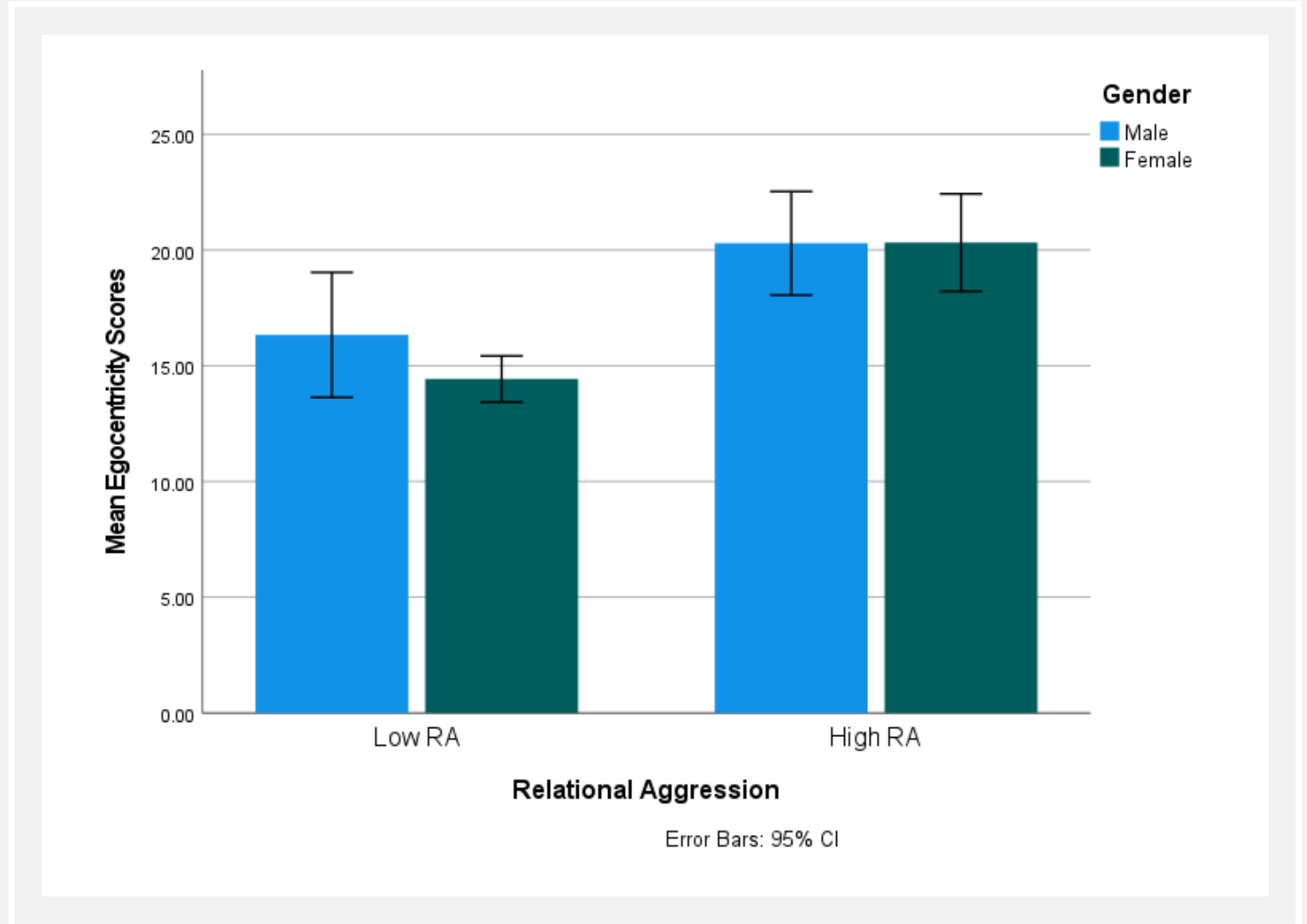


HYPOTHESIS 5: RELATIONAL AGGRESSION, PSYCHOPATHY, AND SPITEFULNESS

- Relational aggression will be associated with (a) psychopathy and (b) spitefulness.
- Relational aggression will be associated with (c) higher egocentric scores and (d) higher antisocial scores. Scores for the (e) callous facet of psychopathy will not be associated with relational aggression.
- Measures used:
 - Levenson Self-Report Psychopathy Scale (LSRPS)
 - Spitefulness Scale

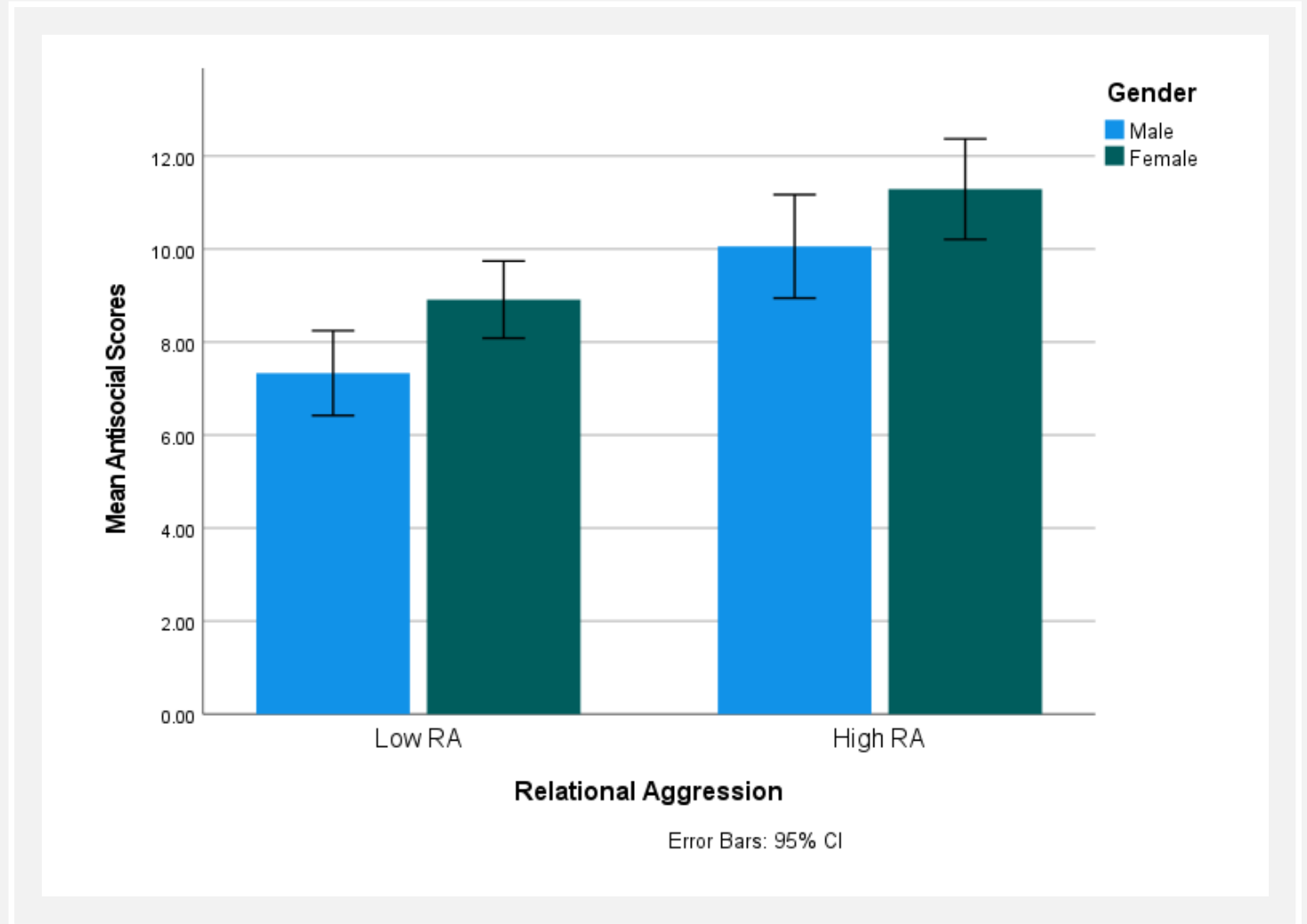
RESULTS: EGOCENTRIC

- The interaction between RA and gender for egocentricity was not significant, $F(3, 91) = .94, p = .33, \eta_p^2 = .01$, observed power = .16
- There was a significant main effect for RA, $F(3, 91) = 24.50, p = <.001, \eta_p^2 = .21$, observed power = .998
- There was no significant main effect for gender, $F(3, 91) = .89, p = .35, \eta_p^2 = .01$, observed power = .15
- Relationally aggressive individuals are more egocentric.
- No gender differences.



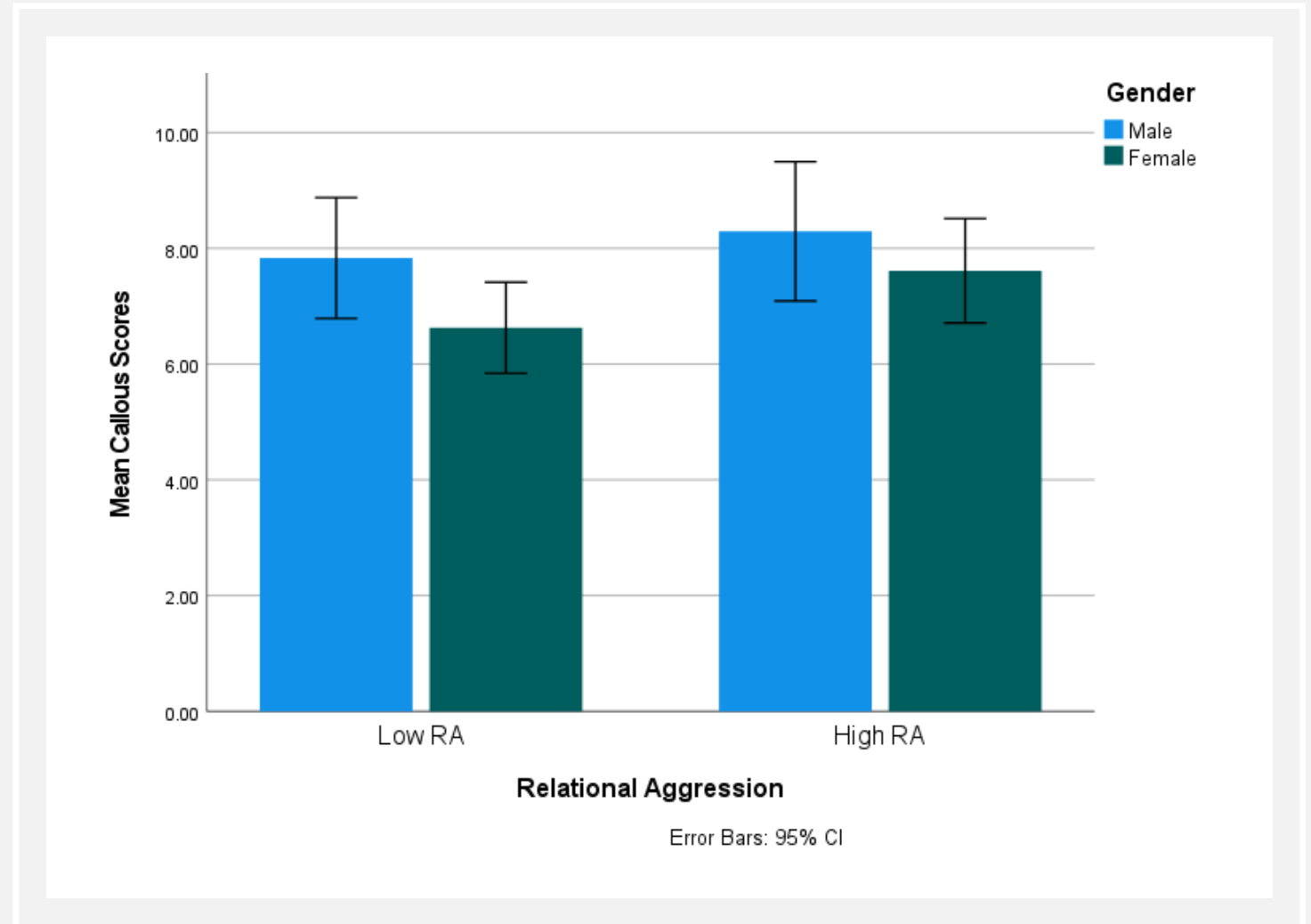
RESULTS: ANTISOCIAL

- The interaction between RA and gender for antisocial traits was not significant, $F(3, 91) = .10, p = .76, \eta_p^2 = .001$, observed power = .06
- There was a significant main effect for RA, $F(3, 91) = 20.96, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .19$, observed power = .99
- There was no significant main effect for gender, $F(3, 91) = 6.37, p = .01, \eta_p^2 = .07$, observed power = .70
- Relationally aggressive individuals are more antisocial.
- No gender differences.



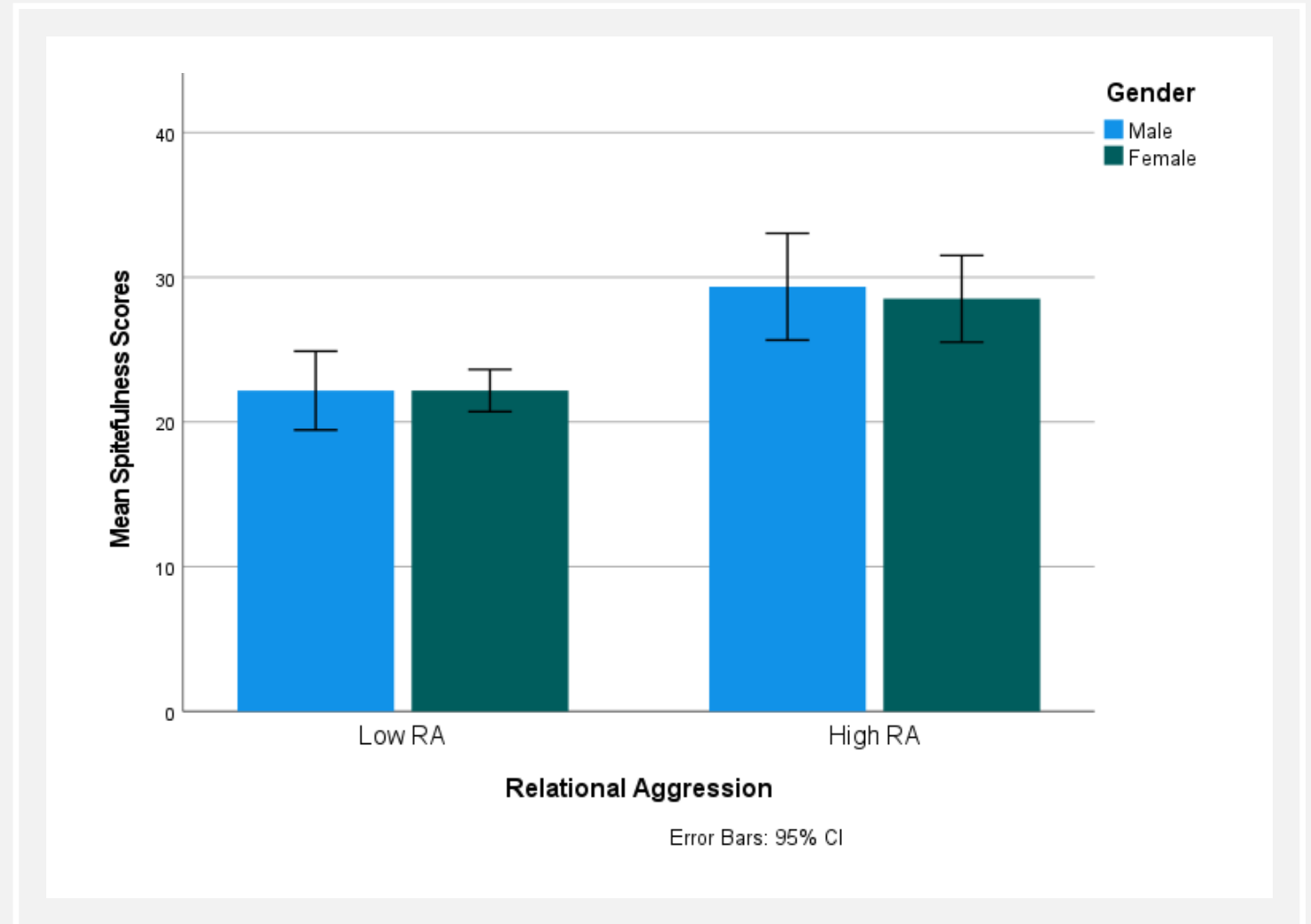
RESULTS: CALLOUS

- The interaction between RA and gender for callousness was not significant, $F(3, 91) = .26, p = .61, \eta_p^2 = .003$, observed power = .08
- There were no significant main effects for RA, $F(3, 91) = 1.96, p = .17, \eta_p^2 = .02$, observed power = .28
- There were no significant main effects for gender, $F(3, 91) = 3.35, p = .07, \eta_p^2 = .04$, observed power = .44
- Relationally aggressive individuals are not callous.
- No gender differences.



RESULTS: SPITEFULNESS

- The interaction between RA and gender for spitefulness was not significant, $F(3, 91) = .09, p = .77, \eta_p^2 = .001$, observed power = .06
- There was a significant main effect for RA, $F(3, 91) = 22.55, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .20$, observed power = .284
- There was no significant main effect for gender, $F(3, 91) = .09, p = .77, \eta_p^2 = .001$, observed power = .06
- Relationally aggressive individuals are more spiteful.
- No gender differences.



CONCLUSION

- Relational aggression is associated with difficulties in emotion regulation, social anxiety, psychopathy, and spitefulness.
- Relational aggression is not associated with positive affect, sleep difficulties, and callousness.
- Relationally aggressive women suffer from more psychological issues compared to relationally aggressive men.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

- Quasi-experiment
- Use of self-report measures
- Limited by participant pool
 - Gender
 - Race
- Examine emerging adults in a non-college setting.
- Continue to collect data into upcoming semesters to even cell counts.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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