

Experiential Avoidance and Emotion Regulation in

Interpersonal Stress Generation

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INTRODUCTION

- Experiential avoidance and maladaptive emotion regulation (ER) are implicated as risk factors for the generation of interpersonal stress and affective symptoms (Gerhart et al., 2014; Moriya & Takahashi, 2013).
- Though research has focused on intrapersonal ER (e.g., rumination), recent work has linked interpersonal ER (IER; Dixon-Gordon et al., 2018), or the regulation of emotion in social contexts (e.g., seeking advice from social supports).
- However, little is known about the association between experiential avoidance and IER (Chapman et al., 2011). Thus, the current study examined the role of experiential avoidance and IER in interpersonal stress. We hypothesized the following:
 1. Experiential avoidance would be associated with greater intra- and interpersonal emotion dysregulation and interpersonal stress.
 2. Experiential avoidance would predict increased interpersonal stress via greater intra- and interpersonal emotion dysregulation.

METHODS

- Undergraduate students (N = 391) completed an online study for course credit. Participants were primarily female (68%; $M_{age} = 19.71$, $SD = 3.32$) and completed the following measures:
 1. Brief Experiential Avoidance Questionnaire (BEAQ; Gamez et al., 2014)
 2. Difficulties in Interpersonal Regulation of Emotions (DIRE; Dixon-Gordon et al., 2018) subscales of Acceptance (Accept), Avoidance (Avoid), and Venting
 3. Depressive Interpersonal Relationships Inventory – Reassurance-seeking (RS) scale (DIRI; Joiner et al., 1992)
 4. Forty-five interpersonal items drawn from the Negative Life Events Questionnaire (NLEQ [NLEQI]; Saxe & Abramson, 1987)
- Hypotheses were examined via correlations and regression analyses (Table 1). Mediation models were employed using SPSS PROCESS (Hayes, 2018), which estimated the indirect effects of inter- and intrapersonal ER on the relationships between experiential avoidance and interpersonal stress.

RESULTS

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics and Correlations for Study Variables

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. BEAQ	3.3	.8	-							
2. Accept	3.1	1.0	-.07	-						
3. Avoid	2.8	.9	.26**	.21**	-					
4. Venting	2.2	.8	.23**	.19**	.28**	-				
5. RS	3.0	1.4	.29**	-.03	.17*	.20**	-			
6. NLEQI	1.7	.6	.28**	.02	.25**	.23**	.35**	-		
7. Age	19.7	3.3	.07	-.04	-.00	-.02	.03	-.04	-	
8. Sex	1.7	.5	.13*	.01	.06	.17*	.24**	.06	-.09	-

Note. Significant correlations are bolded.
* $p < .01$. ** $p < .001$.

References available upon request.

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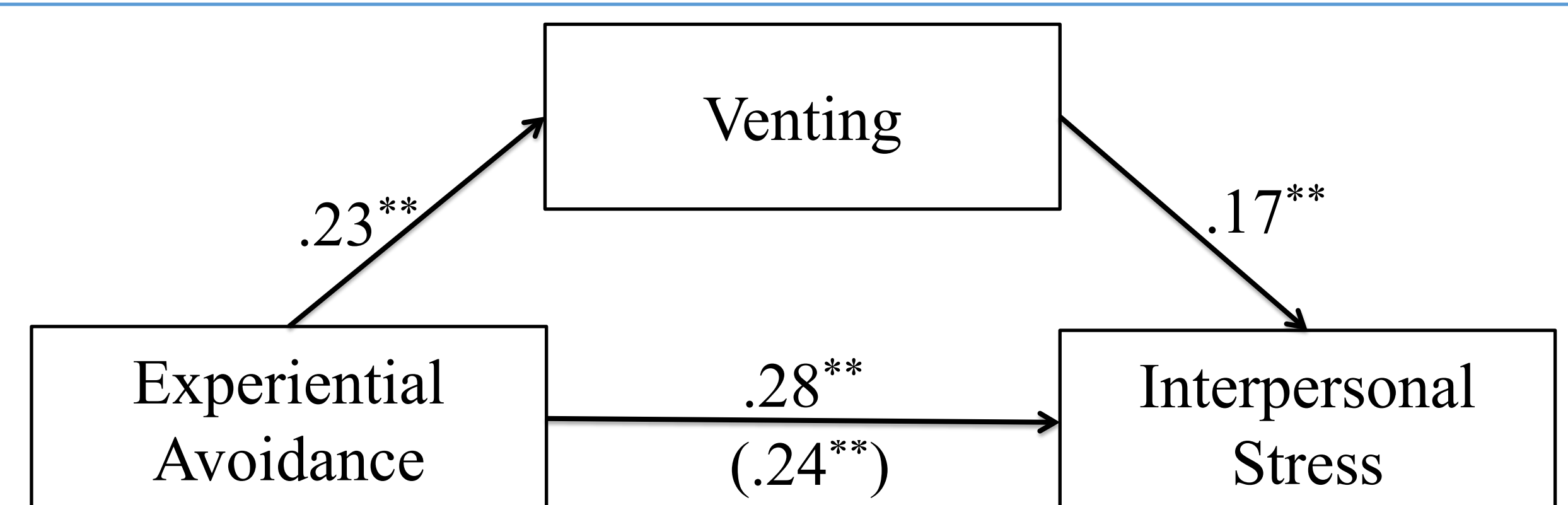


Figure 1. The effect of experiential avoidance on interpersonal stress via social venting. Note. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

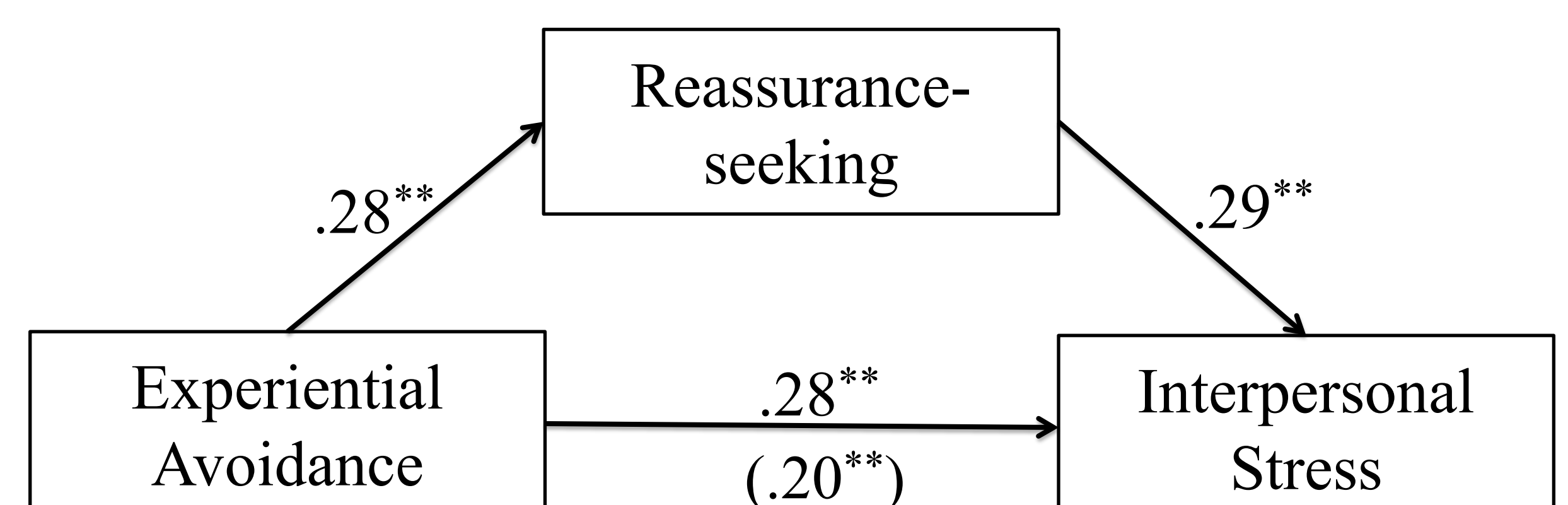


Figure 2. The effect of experiential avoidance on interpersonal stress via reassurance seeking.

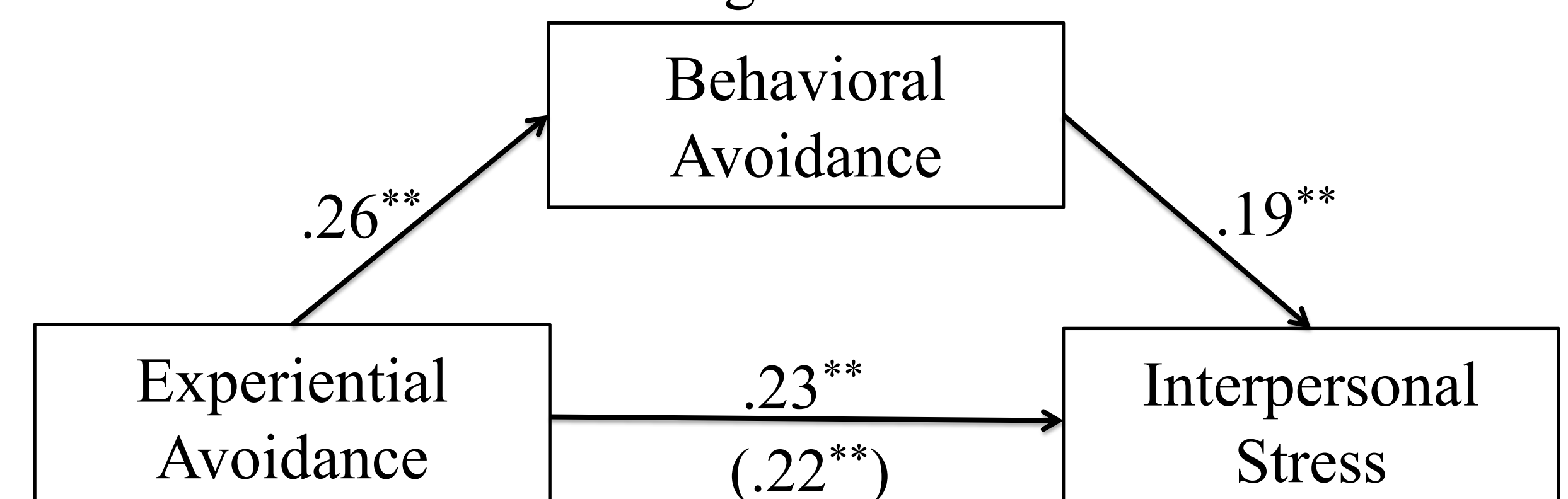


Figure 3. The effect of experiential avoidance on interpersonal stress via behavioral avoidance.

1. Our first hypothesis was supported (Table 1). Experiential avoidance was significantly positively correlated with maladaptive intra- and interpersonal ER and interpersonal stress.
2. Our second hypothesis was partially supported (Figures 1 – 3):
 - There was a significant indirect effect of experiential avoidance on stress through IER (venting and reassurance seeking; Figures 1 & 2), $\beta = .04$, 95% CI [.01, .07] and $\beta = .08$, 95% CI [.04, .12], respectively.
 - There was a significant indirect effect of experiential avoidance on stress via intrapersonal ER (i.e., behavioral avoidance; Figure 3), $\beta = .05$, 95% CI [.02, .08].
 - Experiential avoidance activity predicted greater intra- and interpersonal ER. In turn, greater maladaptive intra- and interpersonal ER mediated the effects of experiential avoidance on stress.

CONCLUSION

- Results of this study are consistent with prior research that has examined experiential avoidance and ER in interpersonal stress generation. Our findings also suggest that experiential avoidance predicts interpersonal stress through several IER processes. More specifically, elevated experiential avoidance may elicit less adaptive intra- and interpersonal ER strategies.
- Further, fewer IER and ER difficulties subsequently predicts decreased levels of interpersonal stress. Thus, reducing maladaptive intra- and interpersonal ER (e.g., avoidance and reassurance seeking) may be a target for intervention during the therapeutic process, particularly in functional analytic psychotherapy.
- Taken together, these findings support the use of experiential avoidance as an index of IER ability and interpersonal functioning.
- These implications call for future studies to further examine the complex role of experiential avoidance and IER abilities in adaptive functioning.