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## The Effect of Self-Construal and Relationship on Psychological Motivations of Dispute Resolution

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# The Effect of Self-Construal and Relationship on Psychological Motivations of Dispute Resolution

Noetzel, J. S., Herzfeld, A.L., & Votruba, A. M.



## Background

- Self-construal is the degree someone sees themselves as separate (Independent) and connected with others (Interdependent).
- Psychological motivations of animosity reduction, process control, and relationship restoration have been found to drive dispute-resolution preferences (Leung et al., 1990).
- The present study aimed to look at how self-construal influences these motivations in a landlord-tenant conflict.
- Hypothesis 1: Participants with high interdependent self-construal will rate the influence of animosity reduction higher than those with low interdependent self-construal.**
- Hypothesis 2: Participants with high independent self-construal will rate the influence of process control higher than those with low independent self-construal.**
- Hypothesis 3: Participants with high interdependent self-construal will rate the influence of relationship restoration higher than participants with low interdependent self-construal.**

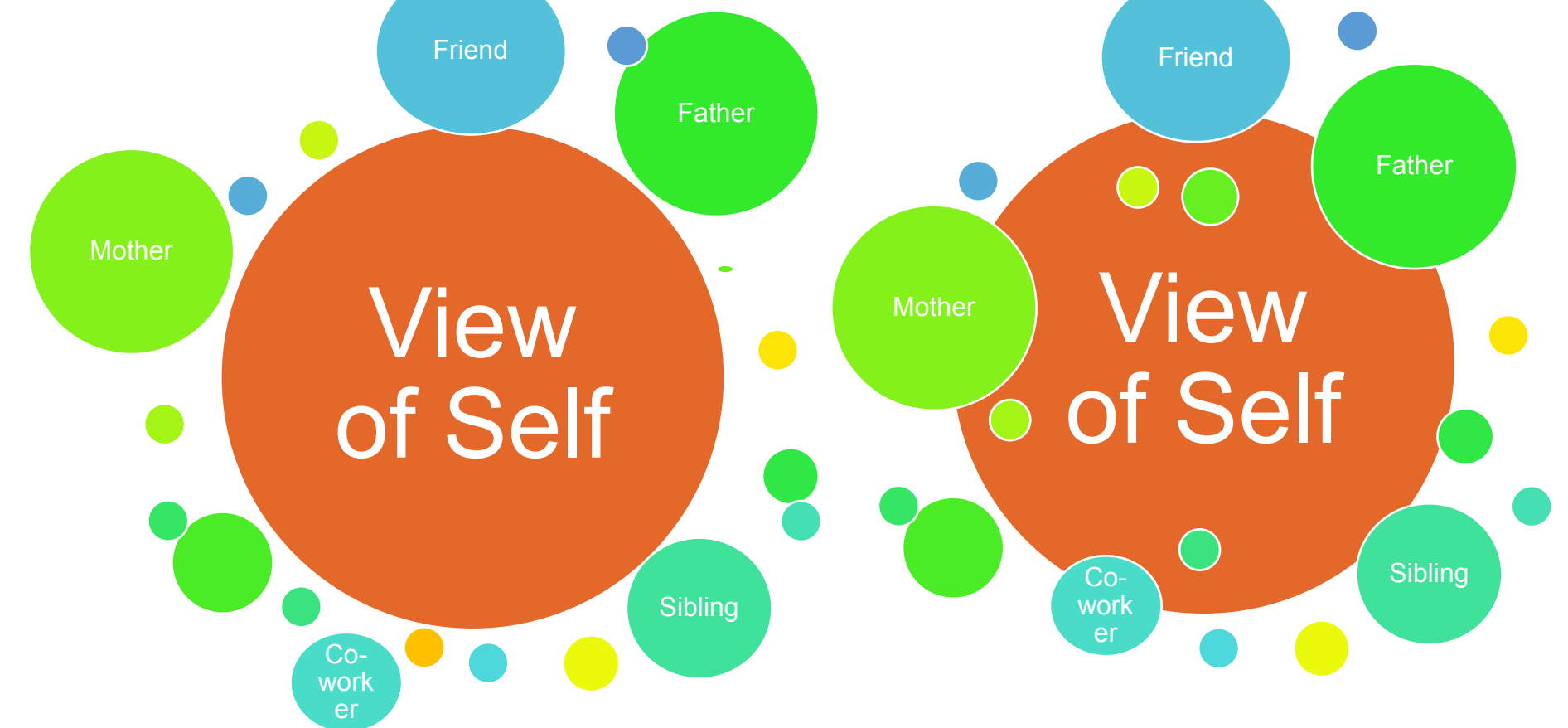


Fig. 1. Conceptual Representations of Independent (left) and Interdependent (right) Self-Construal (Markus & Kitayama, 1991)

## Method

- Participants:** 278 students recruited from a public university in the midwestern United States.
- Design:** 2 (high/low independent self-construal) by 2 (high/low interdependent self-construal) by 3 (disputants' relationship: sibling, friend, stranger) between-subjects design.
- Vignette:** Participants were presented with a landlord-tenant conflict vignette in which the participant was asked to put themselves in the position of the tenant and asked about how to resolve the conflict.
- Self-Construal Measure:** Gudykunst (1996) Self-Construal Scale as refined by Hackman, Ellis, Johnson, and Staley (1999).
- Relationship Manipulation:** The vignette manipulated the participants' relationship to the landlord they conflicted with (versions: stranger, friend, and sibling).
- Goals:** Participants rated the extent to which specific goals of dispute resolution impacted their preferences for specific dispute resolution features and mechanisms. The specific goals were animosity reduction, process control, and relationship restoration.

Table 1. Participants' Demographic Information & Study Design Distribution

Variable/ Response Option	# of Participants	Percent (%) of Participants
Gender		
Male/Man/Masculine	43	18.4
Female/Woman/Feminine	188	80.3
Transman/Transmasculine	1	0.4
Transwoman/Transfeminine	0	0.0
Gender nonconforming	2	0.9
Ethnicity		
White/Caucasian/European	181	77.7
Black/African-American	8	3.4
Latino or Hispanic	15	6.4
Asian/Asian-American/Pacific Islander	16	6.9
Native American Indian	1	0.4
Middle Eastern/Arab/Turkish/Iranian	3	1.3
Biracial/multiracial	8	3.4
Other	1	0.4
Self-reported Social Class		
Working class	19	8.1
Lower-middle class	23	9.8
Middle class	100	42.7
Upper-middle class	85	36.0
Upper class	7	3.0
Version of Scenario		
Stranger	85	36.0
Friend	77	32.6
Family	74	31.4

## Results

Fig 2. Main Effects of Independent Self-Construal \*\* =  $p < .05$

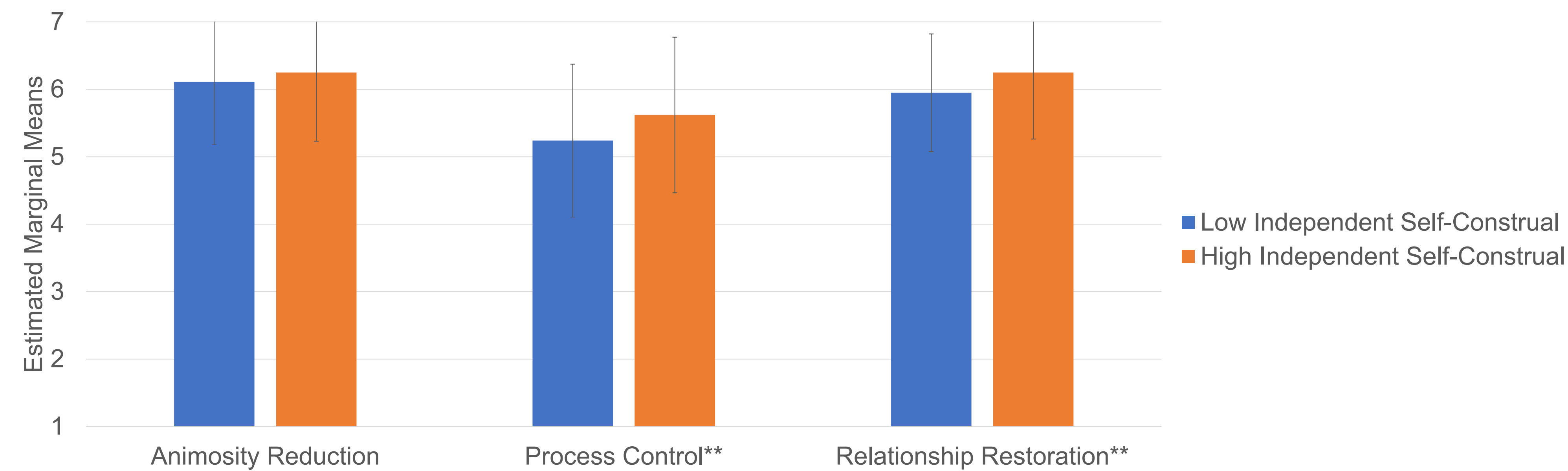


Fig 3. Main Effects of Interdependent Self-Construal \*\* =  $p < .05$

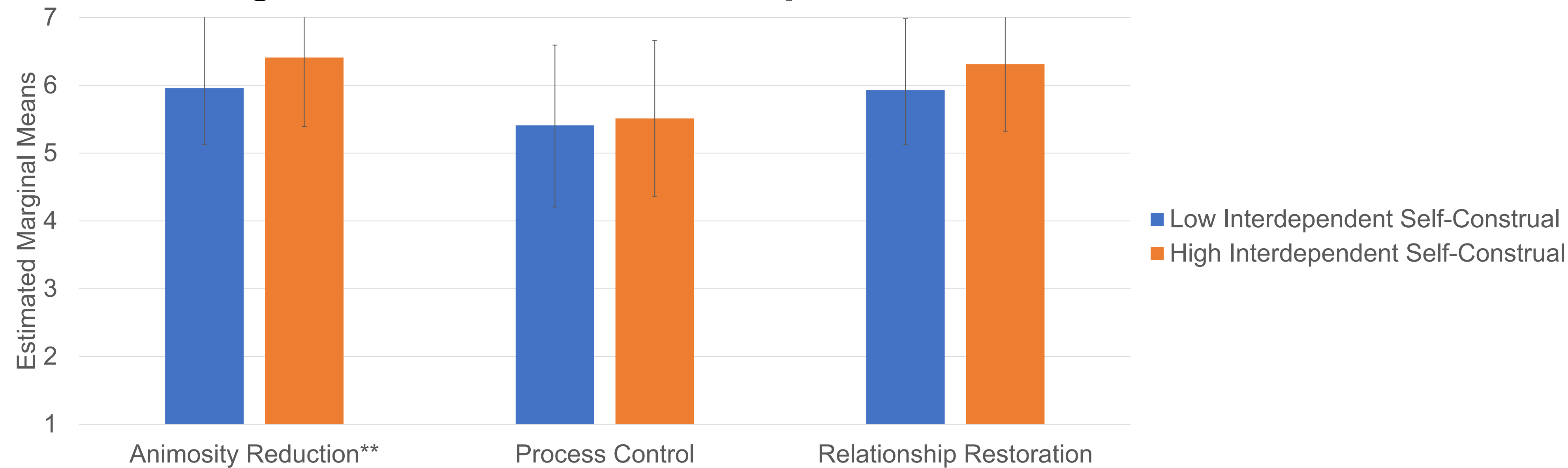


Fig 4. Main Effects of Relationship \*\* =  $p < .05$

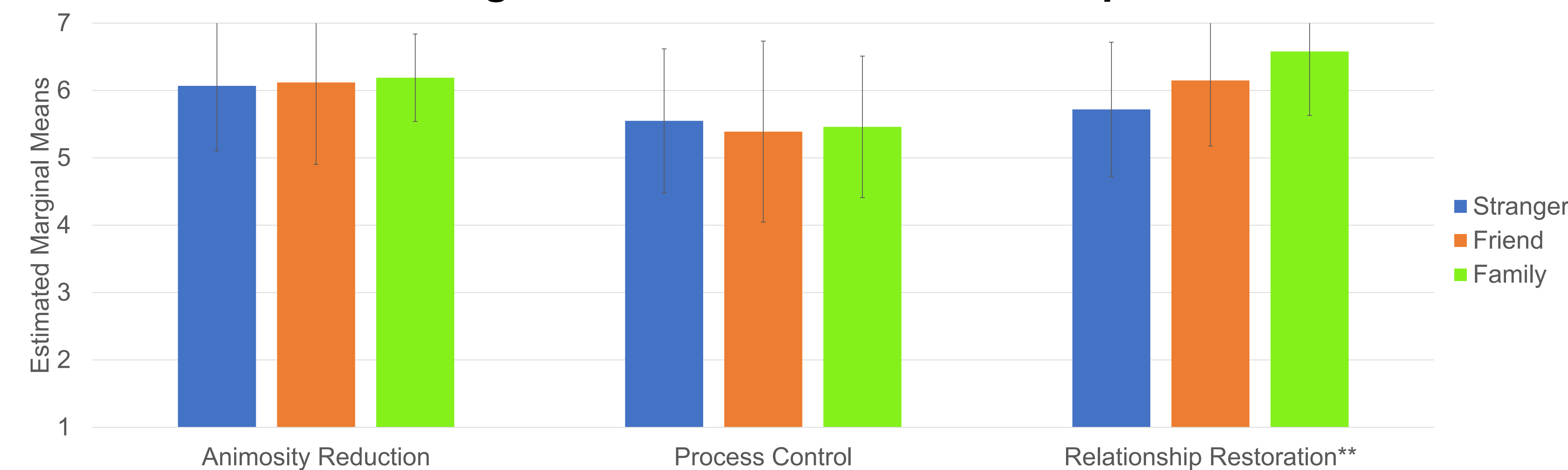
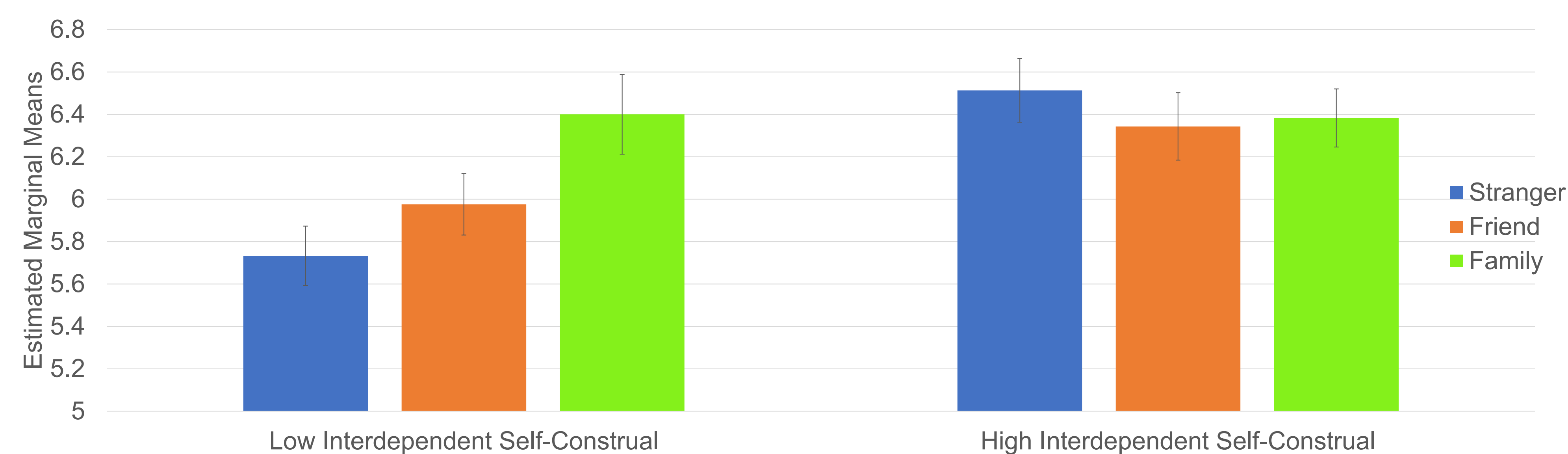


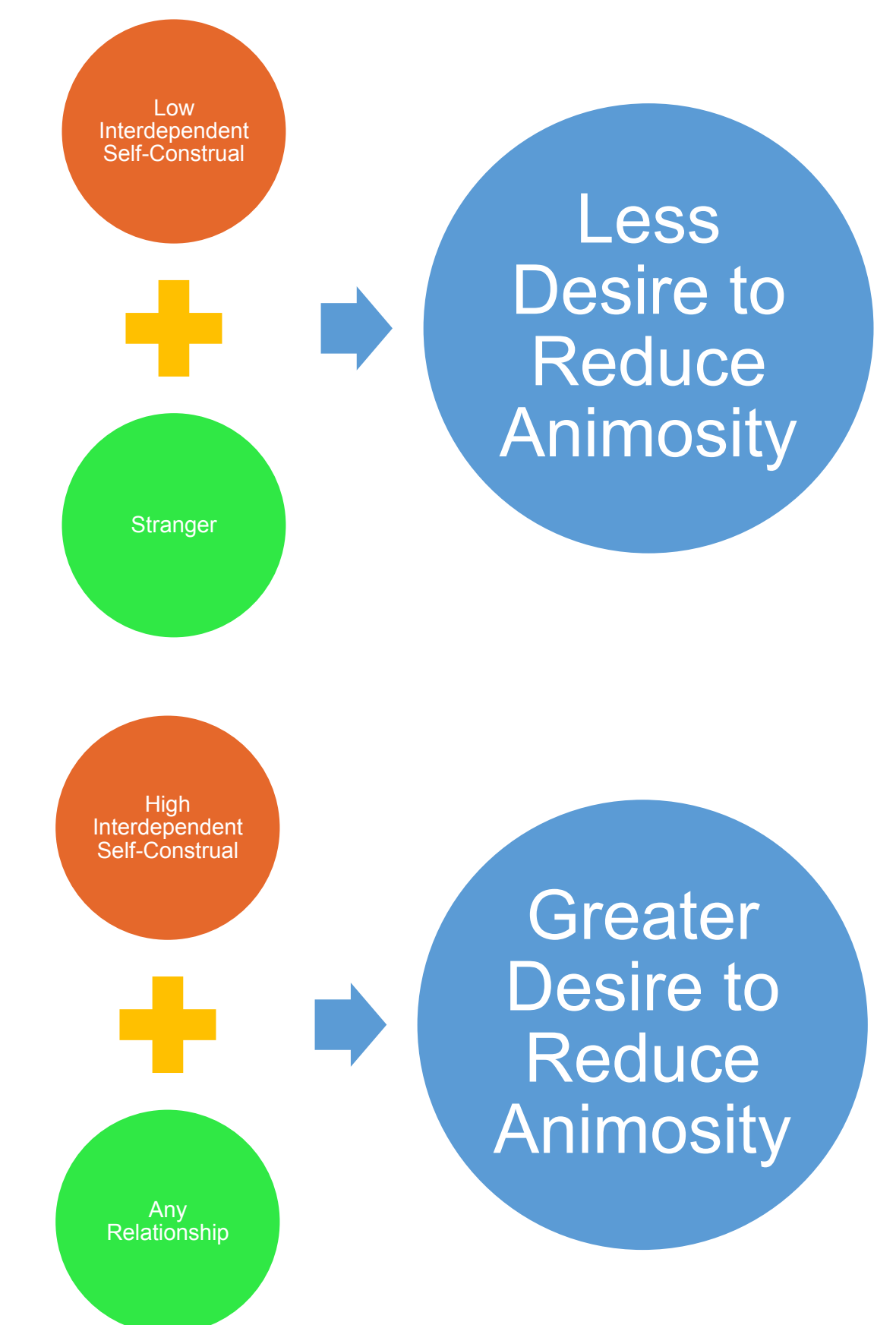
Fig 5. Interaction of Relationship and Interdependent Self-Construal Animosity Reduction \*\* =  $p < .05$



## Discussion

- Participants with **high independent self-construal** → **higher process control and relationship restoration** than those with lower independent self-construal.
- It seems contrary that participants would want to maintain relationships across all levels of familiarity, especially when interdependent self-construal had no such effect on this.
- Relationship alone influenced the extent to which a participant wanted to maintain a relationship with their conflicting party.
- Stranger → Lowest relationship restoration**
- Friend → Moderate relationship restoration**
- Family → Highest relationship restoration**
- Consistent with our research hypothesis, It is likely that a participant would like to maintain a relationship with those they already have an established relationship with (sibling or friend) versus a stranger.
- We found a significant 2-way interaction with interdependent self-construal and animosity reduction where those with high interdependent self-construal had more desire to reduce animosity in the stranger and friend condition when compared to those low in interdependent self-construal.
- This interaction effect on animosity reduction was not seen in individuals across all self-construal levels, which supports our hypothesis.
- Participants with high interdependent self-construal → treat conflicting party more similarly across all relationships
- Participants with low interdependent self-construal → differentiated resolution styles across relationships.

Fig. 6. Conceptual Representation of Significant Interaction of Relationship and Interdependent Self-Construal



## Future Directions

- Results of this study may not be generalizable to the general United States population, as only undergraduate students were used.
- The use of college students can partially explain why all three psychological motivations/goals were rated highly among participants.
- Future studies can potentially use another method other than a vignette, like an interview or simulation of a conflict.
- The use of a vignette could possibly have caused the participants to respond in a more idealistic way, creating bias.
- In future studies, the effect of conflict severity could be looked at by varying the conflict scenario or the severity of it.
- The influence of geographical location could be examined by doing a comparison of a sample from a country with a different cultural environment from the United States, like South Korea.
- A path analysis could be conducted on how these psychological motivations/goals influence participants' choices for specific dispute resolution features and mechanisms (i.e. litigation, arbitration, mediation, avoidance).