

Key Takeaways: Among a nationally representative sample of U.S. Black college students, we found that Black college students' perceptions of institutional mental health climate had the most pronounced impact on their depressive symptoms. Positive mental health and sense of belonging also significantly contributed to Black college students' depressive symptoms.

Background

- Depression is one of the most reported, diagnosed, and treated mental health illnesses on college campuses.¹
- Campus climate is one factor that has been shown to correlate with depression among college students.²⁻⁴
- Although researchers have recently called for (1) empirical investigations of mental health, such as depression, among representative samples of Black college students and (2) research that examines protective factors for mental health among this population,⁵ there remains a dearth of literature in this area.

Hypotheses

- More positive perceptions of mental health climate will predict lower levels of depression.
- Higher levels of positive mental health will predict lower levels of depression.
- A higher sense of belonging will predict lower levels of depression.
- Positive mental health and sense of belonging will moderate the relationship between mental health climate and depression, such that both variables will buffer against the effect of mental health climate on depression.

Methods

- Data source:** 2018-2019 Healthy Minds Survey
- Analytic sample (n=1303):** Black undergraduate and graduate students from 15 colleges and universities throughout the U.S.
- Hierarchical regression analysis:** (controlled for age, gender, race and ethnicity, SES, GPA) to examine the impact of Black college students' perceptions of their institution's mental health climate (e.g., feels administration listens to concerns regarding students' mental health) on depressive symptoms (Patient Health Questionnaire-9) and to explore the protective effects of positive mental health (Diener Flourishing Scale) and sense of belonging (Sense of Social and Academic Fit scale) on reducing the impact of perceived mental health climate on depression.

Results

- Sample characteristics:** Undergraduate: 1081 (83%), Age: (M=24.04, SD= 8.92), Female: 678 (52%), Multiracial Black: 287 (22%), SES (stressful): (M=3.41, SD= 1.02), GPA: 2.8/4.0.
- Hypotheses:** In step 2 of the regression model, reporting higher levels of mental health climate was associated with lower levels of depression ($B = -1.10, p = .001$) (H_1). In step 3, reporting higher levels of positive mental health ($B = -8.53, p = .001$) (H_2) and sense of belonging ($B = -11.70, p = .001$) (H_3) was associated with lower levels of depression. In step 4, both interactions were significant, mental health climate x positive mental health ($B = -.43, p = .022$) and mental health climate x sense of belonging ($B = .55, p = .015$) (H_4).

Figure 1. Interaction Effect of Mental Health Climate and Positive Mental Health on Depression

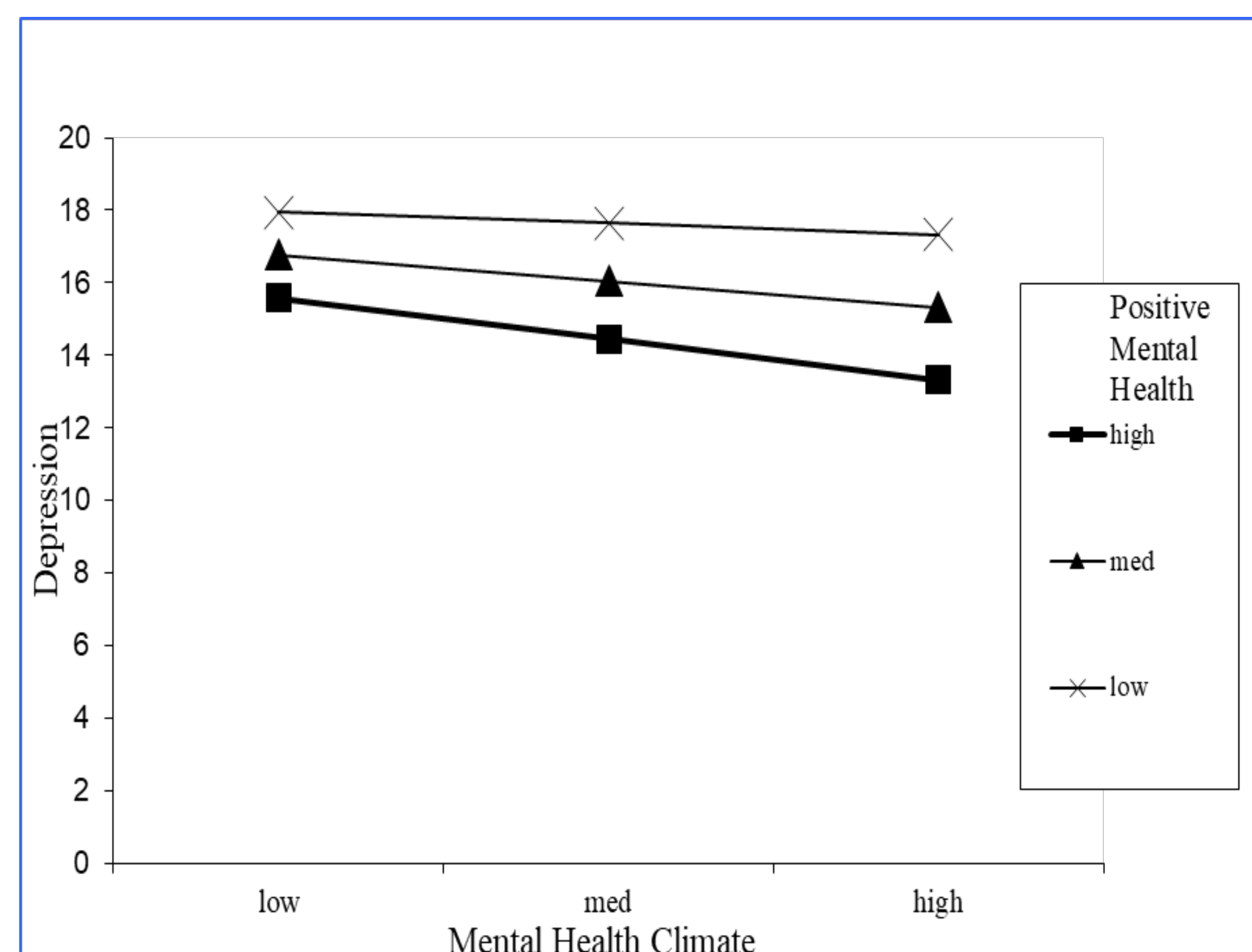
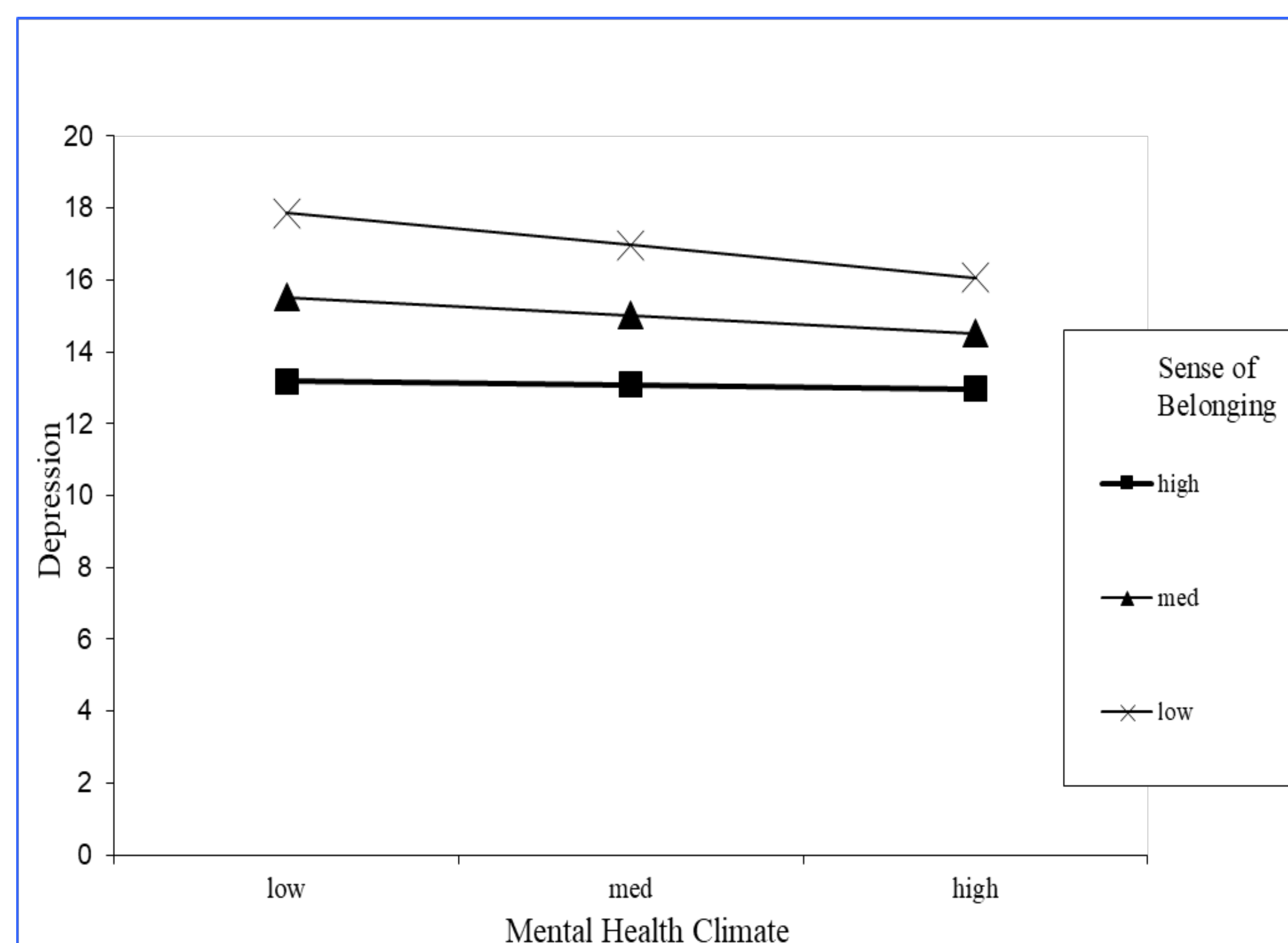


Figure 2. Interaction Effect of Mental Health Climate and Sense of Belonging on Depression



Conclusions & Implications

- The results of this study indicate that while Black college students' perceptions of positive mental health and sense of belonging significantly contributed to depression symptomology, **it was Black college students' perceptions of mental health climate that had the most pronounced impact on their depression.**
- Campuses should focus attention on promoting a positive mental health culture, including listening to students' unique mental health concerns and fostering campus environments that positively impact racial and ethnic minority students' mental and emotional health.
- Examining positive mental health allows scholars to focus on Black college students from a strengths-based perspective**, which can help inform the development of future intervention strategies that specifically mobilize aspects of positive mental health and, in turn, help buffer against negative mental health symptoms.
- College programs and resources should also integrate a racial equity lens into campus initiatives, centering the unique needs of Black college students that experience a disproportionate burden of health disparities including mental health.

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