

# Examining the Mediating Role of Emotion Regulation in the Relationship Between Social Anxiety and Alcohol Use

Sophie Pitts, Madeline Cook, Carey Sevier, M.S. & Laura Dixon, Ph.D.

[smpitts1@go.olemiss.edu](mailto:smpitts1@go.olemiss.edu) | [mecook4@go.olemiss.edu](mailto:mecook4@go.olemiss.edu)

## Introduction:

- Social anxiety disorder (SAD; Ruscio et al., 2007) and problematic alcohol use (Knight et al., 2002) are prevalent mental health disorders among college students
- Literature has shown that those with SAD commonly use alcohol to cope with their anxiety symptoms (Goodman et al., 2022).
- Emotion regulation (ER) is a transdiagnostic factor that potentially mediates this relationship.
- Previous literature has shown an association with ER and both SAD (Farmer & Kashdan, 2012) and problematic alcohol use (Petit et al., 2015).
- This study aimed to investigate the potential mediating effect of ER on the relationship between SAD and problematic alcohol use, while also examining these variables in the context of the DERS subscales. More specifically it was predicted that ER difficulties would mediate the relationship between SAD and problematic alcohol use.

## Methods:

- The sample ( $N=188$ ) all scored above the clinical cut off for social anxiety ( $>19$ ) and were predominantly white (77.0%) and female (79.7%) with a mean age of 19.03 ( $SD=3$ )
- Participants completed a packet of self-report measures assessing social anxiety (SPIN; Conner et al., 2000;  $M=31.9$ ,  $SD=12.7$ ), emotion regulation (DERS; Gratz & Roemer, 2004), and problematic alcohol use (AUDIT; Saunders et al., 1993)

## Results

- 17.1% of participants met criteria for hazardous drinking, and 4.8% met criteria for potential dependence
- 21.9% reported abstaining from alcohol use
- SAD and problematic alcohol use were not significantly correlated.

# Emotion Regulation Mediates the Relationship Between Social Anxiety and Problematic Alcohol Use

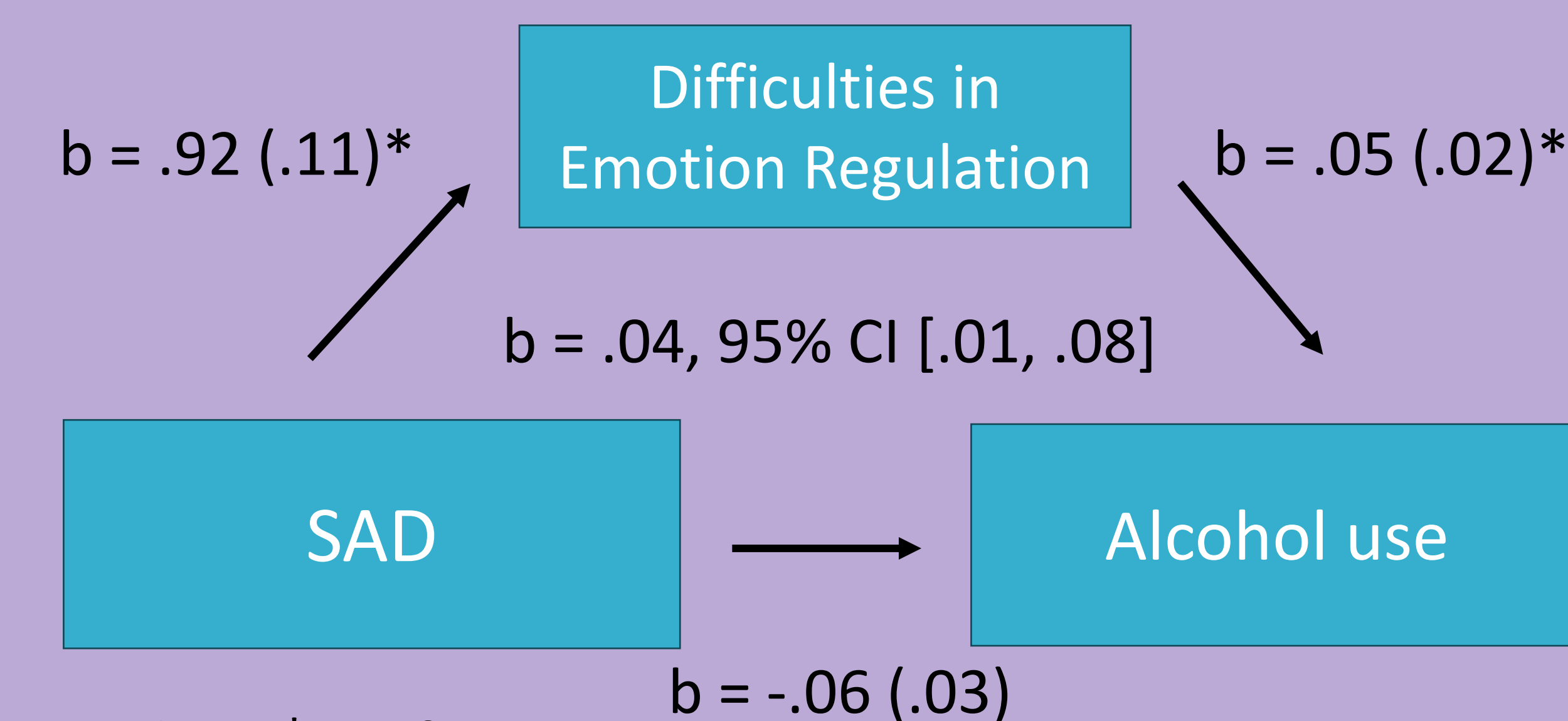


- A series of Pearson's Bivariate correlations were conducted. Difficulties with emotion regulation was found to be significantly correlated with SAD (See Table 1)
- PROCESS was used to estimate the indirect effect. See Figure 1 for results of the paths.

Table 1. Correlations between SAD, alcohol use, and DERS sub-scales

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Social Anxiety	—							
2. Alcohol Use	-.043	—						
3. Nonacceptance	.454**	.061	—					
4. Goals	.296**	.186**	.358**	—				
5. Strategies	.489**	.068	.626**	.633**	—			
6. Impulsivity	.322**	.108**	.400**	.490**	.688**	—		
7. Awareness	.113	.125	.141	-.053	.163*	.102	—	
8. Clarity	.349**	.088	.069	.248**	.329**	.326**	.292**	—

Figure 1. Mediation analyses



## Discussion:

- Results suggest that ER is a significant predictor of SAD and problematic alcohol use while also being a mediator of the relationship.
- These results suggest that socially anxious people may have more difficulties with coping mechanisms and accepting emotions, and those with problematic alcohol usage may have a difficult time accomplishing goals when stressed.
- Consistent with prior literature, ER was found to be significantly associated with both SAD and alcohol use.
- Research is mixed on the relationship between SAD and alcohol use, but this study suggests that the comorbid relationship may not be very strong.
- Overall, this study can aid in future treatment or preventative efforts in college populations.