

## **HPS 304: The Social Psychology of Relationships**

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## About this Unit

- Gain an advanced understanding of social psychological research into interpersonal relationships processes

**Interpersonal processes:** the interplay of cognitive, motivational, and behavioral activities in social interaction.

*Learn about various topics such as:*

- attachment and attitudinal processes,
- the formation and dissolution of relationships,
- emotions and prosocial behaviour in relationships,
- aggression and interpersonal hostility

## Learning Outcomes

	These are the Learning Outcomes (ULO) for this Unit <b>At the completion of this Unit, successful students can:</b>	Deakin Graduate Learning Outcomes
ULO1	develop an understanding of how social psychology theories influence our understanding of social relationships	GLO1: Discipline-specific knowledge and capabilities GLO2: Communication GLO4: Critical thinking GLO5: Problem solving GLO7: Teamwork
ULO2	apply theoretical knowledge to novel problems and situations related to the topic of relationships	GLO1: Discipline-specific knowledge and capabilities GLO4: Critical thinking GLO5: Problem solving
ULO3	apply principles of effective communication and feedback when interacting in social relationships	GLO1: Discipline-specific knowledge and capabilities GLO2: Communication
ULO4	communicate in both written and oral means to different audiences on the topic of social relationships	GLO2: Communication
ULO5	construct a case conceptualisation	GLO1: Discipline-specific knowledge and capabilities GLO2: Communication GLO4: Critical thinking GLO5: Problem solving GLO7: Teamwork
ULO6	understand how to observe and code human behaviour	GLO1: Discipline-specific knowledge and

## Topic 1: Social Cognition & Ideal Standards

### Readings

Boyes, A.D., & Fletcher, G.J.O. (2007). Metaperceptions of bias in intimate relationships. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 92, 286-306

*The Link Between Positive Bias and Perceived Relationship Quality: The Moderating Role of Judgment Type*

- the more positively individuals view their partners (taking into account the target's self-perceptions), the more satisfied both perceivers and targets tend to be with the relationship
- greater positive bias in partner judgments also predicts later increases in satisfaction, decreases in conflict and relationship-related doubts, and greater relationship stability
- maintaining commitment in relationships requires nagging doubts and uncertainties to be quashed.. One primary way this is accomplished is by individuals viewing partners in the best light possible—as more committed, more attractive, more sensitive, and so forth than they would be judged using more brutally realistic criteria
- In contrast to Murray's (2005) approach, Swann's (1990) self-verification theory proposes that successful relationships are built on authenticity and honesty; thus, people are motivated to believe that their partners understand and see them as they perceive themselves, warts and all
- In a similar vein, Kenny and Acitelli (2001) reported that individuals in happier relationships assumed they were similar to their partners (a form of bias) to a greater extent for traits central to the relationship.
- Thus self-verification motives may be limited to low-relevance relationship judgments, whereas high-relevance relationship judgments may be predominately influenced by positivity goals.

#### **The role of ideal standards in relationship imitation process**

- Relationship and partner ideals are key components of the social mind that people use to guide their interpersonal and motivational strategies. An ideal is a mental image of someone or something that serves as a standard of excellence and is highly desirable
- This is rooted in human nature as it has been shaped through evolutionary history
- However, ideal standards also develop as a function of socialisation
- Relationship based knowledge structures involve three interlocking components (a) the self (b) the partner and (c) the relationship
- Individuals who believe that laughter and humor are important features of an ideal relationship, for example, should value a sense of humor in their ideal mates, who in turn should be more capable of creating a relationship filled with laughter and humor.

*Evaluative dimensions*

- Informed by evolutionary principles, the ISM postulates that individuals evaluate prospective or current partners on three dimensions (a) warmth and trustworthiness (b) attractiveness and vitality and (c) status and resources
- According to the ISM, individuals also evaluate relationships on two dimensions (a) the importance of intimacy and stability (labeled relationship intimacy and loyalty) and (b) how passionate and exciting the relationship is expected to be (labeled relationship passion)

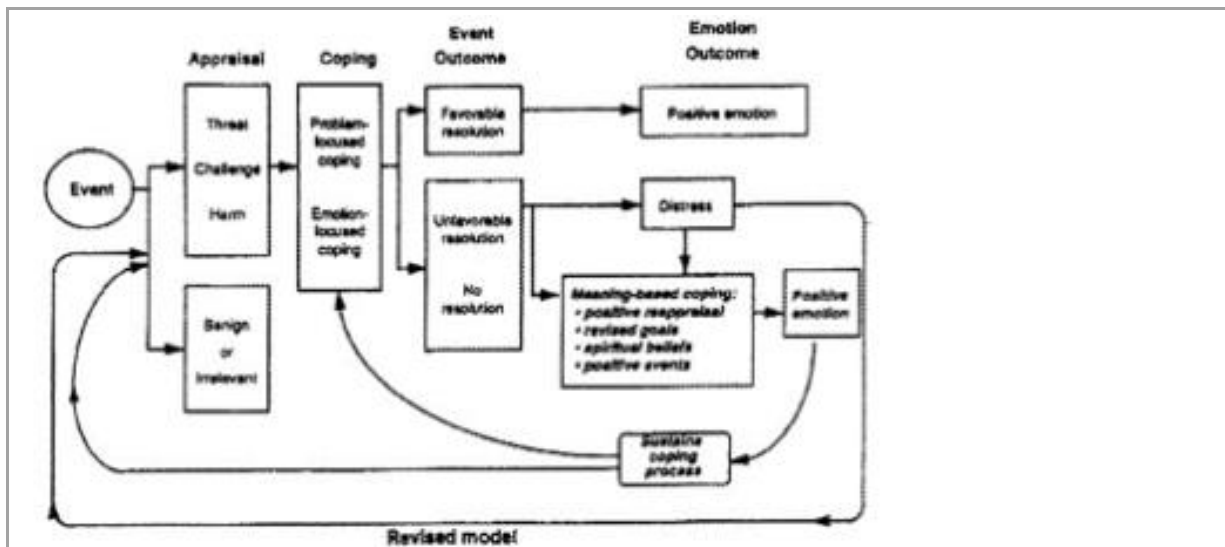
*Functions of ideal standards*

- The ISM proposes that partner and relationship ideal serve three core functions
- (a) evaluation: estimating and evaluating the quality of partners and relationships (e.g., to assess the appropriateness of potential or current partners and relationships)
- (b) explanation: explaining and understanding what is currently happening in relationships (e.g., the generation of plausible causal accounts that explain current relationship satisfaction, problems and conflicts); and
- (c) regulation: regulating and making adjustments in relationships (e.g., to predict and possibly control or change current partners and relationships)
- Relationship evaluations include mental components that people access and use automatically to make important decisions and judgments
- The flexibility of ideal standards (i.e., the degree to which partners can fall below and ideal standards and still be considered acceptable) should also affect relationship decisions
- The level at which individuals set their ideal standards and their ideal flexibility ought to be influenced, at least in part, by their self-assessments on the same dimensions. Individuals who perceive themselves as highly physically attractive, for example, should set higher ideal partner standards on the attractiveness and less flexible range of acceptance
- Flexibility beliefs are likely to be relatively stable

## Topic 3: Attachment and Mental Health

### Attachment & Coping

- The cognitive and behavioural components of the attachment system relate to theories of coping
- Folkman & Lazarus' (1984) transactional model of stress-coping is a process model with two outcomes – emotion or problem-focused coping



**Building on the Folkman & Lazarus’ (1984) transactional model of stress-coping, Carver, Scheier, & Weintraub (1989) suggest four general coping styles (see Milkulincer & Florian, 2004 chpt):**

1. problem-focused coping: Involves active coping, planning, suppress competing activities to focus on problem, restraint in taking action so as not to make a mistake in solving issue
2. emotion-focused coping: Ease inner tension without solving problem such as self-criticism, wishful thinking, rumination, etc...
3. distance coping: Involves cognitive disengagement such as suppression of thoughts, and a need to ignore emotions through behavioural disengagement (this is also an emotion-focused strategy as it is about ignoring feelings not solving the problem)
4. support seeking: Restoring proximity to a significant other who can assist with the situation

**Attachment styles has been linked to coping styles in consistent ways across studies**

secure people

–generally, secure people engage in problem-focused and support seeking coping strategies

- confidence in own abilities and trust in others lends them to use these strategies
- distress/problems usually ameliorated

avoidant people

– avoidant people, due to their tendencies to use deactivating strategies, engage in distance coping (a form of emotional coping).

oTo suppress attachment worries and the need to turn to others.

oEngage in escape avoidance tactics.

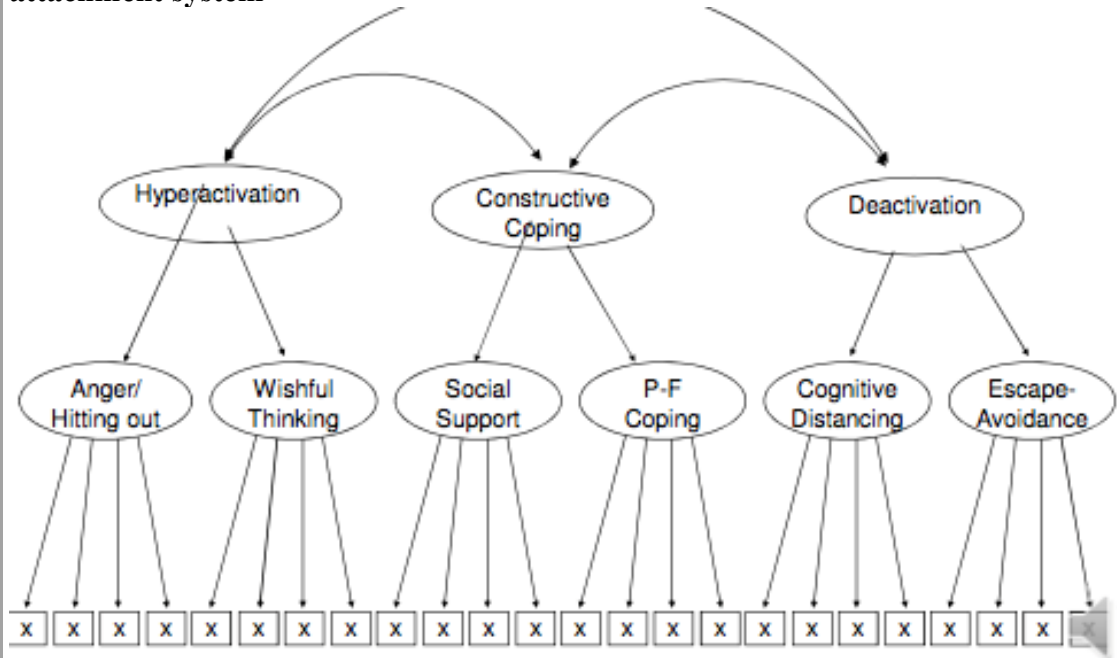
-avoidant people may use problem-focused coping or instrumental support seeking, but only if this strategy will solve the problem quickly

anxious people

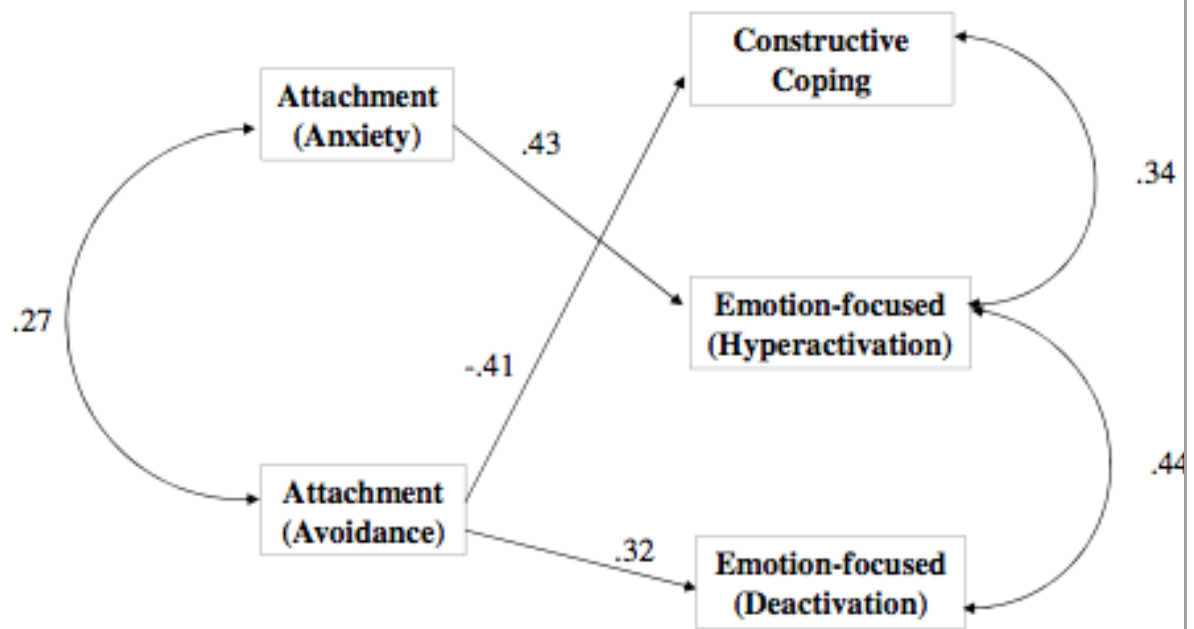
- anxious people engage in coping strategies that reflect their tendencies to hyperactivate their attachment system.
- Engage in emotion-focused coping, can use support-seeking, but used excessively

can't control emotions and experience intense negative affect due to inconsistent past support.

**General coping styles seem to relate to more broader coping, which is related to the attachment system**



Attachment was found to predict use of broad coping strategies



**The relationship between attachment and coping has been studied across numerous contexts** (see Mikulincer & Florian, 2004 chpt)

1. military and war-related stress
2. pregnancy and motherhood