

Spring 2018

Interactions between anxiety subtypes, personality characteristics, and emotional regulation skills as predictors of future career outcomes

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

An Honors College Project Presented to
the Faculty of the Undergraduate
College of Health and Behavioral Sciences
James Madison University

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May 2018

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PUBLIC PRESENTATION

This work is accepted for presentation, in part or in full, at the Virginia Association for Psychological Science
Spring Conference on April 19th, 2018.

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank everyone who has helped me complete my honors thesis. First, I would like to thank Dr. David Szwedo for taking a chance on me and agreeing to advise my thesis. I am forever thankful for your guidance and encouragement throughout this process. You inspired and challenged me to create a project that I am proud to present today. I would also like to extend my gratitude to Dr. Kenn Barron and Dr. Jaime Kurtz for serving on my committee where they provided helpful advice and feedback.

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Abstract

Trait anxiety, anxious arousal, rejection sensitivity, and implicit feelings of rejection in adolescence were examined as predictors of long-term career performance, satisfaction, success, and ambition. Personality traits such as conscientiousness and grit, as well as coping and emotion regulation skills were analyzed as potential moderating variables. Anxious arousal and rejection sensitivity were predicted to be more strongly associated with negative career outcomes, and coping skills were predicted to be more effective in diminishing negative consequences of anxiety. Multi-reporter data were obtained from 184 teens at ages 17-19 and 26-27, and 27-29. Trait anxiety was the only anxiety variable to correlate significantly with negative occupational outcomes. Trait anxiety predicted lower ambition, job satisfaction, and career satisfaction after controlling for the effects of gender and income in hierarchical regressions. Trait anxiety, as well as anxious arousal, had multiple significant interactions with occupational outcomes. Coping skills had main effects with several occupational outcomes including ambition, work performance, and job satisfaction after controlling for each subtype of anxiety; however, no significant interactions were found. Instead, emotion regulation played an important role in four interactions between anxiety and occupational outcomes. Limitations and implications of the findings are discussed.

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

When considering what it means to be successful at work, one usually thinks of awards, recognition, speedy promotions, and improved income as the defining factors of career success. These rewards are often granted to employees who are diligent, confident, resilient, and action-oriented – the type of people who can perform well at any job, and under various work conditions. However, these positive work outcomes may be undermined by specific personal qualities or challenges. For example, people who suffer from symptoms of anxiety often struggle with concentration, assertiveness, and resilience, which may lead to difficulties at work (Orenstein et al., 2008). Indeed, large scale studies suggest that individuals who suffer from anxiety are less likely to experience success and satisfaction at work (Boudreau, Boswell, & Judge, 2001; Judge, Higgins, Thoresen, & Barrick, 1999).

At the same time, anxiety can be experienced and expressed in different ways. *Trait anxiety* is a general type of anxiety that refers to the stable tendency to consciously experience and report negative emotions such as fear and worry across many situations (Gidron, 2013). Some individuals experience anxiety more physiologically; *anxious arousal* is the experience of bodily sensations that are interpreted as unpleasant and include somatic symptoms such as increased heart rate, muscle tension, and shortness of breath (Porter, 2000). Others may have a high level of explicit *rejection sensitivity* as the main component of their anxiety. This is a specific type of cognitive worry: the tendency to anxiously expect, readily perceive, and overreact to social rejection (Downey & Feldman, 1996). Others may be less aware of their anxiety but have *implicit feelings of rejection*, which is similar conceptually to explicit rejection sensitivity, but is measured at the subconscious level through a reaction-time test (Greenwald,

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McGhee, & Schwartz, 1998). Little is known, however, about how these different variations and presentations of anxiety may contribute to predictions of professional success or if certain forms may predict greater impairment than others.

Despite links between anxiety and negative work outcomes, some individuals with anxiety may nevertheless perform very well at their jobs despite the challenges their anxiety presents. This may be because some individuals have personality characteristics that promote effective work behaviors even in the context of anxiety, or perhaps because they possess the emotional tools necessary to successfully cope with symptoms of anxiety when needed. To date, however, research has yet to consider whether specific personality traits or coping mechanisms might predict improved career outcomes for individuals who suffer from higher levels of anxiety. Thus, the purpose of the present study is to better understand (a) how different types of anxiety affect occupational outcomes and (b) which types of personality traits or coping strategies may be more predictive of positive occupational outcomes for highly anxious individuals.

Anxiety and Career Outcomes

Christopher Willard, a psychologist at Tufts University says “although we no longer live with many of the physical dangers our ancestors did, our bodies and brains still react to perceived dangers — like making a presentation to a room full of colleagues — the same way our forebears reacted to the sight of a predator: with the ‘fight or flight’ response” (as cited in Zimmerman, 2010). Anxiety manifests in many ways; some common symptoms include worry, insomnia, irritability, trouble concentrating, and shortness of breath. The resulting stress from general anxiety has been shown to lead to many forms of deleterious health and psychosocial outcomes, including cardiovascular disease, substance abuse, and lower social functioning (Brosschot, Gerin, & Thayer, 2006; Woodward & Fergusson, 2001).

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Anxiety, broadly defined, has also been linked to poorer career-related outcomes. For example, employees suffering from anxiety are often less productive, especially in jobs that require an element of team work (ADAA, 2006). Anxiety symptoms such as fatigue, irritability, difficulty concentrating, and excessive worrying impacts employees' relationships with coworkers and superiors, as well as their quality of work. A study by Eysenck and Calvo (1992) demonstrated that anxiety-induced worry can lead to impaired performance on tasks that require high attention or short-term memory demands. Additionally, they found that concurrent tasks, such as performance and safety, were especially negatively affected by anxiety.

However, little is known about what specific types or components of anxiety may be most influential for explaining negative work outcomes. This is a critical consideration, as a better understanding of how different aspects of anxiety contribute to adult career success can better inform prevention and intervention efforts. Increasing such understanding may be particularly helpful to employees and employers alike, as more than 18 percent of the adult population suffers from an anxiety disorder, which may have more influence on productivity and efficiency than employers often realize (ADAA, 2006).

The Role of Personality Traits

Individuals with anxiety may not necessarily be predestined to poor work performance. There may be mitigating factors that can help them find success in the workplace, such as adaptive personality traits that can facilitate positive work behavior even in the context of experiencing anxiety. Conscientiousness is one such personality trait; it represents impulse control and vigilance that usually manifests into organized and efficient behaviors. Previous studies in industrial-organizational psychology have demonstrated conscientiousness as a protective factor against exhaustion due to prolonged occupational stress, otherwise known as

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job burnout (Swider & Zimmerman, 2010). Conscientiousness is usually negatively correlated with general anxiety, but some complexities have also emerged. After analyzing personality traits and anxiety symptoms, Vreeke and Muris (2012) found that conscientiousness served as a significant positive predictor of behavioral inhibition. Behavioral inhibition is a component of anxiety that is characterized by timidity and withdrawal, suggesting that conscientiousness and anxiety may be interrelated and co-exist in some individuals. Due to such complexities, it appears necessary to further explore how different aspects of anxiety may interact with personality traits to predict future outcomes.

Grit may be another particularly useful construct to consider in this regard. Grit is a personality trait that is defined by an individual's passion and motivation to reach a long-term goal, regardless of challenges that may obstruct their path. Grit is a top predictor of success in academic and occupational roles. Like conscientiousness, grit may coexist with anxiety. For example, grit does not make a person invincible or prevent them from having setbacks. Instead, it is a quality of passion and motivation that helps individuals overcome these setbacks and progress towards an objective. Although research is sparse on this subject, studies show that conscientiousness and grit both correlate negatively with anxiety (Sheridan, Boman, Mergler, Furlong, & Elmer, 2015). However, some studies have shown no correlation between anxiety and grit (Chinoy, 2016; MacCann & Roberts, 2010). Though some researchers believe that grit is merely a subtrait of conscientiousness, because it seems to overlap with some of the facets of conscientiousness (Ivcevic & Brackett, 2014), it remains unclear how these traits may function relative to one another with regard to predicting future outcomes. Thus, including both of these variables in the present study is imperative to understanding their unique contributions to potentially enhancing job performance in the context of problems with anxiety. With either of

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these qualities, it is possible that people can overcome some of the challenges of anxiety and find success in their careers.

Positive Coping and Emotion Regulation Skills

Another hopeful possibility with regard to successfully combatting anxiety is the development of positive coping skills to respond to stress in a healthier and productive way. Coping skills are methods that people employ in order to minimize and/or better tolerate stressful situations. Emotion regulation (ER) is the act of monitoring, evaluating, and modifying emotional reactions in a manner that complies with societal norms. Thus, coping and ER are two different but related skills that an individual can develop to adapt and react to environmental stressors. A correlational analysis by Smrtnik, Vitulić, and Prosen (2016) showed significant associations between specific coping and ER strategies, but no significant correlation between coping and ER overall; this implies that coping and ER are related yet distinct processes.

Past research on ER skills shows that students with higher ER abilities seem to exhibit lower levels of anxiety and more successful school outcomes in terms of GPA and academic honors (Ivcevic & Brackett, 2014). Neuroimaging studies have supported cognitive reappraisal, a key component of ER, as an adaptive method against stress; these studies demonstrated decreased activation in brain regions that are associated with emotions, such as the amygdala and insula, when reappraisal was used to decrease negative emotions (Troy & Mauss, 2011). Moreover, a study of employees at three hotel and resort facilities found that ER, specifically reappraisal, positively correlated with job performance (Liu, Prati, Perrewé, & Brymer, 2010). Although recent research in ER and job performance is sparse, these studies suggest that there are links between them.

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Similarly, research on coping strategies demonstrates an inverse relationship with anxiety. There are two primary types of coping skills: emotion-focused and problem-focused coping. Research has shown that emotion-focused coping skills can serve as a protective factor against developing higher levels of anxiety in long-term, stressful situations (Cooper, Katona, Orrell, & Livingston, 2008). Other studies have shown that problem-focused coping strategies are negatively correlated with anxiety (Byrne, 2000). A 2001 study by Van der Klink, Blonk, Schene, and Van Dijk found that the most effective way of combatting occupation stress was through cognitive behavioral interventions, which focused on the development of active coping skills, which utilize problem-focused coping strategies.

Importantly, both positive coping and emotion regulation are skills that are designed to be effective in reducing anxiety symptoms, as opposed to eliminating them. This means that these skills are often used, and can be developed, in the context of existing anxiety. Thus, merely having anxiety does not preclude individuals from also having the skills to manage it. In order to understand how coping skills and emotion regulation are predictive of future outcomes, it is essential to examine both as potential moderators of associations between anxiety and job performance. Moreover, it is important to examine the relative helpfulness of ER/coping strategies versus personality characteristics for potentially reducing the negative effects of anxiety on work outcomes. Such information would better inform early interventionists about what personal qualities or skills might be most helpful to promote in youth.

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Hypotheses

Based on prior research, it is hypothesized that all types of anxiety will be negatively correlated with various aspects of occupational performance. However, it is predicted that rejection sensitivity and anxious arousal, as compared to other subtypes of anxiety, will be more strongly associated with poorer performance at work. This is because rejection sensitivity may be especially insidious due to its social nature, potentially inhibiting positive work relationships important for job and career success. Similarly, symptoms related to anxious arousal may be distracting and difficult to overcome in the workplace, potentially inhibiting positive work performance. It is also hypothesized that both adaptive personality traits and ER/coping will diminish the negative effect that anxiety has on job performance, with a more robust effect for emotional regulation and coping skills. This is because ER/coping skills seem to directly target specific symptoms of anxiety such as worry and avoidance, whereas the benefits of positive personality characteristics might have a more diffused effect and therefore a lesser impact on anxiety in particular.

Method

Participants and Procedure

The sample for this study is drawn from the Virginia Institute for Development in Adulthood, which is a longitudinal study of adolescent/young adult social and emotional development. Participants included 184 young adults (86 male, 98 female). The sample was racially/ethnically and socioeconomically diverse (107 Caucasian, 53 African American, 2 Hispanic/Latino, 2 Asian American, 1 American Indian, 15 mixed ethnicity, and 4 “other”). Participants were initially interviewed at approximately age 13, and then interviewed again on an annual basis for 16 years. Participants were initially recruited from a single public middle school drawing from suburban and urban populations in the Southeastern United States. Students were recruited through an initial mailing to all parents of students in the 7th and 8th grades of the school that gave them the opportunity to opt out of any further contact with the study (N = 298). Only 2% of parents opted out of such contact. Of all families subsequently contacted by phone, 63% agreed to participate and had an adolescent who was able to come in with both a parent and a close friend. This sample appeared generally comparable to the overall population of the school in terms of racial/ethnic makeup (42% non-white in sample and about 40% non-white in school) and socio-economic status (mean household income of \$43,618 in the sample compared to \$48,000 for the broader community).

The current study used three waves of measurement, interviewing participants when they were approximately 17-19 and 26-27 years old to predict career outcomes when the participants were 27-29 years old. Data analysis was assisted by computer software (SAS). For descriptive purposes, simple univariate correlations were examined between all variables of interest. Hierarchical regression analyses were used to test study hypotheses.

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Measures

Trait Anxiety. The State-Trait Anxiety Inventory is a self-report measure that was given to participants at ages 18-19. Items are scored on a 4-point Likert scale with reverse coded positive items such that higher scores indicate greater anxiety. Responses to the STAI correlated with previous anxiety measures (Spielberger, Gorsuch, & Lushene, 1970). In this longitudinal study, only the trait version of the STAI was used; it is designed to measure the general, persistent quality of anxiety as opposed to temporary states of anxiety. Participants completed the STAI at both ages 18 and 19; an average score across these ages was used to obtain a more stable measure of trait anxiety during the late adolescent years ($\alpha = .90$).

Anxious Arousal. The Affective Arousal Scale, also known as the Semantic Difference Task, is an 8-item self-report measure that quantifies individuals' subjective experience of attachment-related arousal. This scale was given to participants at ages 17-19 and the scores were averaged to attain a solid measure of anxious arousal during late adolescence. It was administered before and after an attachment interview; they were asked to respond to questions about how they were feeling at that exact moment. The pre-interview score was subtracted from the post-interview score; higher scores represent greater attachment-related negative arousal. The anxious subscale ("tense and worried" items) was used in the current study. Cronbach's alpha coefficient demonstrates internal consistency for the anxious subscale (Porter, 2000; $\alpha = .84$).

Rejection Sensitivity. The Rejection Sensitivity Questionnaire was given to participants at ages 17-19; an average score across these ages was used to secure a more stable measure of rejection sensitivity in late adolescence. They were presented with brief vignettes about themselves and another person (parent, peer, etc.), and then asked "How concerned or anxious would you be about how the other person would respond?" and "How do you think the other

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person would be likely to respond?” Each question was scored on a Likert scale from 1 (very unconcerned/very unlikely) to 6 (very concerned/very likely). Factor loadings for questions from the measure ranged from .41 to .68 (Downey & Feldman, 1996; $\alpha = .90$).

Implicit Feelings of Rejection. The Implicit Association Test is a response time task that presents words or pictures to participants who must classify them into one of two categories. It has adequate test-retest reliability and correlates with similar implicit measures. It was administered to participants at ages 17-18; these scores were averaged in order to obtain a more stable measure of implicit rejection sensitivity in the late adolescent years. This study specifically used the “self: rejected vs. liked” scale (Greenwald, McGhee, & Schwartz, 1998). Higher scores indicate greater feelings of implicit rejection.

Conscientiousness. At age 26, participants took the Personality Item Pool (PIP), which measures the Big 5 personality traits using a 5-point Likert scale. For this study, the personality trait of conscientiousness is the only subscale of interest from this self-report inventory. PIP has comparable internal consistency estimates with other similar measures, as well as high predictive validity (Goldberg et al., 2006; $\alpha = .84$).

Grit. Grit was measured at age 27 using the 12-item self-report Grit Scale. The average maximum score on this scale is 5 (extremely gritty), and the minimum score on this scale is 1 (not at all gritty). In past studies, this scale has shown face validity for varied populations and predictive validity for educational attainment (Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, & Kelly, 2007; $\alpha = .79$).

Emotional Regulation. The Emotional Regulation Questionnaire is a 10-item self-report scale designed to assess individual differences in the use of two emotion regulation strategies: cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression (Gross & John, 2003). In the present study,

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cognitive reappraisal was the focus of analysis. Participants responded to this questionnaire when they were 26 years old ($\alpha = .89$).

Positive coping skills. Young adults' ability to positively cope with negative emotions at the age of 26 was assessed using the COPE inventory. This inventory uses 28 self-report items to measure different adaptive and dysfunctional responses to stress. More specifically, the subscales that reflect positive coping strategies such as planning, active coping, and positive reframing are the focus of this study. Cronbach's alpha averaged .80 across the 3 subscales (Carver, Scheier, & Weintraub, 1989).

Occupational performance. Occupational outcomes at ages 27-29 were measured by the responses of close friends about participants on the Young Adult Adjustment Scale. Occupational performance is further defined by subscale scores of professional ambition, positive work performance, satisfaction with current job, career satisfaction, and job success. Alphas for the scales showed good to excellent reliability ($\alpha s > .85$; Capaldi, King, & Wilson, 1992).

Results

Preliminary Analyses

Univariate and correlational analyses. Means and standard deviations for all primary variables are presented in Table 1. For descriptive purposes, correlations were examined between all key variables of interest and are presented in Table 1. These analyses revealed that gender and family income had significant associations with several primary variables. Income only had a positive correlation with positive coping skills ($r = .23, p < .01$). Gender had significant, positive associations with anxious arousal ($r = .17, p < .05$) and coping ($r = .18, p < .05$), indicating that females were more likely to score higher on these measures. In addition, gender correlated

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negatively with rejection sensitivity ($r = -.16, p < .05$), indicating that males were more likely to report rejection sensitivity. Both demographic variables were included as covariates in all regression analyses to account for any possible effects that may not have reached conventional levels of statistical significance.

Preliminary analyses also investigated possible associations between predictors, potential moderators, and outcomes. Trait anxiety, anxious arousal, and rejection sensitivity had moderate, positive correlations with each other. However, implicit rejection sensitivity was not significantly related to the other anxiety subtypes or any of the other primary variables. The potential moderating variable of positive coping skills was also notable in that it correlated significantly with all primary variables except for the anxiety subtypes. Additionally, the outcomes of ambition, work performance, and job satisfaction were noteworthy due to their positive correlations with one another. On the other hand, job success only had a modest correlation with one primary variable, emotion regulation ($r = .21, p < .05$).

Primary Analyses

Hypothesis 1. *All subtypes of anxiety will predict more negative work outcomes, with stronger negative effects for anxious arousal and rejection sensitivity.*

Analyses first investigated the relative impact of trait anxiety, anxious arousal, rejection sensitivity, and implicit rejection sensitivity on occupational outcomes. Trait anxiety negatively correlated with job satisfaction ($r = -.17, p < .05$) and career satisfaction ($r = -.25, p < .01$), but the rest of the anxiety subtypes did not significantly correlate with any of the occupational outcomes (see Table 1).

A series of hierarchical regression analyses examined predictions from anxiety subtypes at the ages of 17-19 to each of the occupational outcomes at ages 27-29. Gender and income

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were entered as covariates in all models, followed by the four anxiety subtype variables. There were no significant results with gender or income. Results indicated that trait anxiety was a predictor of lower professional ambition ($\beta = -.27, p < .01$), job satisfaction ($\beta = -.23, p < .05$), and career satisfaction ($\beta = -.40, p < .001$). The other anxiety subtypes were not significant predictors of any occupational outcomes in regression analyses.

Hypothesis 2. *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.*

Analyses next examined the extent to which conscientiousness, grit, positive coping skills, and emotion regulation skills might moderate the relationship between anxiety and occupational outcomes. To test this hypothesis, a series of hierarchical regression analyses were conducted. All analyses included gender and income as covariates, one anxiety subtype variable, the two coping and two personality variables, and the interactions between the anxiety subtype and coping/personality variables. Interaction variables were created by standardizing the anxiety subtype and coping/personality variables and then multiplying them together.

Ambition

Hierarchical regression analyses investigated interactions between each anxiety subtype and personality traits, ER/coping skills, and professional ambition. Gender and income were entered as covariates, but neither were found to be significant. Significant main effects were found between positive coping skills at age 26 and ambition at ages 27-29 in regressions accounting for the effects of trait anxiety ($\beta = .29, p < .01$), anxious arousal ($\beta = .39, p < .01$), rejection sensitivity ($\beta = .24, p < .05$), and implicit rejection sensitivity ($\beta = .33, p < .01$). Results indicated a significant interaction between anxious arousal and conscientiousness predicting

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ambition ($\beta = .29, p < .05$; see Figure 1). The interaction shows that physically anxious individuals with higher conscientiousness experience higher levels of ambition as compared to anxious individuals with lower conscientiousness. Results also indicated an interaction between trait anxiety and emotion regulation predicting ambition ($\beta = .20, p < .05$; see Figure 2). This demonstrates that cognitively anxious individuals with higher emotion regulation convey higher levels of ambition as compared to anxious individuals with lower emotion regulation.

Work Performance

Following the same approach described above, regression analyses were used to examine personality traits and ER/coping skills as potential moderators between subtypes of anxiety and work performance. Gender and income were entered as covariates, but gender only played a significant role in the regression examining anxious arousal and work performance, such that females were reported as lower on work performance as compared to males ($\beta = -.26, p < .05$). Several main effects were found between positive coping at age 26 and work performance at ages 27-29 when accounting for the effects of trait anxiety ($\beta = .32, p < .05$), anxious arousal ($\beta = .39, p < .01$), and rejection sensitivity ($\beta = .26, p < .05$). Results indicated a significant interaction between implicit rejection sensitivity and emotion regulation predicting work performance ($\beta = .35, p < .05$; see Figure 3). This interaction shows that people with implicit rejection sensitivity and high emotion regulation experience higher levels of performance at work than anxious people with low emotion regulation.

Job Satisfaction

A hierarchical regression next examined personality traits and ER/coping skills as moderators between anxiety subtypes and job satisfaction. Gender and income were entered as covariates, but neither were found to be significant. A significant main effect for positive coping

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skills was found, such that higher levels of coping at age 26 predicted higher job satisfaction at ages 27-29 when accounting for the effects of implicit rejection sensitivity ($\beta = .28, p < .05$). A significant interaction between anxious arousal and emotion regulation predicting job satisfaction was found ($\beta = -.37, p < .05$; see Figure 4). This interaction demonstrates that physically anxious individuals with high emotion regulation convey lower levels of job satisfaction than anxious people with low emotion regulation. Results also indicated a significant interaction between trait anxiety and grit predicting job satisfaction ($\beta = .24, p < .05$; see Figure 5). This shows that cognitively anxious individuals with high grit experience higher job satisfaction as compared to anxious people with low grit.

Job Success

Following the same approach described above, regression analyses were used to examine personality traits and ER/coping skills as potential moderators between subtypes of anxiety and job success. Gender and income were entered as covariates, but neither were found to be significant. Additionally, no significant main effects were found. However, there was a significant interaction between trait anxiety and conscientiousness predicting job success ($\beta = -.37, p < .05$; see Figure 6). This interaction indicates that anxious individuals with high conscientiousness experience lower levels of success at work than anxious individuals with low conscientiousness.

Career Satisfaction

Finally, regression analyses were performed to investigate interactions between anxiety subtypes, personality traits, ER/coping skills, and career satisfaction. Gender and income were entered as covariates, but neither were found to be significant. Main effects were found between grit at age 27 and career satisfaction at age 29 when accounting for the effects of trait anxiety (β

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= .32, $p < .01$), rejection sensitivity ($\beta = .32, p < .01$), and implicit rejection sensitivity ($\beta = .36, p < .05$). Results indicated a significant interaction between anxious arousal and emotion regulation predicting career satisfaction ($\beta = .35, p < .05$; see Figure 7). This interaction shows that physically anxious individuals with high emotion regulation convey higher levels of career satisfaction than physically anxious people with low emotion regulation.

Discussion

This study provides evidence for links between anxiety subtypes, personality traits, ER/coping skills, and occupational outcomes, while also providing support for personality traits and ER/coping skills as moderators of links between anxiety and occupational outcomes. Anxiety symptoms were assessed at ages 17-19, personality and ER/coping were assessed at ages 26-27, and occupational outcomes were assessed at ages 27-29.

Connections between anxiety symptoms and negative occupational outcomes were hypothesized based on the findings of previous research, which suggest that anxious individuals are less likely to experience success and satisfaction at work (Boudreau, Boswell, & Judge, 2001; Judge, Higgins, Thoresen, & Barrick, 1999). Data from the current study suggest some support for this hypothesis. Trait anxiety negatively correlated with job and career satisfaction. Additionally, trait anxiety predicted low professional ambition, low job satisfaction, and low career satisfaction in regression equations after controlling for gender and income. However, significant long-term links were not found between the other anxiety subtypes and occupational outcomes that were examined in this study. This implies that if a person has symptoms of trait anxiety, as opposed to symptoms of anxious arousal or rejection sensitivity, they are less likely to feel fulfilled and happy in their current job and career path. One explanation could be that cognitive symptoms such as worry and rumination make it increasingly difficult to feel

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competent and productive. These maladaptive thought processes might also interfere with how a person perceives their work environment. It is possible that trait anxiety is more pervasive due to its cognitive components, while anxious arousal and rejection sensitivity may only affect specific situations that induce stress. Rejection sensitivity, by definition, is the tendency to anxiously expect, readily perceive, and overreact to rejection in interpersonal situations (Downey & Feldman, 1996). Therefore, it follows that rejection sensitivity may have greater implications during social aspects of work such as networking and customer interactions. Anxious arousal may only have a significant effect on performance-related tasks such as public speaking. The Yerkes-Dodson law of optimal arousal supports this theory. It states that the performance of a task increases with stress up to a certain point; when the level of anxious arousal is too high, performance is impaired (Yerkes & Dodson, 1908). It is also dependent on task difficulty, as the successful completion of simple tasks correspond with higher arousal and complex tasks correspond with lower arousal. This provides a possible explanation for the selective effect that anxious arousal may have on specific situations involving performance.

The second hypothesis predicted that ER/coping skills would have a more robust moderating effect on anxiety and occupational outcomes compared to personality traits such as conscientiousness and grit. The results of the current study also provided some support for this hypothesis, though the findings suggested additional distinctions regarding how these potential moderators behaved with anxiety and occupational outcomes. Interestingly, coping skills had main effects with several occupational outcomes including ambition, work performance, and job satisfaction after controlling for each subtype of anxiety. Thus, coping skills seem to be generally positive predictors of occupational outcomes even after considering the potential negative effects of anxiety. However, no significant interactions were found, suggesting that the helpful effects of

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positive coping skills may be more ubiquitous and not limited only to high-anxiety contexts. This corresponds with the current literature which demonstrates that the development of adaptive coping skills benefit both clinical and non-clinical populations (Borkovec & Ruscio, 2001; Hartman, Evans, & Anderson, 2017).

Findings did indicate, however, that the potentially negative effects of anxiety on occupational outcomes might be mitigated through use of emotion regulation skills. In this case, no main effects were found concerning emotion regulation; however, a significant interaction indicated that individuals with symptoms of anxious arousal and high emotion regulation experienced higher career satisfaction relative to individuals with anxious arousal and lower emotion regulation. It may be that if a person is physically stressed, but can control their emotions to adapt to various workplace situations, then they may feel like they can adequately manage their proposed career path. A second interaction suggested that individuals with high trait anxiety and high emotion regulation experience higher ambition when compared to anxious individuals with lower emotion regulation. If a person experiences general anxiety and worry, but can manage their emotional reactions to adapt to stressful situations, then they are likely to adequately manage the responsibilities of their current position; this may allow them time and energy to think ahead and set long-term goals. A third interaction indicated that individuals with implicit rejection sensitivity and high emotion regulation tend to perform well at their job compared to individuals with implicit rejection sensitivity and lower emotion regulation. If an individual is constantly ready to perceive rejection from others, but is able to control their emotions so that this anxiety is not obvious, then that indicates a certain mastery of interpersonal skills that could be useful in a professional context. Also, expecting rejection may motivate an individual to perform at their best in order to avoid experiencing rejection from a manager or

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boss. The ability to appropriately respond to emotional experiences while also attempting to avoid possible rejection from others demonstrates thorough attentiveness that may translate to higher work performance. Unlike positive coping skills, which had multiple direct associations with occupational outcomes, emotion regulation seems to be more nuanced in its relationship with anxiety subtypes. Perhaps emotion regulation skills are only helpful if an individual experiences symptoms of anxiety, whereas coping skills are applied more broadly across stressful contexts and thus more likely to be useful in the occupational context regardless of the presence of anxiety. Indeed, a study by Billings and Moos (1981) examined coping responses to illness, death, economic, child, other interpersonal, and other non-interpersonal stressors. They found that active, problem-focused coping skills attenuate the relationship between a variety of stressful life events and overall functioning.

Results also indicated that the presence of personality traits such as conscientiousness and grit may also ameliorate the negative effects of high anxiety on occupational outcomes. No main effects were found concerning conscientiousness; however, a significant interaction indicated that individuals with high anxious arousal and high conscientiousness experienced higher levels of professional ambition relative to individuals with anxious arousal and lower conscientiousness. Anxious individuals may be able to dream big in terms of professional goals if they can successfully manage physical stress by planning ahead. The ability to control challenging demands through behavioral inhibition and organizational behaviors is a core characteristic of self-efficacy, which is associated with enhanced motivation to achieve in academic and occupational settings (Bandura, 1997). Therefore, conscientiousness appears to be an important moderator between anxious arousal and professional ambition.

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Findings also indicated that the negative relationship between anxiety and occupational outcomes can be reduced by the presence of grit. Positive main effects were found between grit and career satisfaction when accounting for trait anxiety, rejection sensitivity, and implicit rejection sensitivity. Similarly, positive main effects were found between grit and job satisfaction when accounting for implicit rejection sensitivity. A significant interaction indicated that if a person has high levels of trait anxiety and grit, they are more likely to experience higher levels of job satisfaction as compared to individuals with lower levels of grit. A possible explanation for this phenomenon is that the pursuit of a larger goal can help overcome negative symptoms of anxiety in the present, as demonstrated in a study by Sheridan et al. (2015). In this study, grit correlated negatively with anxiety and positively with hope, a positive state that is directed towards the future. Similarly, a study by Singh and Jha (2008) found a positive correlation between grit and life satisfaction. Thus, a focus on long-term goals may manifest into being content in one's current position. Although grit and conscientiousness seem to be closely-related personality traits, these differing results show that there are some nuances that are not yet understood to their full extent. Grit is often considered a sub-trait of conscientiousness, which may explain why they sometimes show similar results, but not in all cases. In a study by MacCann, Duckworth, and Roberts (2009), the concept of grit seemed to correspond to the facets of perseverance and task planning, which focus on goal-oriented behaviors and the ability to overcome obstacles. These facets had moderate effect sizes when examining their relationship to academic outcomes; this contrasted with the smaller effect sizes of facets such as tidiness and perfectionism. Future research should examine different sub-traits of conscientiousness, other than grit, in comparison to anxiety and occupational outcomes in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the complexities introduced in this study.

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Findings from the current study mostly supported hypotheses based on previous research. However, there were a few results that seemed to contradict the initial predictions. There was a significant interaction between anxious arousal and emotion regulation for predicting job satisfaction in which high anxiety and greater use of emotion regulation skills were associated with lower job satisfaction relative to less use of emotion regulation skills. Perhaps anxious individuals reinterpret situations to reduce negative thoughts in a way that externalizes their problems. They may attribute their negative emotions to external factors, like their supervisor or their salary. This may lead anxious individuals to think negatively of their job in order to preserve their self-esteem. As a result, job satisfaction can be low for anxious individuals with high emotion regulation skills.

Additionally, there was a significant interaction between trait anxiety and conscientiousness predicting job success that challenged the initial predictions of this study. This interaction indicated that individuals with cognitive symptoms of anxiety and high conscientiousness experienced lower levels of success at work than anxious individuals with low conscientiousness. Excessive worrying may distract anxious individuals from completing tasks or performing well on the job. Importantly, conscientiousness can manifest in different ways; sometimes it is embodied more by organized behavior, and in other cases, it can be more defined by impulse control and behavioral inhibition. Therefore, certain aspects of conscientiousness may have a more significant impact on occupational outcomes. In a previously mentioned study by MacCann, Duckworth, and Roberts (2009), eight different facets of conscientiousness were identified: industriousness, perfectionism, tidiness, procrastination refrainment, control, cautiousness, task planning, and perseverance. Not surprisingly, industriousness, which is defined by devotion and effort in application to work, was the most predictive facet of academic

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achievement. On the other hand, tidiness, which is defined by the organization of physical possessions, was the least predictive facet of academic outcomes. Thus, it might also be the case that conscientiousness has an overall positive effect on occupational outcomes, but that being too conscientiousness (or being such in the context of high anxiety) can cause some impairment. For example, having extreme perfectionism might prevent a person from reaching deadlines if they focus too much on refining minor details. Therefore, an anxious person may have more difficulties thriving in the workforce if they tend to overanalyze such details. Overall, it seems that anxiety subtypes, moderators, and their effects on occupational outcomes, are complex and require further research to develop a more thorough understanding of these relationships.

There are several limitations to these findings that are worth noting. First, the sample used in this study lacks Hispanic and Asian representation, which makes it difficult to generalize the results of this study to those populations. The generalizability of these findings is also limited, because participants represent only the Southeast region of the United States. Future replications should include more participants of Hispanic and Asian descent and use samples from different regions of the U.S, or even outside of the U.S, in order to increase external validity. Additionally, participants in this study did not necessarily have clinical levels of anxiety, so the results may be more understated than if a clinical population had been utilized. Future research should replicate these findings with a sample of people with diagnosed anxiety disorders to see if these effects are more pronounced.

It is also important to note that conclusions concerning causality cannot be drawn from naturalistic longitudinal studies; therefore, it is possible that anxiety, personality, and ER/coping may not directly cause changes in the occupational outcomes of young adults, but instead, indicate the presence of other characteristics that affect professional ambition, satisfaction,

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performance, and success. Future research should use methods other than correlational, longitudinal, self-report, peer-report, parent-report, and archival data. For example, future studies should consider collecting employer feedback when examining occupational outcomes like job satisfaction, performance, and success. This may be a more valid method of understanding how well an anxious individual is adapting in the working world, since peer and parent reports can reflect bias. Investigating anxiety, personality, ER/coping, and occupational outcomes through multiple perspectives will hopefully lead to a more thorough understanding of this topic.

Hopefully, future research can examine the relationship between anxiety and occupational outcomes more comprehensively than what was possible in the current study. In this longitudinal study, participants are currently in their late 20's, so they are just starting long-term careers. Therefore, it is difficult to judge overall career satisfaction and success this early in their lifetime. In order to understand the full extent of occupational outcomes, researchers should measure success and satisfaction at the end of people's careers. Recruiting participants who are recently retired may be helpful for this line of inquiry. In addition, participants' professions were not specified in the current study when assessing professional ambition, satisfaction, performance, and success. It is possible that people with anxiety may thrive more in certain types of occupations. Thus, future studies should examine specific professions when studying people with anxiety disorders. Overall, the topic of anxiety in professional contexts needs to be explored further in order to improve employee satisfaction, performance, and success in the workforce.

Despite the limitations in this study, the results are consistent with the existing literature in supporting that anxiety negatively affects occupational outcomes and that certain personality traits and ER/coping skills can reduce symptoms of anxiety. If replicated and confirmed by further research, these findings have significant implications for anxious individuals and their

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employers. This study demonstrates the possibility that people with anxiety can find success and satisfaction in their chosen occupations. Thus, employers should not necessarily discount a potential employee who exhibits signs of anxiety. Instead, they should look for the presence of personality traits such as conscientiousness and grit, as well as proficiency in employing emotion regulation and positive coping skills when making hiring decisions. These findings also suggest that interventions that target the development of coping skills may help anxious individuals achieve success and satisfaction in their chosen profession. These types of interventions could be used in schools as preventative measures for anxious adolescents, or they could be tailored to help anxious adults who are currently struggling in the workforce. In this way, quality of life and productivity can be improved to benefit society overall.

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Table 1. Means, standard deviations, 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;

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

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Table 2.
Predicting Occupational Outcomes from Trait Anxiety Interacting with Coping, ER, Conscientiousness, and Grit.

	Ambition			Work Performance			Success			Job Satisfaction			Career Satisfaction		
	β final	ΔR^2	R^2	β final	ΔR^2	R^2	β final	ΔR^2	R^2	β final	ΔR^2	R^2	β final	ΔR^2	R^2
Step 1.			.03			.01			.00			.01			.00
Gender	.15			.06			.06			.05			.00		
Income	.08			.07			.01			.09			-.04		
Step 2.		.02	.05		.00	.01		.01	.01		.03*	.04		.06**	.06
Trait Anxiety (18)	-.13			.03			.09			-.17*			-.25**		
Step 3.		.11**	.16**		.06	.07		.03	.04		.06	.10		.23***	.29***
Coping (26)	.24*			.24			.14			.11			.12		
Emotion Regulation (26)	.13			-.10			.06			.11			-.02		
Conscientiousness (26)	.00			-.01			-.07			.12			.19		
Grit (27)	.08			.07			-.05			-.04			.31**		
Step 5		.07*	.23**		.05	.12		.06	.10		.06	.16		.01	.30***
Trait Anxiety (18) X Coping (26)	.01			.07			.14			.17			.00		
Trait Anxiety (18) X Emotion Reg. (26)	.20*			.11			.12			.07			-.04		
Trait Anxiety (18) X Conscientiousness (26)	-.03			.10			-.37*			-.24			.05		
Trait Anxiety (18) X Grit (27)	.18			.10			.21			.24*			.02		

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

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Table 3.
Predicting Occupational Outcomes from Anxious Arousal Interacting with Coping, ER, Conscientiousness, and Grit.

	Ambition			Work Performance			Success			Job Satisfaction			Career Satisfaction		
	β final	ΔR^2	R^2	β final	ΔR^2	R^2									
Step 1.			.03			.01			.00			.01			.00
Gender	.15			.06			.06			.05			.00		
Income	.08			.07			.01			.09			-.04		
Step 2.		.00	.03		.01	.02		.01	.01		.03	.04		.01	.01
Anxious Arousal (18)	.01			-.06			.06			-.15			-.06		
Step 3.		.18**	.21**		.14	.16		.05	.06		.11	.15*		.33***	.34***
Coping (26)	.30*			.35*			.10			.11			.04		
Emotion Regulation (26)	.18			-.02			.07			.13			-.09		
Conscientiousness (26)	-.03			-.02			.02			.16			.20		
Grit (27)	.10			.05			-.16			-.02			.44***		
Step 5		.08	.29**		.05	.21		.03	.09		.07	.22*		.05	.39***
Anxious Arousal (18) X Coping (26)	-.01			.06			.10			.23			-.09		
Anxious Arousal (18) X Emotion Reg. (26)	-.11			-.27			-.20			-.37*			.35*		
Anxious Arousal (18) X Conscientiousness (26)	.29*			.16			-.10			.04			.06		
Anxious Arousal (18) X Grit (27)	.05			.14			.30			.03			-.31		

Note. Gender coded as: 1 = males, 2 = females;

* $p \leq .05$, ** $p \leq .01$, *** $p \leq .001$

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Table 4.

Predicting Occupational Outcomes from Rejection Sensitivity Interacting with Coping, ER, Conscientiousness, and Grit.

	Ambition			Work Performance			Success			Job Satisfaction			Career Satisfaction		
	β final	ΔR^2	R^2	β final	ΔR^2	R^2									
Step 1.			.03			.01			.00			.01			.00
Gender	.15			.06			.06			.05			.00		
Income	.08			.07			.01			.09			-.04		
Step 2.		.00	.03		.00	.01		.01	.01		.00	.01		.01	.01
Rejection Sensitivity (18)	-.01			.01			.05			.00			.08		
Step 3.		.12**	.15**		.05	.06		.04	.05		.09	.10		.24***	.25***
Coping (26)	.25*			.25			.09			.11			.11		
Emotion Regulation (26)	.14			-.07			.10			.13			.07		
Conscientiousness (26)	.00			-.03			-.07			.12			.17		
Grit (27)	.09			.05			-.10			-.01			.32**		
Step 5		.01	.16*		.04	.10		.01	.06		.06	.16		.01	.26**
Rejection Sensitivity (18) X Coping (26)	.06			.14			-.11			.22			-.09		
Rejection Sensitivity (18) X Emotion Reg. (26)	-.09			-.25			.09			-.21			.06		
Rejection Sensitivity (18) X Conscientiousness (26)	-.13			-.09			.03			-.23			-.06		
Rejection Sensitivity (18) X Grit (27)	.12			.09			-.01			.17			-.01		

Note. Gender coded as: 1 = males, 2 = females;

* $p \leq .05$, ** $p \leq .01$, *** $p \leq .001$.

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Table 5.
Predicting Occupational Outcomes from Implicit Rejection Sensitivity Interacting with Coping, ER, Conscientiousness, and Grit.

	Ambition			Work Performance			Success			Job Satisfaction			Career Satisfaction		
	β final	ΔR^2	R^2	β final	ΔR^2	R^2									
Step 1.			.03			.01			.00			.01			.00
Gender	.15			.06			.06			.05			.00		
Income	.08			.07			.01			.09			-.04		
Step 2.		.00	.03		.02	.03		.01	.01		.00	.01		.02	.02
Implicit Rej. Sens. (18)	-.05			.14			-.04			.03			.13		
Step 3.		.16**	.19*		.03	.06		.07	.08		.13*	.14		.25***	.27**
Coping (26)	.31*			.17			.13			.28*			.11		
Emotion Regulation (26)	.15			-.03			.06			.09			-.14		
Conscientiousness (26)	-.01			.00			-.05			-.03			.25		
Grit (27)	.07			.02			.05			.14			.32*		
Step 5		.06	.25*		.11	.17		.04	.12		.04	.18		.05	.32*
IRS (18) X Coping (26)	.03			-.19			.11			-.14			-.14		
IRS (18) X Emotion Reg. (26)	.19			.35*			.08			.15			.08		
IRS (18) X Conscientiousness (26)	-.21			.11			.10			-.07			-.13		
IRS (18) X Grit (27)	.07			-.21			-.17			.07			-.04		

Note. Gender coded as: 1 = males, 2 = females;

* $p \leq .05$, ** $p \leq .01$, *** $p \leq .00$

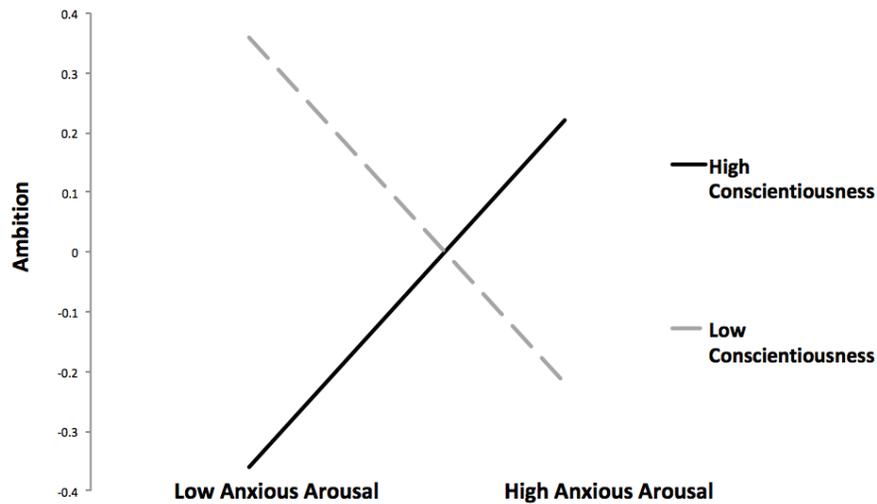


Figure 1. Interaction between anxious arousal (17-19) and conscientiousness (26) predicting ambition (27-29). High and low values of the constructs represent scores 1 SD above and below the mean, respectively.

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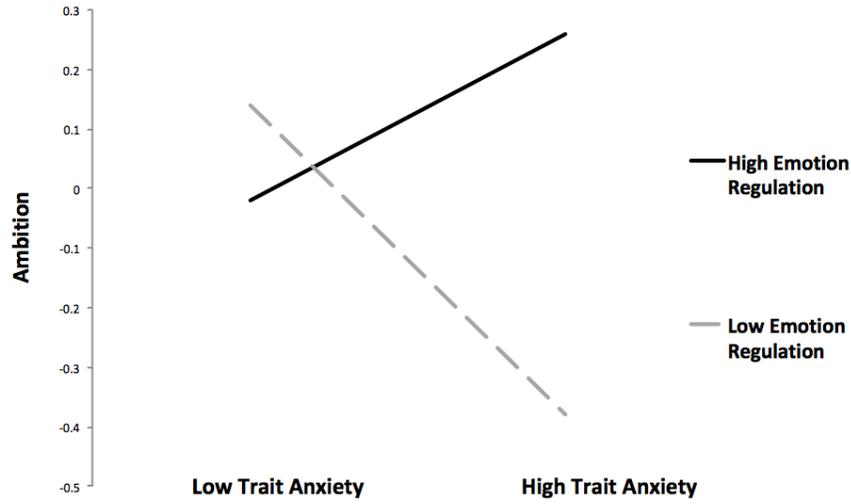


Figure 2. Interaction between trait anxiety (18-19) and emotion regulation (26) predicting ambition (27-29). High and low values of the constructs represent scores 1 SD above and below the mean, respectively.

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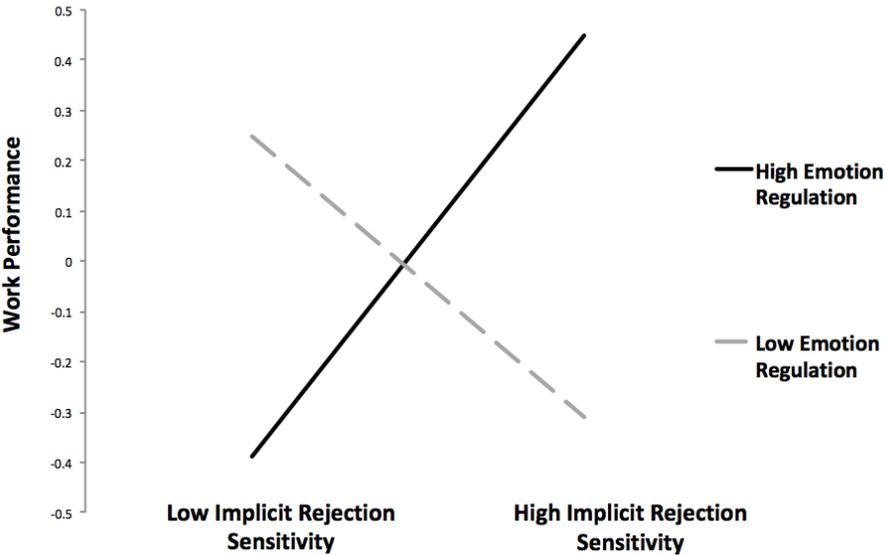


Figure 3. Interaction between implicit rejection sensitivity (17-18) and emotion regulation (26) predicting work performance (27-29). High and low values of the constructs represent scores 1 SD above and below the mean, respectively.

ANXIETY AND CAREER OUTCOMES

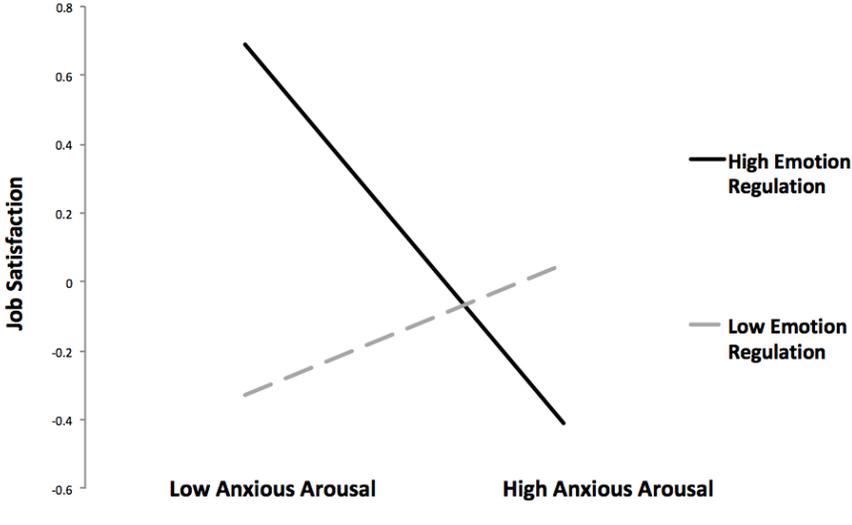


Figure 4. Interaction between anxious arousal (17-19) and emotion regulation (26) predicting job satisfaction (27-29). High and low values of the constructs represent scores 1 SD above and below the mean, respectively.

ANXIETY AND CAREER OUTCOMES

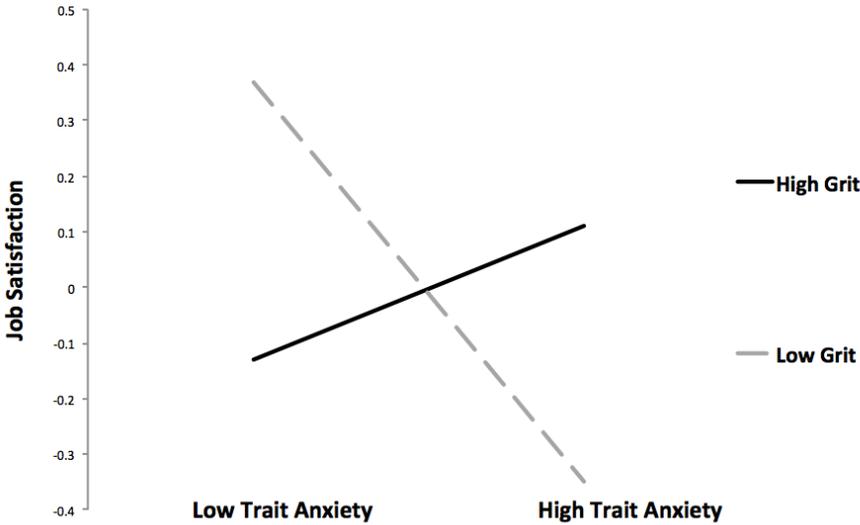


Figure 5. Interaction between trait anxiety (17-19) and grit (27) predicting job satisfaction (27-29). High and low values of the constructs represent scores 1 SD above and below the mean, respectively.

ANXIETY AND CAREER OUTCOMES

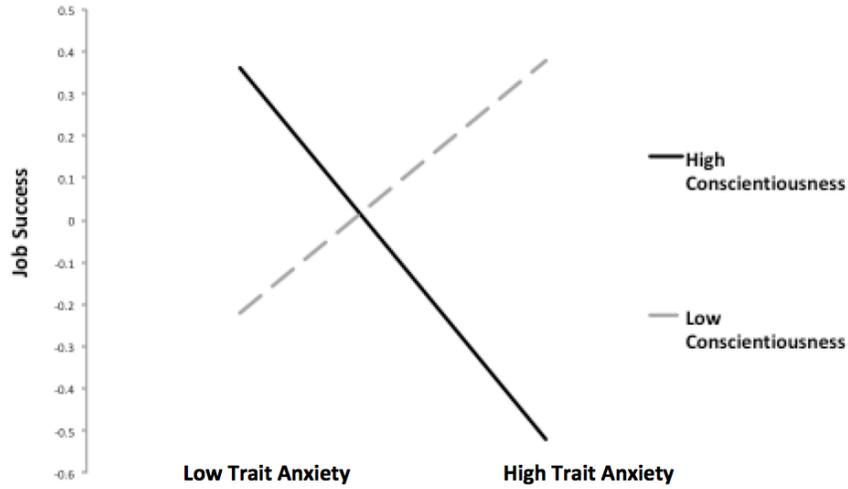


Figure 6. Interaction between trait anxiety (17-19) and conscientiousness (26) predicting job success (17-19). High and low values of the constructs represent scores 1 SD above and below the mean, respectively.

ANXIETY AND CAREER OUTCOMES

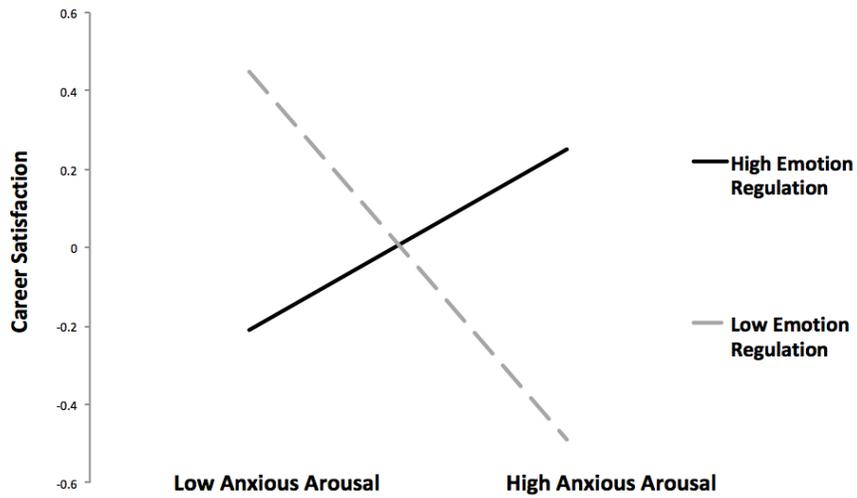


Figure 7. Interaction between anxious arousal (17-19) and emotion regulation (26) predicting career satisfaction (29). High and low values of the constructs represent scores 1 SD above and below the mean, respectively.