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REVIEW ARTICLE

Individual differences in interpersonal emotion regulation: What makes some people more (or less) successful than others?

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Abstract

People vary in the effectiveness with which they can change the way that others feel, yet we know surprisingly little about what drives these individual differences in interpersonal emotion regulation success. This paper provides a framework for describing 'success' in interpersonal emotion regulation and synthesizes extant theory and research regarding how personality and cognitive ability relate to interpersonal emotion regulation success. In doing so, our review brings together work from several related fields to offer an integrative framework to generate and guide future research that aims to understand why some people are proficient at influencing the emotions of others and why some are not, often suffering additional unintended consequences, such as diminished work or relationship success.

KEYWORDS
cognitive ability, emotion regulation, emotional intelligence, individual differences, interpersonal emotion regulation, personality, regulatory success

People try to influence the feelings of others across a large range of their relationships and interactions, including with friends, partners, family members, and those they work with. The process by which people attempt to shape others' emotions is referred to as 'interpersonal emotion regulation' (Niven, 2017). Although some researchers have used the term interpersonal emotion regulation to refer to any form of emotion regulation that

involves a social component, including the regulation of one's own feelings using the presence or help of others (Zaki & Williams, 2013), we reserve the term to refer exclusively to extrinsic processes in which the feelings regulated belong to another person (i.e., the regulatory 'target') and in which regulation is engaged in a deliberate manner.

When employed effectively, interpersonal emotion regulation can facilitate wide-ranging benefits, including improved wellbeing and performance for both the regulator and the target (e.g., Little et al., 2016; Marroquín, 2011; Pauw et al., 2018). However, interpersonal emotion regulation comprises four stages—(i) identifying how the target is currently feeling, and (ii) setting an affective goal, then (iii) selecting and (iv) implementing a regulation strategy to achieve the goal (Reeck et al., 2016)—each of which provides potential pitfalls (Dixon-Gordon et al., 2015; Nozaki & Mikolajczak, 2020). One can incorrectly identify or misattribute the causes of others' feelings, choose inappropriate goals or strategies, or implement strategies poorly. Thus, attempts to manage others' feelings are fraught with risk, often fail, and can produce unwanted and maladaptive effects (Williams & Emich, 2014).

Given that attempts to regulate others' emotions are not always successful, it is surprising that we know relatively little about the drivers of individual differences in interpersonal emotion regulation success. The goal of this review is to provide insight into whether and why some people may be more (or less) successful than others when trying to influence others' feelings. We begin by defining 'success' in the context of interpersonal emotion regulation, then review the evidence regarding the role of personality and cognitive ability in shaping successful performance during the four stages of interpersonal emotion regulation. Finally, we use our analysis to identify important avenues for future research.

1 | INTERPERSONAL EMOTION REGULATION: WHAT DOES SUCCESS LOOK LIKE?

Interpersonal emotion regulation can be considered 'successful' in at least three ways, with these ways sometimes operating in conflict (Springstein & English, 2023). First, given that the proximate goal of any interpersonal emotion regulation attempt is to achieve a change in the emotional experience and/or expression of the target of regulation (Niven, 2017), a simple definition of success is whether the regulator elicits the desired affective change.

Second, because many instances of interpersonal emotion regulation are enacted in pursuit of higher-order goals that extend beyond the immediate feelings of the target (Niven, 2016), success might be defined more broadly, in terms of whether the act of regulation achieves both the proximate (affective) goal and other underlying goals (Dixon-Gordon et al., 2015). For example, we might wish to make our partner feel guilty so that they help with the housework, and we might judge such an interpersonal emotion regulation attempt as successful if the partner felt guilty *and* did some cleaning.

Third, because regulatory efforts, regardless of their success in relation to proximate affective goals or underlying goals, tend to accrete over time, successful regulation can also be considered at a broader level including whether regulatory approaches are generally adaptive or generally maladaptive. For example, a manager might fail to sufficiently enthuse a team member to convince them to take on extra work but do so in a manner that feeds into the development of a trusting and respectful relationship. By contrast, a more punitive regulatory style (e.g., inducing fear) might achieve the intended goals but undermine the long-term relationship. Indeed, evidence suggests that the cumulative use of 'generally adaptive' interpersonal emotion regulation is associated with a variety of salubrious affective, relational, and behavioral outcomes, including enhanced regulator and target wellbeing, the formation and reinforcement of relationships, and improved performance (e.g., Little et al., 2016; Morelli et al., 2015; Niven et al., 2012, 2015; Tamminen et al., 2019; Vasquez et al., 2020).

2 | INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES AND INTERPERSONAL EMOTION REGULATION SUCCESS

From a core individual differences perspective, there are two likely drivers of interpersonal emotion regulation success: cognitive abilities and personality traits (Hughes & Evans, 2018). Cognitive abilities, especially emotion-relevant skills and knowledge, likely shape success in a maximal sense, that is, those who have the raw skills can and often do regulate successfully (Hughes & Evans, 2018; Mestre et al., 2016). For example, ability emotional intelligence (the most emotion-laden domain of the Carrol-Horn-Cattel model of cognitive ability; Evans et al., 2020; MacCann et al., 2014) assesses processing accuracy and knowledge regarding emotion perception, emotion understanding, and emotion management, all of which have close parallels with stages of interpersonal emotion regulation (i.e., emotion identification, strategy selection, implementation). Thus, cognitive abilities likely play an important role in how successful a person is at achieving the desired change in the recipient's emotion and achieving underlying goals within specific regulatory episodes.

However, as noted, interpersonal emotion-regulation can also be considered successful in relation to broader life outcomes. In this regard, it is perhaps the accumulative effects of many regulatory episodes, or regulatory styles, that are most important—and there is good reason to suspect that personality traits shape interpersonal emotion regulation success in this typical and aggregate sense (Hughes et al., 2020; Hughes & Evans, 2018). Personality traits describe a person's typical patterns of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors (DeYoung, 2015) and thus affect how people interpret and appraise their social environments, their motivations in relationships, and how they select and apply their interpersonal behaviors (Back et al., 2023). That is, some traits will predispose people to pay more attention to the emotional states of others, to invest more effort into interpersonal regulation, and to develop their regulatory repertoire (Hughes et al., 2020; Hughes & Evans, 2018).

There are many models of personality traits, all of which are hierarchically structured, but differ by trait content (Irwing, Hughes, et al., 2023). Two particularly useful frameworks for this review are the Big Five traits and the Dark Triad traits. The Big Five—neuroticism, extraversion, openness-to-experience, agreeableness, and conscientiousness—represent broad domains that encompass numerous narrow facets from across the personality spectrum, grouped according to their intercorrelations. It is possible, therefore, for two similarly extraverted individuals, for example, to have different facet profiles. In contrast, the Dark Triad—psychopathy, narcissism, and Machiavellianism—refers to three broad antagonistic traits that combine facets from (dis)agreeableness and other Big Five domains, such that to be considered, Machiavellian, for example, a person must be elevated on all facets. Table 1 provides a brief overview of the major components of each trait.

3 | *HOW* MIGHT INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES SHAPE INTERPERSONAL EMOTION REGULATION?

Below, we review evidence for how the individual differences of interest—cognitive abilities and personality—are likely to influence success during each of the stages of interpersonal emotion regulation.

3.1 | Stage 1: Emotion identification

The first stage of interpersonal emotion regulation involves assessing how the target is currently feeling, by decoding their emotion communication cues (e.g., facial expressions, tone of voice) and interpreting those in light of contextual information (Niven, 2022). Accurate emotion identification, in terms of the nature (i.e., which emotion) and intensity, allows the regulator to be more responsive to the needs of the target (Gregory et al., 2020),

TABLE 1 Focal personality traits and their key characteristics.

Broad personality trait	Indicative facets
Big Five	
Neuroticism	Anxious, emotionally volatile, insecure
Extraversion	Sociable, assertive, enthusiastic
Openness to experience	Curious, aesthetically sensitive, imaginative
Agreeableness	Empathetic, altruistic, co-operative, respectful
Conscientiousness	Industrious, orderly, self-disciplined
Dark Triad	
Psychopathy	Callous, manipulative, impetuous, angry
Narcissism	Callous, manipulative, attention-seeking, grandiose
Machiavellianism	Callous, manipulative, strategic, power-hungry

evaluating how much, if any, regulation is needed. Misidentified or misattributed emotions may cause the regulator to initiate too much or too little regulatory action, or the wrong type of action altogether.

There is strong evidence that cognitive abilities explain a large proportion of variance in emotion identification (e.g., Evans et al., 2020; MacCann et al., 2014), so much so that tests examining the recognition of others' emotions are now often included as components of models of cognitive abilities (e.g., Schneider & McGrew, 2022). However, although cognitive ability influences maximal performance in emotion recognition (e.g., test performance in studies or singular instances of recognition in real life), some personality traits are likely to influence the effort people typically expend on this activity within their daily life and thus contribute to success in more aggregate terms (Back et al., 2023; Hughes & Evans, 2016, 2018).

From a broad trait perspective, agreeableness is consistently but weakly correlated with test-based measures of the ability to recognize others' emotions that provide cues such as facial expressions (e.g., Côté et al., 2011; Kraus et al., 2010; Mayer et al., 2004), and the correlations often become larger when tests include contextual information, in a story-like manner (e.g., Nettle & Liddle, 2008). Thus, when cues are purely perceptual, they seem to draw more on the raw processing skills associated with emotion-laden cognitive abilities (Evans et al., 2020; Hughes & Evans, 2018; MacCann et al., 2014), but when social and relational contexts are considered, agreeableness appears a useful marker of success in emotion identification. Studies examining specific facets of agreeableness suggest the major drivers of this relationship might be the facets of affective empathy (also known as empathic concern) and altruism. Experimental research supports the idea that those higher in affective empathy, the propensity to take on the feelings of others (Davis, 1983), excel at emotion identification, especially when interacting with emotionally expressive partners (Zaki et al., 2008; but see Grant et al., 2018). Evidence from behavioral and neural (fMRI) measures also suggests that altruism (i.e., selfless concern for others) correlates with emotion identification ability (Haas et al., 2015).

In contrast, and perhaps because they reflect low levels of certain facets of agreeableness, the Dark Triad traits tend to be negatively correlated with emotion identification (e.g., Jonason & Krause, 2013; Lyons et al., 2010; Pajevic et al., 2018; Wai & Tiliopoulos, 2012). However, there is some nuance, with research suggesting that the exploitative or manipulative components of these traits might actually be positively correlated with emotion recognition, because these facets capture the motivation to manipulate others (e.g., Konrath et al., 2014). Nevertheless, because psychopathy, narcissism, and Machiavellianism are compound constructs (i.e., one needs to be high in all facets), and they are, on the whole, negatively related to emotion identification, those scoring high in these traits are more likely to fail at this first hurdle when regulating others' emotions.

3.2 | Stage 2: Regulatory goal setting

In the second stage, the regulator sets a goal for how the target ought to feel, which is then compared to the target's current emotion state to discern if regulation is required. Success at this stage is the setting of an appropriate goal for the target's feelings; if the goal is unrealistic or a poor fit for the context (e.g., a goal for the bereaved to feel happy during a funeral), or the regulator's goal diverges from the target's goal (see Zaki, 2020), the subsequent regulation is less likely to succeed.

Cognitive skills such as social cognition may be relevant here, for example, in shaping how able a regulator is to judge what a target needs in a given situation or how appropriate a particular emotion goal might be. But personality is also likely to be salient, for example, in influencing the desire to improve or worsen others' affect. Extraversion and agreeableness are positively correlated with the motivation to improve others' feelings (Austin et al., 2014; Austin & O'Donnell, 2013; López-Pérez, Morillo, & Wilson, 2017; Niven et al., 2011; Niven et al., 2015) and negatively correlated with the motivation to worsen others' feelings. Given that people usually want to feel pleasant (e.g., Larsen, 2000), the emotion regulation goals set by highly extraverted and agreeable regulators are likely to be in alignment with, and therefore embraced by, targets. Accordingly, extraverted and agreeable individuals have a higher probability of regulatory success in achieving proximate affective goals and broader success (e.g., development of mutually beneficial relationships).

An interesting nuance to this relationship can be observed when examining empathic concern, a facet within agreeableness. There is some evidence that those higher in empathic concern set emotion goals for others based on what they believe will be most beneficial for the target, even making others feel worse if they believe it is ultimately in the interests of the target (i.e., being 'cruel to be kind', López-Pérez, Howells, & Gummerum, 2017; López-Pérez et al., 2022). Although such regulation goals are motivated by the desire to benefit the target, they might meet resistance if they diverge from what the target *wants* to feel (Zaki, 2020). Nevertheless, such efforts are often perceived as well-meaning given the general approach of the highly empathic person (Niven et al., 2019; Vasquez et al., 2021), and present a neat illustration of an instance in which the proximate affective goal might seem counterintuitive and even fail to be achieved but the regulatory episode contributes to success in broader relational terms (i.e., I can rely on this person to do what is best for me, even if it's difficult for them). By contrast, the compassion facet of agreeableness might be related to 'prosocial lying', whereby motivations to prevent emotional harm in others, even at the expense of facilitating their goal attainment, reduce the willingness to speak 'hard truths' (Lupoli et al., 2017, 2020). Thus, further research is needed to determine whether those higher in these aspects of agreeableness prioritize shorter-term hedonic goals or longer-term instrumental goals (Tamir, 2009).

In contrast, those high in the Dark Triad traits have a propensity to seek to worsen others' feelings (Austin et al., 2014; Austin & O'Donnell, 2013), regardless of what might be beneficial for the target. Those high in the Dark Triad regulate the emotions of others for selfish purposes and thus are less likely to set goals that align with those of the target, increasing chances of failure. Even on occasions when those high in these traits seek to elicit positive emotions, their efforts may fall flat because they are perceived as exploitative or egoistic (Niven et al., 2019). For example, compliments are often poorly received when perceived as a ruse intended to facilitate a request for a favor.

3.3 | Stage 3: Strategy selection

After setting a regulatory goal, a strategy must be selected. Selecting an optimal strategy ought to result in a change in the target's feelings in line with the goal. However, the regulation process could become derailed if the regulator chooses an ineffective or maladaptive strategy. Successful strategy selection requires evaluation of the social context and also the general preferences (Niven, in press), goals (Horowitz et al., 2001), and personality (Marigold et al., 2014) of the target.

One of the most common pitfalls in strategy selection is choosing to pursue situationally inappropriate strategies. For example, positively reappraising the death of a target's loved one (e.g., "at least both parents didn't die") would rarely, if ever, be successful, even though reappraisal is a generally adaptive approach. Such straightforward strategy selection errors most likely stem from a lack of knowledge and thus most prominently reflect deficits in emotion-related cognitive abilities, and broader skills, such as person perception and social cognition, rather than any particular personality trait (Hughes & Evans, 2018). Indeed, emotion-laden cognitive abilities are associated with greater use of broadly adaptive strategies (e.g., reappraisal and valuing) and negatively correlated with use of generally maladaptive strategies (e.g., downward social comparison and suppression; Xiao et al., 2022).

However, because personality traits account for differences in interpersonal behaviours (e.g., Back et al., 2023) and regulatory style (Hughes et al., 2020), they too play an important role in strategy selection. The broad trait of agreeableness is, once again, a prime candidate. People high in agreeableness seek to maintain positive relationships, often placing others' needs above their own, and thus may routinely invest more resources in 'reading' the situation and targets' needs (Hughes & Evans, 2016). In support of this idea, in a dyadic study of romantic couples, Levy-Gigi and Shamay-Tsoory (2017) found that regulators who scored higher in cognitive empathy (i.e., the ability to take on others' perspectives), a facet of agreeableness, selected strategies that were more effective at regulating their partners' distress while viewing images of negative valence. Brown et al. (2021) further reported evidence of more effective regulation of partner distress among individuals higher in affective empathy, although it was unclear if this was due to the use of particular strategies or if their mere presence was comforting.

Furthermore, López-Pérez et al. (2017a, Study 2) found that agreeableness, and also extraversion, positively correlated with the use of two classes of broadly adaptive regulatory strategies (Jurkiewicz et al., 2023; Little et al., 2013; Sahi et al., 2023): antecedent-focused strategies, such as situation modification and cognitive reappraisal (Gross, 1998); and acceptance strategies, such as active listening and making the target feel valued (Niven et al., 2009). López-Pérez and colleagues (2017a) further found that agreeableness was negatively related to the use of the response-focused strategy of suppression, which is typically ineffective for managing others' feelings (Jurkiewicz et al., 2023; Little et al., 2013). Supplementing these findings, studies focusing on the cognitive and affective empathy facets of agreeableness also report positive correlations with antecedent-focused strategies and negative correlations with response-focused strategies (Little et al., 2012; Trujillo et al., 2022).

Another established link between personality and strategy use concerns a positive correlation between the Dark Triad traits and the use of 'inauthentic' strategies, which entail misleading displays of one's own feelings to regulate others (e.g., sulking, flattery, inauthentic niceness; Austin & O'Donnell, 2013; Austin et al., 2014). Some of these studies also reveal a positive correlation between neuroticism and inauthentic interpersonal emotion regulation strategies. Currently, there is scant evidence regarding the general effectiveness of inauthentic strategies. However, inauthentic strategies seem likely to be generally maladaptive. Even if inauthentic strategies achieve proximate affective goals, they lead others to question one's intentions (Kang & Schweitzer, 2022) and because of this they are unlikely to contribute to longer-term goals or the development of meaningful relationships, which is a major struggle for those higher in the Dark Triad (Bloxsom et al., 2021; Brewer et al., 2018) and neuroticism (Harris & Vazire, 2016; Kreuzer & Gollwitzer, 2022).

3.4 | Stage 4: Implementation

The final stage of interpersonal emotion regulation is the implementation of the selected regulation strategy. There is very little evidence concerning implementation in general, and an almost complete absence of research exploring relationships between cognitive ability or personality traits and implementation. This is an important oversight, because even if all previous stages have been successfully navigated, it is easy to falter at this final hurdle.

Success at the implementation stage could be compromised in at least five ways. First, a person might successfully identify a regulatory approach but fail to implement it. Second, an inappropriate implementation tactic

could be adopted. For example, many efforts to reappraise fail because the alternative interpretation is unconvincing. Third, an appropriate tactic could be adopted but executed with a lack of skill and nuance such that, for example, the attempt to regulate is too obvious (Zee & Bolger, 2019). Fourth, regulation could be implemented at a sub-optimal moment, either too early or late. For example, a regulator might experience personally elevated levels of negative affect and be impatient to regulate, appearing not to fully appreciate the target's plight (i.e., a failure of self-regulation). Fifth, a regulator could switch approaches too soon, or persist with ineffective approaches, for example, due to a limited repertoire (Stelzer & O'Connor, 2021).

Cognitive ability almost certainly plays a role when it comes to the success of implementation, for example, in shaping knowledge about appropriate implementation tactics, the skill with which tactics are implemented, and the regulatory capacity that is available to engage in and sustain interpersonal emotion regulation (e.g., Martínez-Íñigo et al., 2013). Neuroticism also likely plays a role. Those higher in neuroticism may fail to implement interpersonal emotion regulation because they can be pre-occupied with their own emotions and may feel driven to avoid making any social faux pas that might result in rejection (Kanning, 2006). They also experience more, yet have lower tolerance for, negative affect (e.g., Chowdhury et al., 2018), so may be more likely to regulate too quickly and fail to persist in their efforts (Southward et al., 2018). In contrast, those higher in conscientiousness may allow more time for regulatory efforts to yield effects, given their lower levels of impulsivity, higher levels of restraint, and higher self-efficacy, and may be more flexible in their implementation, due to having a greater repertoire of regulation strategies (Southward et al., 2018).

4 | DISCUSSION

In this review, we identified two key types of individual differences that relate to interpersonal emotion regulation effectiveness: cognitive abilities and personality traits. We differentiated between three different types of 'interpersonal emotion regulation 'success': (i) achieving the desired affective change, (ii) achieving the underlying goal, and (iii) obtaining broader adaptive outcomes (e.g., cultivating quality relationships). Although a major finding of our review was that research at the interface of individual differences and interpersonal emotion regulation success is rare, we can make some conclusions.

First, cognitive abilities and personality are likely to explain different types of success. Cognitive abilities tend to best explain interpersonal emotion regulation success defined by eliciting the desired emotion and achieving the underlying goal within short-term performative episodes (e.g., experimental tests, job interviews), which draw on maximal performance, given that most regulators are roughly equally motivated. In contrast, personality tends to best explain interpersonal emotion regulation success in terms of broader adaptive outcomes over longer time-frames through processes of aggregation and accretion. Whether someone's style is generally prosocial (agreeableness) or selfish (Dark Triad) has meaningful effects, regardless of the success in any singular regulatory episode. Hughes and Evans (2018) theorized that "cognitive ability accounts for differences in knowledge/ability related to emotion regulation, [whereas] personality accounts for differences in style, and the interaction between these two elements provides a meaningful insight into individual differences in emotion regulation" (p.10), and our review offers evidence in support of this contention.

The major correlates of likely success or failure identified by our review are summarized in Table 2 and suggest some clear patterns. Cognitive abilities are important at all stages and the personality traits of agreeableness, extraversion, and the Dark Triad also appear particularly salient. Highly agreeable people will pay more attention to how others are feeling due to their prosocial orientation, the goals they set for interpersonal emotion regulation will be motivated by their desire to consider others' needs, and the strategies they choose to manage others' feelings will be more tailored to the target and social context. Those high on extraversion typically try to make others feel more pleasant and tend to use strategies which are generally adaptive. They may also implement those strategies more effectively (e.g., Wickett et al., 2023), potentially because others perceive their attempts to

TABLE 2 Summary of the major stages of interpersonal emotion regulation, their potential points of success/failure, and likely individual difference correlates.

Regulation stage	Potential success/failure points	Likely correlates
Stage 1: Emotion identification	(In)accurate decoding of target emotion cues or interpretation of cues within context	Cognitive ability Agreeableness *Dark Triad*
Stage 2: Regulatory goal setting	Setting a goal that is (un)realistic, (in)appropriate for context, or (in)congruent with target goals	Cognitive ability Agreeableness Extraversion *Dark Triad*
Stage 3: Strategy selection	Selection of generally (mal)adaptive strategy, or strategy that is (in)appropriate given context, target preferences, or relationship with target	Cognitive ability Agreeableness *Dark Triad*
Stage 4: Implementation	Implementation of strategy at (sub)optimal moment, in an (un)skilful manner, or persisting with the strategy for a (sub)optimal duration	Cognitive ability Extraversion Conscientiousness *Neuroticism*

Note: expected negative relationships with success are shown in *italics*.

improve affect as consistent with their character (e.g., as socially outgoing and optimistic types), rather than contrived (Howland & Simpson, 2010). Meanwhile, for people higher in Dark Triad traits, their lack of empathic concern may dispose difficulties in identifying others' emotions and their self-focused nature may lead to the setting of selfish regulatory goals that disregard the needs of others and are perceived as exploitative.

4.1 | Call for future research

Our primary call for future research is simple: we need more studies examining the role of cognitive ability and personality traits across all stages and elements of success within interpersonal emotion regulation. Such studies have clear potential to develop theoretically and practically useful knowledge in both domains.

Regarding interpersonal emotion regulation, we lack knowledge regarding why regulation attempts succeed or fail and what makes some people more successful than others. The present review provides a framework to aid future work on this topic. Notably, examining success across the three levels identified (proximate affective goal, underlying goal, general adaptiveness), and across each stage of the interpersonal emotion regulation process (identification, regulatory goal setting, strategy selection, implementation), should help researchers to consider and identify which cognitive abilities and personality traits make the biggest difference to each aspect of regulatory success.

Regarding individual differences, a long-standing question concerns how personality 'gets outside of the skin'. As Hampson (2012, p. 315) puts it, "reviews provide an extensive catalogue of *what* personality predicts but do not examine *how* personality gives rise to these associations." We contend that interpersonal emotion regulation is likely to be an important mechanism through which personality exerts effects on various life outcomes, such as wellbeing and relationship quality. Why are agreeable people liked whereas those high in Dark Triad traits find it difficult to sustain relationships (Bloxsom et al., 2021; Brewer et al., 2018; Harris & Vazire, 2016)? Perhaps because the former prioritize making interaction partners feel good, while the latter do not. Why does interacting with

people high in neuroticism feel draining whereas high extraverts energize (Harris & Vazire, 2016; Kreuzer & Gollwitzer, 2022)? Perhaps because the former are pre-occupied by their own emotions and fears of rejection, whereas the latter are particularly effective at up-regulating others' positive affect? A better understanding of how personality shapes interpersonal emotion regulation could help to answer broader questions about how personality causes the outcomes that it does.

More specifically, we make five recommendations for future work. First, we call for nuance in the assessment of interpersonal emotion regulation. Assessing correlates of general tendencies to improve or worsen others' affect is a useful starting point. However, given our review suggests that relevant traits differ across the stages of the interpersonal emotion regulation process, it would be beneficial to examine success or failure in specific stages. For example, whereas outwardly focussed traits such as agreeableness might be particularly important in shaping investment in interpersonal emotion recognition and the setting of prosocial (and thus broadly adaptive) regulatory goals, neuroticism might be particularly relevant for the initiation and persistence of implementation efforts.

Second, we call for the inclusion of a broader range of cognitive abilities and personality traits in future studies. Our review identified that studies of interpersonal emotion regulation effectiveness have largely ignored cognitive abilities, despite the fact that they are one of the most likely antecedents of success (Hughes & Evans, 2018), especially in some parts of the process (e.g., emotion recognition; Evans et al., 2020; MacCann et al., 2014), and in strong situations that promote maximal performance. Similarly, studies should seek to extend the range of personality traits that they assess. Many studies focus on agreeableness and extraversion or the Dark Triad but exclude other traits (Hughes et al., 2020). It is highly likely that the remaining Big Five traits (conscientiousness, openness, and neuroticism) will provide meaningful insights. Beyond this, researchers may also wish to consider new constructs that bridge the gap between personality and cognitive ability, such as 'adaptive personality regulation' (e.g., Irwing, Cook, et al., 2023), which may be salient in shaping interpersonal emotion regulation success.

Third, we call for nuanced assessments of personality traits. Although broad traits give us some information, and can offer a good starting point, they often obscure important relationships (Hughes et al., 2020). Our review identifies a number of facet-level associations and that particular facets within broad traits may be more relevant than others or even have diametrically opposed relationships (e.g., facets within the Dark Triad in emotion identification; empathy and compassion in regulatory goal setting). Taking a nuanced approach to the assessment of personality traits would therefore provide greater insight (Irwing, Hughes, et al., 2023).

Fourth, we urge researchers to take a careful and explicit approach to the assessment of 'success'. As we have argued, successfully eliciting the desired emotion in the target within in a one-off maximal performance setting is quite different from sustained success within complex and long-lasting relationships. Although assessing maximal performance, such as in controlled laboratory experiments, is helpful in shaping knowledge regarding what 'works' and what does not, studies of typical performance across many instances of interpersonal emotion regulation, ideally in the context of real social interactions, might help explain meaningful life outcomes. Dyadic diary and video-cued recall studies would help to examine interactions intensively and dynamically over time, to provide greater insight into which individual differences are most salient in explaining longer-term regulation success.

Fifth, we advocate for studies that integrate regulator individual differences with other major components of regulation so that we can assess the degree to which regulatory success reflects (i) the regulator, (ii) the target, and (iii) the situation. Multi-source studies that use round robin type designs and partition variance accordingly have some promise in this area (e.g., Berrios et al., 2015).

5 | CONCLUSION

People vary in how successfully they manage others' feelings. Our review suggests that both cognitive abilities and personality traits influence success in interpersonal emotion regulation; cognitive ability primarily in the context of short-term performative episodes, and personality primarily over longer timeframes within ongoing relationships.

Our review generates new questions that, when answered, will refine our understanding of which aspects of personality and cognitive ability influence different forms of success (changing emotion, fulfilling underlying goals, and broader adaptive outcomes) and specifically how they do so (i.e., which stage/s of the regulation process they shape).

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors have no conflict of interests to declare.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data sharing not applicable to this article as no datasets were generated or analysed during the current study.

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