

A Review of Contextual Factors of Interpersonal Regulation



in Emotional Disorders

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INTRODUCTION

- Depression and anxiety are major public health burdens and leading causes of disability and morbidity worldwide (World Health Organization, 2017). Given their economic and societal costs, more research is needed to identify predictors and maintaining mechanisms of emotional disorders.
- Interpersonal models posit that dysphoric persons' maladaptive social behaviors are a causal and prolonging factor of disorders (Gillet & Mazza, 2018; Joiner & Metalsky 2001; Zaki & Williams, 2018).
- While models have preliminary support, conceptual and theoretical inconsistencies and methodological limitations hinder this research. To clarify this research, the present integrative review will:
 1. Synthesize interpersonal models and prominent contextual mechanisms.
 2. Present a theoretical framework that integrates these models and discuss the model's implications.

INTERPERSONAL MODELS OF EMOTIONAL DISORDERS

Cognitive-behavioral theories of depression primarily inform interpersonal models that include:

- Interpersonal Theory of Depression (Coyne, 1976)
- Cognitive and Interpersonal Integration Model (Hammen, 1991)
- Integrative Interpersonal Framework (Joiner, 2000; Hammen, 1991)
- Global Enhancement and Specific Verification Theory (Evraire & Dozois, 2011)
- A transdiagnostic maladaptive interpersonal behavior is **excessive reassurance seeking**, in which an individual repeatedly seeks assurance about a perceived threat in the environment (Joiner et al., 1992; Parrish & Radomsky, 2010).

MECHANISMS

Several mechanisms mediate or moderate maladaptive social coping strategies in depression and anxiety:

Depression

- *Social support erosion* (Coyne, 1976; Joiner & Metalsky, 1995)
- *Interpersonal stress generation* (Hammen, 1991, 1992; Joiner, 2000)
- *Attachment/dependency* (Evraire & Dozois, 2014)

Anxiety

- *Safety-seeking behavior* (Parrish & Radomsky, 2010)
- *Dispersion of responsibility* (Halldorsson & Salkovskis, 2017)
- *Rumination* (Oppenheimer et al., 2012)
- *Intolerance of uncertainty* (Cougale et al., 2012; Halldorsson & Salkovskis, 2017)

LIMITATIONS OF THE LITERATURE

A review of the above-mentioned lines of literature and research identified several predominant limitations within these models and their methodology:

Inconsistent Operationalization of Constructs

- Social support
- Interpersonal stress
- Reassurance seeking

Theoretical Perspectives Limited

- Research limited to cognitive-behavioral theory

Limited Assessment Methods

- Reliance on self-report measures
- Limited scientific technology
- Few naturalistic observations
- Little consideration of dyadic processes

INTERPERSONAL EMOTION REGULATION

- *Emotion regulation* (ER) is one viable mechanism that may extend traditional interpersonal models (Aldao et al., 2016). ER is the process through which people control when and how they experience and express their emotions (Gross, 2002).
- ER may be understood in interpersonal contexts and these social emotion-regulatory processes are referred to as *interpersonal emotion regulation* (IER), broadly defined as the pursuit of a regulatory goal in the context of social interaction (Hofmann, 2014; Zaki & Williams, 2013).

References available upon request.

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IER MODELS

Process Model of IER

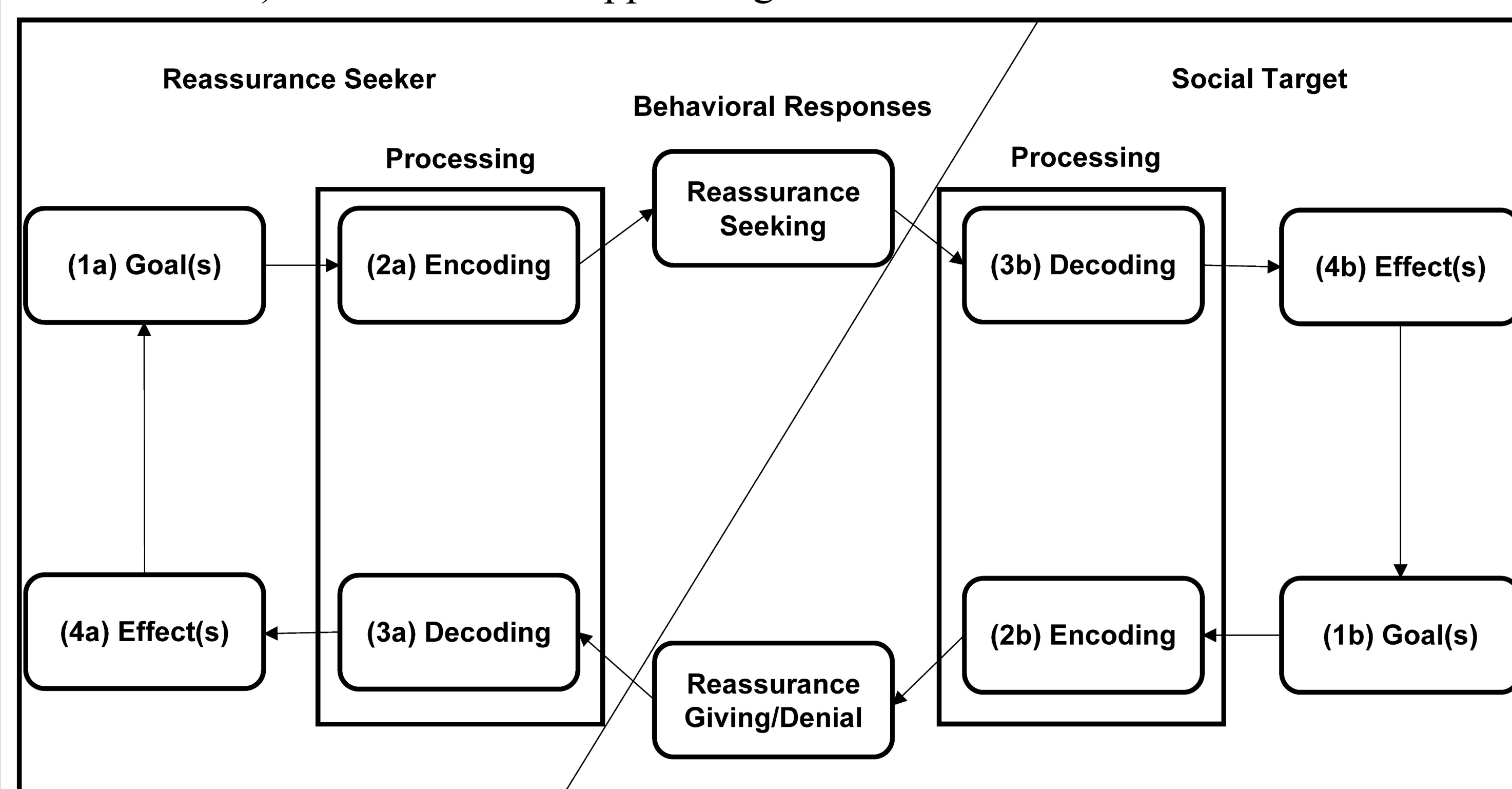
- Zaki and Williams' (2013) process model of IER categorizes strategies using two orthogonal dimensions. *Intrinsic interpersonal regulation* involves initiating social contact to regulate one's own emotion. *Extrinsic interpersonal regulation* refers to regulating another individual's emotion. These processes may be *response-dependent* if they rely on a specific response from their target or *response-independent* if they do not rely on a specific response.
- IER models have been applied to understanding depression and anxiety (Hofmann, 2014; Marroquin, 2011).

Interpersonal Emotion Dysregulation

- Dixon-Gordon et al. (2015) proposed a framework for understanding problems that arise during the IER process. This framework captures processes across individuals in a dyad (e.g., a dysphoric person and their social support/target): regulatory goals (Caughlin, 2010; Gratz & Roemer, 2004), observable regulatory behaviors/messages, encoding and decoding processes (Hallam et al., 2014; Kappas, 2013), and the interpretation/effect on both individuals.

AN INTERPERSONAL EMOTION REGULATION MODEL

- Traditional interpersonal models of emotional disorders posit that excessive reassurance seeking is a maladaptive ER strategy that erodes a dysphoric individual's social support systems, which subsequently worsens their distress.
- The proposed model asserts that reassurance seeking is a dyadic process with several stages of ER occurring between both the dysphoric reassurance-seeker (i.e., intrinsic IER) and their social support target.



Five components per Dixon-Gordon et al. (2015):

1. *Goals* - Both individuals in a dyad attempt to achieve respective goals.
2. *Encoding Processes* - Informational processing underlying the selection of an appropriate *Behavioral Strategy/Response* to up- or down-regulate emotion.
3. *Decoding Processes* - Informational processing of another person's behavioral responses and emotional feedback.
4. *Dyadic Effects* - The effects of a partner's behavioral strategy influences both individuals' emotions, relationship outcomes, and future goals.

IMPLICATIONS

Drawing from the cited ER literature and the above model, researchers of social behavior in depressed and anxious persons may want to consider the following:

- Future research should examine inter- and intra-personal ER deficits in traditional interpersonal models of depression and anxiety.
- Studies should also examine the context-pertinent goals of IER strategies (e.g., reassurance-seeking), individual differences, and potential outcomes (Dixon-Gordon et al., 2015; Niven, 2017).
- Researchers should test comparable mechanisms from interpersonal models of depression in models of anxiety disorders (e.g., affective instability).
- Studies may benefit by implementing multimodal assessments of IER (e.g., cross-sectional/longitudinal, dyadic observations, ecological assessment, and physiological measurements) across community and clinical populations. Ecological momentary assessment (EMA) could offer an hourly view into stressful life events, erosion of social supports, and the generation of mood symptoms.
- In sum, incorporating ER research in contemporary interpersonal models of emotional disorders can elucidate inter- and intrapersonal differences in social behavior and allow for more stage-specific understandings of maladaptive behavior.