Responses to Emotional Situations

Alli DeMoss
Faculty Advisor: Dr. Katie Garrison
The University of Alabama

ABSTRACT

- Our goal was to understand the use of two emotion regulation (ER) strategies, cognitive reappraisal (CR) and expressive suppression (ES).

- We also examined how social anxiety (SA) moderates the effects of social contexts (close others vs. non-close others) on ER.

- The results yielded that participants use more ES in negative emotional situations when in either of the social contexts.

- We found that SA did not moderate the effects of social context or emotional valence on ER.

INTRODUCTION

- The significance of the following study is to understand the impact of social context on ER in individuals with various levels of SA.

- ER is defined as the processes individuals use to modify the emotions they experience, the intensity of the emotion, the duration of the emotion, and the expression of emotion[5].

- This study highlights the importance of two distinct ER strategies: ES and CR.

Expressive suppression is a form of response modulation that is triggered when an individual inhibits their own emotional expression to suppress what they are feeling.

Cognitive Reappraisal is the process by which an individual purposefully focuses on specific aspects of an emotional situation to re-frame its significance.

- The study will assess the dependence of ES and CR on the particular social context surrounding the emotional event and individual differences in SA.

Hypotheses

1. The social context will influence ER, such that there will be less ES when among close others compared to non-close others. Predictions are less clear for how CR is influenced by social context.
2. The valence of the emotional situation will influence ER, such that people will use more ES and CR in negative emotional situations compared to positive emotional situations.
3. The social context will have a stronger impact on ES and CR for those with higher SA versus lower SA.

METHODS

- Participants were randomly assigned to a social context (close others vs. non-close others), then presented with 2 positive and 2 negative hypothetical emotional scenarios in a random order (Table 1).

- Then, participants were asked to imagine that they were experiencing the particular situation within their assigned social context, then were given a free response text box to report how they would feel in the situation.

- The participants completed the main dependent measure assessing ER use, the Regulation of Emotion Systems-Ecological Momentary Assessment (RESS-EMA).

- Finally, the participants filled out questionnaires assessing general social anxiety, including the Social Interaction Anxiety Scale (SIAS)[8] and the Social Phobia Scale (SPS)[8], emotion regulation tendencies (ERQ)[6], and demographic information.

Table 1

Emotional Scenarios	
Positive	Negative
Date with Crush: You have had your eyes on a specific person for a few months now because they have a great personality and are very attractive to you. Y'all end up becoming close friends and get a text from them asking you out on a dinner date.	*Pet Died*: You have had your pet that you love dearly throughout your childhood. You have bonded with your pet throughout your life, but it has started aging, unfortunately. You receive a message from your vet saying your pet has passed away.
Receiving Honors:	*Failed Exam*:
You have been in school for many years figuring out what to do with your future and finally you find a specific subject that you are passionate about learning. After taking many classes and receiving high grades due to all your hard work, you are contacted by the university saying your hard work is recognized and you will be given honors.	It is your final exam and you have completed the study guide, discussed the content with your professor during office hours, and have been studying for hours all week so that you can pass the final exam. You take the exam and when you press submit, you receive a failing grade.

Note: This table describes all emotional scenarios that were shown to participants followed by a free response answer space.

RESULTS

- The data analysis plan was pre-registered online (https://doi.org/10.17605/OSF.IO/TD23E).

- CR was not influenced by the valence or social context of the scenario (See Figure 1).

- A main effect of valence was observed on ES, $F_{(1, 377)} = 202.988$, $p < .001$, $np2 = .350$, such that ES was higher in the negative scenarios versus the positive scenarios (See Figure 2).

- The use of emotional suppression was influenced by both the emotional valence of the situation and the social context.

- SA did not moderate the effects of social context or valence on CR, but predicted greater use of CR.

- SA predicted greater suppression of emotion but did not moderate the effect of social context or valence on suppression.
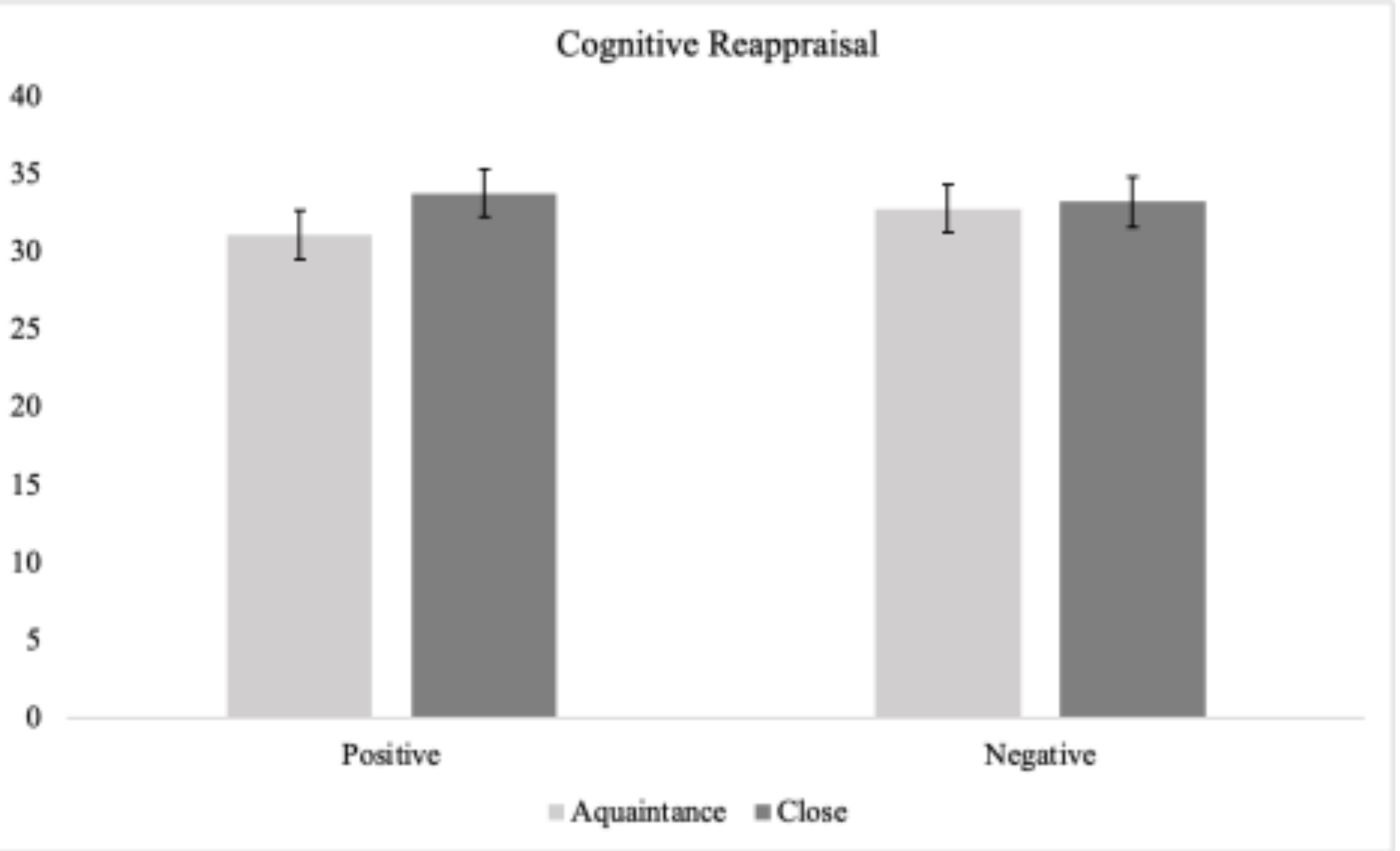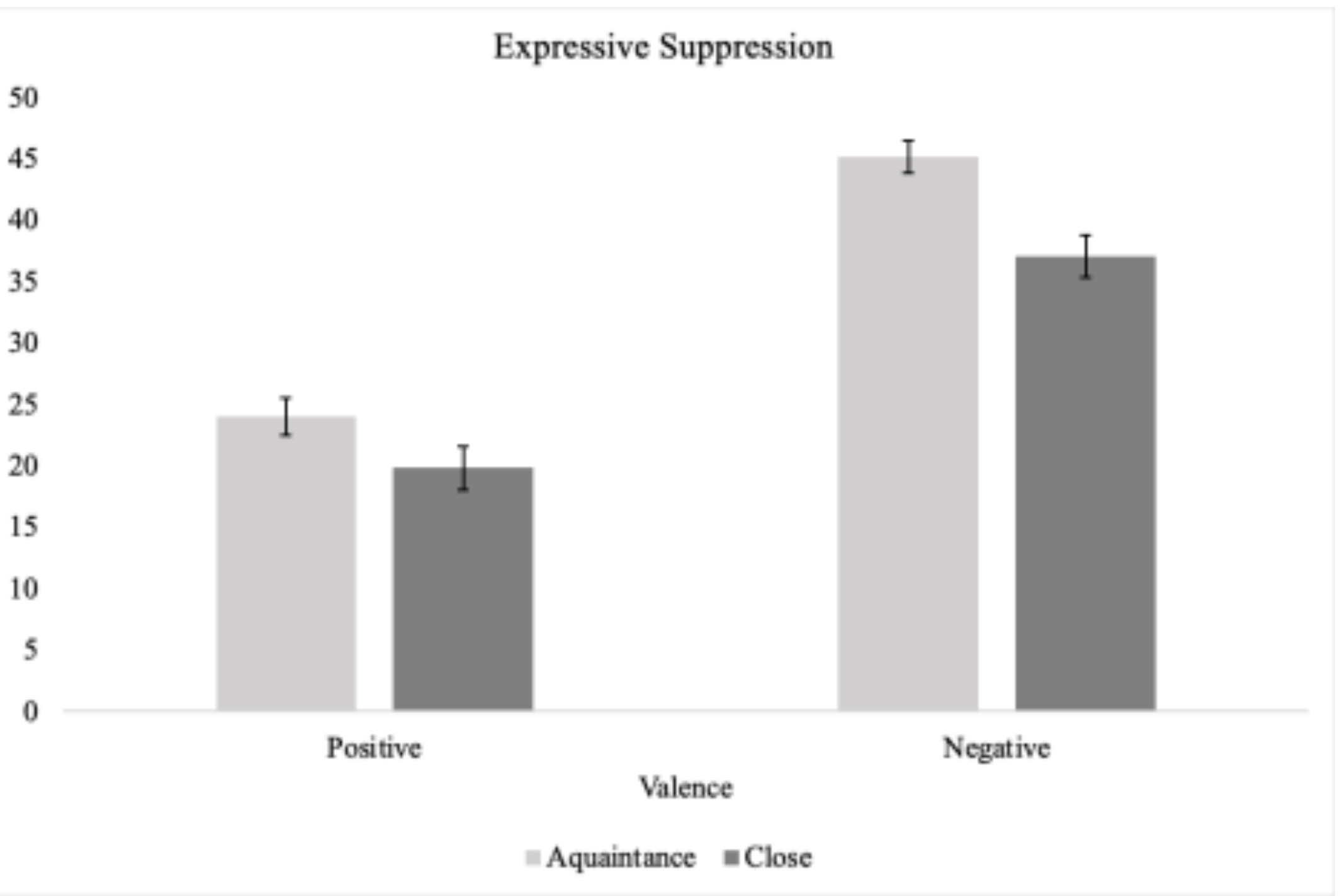
Figure #1

Figure #2

CONCLUSIONS/SIGNIFICANCE

- We addressed how undergraduate students use CR and ES based on emotionally charged situations and investigated if SA moderates the use of these emotion regulation strategies.

- From the results, we can infer that individuals are less likely to open up about emotional situations with people they are unfamiliar with compared to those they consider close friends or family.

- The results indicate that individuals are more likely to hold in negative emotions over positive emotions.

- Surprisingly, the results determined that there was not an amplified use of ER strategies based on the social context when analyzing levels of SA.

- Being that SA is characteristic of fearing social situations, it seemed logical that SA would moderate the use of ER in social contexts, however that was not the case.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

- Future research should consider experimental realism because a limitation of this study was that the data was recorded via self-report survey.

- It would also be beneficial to expand research to not only undergraduate students, but individuals of all age groups.

- Further research is important to help find treatments so that anyone diagnosed with or experiencing symptoms of SAD can efficiently use emotion regulation strategies without further experiencing social and cognitive consequences.

REFERENCES/LINK TO PAPER