

Gender Disparities in Depression Assessment Item Parcels: The Role of Emotion Content

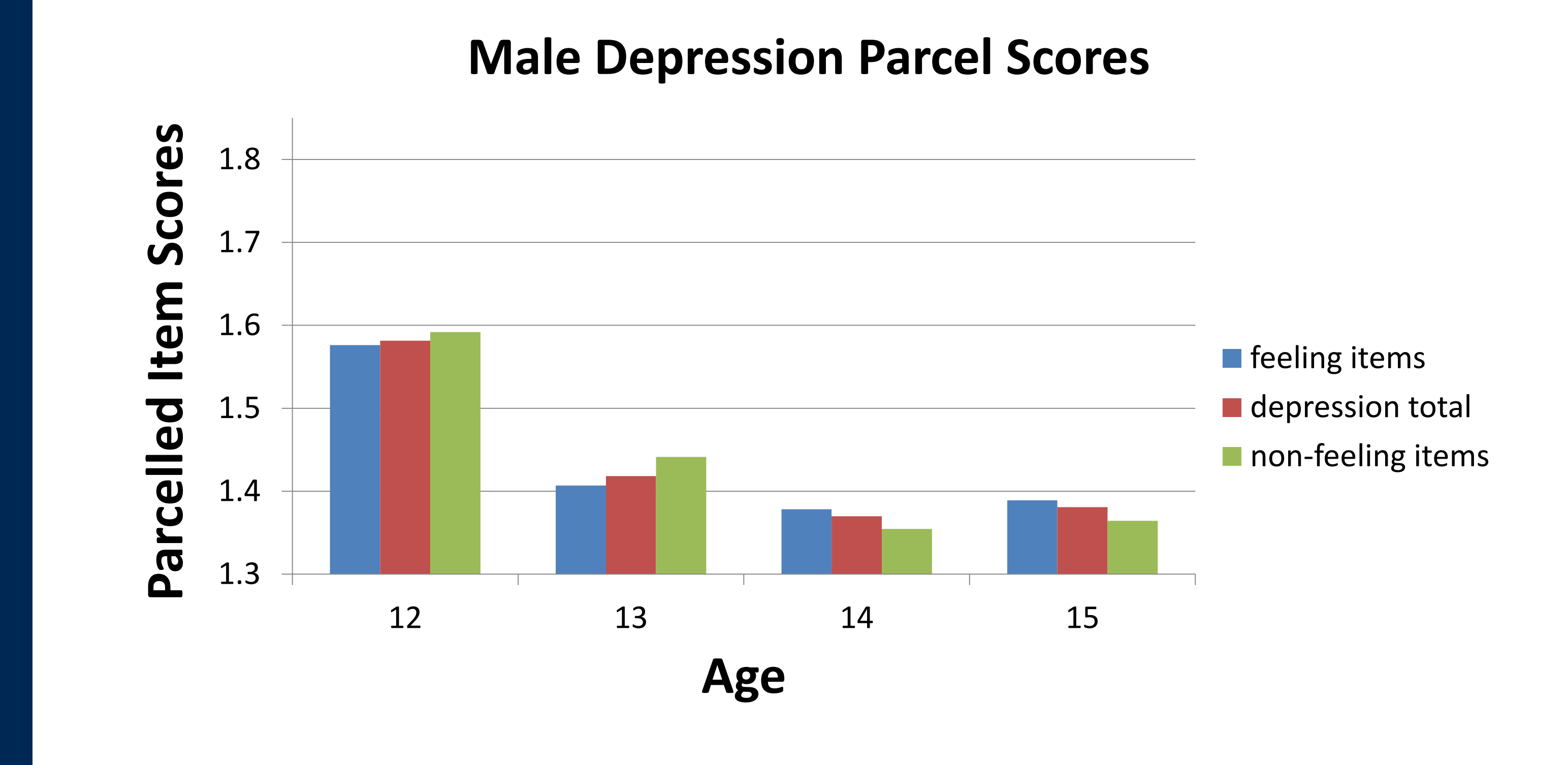
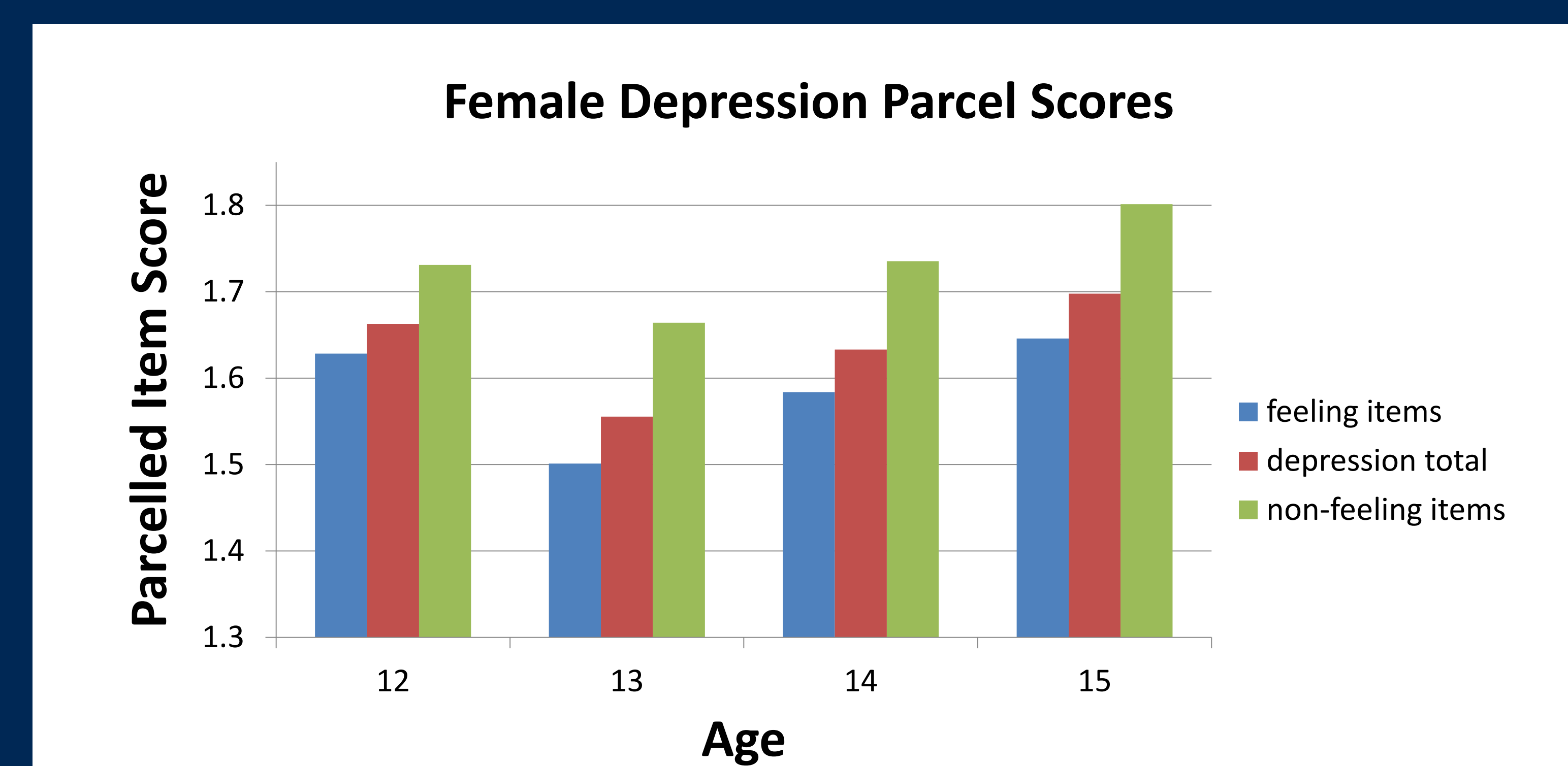
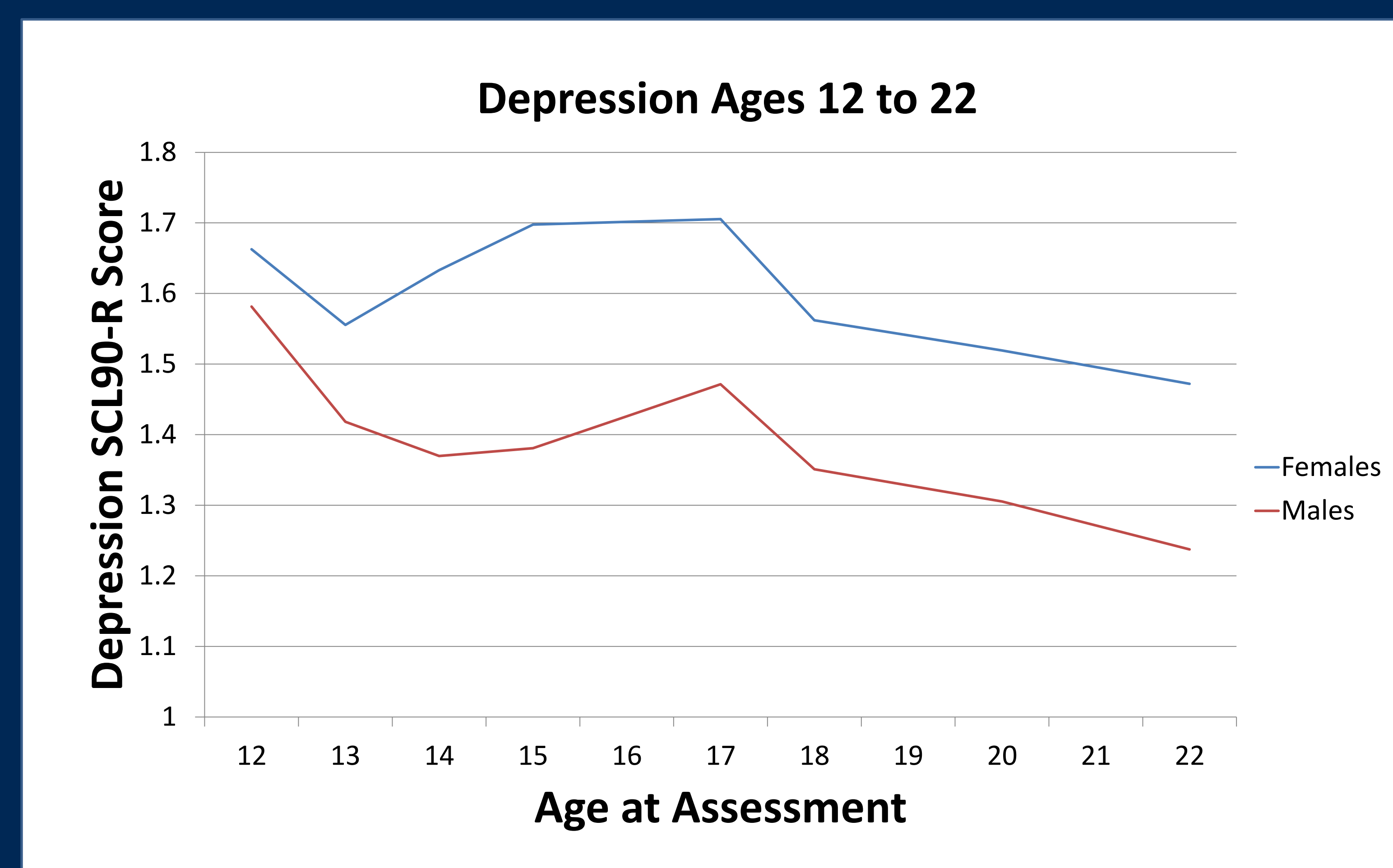
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Introduction: It is well documented that, beginning in adolescence, male and female psychopathologies follow distinct trajectories, with females exhibiting higher levels of depression and anxiety than males (Halbreich & Kahn, 2007). It is also well documented that females have a more complex ability of emotional expression than males (Barrett et al., 2000). This study seeks to explore if expressed emotions plays a role in gender differences on item endorsement of the depression scale in the SCL90-R (Derogatis, 1983).

Hypothesis: Due to a lower and less nuanced level of emotional expression, male adolescents will endorse item parcels on a self-administered symptom checklist that contain the word *feeling* significantly lower than parcels without this word, while same aged females will not display this pattern.

Sample: The sample consisted of 451 youth (236 female) that participated in the Iowa Youth and Families Project (Conger & Conger, 2002), which began when the participants were in 7th grade (M age = 12.61).

Measures: Depression symptoms were assessed utilizing the SCL90-R (Derogatis, 1977).



Summary of Results:

- As expected, females had significantly higher depression ratings than males across all ages.
- *Feeling* and *non-feeling* parcel scores were not significantly different for males.
- Females parcel scores were significantly different from each other at all time points, with significantly higher endorsement of the *non-feeling* parcel.
- Further analyses were conducted, assessing adolescents who scored 1 and 2 SD's above the mean on their depression score.
- The observed female and male patterns remained the same, with females having significantly lower *feeling* item parcels than *non-feeling* item parcels, and males showing no significant difference between the parcels.

Discussion:

- An opposite pattern than hypothesized was observed, with females endorsing *feeling* item parcels at a significantly lower rate than the *non-feeling* item parcels; males did not display a significant difference between the parcel types.
- Future directions should address how these differences in item endorsement relate to diagnostic interviews.
- In addition, replication of these results in a more diverse sample would inform if these gender based differences hold across cultures.
- Results highlight the need for a better understanding of the multiple courses depression symptoms might manifest for the individual.
- As depression is treatable, understanding these differences hold potential for increasing positive mental health through more accurate detection.

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