

# Self-concept clarity and regulatory focus: Their relationship to self-esteem, depression, and anxiety

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## Introduction

### Self-Concept Clarity and Psychological adjustment

Self-Concept Clarity (SCC) is defined as the extent to which the contents of an individual's self-concept are clearly and confidently defined, internally consistent, and temporally stable (Campbell, Trapnell, Heine, Katz, Lavalley, & Lehman, 1996). To know clearly who we are contributes our psychological adjustment. High SCC is related to higher self-esteem (SE), lower depression and anxiety (Campbell, et al., 1996; Tokunaga & Horiuchi, 2012). However, there is only one study (Parise, Canzi, Olivari, & Ferrari, 2019) tried to research the mechanism explaining the relationship between SCC and psychological adjustment. The purpose of the present study is to elucidate mechanism that SCC affects psychological adjustment and this study focuses on self-regulation as one variable underlying this relationship.

### Self-regulation and Psychological adjustment

One of the theories on self-regulation, regulatory focus theory (Higgins, 1997; 1998), proposes two motivational systems: promotion focus and prevention focus. Self-regulation with a promotion focus (ProF) involves advancement and accomplishment. Pursuing promotion goals means making good things happen and engenders an eager, positive-outcome-focused motivational state. Self-regulation with a prevention focus (PreF) involves concerns with security, protection, and responsibility. Pursuing prevention goals means keeping bad things from happening and engenders a vigilant, negative-outcome-focused motivational state (Klenk, Strauman, & Higgins, 2011).

In the literatures on regulatory focus theory, ProF and PreF are related to depression and anxiety respectively. Especially, whereas chronic prevention system failure is likely to produce over time generalized anxiety and depression symptoms, chronic promotion system failure is likely to produce depression and hypo-eagerness (Review for Klenk et al., 2011). Also, ProF is positively related to SE and PreF is negatively related to SE (McGregor, Gailliot, Vasquez, & Nash, 2007).

### The relationship between Self-Concept Clarity and Psychological adjustment via Regulatory Focus

Self-concept is used as a guide in selecting which goals to actually pursue (Light, 2017), and to know with clarity who and what people are allows them to predict other's response to them and what they will do in the future (Boucher, Bloch, & Pelletier, 2016). High SCC can provide people with visions for the future, so that could allow them conduct self-regulation with ProF to gain positive outcomes. Then, this relationship would contribute to better psychological adjustment. On the other hand, low SCC cannot allow people to have visions for the future. That would cause people uneasiness and make them do self-regulation with PreF to avoid negative outcomes. Then, this relationship would contribute to their worse psychological adjustment.

The present study investigates how two regulatory systems mediate between SCC and psychological adjustment (SE, anxiety, and depression) by testing a structural model (Figure1) based on two following hypotheses.

1. SCC positively correlates with ProF, which contributes higher SE and lower depression and anxiety.
2. SCC negatively correlates with PreF, which contributes lower SE and higher depression and anxiety.

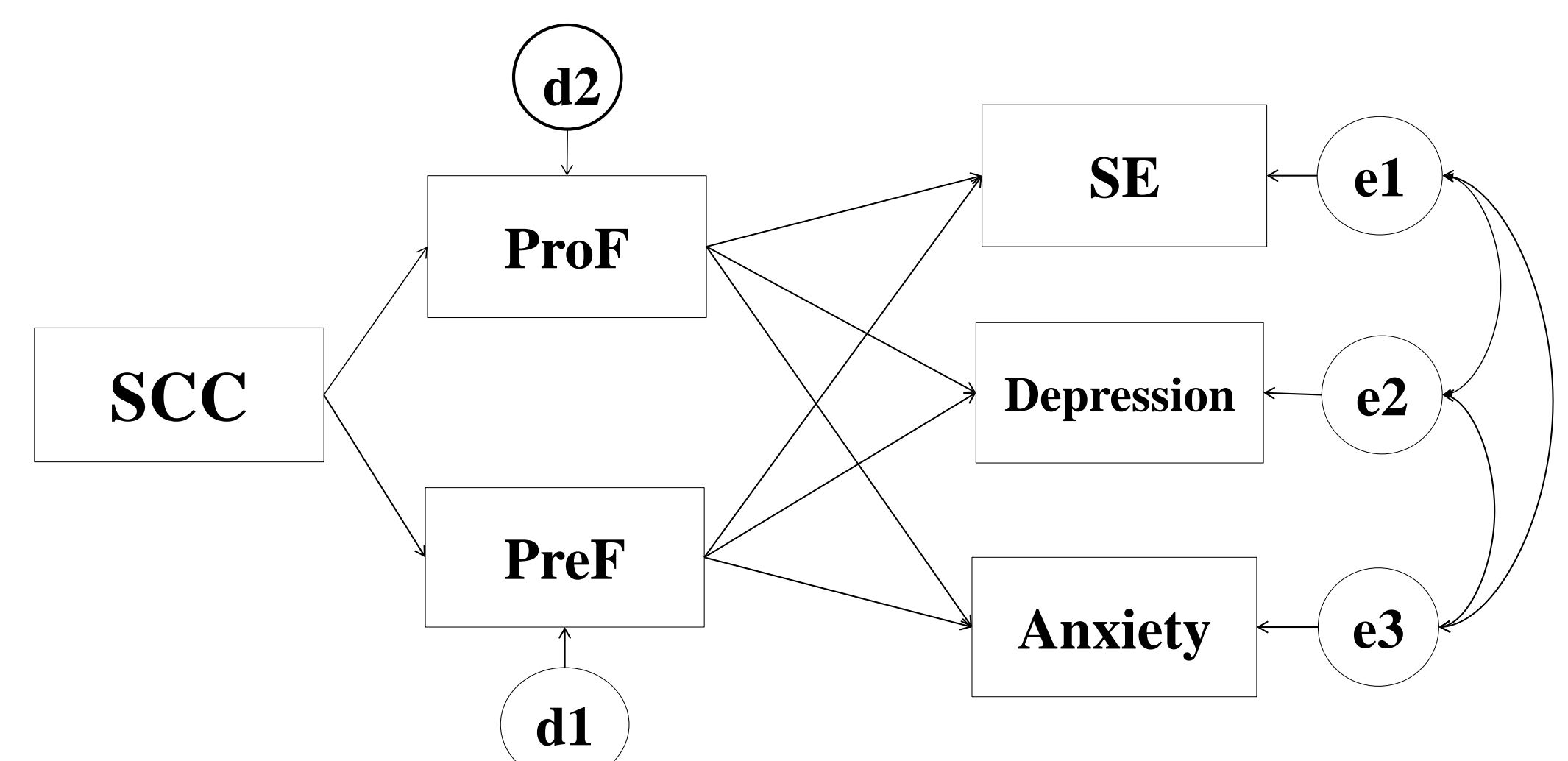


Figure1. Structural Model

## Method

**Participants** One hundred-thirty-nine women in a university in Japan

**Measures** SCC(Campbell et al., 1996), SE(Rosenberg, 1965), Promotion/Prevention Scale(Lockwood, Jordan, & Kunda, 2002), CES-D(Radloff, 1977), A-Trait of STAI(Spielberger, Gorsuch, & Lushene, 1970)

**Procedure** All questionnaires were administered in the class and required approximately 15 minutes to complete. At beginning of administration, researcher explained the purpose of the study and ethical considerations. After informed consent was obtained, participants completed the questionnaire. Participants perceived course credit as incentive.

## Result

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	$\alpha$	correlation					
				②	③	④	⑤	⑥	
① SCC	35.22	6.31	.74	.50 **	.07	-.51 **	-.61 **	-.59 **	
② SE	28.70	7.67	.88	—	.17 *	-.52 **	-.69 **	-.60 **	
③ ProF	37.14	6.35	.77		—	.08	-.11	-.20 *	
④ PreF	37.35	7.14	.80			—	.64 **	.46 **	
⑤ Anxiety	50.79	10.13	.88				—	.78 **	
⑥ Depression	16.05	9.78	.89					—	

\*  $p < .5$ , \*\*  $p < .01$

SCC: Self-Concept clarity, SE: Self-esteem, ProF: Promotion Focus, PreF: Prevention Focus

Table 1 shows means, standard deviations, Cronbach's alpha scales, and correlations for all variables. Almost all correlations were significant and in presumed direction. Contrary to expectation, correlation between SCC and ProF was not significant.

The result of SEM indicated that the overall fit of the hypothetical model was not adequate ( $X^2=37.715$  ( $df=4$ ,  $p=.000$ ),  $GFI=.926$ ,  $AGFI=.611$ ,  $CFI=.910$ ,  $RMSEA=.247$ ). Then, after direct paths from SCC to SE, anxiety and depression were added, the fit indices for model indicated almost good overall fit. ( $X^2=2.701$  ( $df=1$ ,  $p=.100$ ),  $GFI=.994$ ,  $AGFI=.865$ ,  $CFI=.995$ ,  $RMSEA=.111$ ). In the end, nonsignificant path from SCC to ProF was removed. Final structural model(Figure 2) fitted the data well( $X^2=3.450$  ( $df=2$ ,  $p=.178$ ),  $GFI=.992$ ,  $AGFI=.914$ ,  $CFI=.996$ ,  $RMSEA=.072$ ).

Finally, mediation analysis was conducted with HAD (Shimizu, 2016) to test the hypothesis that PreF mediates the relationship between SCC and psychological adjustment variables (SE, depression and anxiety). As a result, three all indirect effects were significant (Table 2).

## Discussion

### The direct effect from Self-Concept Clarity and Regulatory Focus to Psychological adjustment

All paths from SCC to SE, depression and anxiety were significant. Given individuals with high SCC report more purpose and meaning in their lives than with low SCC (Bigler, Neimeyer, & Brown, 2001), to know oneself is essential to live meaningful life and to maintain better psychological adjustment.

The direct paths from ProF and PreF to SE, depression and anxiety were significant. This finding suggests that pursuing promotion goals contributes better psychological adjustment and that pursuing prevention goals contributes worse psychological adjustment.

### Indirect effect from Self-Concept Clarity to Psychological adjustment via Regulatory Focus

It is found that SCC negatively correlates only with PreF. To know oneself uncertainly is a self-threat that makes individuals difficult to have visions for the future (Boucher, et al., 2016), which makes individuals try to ensure the security. Then, it is assumed that individuals with lower SCC are obsessed with pursuing prevention goals for the security, resulting in worse psychological adjustment.

SCC doesn't correlate with ProF. This result means that the extent of clarity about the self-concept structure doesn't affect whether they pursue promotion goals or not. Other variable might affect conducting self-regulation with ProF.

### Limitation

Only women participated in the present study. It is needed to continue this study and to recruit men because whether these findings can be generalized or not should be confirmed. Also, what variables affects ProF should be investigated.

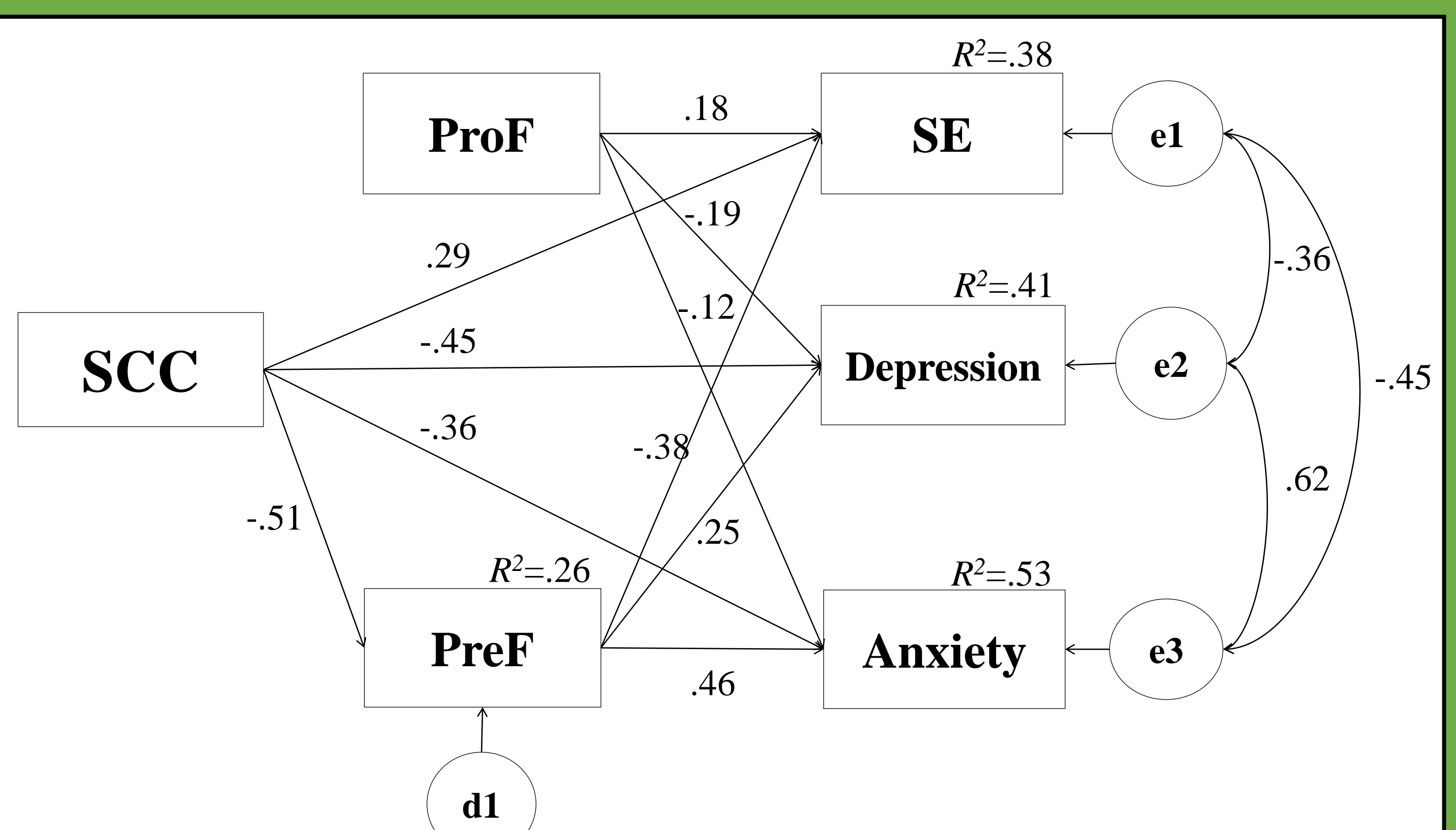


Figure2. Result of the final structural model.: All path coefficients are significant( $p < .05$ ). ( $X^2=3.450$  ( $df=2$ ,  $p=.178$ ),  $GFI=.992$ ,  $AGFI=.914$ ,  $CFI=.996$ ,  $RMSEA=.072$ )

Psychological Adjustment	Indirect Effect			Direct Effect		
	Bootstrap coefficient	Z	95% CI	SCC→PreF	PreF→PA	SCC→PA
Self-Esteem	.18	3.77	[.11, .34]	-.51**	-.36**	.32**
Depression	-.11	-2.73	[-.32, -.06]	-.52**	.22**	-.47**
Anxiety	-.23	-4.72	[-.53, -.23]	-.53**	.44**	-.38**

PA: Psychological Adjustment. All coefficients were significant.