

Understanding the Impact of Maternal Parenting Practices on College Students' Experiences of Social Anxiety through Emotion Regulation

Megan Perry, M.A., Molly Schadegg,
M.A., & Laura Dixon, Ph.D.

 mperry1@go.olemiss.edu

INTRO

- Social anxiety disorder (SAD) affects 12.7% women and 13.1% men in young adults.
- Maternal parental threat (PT; i.e., threat of abandonment, punishment, and rejection) has been implicated in the development of SAD in emerging adults.
- Negative maternal parenting practices have been associated in emotion regulation (ER) difficulties and SAD; yet, the connection between maternal PT and ER difficulties has not been investigated.

Current Study

- Given the heightened emotional vulnerability observed in young adults, this study investigated the role of maternal PT in relation to ER difficulties and SAD among college students.
- H1: It is predicted that maternal PT will be associated with SA symptoms through an indirect relationship with ER difficulties.

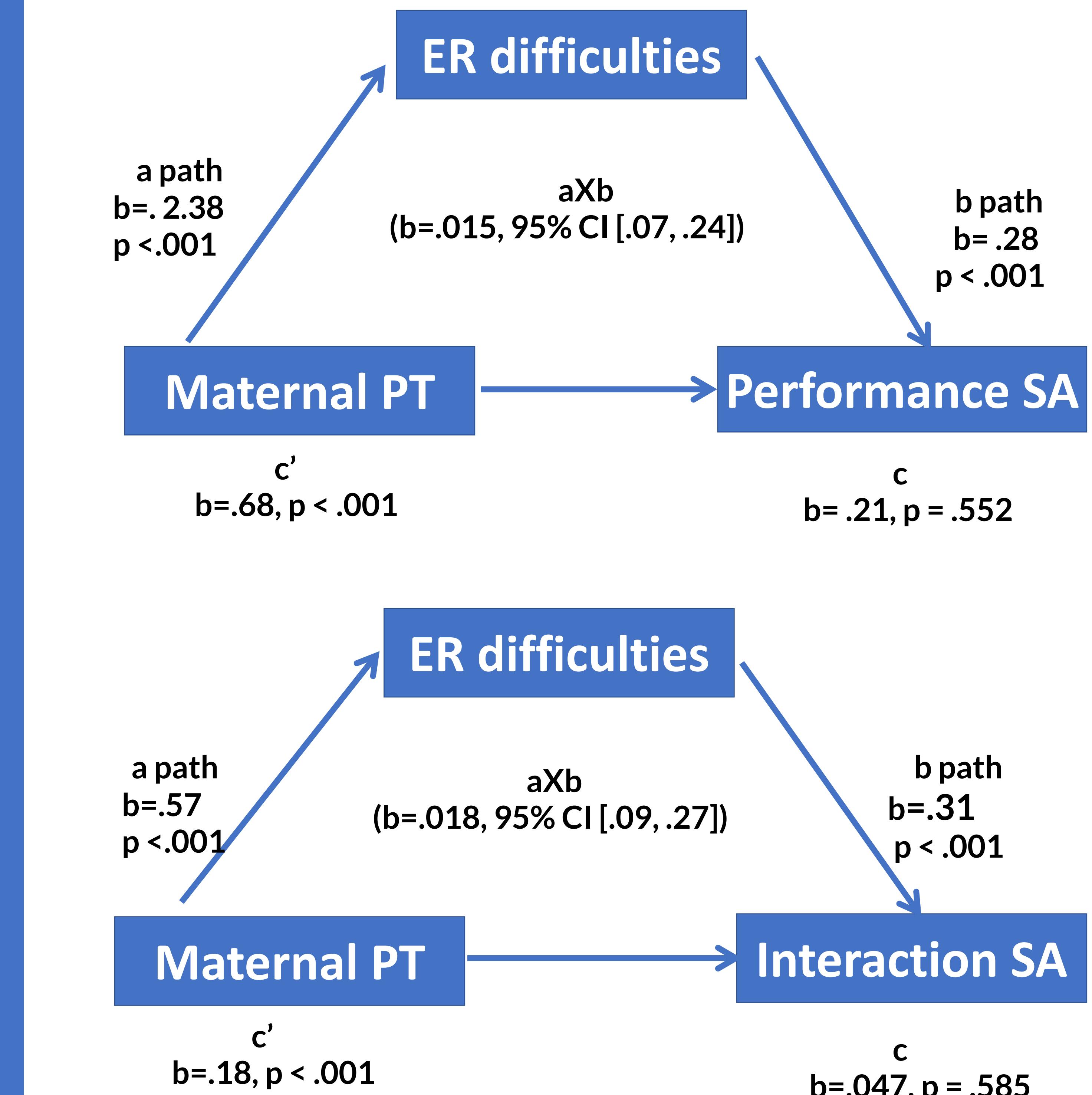
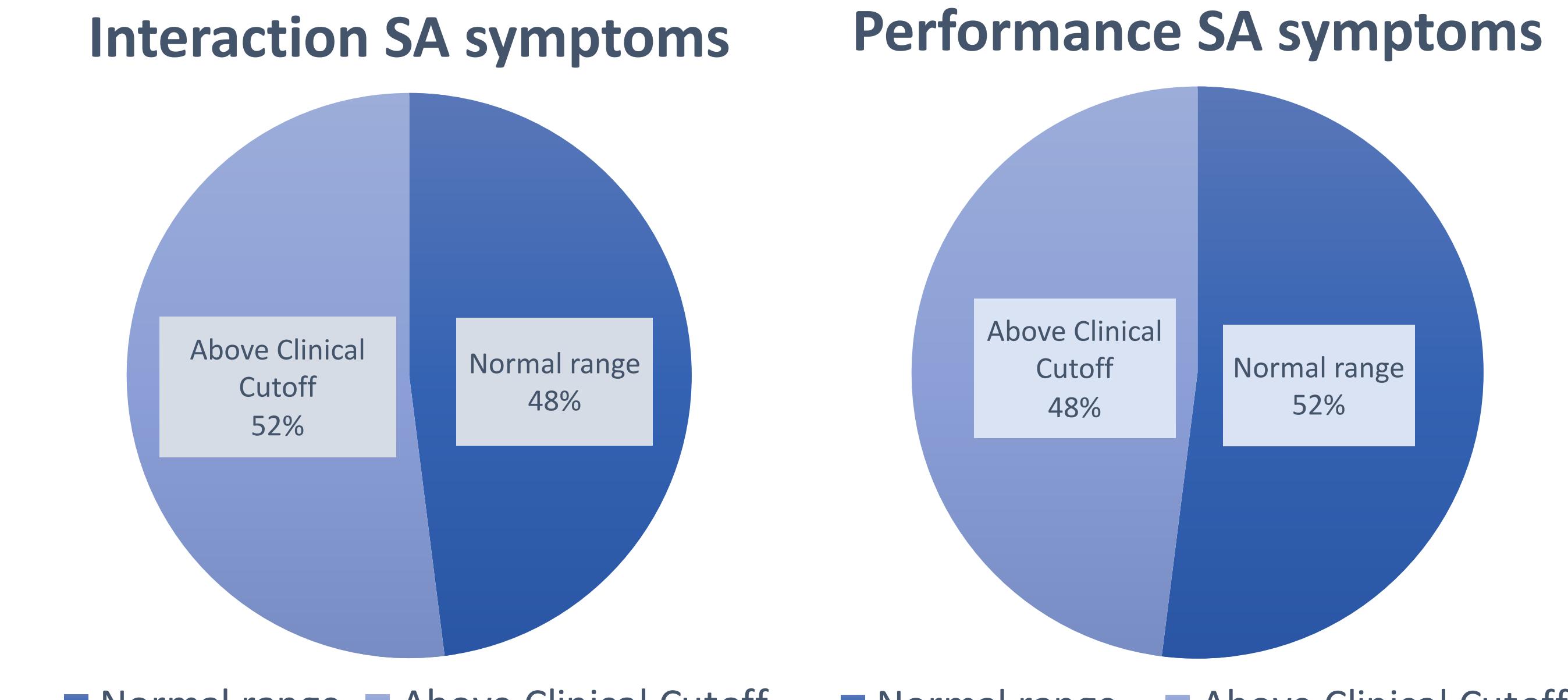
METHODS

- College students with elevated SA symptoms (SPIN) were recruited for this study.
- The sample ($N = 267$; $M_{age} = 18.71$) was primarily female (75.9%) and White (85.9%).
- Participants completed self-report measures of maternal PT, social anxiety and ER difficulties.
- Social anxiety symptoms, maternal PT, and ER difficulties investigated through two separate mediation models.
 - Model 1: Performance-based SA symptoms
 - Model 2: Interaction-based SA symptoms

RESULTS

- Model 1 accounted for 21% of the variance between maternal PT and performance SA symptoms $F(2, 228) = 29.17$, $p < .001$
- Model 2 accounted for 25% of the variance between maternal PT and interaction SA symptoms $F(2, 228) = 38.65$, $p < .001$

Maternal parenting practices and social anxiety are associated through emotion regulation difficulties.



DISCUSSION

- Results indicate greater maternal PT experiences contribute to increased ER difficulties, which lead to increased social anxiety symptoms in college students.
- Findings highlight the need to examine maternal PT behaviors during childhood to further understand how these practices may lead to SAD in young adults.
- Results suggest that it may be beneficial to address ER difficulties in SAD interventions for college students.



University of Mississippi

Authors: Megan M. Perry, Mary J. Schadegg, & Laura J. Dixon

Understanding the Impact of Maternal Parenting Practices on College Students' Experiences of Social Anxiety through Emotion Regulation

Background

Social anxiety disorder (SAD) is characterized as the fear of social evaluation where individuals experience maladaptive cognitive and behavior processes before, during, and after a social event (Wong & Rapee, 2016). Maternal threat (i.e., threat of abandonment, punishment, and rejection) has been established as a critical etiological factor in the development of SAD during young adulthood (Asbrand et al., 2017). Although research suggests negative maternal parenting practices contribute to emotion regulation (ER) difficulties (Brenning et al., 2015), difficulty with ER has yet to be explored in the connection between maternal threat and SAD. Therefore, the current study explored the associations between maternal parental threat, social anxiety (SA) symptoms, and ER difficulties among college students. College represents a particularly complex period of transitions and heightened period of vulnerability (Fehm et al., 2008); indeed, as many as 12.7% of women and 13.1% men experiencing SAD in college. We predicted that maternal threat will be associated with SA symptoms through an indirect relationship with ER difficulties.

Methods

Data were collected from a university sample who screened positive for elevated social anxiety symptoms (SPIN), and those with elevated SA symptoms were invited to complete an online questionnaire for course credit. Participants ($N = 267$; $M_{age} = 18.71$; $SD = 0.91$) completed self-report measures of social anxiety (Social Phobia Scale [SPS], Social Interaction Anxiety Scale [SIAS]; Mattick & Clarke, 1998), maternal parental threat (Parental Threat Inventory; Scher et al., 2002), and emotion regulation difficulties (Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale; Gratz & Roemer, 2004). The PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2018) was used to conduct mediation analyses and estimate the indirect effect of ER difficulties in the relation between maternal parental threat and performance-based SA symptoms (Model 1) and interaction SA symptoms (Model 2).

Results

In this sample, 48.3% of participants were above the clinical cutoff for SPS and 51.5% for SIAS. The total effect for Model 1 was significant ($R^2 = .21$, $p < .001$). The estimated indirect effect indicated that maternal parental threat predicted greater levels of performance-based social anxiety symptoms indirectly through increased ER difficulties ($b = .15$, 95% CI [.07, .24]). Similarly, the total effect for Model 2 was significant ($R^2 = .25$, $p < .001$), and maternal parental threat predicted greater levels of interaction social anxiety symptoms indirectly through increased ER difficulties ($b = .18$, 95% CI [.09, .27]).

Discussion

The results support for the role of maternal threat and ER difficulties in SA symptoms and suggest the potential mediating role of ER difficulties in the relation between maternal parental threat and SA symptoms among college students. Findings highlight the need for additional research examining maternal parenting relationships and ER difficulties as mechanisms in SAD. These factors warrant further consideration as pathways for improving outcomes in cognitive and behavioral therapies for SAD among young adults.

Characters: 2,959 (max 2800)

List of Measures

Social Phobia Scale (SPS)

Social Interaction Anxiety Scale (SIAS)

Parental Threat Inventory (PTI) (Total score)

Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale (DERS-total score)

References

Asbrand, J., Blechert, J., Nitschke, & Schmitz, J. (2017). Aroused at home: Basic autonomic regulation during orthostatic and physical activation is altered in children with social anxiety disorder. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology*, 45(1), 143-155.

Brenning, K., Soenens, B., Van der Kaap-Deeder, J., Dieleman, L., & Vansteenkiste, M. (2020). Psychologically controlling parenting during toddlerhood: The role of mothers' perceived parenting history and emotion regulation style. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 29(8), 2257-2267.

Fehm, L., Beesdo, K., Jacobi, F., & Fiedler, A. (2008). Social anxiety disorder above and below the diagnostic threshold: Prevalence, comorbidity and impairment in the general population. *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology: The International Journal for Research in Social and Genetic Epidemiology and Mental Health Services*, 43(4), 257–265.

Gratz, K. L., & Roemer, L. (2004). Multidimensional assessment of emotion regulation and dysregulation: development, factor structure, and initial validation of the Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale. *Journal of Psychopathology and Behavioral Assessment*, 26(1), 41–54.

Mattick, R. P., & Clarke, J. C. (1998). Development and validation of measures of social phobia scrutiny fear and social interaction anxiety. *Behaviour Research and Therapy*, 36(4), 455-470.

Scher, C. D., Stein, M. B., Ingram, R. E., Malcarne, V. L., & McQuaid, J. R. (2002). The parent threat inventory: Development, reliability, and validity. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 26(2), 207-225.

Wong, Q. J., & Rapee, R. M. (2016). The etiology and maintenance of social anxiety disorder: A synthesis of complimentary theoretical models and formulation of a new integrated model. *Journal of Affective Disorders*, 203, 84–100.