



Interactions between Anxiety Subtypes, Personality Characteristics, and Emotional Regulation Skills as Predictors of Future Career Outcomes

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Introduction

Anxiety and Occupational Outcomes

- Anxious individuals are more likely to make mistakes on safety and performance tasks that require high attention (Eysenck & Calvo, 1992).
- Anxious individuals are less likely to experience success and satisfaction at work (Boudreau, Boswell, & Judge, 2001; Judge, Higgins, Thoresen, & Barrick, 1999).

Anxiety Subtypes

- Trait anxiety is the stable tendency to consciously experience fear and worry across many situations (Gidron, 2013).
- Anxious arousal is the experience of unpleasant somatic symptoms such as increased heart rate, muscle tension, and shortness of breath (Porter, 2000).
- Rejection sensitivity is the tendency to anxiously expect, readily perceive, and overreact to social rejection (Downey & Feldman, 1996).
- Implicit feelings of rejection is similar to rejection sensitivity, but it is measured at the subconscious level (Greenwald, McGhee, & Schwartz, 1998).

Personality and Skills as Potential Moderators

- Conscientiousness and grit are closely related personality traits that correlate negatively with anxiety (Sheridan, Boman, Mergler, Furlong, & Elmer, 2015).
- Positive coping and emotion regulation skills also correlate negatively with anxiety (Byrne, 2000; Ivcevic & Brackett, 2014).

Hypotheses

- All subtypes of anxiety will predict more negative work outcomes, with stronger negative effects for anxious arousal and rejection sensitivity.
- Adaptive personality traits and ER/coping skills will diminish the negative effects that anxiety subtypes have on occupational outcomes, with a more robust effect for ER/coping skills.

Methods

Participants

Full sample from larger study: N=184

Gender

86 males
98 females

Race/Ethnicity

107 Caucasian
53 African American
24 Mixed/Other

Income

Median=\$40,000-\$59,000

Measures

Trait Anxiety (ages 18-19) Assessed using the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory, a self-report of general, persistent anxiety using responses on a 4-point Likert scale.

Anxious Arousal (ages 17-19) Assessed using the anxious subscale of the Affective Arousal Scale, an 8-item self-report measure given before and after an interview.

Rejection Sensitivity (ages 17-19) Assessed using the Rejection Sensitivity Questionnaire, a self-report using responses to brief vignettes of social situations on a 6-point Likert scale.

Implicit Feelings of Rejection (ages 17-18) Assessed using the "self: rejected vs. liked" scale of the Implicit Association Test, a response time task.

Conscientiousness (age 26) Assessed using the Personality Item Pool, a self-report of Big 5 personality traits using responses on a 5-point Likert scale.

Grit (age 27) Assessed using the 12-item self-report Grit Scale.

Emotional Regulation (age 26) Assessed using the Emotional Regulation Questionnaire, a 10-item self-report scale designed to assess cognitive reappraisal.

Positive Coping Skills (age 26) Assessed using subscale scores of planning, active coping, and positive reframing from the COPE inventory.

Occupational Outcomes (ages 27-29) Assessed using peer and self-report subscale scores of professional ambition, positive work performance, satisfaction with current job, satisfaction with proposed career path, and job success from the Young Adult Adjustment Scale.

Results

Correlations between variables are presented in Table 1.

Hierarchical regression equations examined interactions between anxiety subtypes, personality, ER/coping, and occupational outcomes. Analyses controlled for participant gender and household family income.

A number of significant interactions were found between different anxiety subtypes and the proposed moderator variables, which are presented in Figures 1-5.

Table 1: Means, SDs, and Correlations of Primary Variables

	Mean (SD)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1. Income	43,618 (22,420)	-													
2. Gender	47% male	-.11	-												
3. Trait Anxiety (18-19)	35.24 (8.30)	.03	.05	-											
4. Anxious Arousal (17-19)	1.63 (1.93)	.12	.17*	.25**	-										
5. Rejection Sensitivity (17-19)	7.82 (3.00)	-.06	-.16*	.34***	.28**	-									
6. Implicit Rejection Sensitivity (17-18)	-0.59 (0.37)	.12	.08	-.01	-.09	.03	-								
7. Conscientiousness (26)	37.79 (6.93)	.03	.12	-.32***	.04	-.10	-.10	-							
8. Grit (27)	43.36 (6.90)	.00	.05	-.31***	-.03	-.15	-.04	.51***	-						
9. Positive Coping (26)	11.62 (2.16)	.23**	.18*	-.09	.10	-.13	.10	.39***	.33***	-					
10. Emotion Regulation (26)	29.88 (6.58)	.12	.07	-.04	.04	-.08	-.07	.17*	.11	.37***	-				
11. Ambition (27-29)	19.63 (3.88)	.06	.15	-.11	-.05	-.04	-.01	.19*	.19*	.36***	.23**	-			
12. Work Performance (27-29)	35.39 (3.94)	.06	.06	-.03	-.05	-.00	.16	.06	.08	.22*	-.02	.64***	-		
13. Job Satisfaction (27-29)	3.55 (0.97)	.09	.04	-.17*	-.10	-.02	.04	.21*	.14	.24**	.16	.55***	.38***	-	
14. Job Success (27-29)	3.25 (0.84)	.00	.04	.12	-.08	.05	-.04	-.09	-.08	.10	.21*	.12	.05	.09	-
15. Career Satisfaction (29)	17.39 (5.89)	-.04	.00	-.25**	-.06	.08	.13	.32***	.41***	.24*	.14	.17	.02	.17	.16

Note. Gender coded as: 1 = males, 2 = females;
* $p \leq .05$, ** $p \leq .01$, *** $p \leq .001$.

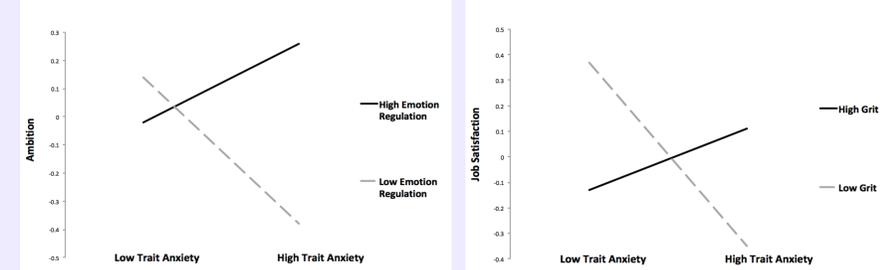


Figure 1: Interaction between trait anxiety (18-19) and emotion regulation (26) predicting ambition (27-29). Cognitively anxious individuals with higher emotion regulation experience higher levels of ambition than anxious individuals with lower emotion regulation.

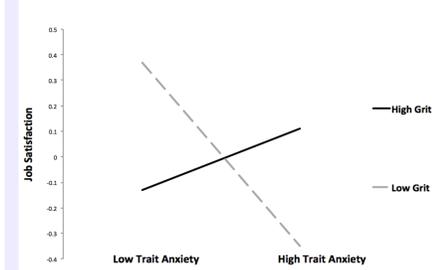


Figure 2: Interaction between trait anxiety (17-19) and grit (27) predicting job satisfaction (27-29). Cognitively anxious individuals with high grit experience higher job satisfaction than anxious people with low grit.

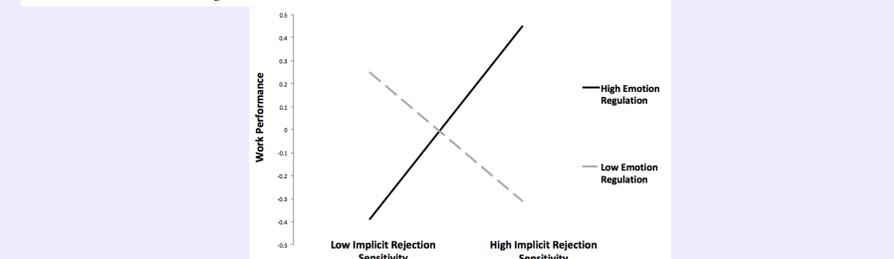


Figure 3: Interaction between implicit rejection sensitivity (17-18) and emotion regulation (26) predicting work performance (27-29). Individuals with implicit rejection sensitivity and high emotion regulation experience higher levels of performance at work than anxious individuals with low emotion regulation.

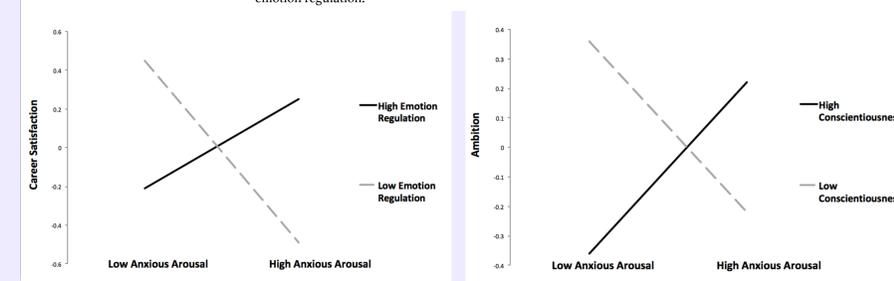


Figure 4: Interaction between anxious arousal (17-19) and emotion regulation (26) predicting career satisfaction (29). Physically anxious individuals with high emotion regulation experience higher levels of career satisfaction than anxious people with low emotion regulation.

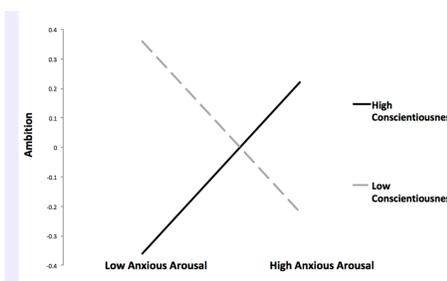


Figure 5: Interaction between anxious arousal (17-19) and conscientiousness (26) predicting ambition (27-29). Physically anxious individuals with higher conscientiousness experience higher levels of ambition than anxious individuals with lower conscientiousness.

Discussion

Trait anxiety was the only subtype to significantly predict negative career outcomes. Trait anxiety and anxious arousal were more often moderated by adaptive personality traits and ER/coping, compared to other anxiety subtypes in a work context.

Emotion regulation skills seem to be helpful for people with anxiety at work. However, coping skills seem to benefit people regardless of context or the presence of anxiety, as shown in its more direct associations with positive occupational outcomes (Table 1).

Anxious individuals can find success and satisfaction in their careers. Employers should not discount a potential employee just because they exhibit signs of anxiety. Instead, they should look for the presence of conscientiousness, grit, positive coping skills, and emotion regulation skills when making hiring decisions.

Anxiety is complex and requires further research to truly understand how it can differ from person to person and how it affects occupational outcomes.