

Examining *Interpersonal* and *Intrapersonal* Emotion Regulation, Social Anxiety, and Aggression among College Students

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INTRO

- A small subset of social anxiety (SA) is associated with aggression, anger, and impulsivity.
- Previous studies have shown SA is associated with aggression through emotion regulation (ER) difficulties.
- *Intrapersonal* ER is defined as ER strategies within the internal, individual experience and *Interpersonal* ER is defined using others' people responses to regulate one's emotions.
- Hypothesis
 - *interpersonal* and *intrapersonal* ER difficulties mediates the association between SA symptoms and elevated aggression.

METHODS

- Participants ($N = 640$; 70.2 % Female) completed self-report measures of *interpersonal* and *intrapersonal* ER difficulties, SA, and aggression.
- PROCESS was used to compute parallel mediation models to concurrently examine *interpersonal* and *intrapersonal* ER difficulties as mediators of the relation between social anxiety and relevant facets of aggression.
 - Model 1: Physical Aggression (PA)
 - Model 2: Hostility

RESULTS

- Model 1: Analyses revealed that the full model accounted for 18.3% variance in PA outcomes ($F[3, 636] = 47.37, p < .001$). See Fig. 1.
- Model 2: Analyses revealed that the full model accounted for 14.5% variance in Hostility outcomes ($F[3, 636] = 47.33, p < .001$). See Fig. 2.

Social anxiety is associated with physical aggression and hostility via *intrapersonal* and *interpersonal* emotion regulation difficulties .

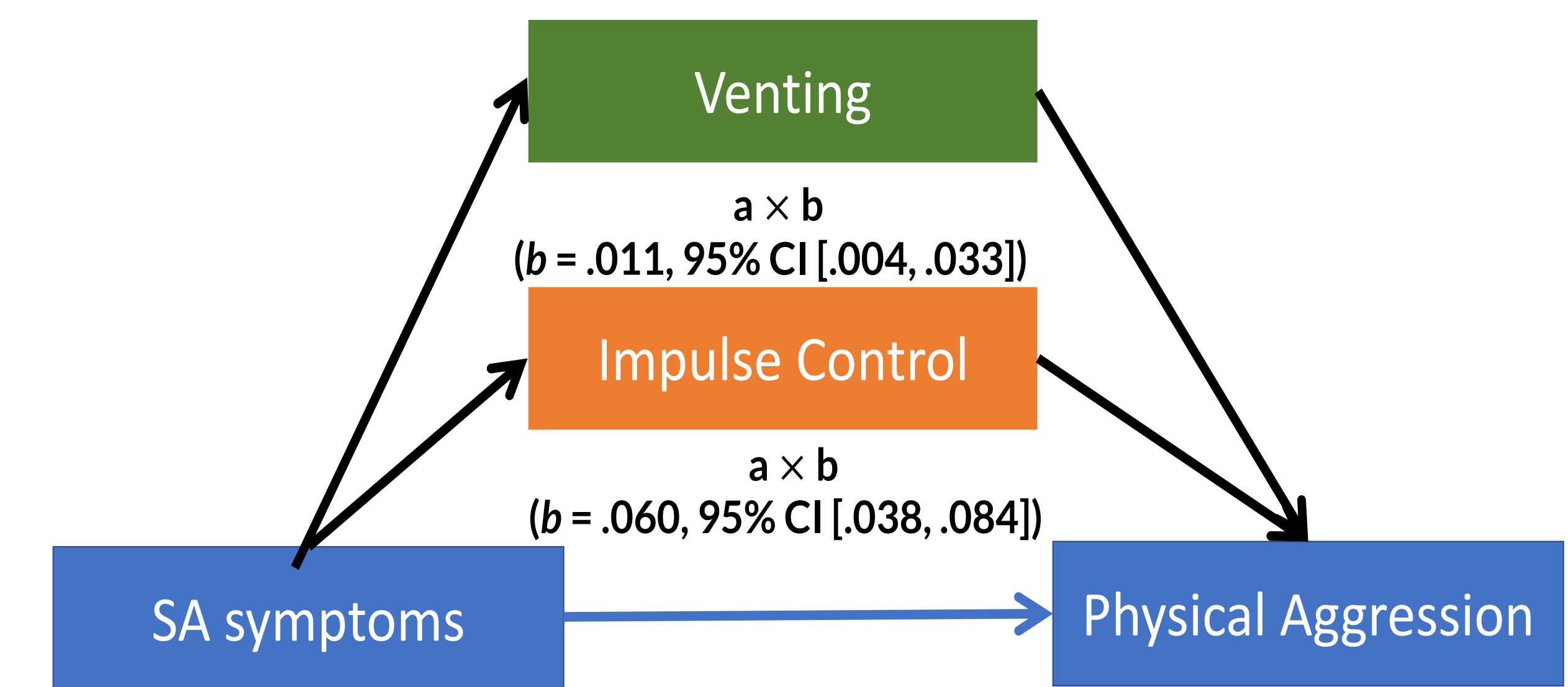


Figure 1. Parallel mediation model examining physical aggression.

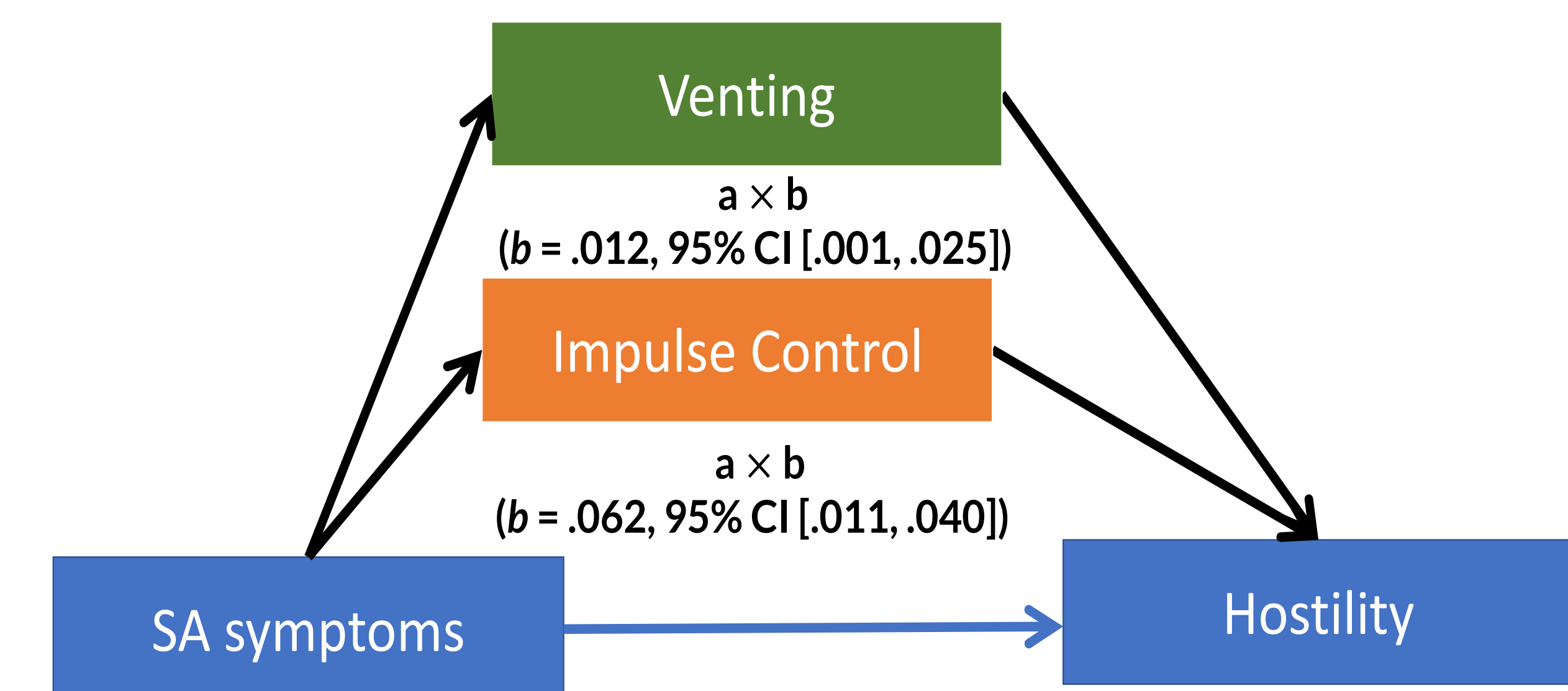


Figure 2. Parallel mediation model examining hostility.

DISCUSSION

- Results support concurrent roles of *intrapersonal* (impulse control) and *interpersonal* (venting) ER difficulties in the association between SA and aggression .
- Prior research suggests that aggression has a stronger link with SA in the Southern region compared to other areas of the US. Additionally, college students demonstrate higher levels of SA and aggressive behaviors.
- Therefore, results could be used to inform campus resources to decrease aggressive behaviors and violence, which has the potential to contribute to safer college campuses.



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Background

Emphasizing the fight (vs. flight) response, recent studies have found associations between social anxiety and elevations in aggression, anger, and impulsivity (Hanby et al., 2012; Kashdan & McKnight, 2010). Relatively little is known about this anomaly in social anxiety; yet, one study found that social anxiety was indirectly associated with aggression via emotion-driven impulse control difficulties (Dixon et al., 2016). An additional factor warranting consideration is interpersonal emotion regulation (ER), or using social interactions to regulate emotions (Zaki & Williams, 2013). To further elucidate the connection between social anxiety and aggression, the current study investigated associations among interpersonal and intrapersonal ER difficulties, social anxiety, and aggression among Southern college students. This sample is particularly relevant as college students evidence higher levels of both social anxiety disorder and aggressive behaviors (Schwartz et al., 2015; Storch et al., 2004), and aggression has a stronger link with social anxiety in the Southern region (vs. other areas of the US; Howell et al., 2015).

Methods

Data were collected from a Southern university sample ($N=655$; $M_{age} = 18.70$; $SD= 1.42$). Participants completed self-report measures of intrapersonal and interpersonal ER difficulties (DERS, DIRE), social anxiety, and aggression. The PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2018) was used to estimate the indirect effect and a 95% confidence interval (CI). Specifically, parallel mediation models examined the indirect effect of DERS-Impulse and DIRE-Venting in the relation between social anxiety symptoms and physical aggression (Model 1) and hostility (Model 2).

Results

The total effect for Model 1 was significant ($R^2 = .18$, $p < .001$). The estimated indirect effect indicated that social anxiety symptoms predicted greater levels of physical aggression indirectly through increased interpersonal ($b = .011$, 95% CI [.001, .025]) and intrapersonal ($b = .06$, 95% CI [.04, .08]) difficulties in ER. Similarly, the total effect for Model 2 was significant ($R^2 = .07$, $p < .001$), and social anxiety symptoms predicted

greater levels of hostility indirectly through increased interpersonal ($b = .017$, 95% CI [.004, .033]) and intrapersonal difficulties in ER ($b = .06$, 95% CI [.038, .084]).

Discussion

The results replicate and extend prior work by demonstrating the concurrent roles of intrapersonal (impulse control) and interpersonal (venting) ER difficulties in the association between social anxiety and aggression. Extending the social impact of cognitive behavioral research, results may be useful for informing campus resources to decrease aggressive behaviors and violence, which could lead to greater safety on college campuses.

List of Measures

Difficulties in Interpersonal Emotion Regulation (DIRE)

Social Phobia Inventory (SPIN)

Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (DERS)

Aggression Questionnaire (AQ)

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