INTERNAL REPRESENTATIONS OF OTHERS IN SELF-REGULATION: A NEW LOOK AT A CLASSIC ISSUE

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The impact of internal representations of others on self-regulation has received little empirical attention. The current study measured people's own guides for their behavior and the guides they believed their parents held for them and distinguished between: (a) guides perceived as shared between oneself and parents (i.e., identified guides); (b) perceived parental guides not adopted as one's own (i.e., introjected guides); and (c) self-guides independent from one's parents. As hypothesized, only identified and independent guides significantly predicted emotional and interpersonal functioning. Introjected guides, the "felt presence" of parents within the self-system, did not predict functioning. Significant sex differences were found: Independent self-guides predicted emotional and interpersonal problems in men but not women; identified self-guides predicted functioning in women but not men. Results are discussed in relation to psychodynamic and relational theories of self-development and research on gender differences in socialization. The benefits and liabilities of a self-regulatory focus that emphasizes self-other relatedness are discussed.

Our mental representations of ourselves and others develop within an interpersonal context. Over time, experiences of ourselves in relation to others coalesce to form an internal structure that is an important determinant of our psychological experiences of ourselves and others, and of the strategies that we employ in interpersonal relationships. Thus, our internal representations of self and of others are intimately connected, both developmentally and structurally. In this article we examine the

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self-regulatory implications of significant-other representations within the self-system. The approach that we have adopted is guided by self-discrepancy theory (Higgins, 1987; 1989), a model that describes the structure of self-representation and the implications of discrepancy between self-guides.

**SELF-DISCREPANCY THEORY**

Self-discrepancy theory (Higgins, 1987; 1989) identifies three domains of self-representation: the actual-self which is comprised of the attributes that individuals believe they actually possess; the ideal-self which represents the traits or characteristics that individuals wish or hope to possess; and the ought-self which represents traits or characteristics that individuals believe they have a duty or obligation to possess. Each of these domains of the self can be considered from several perspectives: one's own perspective on the self (i.e., the attributes one really does possess, the attributes one wishes to possess, and the attributes one believes one should possess) or the inferred perspectives of significant others (i.e., the attributes that one assumes one's mother, father, or another individual believes one actually possesses, wishes one possessed, or believes one should possess). One's own perspective on the actual-self is analogous to what is commonly referred to as the self-concept. Other self-state representations, such as one's own hopes and wishes for the self (ideal: own self-state) or the duties and obligations that one believes significant others hold for the self (ought: other self-state), offer important standards, or self-guides for the regulation and evaluation of the actual-self. Self-state representations related to individuals own perspectives and the inferred perspectives of others exist together within the self-system. This self-system guides and in turn is shaped by interpersonal experiences.

To date, the bulk of research has focused on examining the emotional consequences of discrepancy between the actual-self and two self-evaluative guides—the ideal-self and the ought-self. Several studies have confirmed the unique relationship of actual-ideal discrepancy with dejection related emotions and actual-ought discrepancy with agitation related emotions (Higgins, Klein, Strauman, 1985; Scott & O’Hara, 1993; Strauman, 1989). Research also indicates that self-discrepancies are important vulnerability factors for depression and anxiety (Strauman, 1992; Strauman & Higgins, 1987, 1988). It has also been shown that the emotional consequences of activating self-discrepancies are due to the structural relationships between self-state representations rather than the content of representations per se (Moretti & Higgins, 1990a).
STANDPOINTS ON THE SELF

Little is known about the importance of different standpoints (e.g., own vs. parental) embodied within self-state representations. To date, most self-discrepancy studies have either collapsed across self-guides representing own and other standpoints on the self, considered only one standpoint (e.g., ideal: own or ought: own), or have contrasted actual-ideal: own discrepancy with actual-ought:other discrepancy. Thus, the effect of standpoint per se has received little empirical attention. Fundamental questions regarding the development and consequences of actual-own and actual-other discrepancy have not yet been addressed. For example, does it matter whether the actual-self is discrepant from one's own hopes and wishes versus the hopes and wishes one believes others hold for the self?

The concept of internalization may be useful in understanding the process by which own and other self-regulatory perspectives are integrated into the self-system. Even though theorists define internalization in slightly different ways, there is general agreement that it involves the gradual transformation of regulatory functions provided by significant others and society into inner regulatory mechanisms (Blatt & Behrends, 1987; Hartmann, Kris, & Lowenstein, 1946; Meissner, 1980, 1981; Ryan, Deci, & Grolnick, 1995; Schafer, 1968). Schafer (1968) argues that "internalization refers to all those processes by which the subject transforms real or imagined regulatory interactions with his environment, and real or imagined characteristics of his environment, into inner regulations and characteristics (pg. 9)." Through this process we adopt, as our own, self-regulatory guides or standards that once existed external to the self.

A common assumption held by psychodynamic and object relations theorists is that the process of internalization is present throughout the lifespan but that it takes different forms at different levels of development (Blatt & Behrends, 1987; Meissner, 1981). Psychological maturation is accompanied by increasing differentiation between the self and others and this is reflected in the internalization process. In its earliest form, internalization involves little or no self-other differentiation. This form of internalization, sometimes referred to as "incorporation" (Schafer, 1968; Meissner, 1981), is assumed to be common in young children and involves a process by which "object representations completely lose their object character and are merged or fused with self-representations without distinction" (Meissner, 1981, p. 18).

With greater psychological maturation, regulatory functions are identified as being outside of the self (e.g., parental). These functions may be taken into the self, or "introjected," in an attempt to provide inner regulation. The introjection of external regulatory functions leads to greater internal self-regulation, but these functions continue to be experienced
as the "felt presence's of others" (Sandler & Rosenblatt, 1962; Schafer, 1968). It is only through the process of identification, which involves the restructuring of preexisting self-regulatory guides and structures that some aspects of self-regulation come to be adopted and integrated as one's own. In contrast to introjection, identification marks the true transformation of external regulatory guides to shared self-guides that are identified as part of the "true" or core self (Deci & Ryan, 1991). Respect and support for autonomy, clear structure, and positive affective involvement facilitate the process of internalization or "integration" (Deci, Eghrari, Patrick, & Leone, 1994; Grolnick & Ryan, 1989; Ryan, Deci & Grolnick, 1995).

With the exception of incorporation, an ongoing dynamic process of introjection and identification characterizes development. This process is not necessarily restricted to childhood but rather occurs across the life-span (Blatt & Behrend, 1987). As the self becomes reorganized and self-regulatory guides are adopted as one's own, the capacity for inner regulation increases and dependence on the environment for self-regulation decreases (Hartmann, Kris, & Lowenstein, 1946). Thus, the internalization of self-regulatory mechanisms is an adaptive developmental process because it reduces dependency on external factors for self-regulation and ensures effective regulation across varying environments and life crises.

Despite the importance of the internalization process in the development of the self-system, there has been no research directly examining the structure and psychological implications of introjected versus identified self-guides. The lack of research in this area reflects, in part, the difficulty of developing a methodology to examine these issues. If internalization is important to self-regulation, one would predict that identified self-guides would have a more powerful impact on functioning than would introjected self-guides, because identified guides represent the "true self" (Deci & Ryan, 1991) and the acceptance of a shared reality about the self with significant others (Hardin & Higgins, 1996). Thus, our perception of the relationship between our behavior or performance and our identified self-guides is likely to have a powerful impact on our feelings. When we believe that our behavior or performance is congruent with identified self-guides, this is likely to promote feelings of satisfaction and contentment. In contrast, when we believe that our behavior or performance is discrepant from our identified self-guides, this is likely to evoke strong negative feelings about the self. This is not to say that perceiving our behavior as incongruent with the introjected self-guides of significant others will not also have negative repercussions. These discrepancies, however, strike further from the core of ourselves, and to some extent we can
dismiss discrepancies with introjected self-guides because we do not accept them as our own.

Not all self-guides are identified or introjected parental standards. Self-regulatory guides may also develop in the context of other important relationships, or as a function of exposure to general social norms, prescriptions, and standards. In addition, important historical figures or social virtues may provide a source of information that is internalized into self-regulatory guides, particularly if these guides have relevance in terms of individual life experiences, talents, or interests (Moretti & Higgins, in press). Self-guides that originate from these diverse sources may be equally important to identified parental guides in self-regulation if they are adopted as one’s own and represent an aspect of the true self. In this sense, these independent self-guides share important characteristics of identified guides and therefore are likely to be of equal significance in self-regulation.

In summary, we distinguished between three types of self-guides: identified, introjected, and independent self-guides (see Figure 1). Identified self-guides are adopted as one’s own and shared by ourselves and others. These self-guides are integrated as part of the true self and represent a perceived shared perspective on the self with significant others. In contrast, introjected self-guides are those self-guides that represent other’s standards for the self, but are not adopted as one’s own. Introjected guides are not fully integrated into the self, but represent the felt
presence of others in the self. Finally, independent self-guides are those
guides that are uniquely one's own.
Following self-discrepancy theory, we also distinguished self-guides
in terms of their relationship with the actual-self. Self-guides may either
be congruent (match) or discrepant (mismatch) with the actual-self. In
addition, there are self-guides not currently active in self-regulation but
that potentially could become active (i.e., nonmatches).
In the current study, we focused on internalization of parental guides.
To reiterate our predictions, we hypothesized that discrepancy between
the actual-self and identified (parental guides) and independent
self-guides would be more predictive of emotional and interpersonal
functioning than would discrepancy between the actual-self and
introjected (parental) guides. We tested this hypothesis by comparing the
unique predictive relationship between identified, introjected, and indep-
endent self-guides, and feelings of distress and interpersonal difficulty.
More specifically, we hypothesized that when the actual-self is perceived
as discrepant from identified or independent self-guides, participants
would report significantly elevated levels of overall psychological dis-
stress, interpersonal sensitivity and interpersonal problems. Conversely,
when the actual-self is perceived as congruent with identified or inde-
endent self-guides, we predicted that participants would report signifi-
cantly lower levels of psychological distress, interpersonal sensitivity,
and interpersonal problems. In contrast, we predicted that discrepancy or
congruency between the actual-self and introjected self-guides would not
be predictive of participants' reports on these dependent measures.
Our selection of dependent variables was based on the basic premise
of self-discrepancy theory that increased discrepancy is related to psy-
chological distress. Because the current study did not focus on the
unique relationship between ideal and ought self-discrepancy and types
of psychological distress (i.e., dejection and agitation respectively), we
selected a measure of overall psychological distress. In addition, we in-
cluded measures of interpersonal functioning (interpersonal sensitivity,
interpersonal problems) because of the current focus on the interper-
sonal dimension within self-discrepancy theory (i.e., own versus other
self-state representations). We reasoned that discrepancies involving
different standpoints on the self may play a particularly important role
in interpersonal problems.

GENDER DIFFERENCES IN REGULATORY SIGNIFICANCE OF
SELF-GUIDES

There is a substantial literature on sex differences in socialization sug-
gesting that the central predictions of this study should be considered
separately for males and females. Although research on differences in male and female socialization has produced mixed findings, Higgins (1991) suggests that one common theme across many studies is that parents tend to monitor and control the behavior of their daughters more than their sons (see Block, 1983; Fagot, 1978; Huston, 1983; Parke & Slaby, 1983; Radke-Yarrow, Zahn-Waxler, & Chapman, 1983; Rothbart & Maccoby, 1966; Rothbart & Rothbart, 1976). Higgins (1991) argues that one consequence of these socialization differences is that females are likely to develop stronger self-other contingencies, or significant other guides than males. Our recent research (Moretti, Rein, & Wiebe, 1998) on the regulatory significance of own versus other standpoint guides supports this view and is consistent with Cross and Madson’s (1997) review of research examining gender differences in cognition, motivation, emotion, and social behavior. Cross and Madson (1997) concluded that women in North America are socialized to construct and maintain an “interdependent” self-system; in contrast, men are socialized to develop and maintain an “independent” self-system.

Baumeister and Sommer (1997) argue that the sex differences noted by Cross and Madson (1997) do not imply that males are any less motivated toward ensuring relatedness than are females. Rather they suggest that there is fundamental difference in how males and females maintain relatedness. More specifically, they suggest that males are socialized to establish and maintain relatedness with a broader social sphere than are females, and that the use of power and dominance by males is directed toward this goal. Although the views of Cross and Madson (1997) and Baumeister and Sommer (1997) differ in terms of the extent to which they assume relatedness is a primary motivation for males and females, they are not necessarily incompatible in terms of how they understand gender differences in self-construal. Both agree that females tend to construe the self in terms of experiences in intimate relationships. Both also agree that males construct the self in terms of experiences that differentiate or distinguish themselves from others. For females, relatedness is maintained through the communality between self and other; for males, it is maintained through differentiation and distinctiveness.

Cross and Madson (1997) and Baumeister and Sommer’s (1997) positions lead to a similar prediction regarding gender differences: The psychological relevance of identified and independent self-guides is likely different for males and females. More specifically, females may be more strongly influenced by identified self-guides that represent a perceived shared or “interdependent” view of the self than by independent self-guides. In contrast, males may be more strongly influenced by independent self-guides that represent differentiation from others than by identified self-guides. To test these predictions, we completed separate
regression analyses for males and females. For females, we hypothesized that the relationship between the actual-self and identified self-guides (i.e., discrepancy and congruency) would be significantly more predictive of functioning than would the relationship between the actual-self and independent self-guides. Conversely, for males we hypothesized that the relationship between the actual-self and independent self-guides would be significantly more predictive of functioning than would the relationship between the actual-self and identified self-guides.

METHOD

PARTICIPANTS

Participants were 110 psychology undergraduates (74 females and 36 males) enrolled at Simon Fraser University. Females tended to be slightly older than males (25.57 vs. 23.53 years respectively; Mean = 24.88 years).

MEASURES

Selves Questionnaire (adapted from Higgins, Bond, Klein, & Strauman, 1986). Participants were asked to spontaneously generate sets of up to 10 traits or attributes that describe their actual-self (i.e., attributes they believe they actually possess), and their self-guides, including their ideal-self (i.e., attributes they ideally wish or hope to possess), and ought-self (i.e., attributes they believe they should or ought to possess). In addition, they generate separate lists of attributes that they believe their mother and father hope they possess (ideal: other) or feel they should possess (ought: other). For each list of attributes, participants rate the extent to which they believe they possess each attribute (or wish to possess; or should possess) on a 4-point scale ranging from 1 (slightly) to 4 (extremely).

The Selves was scored to distinguish identified, introjected, and independent guides. Identified or perceived shared guides were scored as those attributes that participants listed in their own-ideal or ought self-guides, as well as in their parental ideal or parental ought guides. Introjected guides were scored as attributes that participants listed in their parental guides (ideal or ought) but did not list in their own self-guides. Maternal and paternal introjected and identified self-guides were scored separately and then averaged. Independent self-guides were scored as ideal or ought self-guide attributes, which were listed only in participant’s own self-guides and not in parental guides.
Self-guides were then classified as matches, mismatches, or nonmatches, based on their relation to attributes of the actual-self. Self-guide matches were defined as attributes present in both the actual-self and the self-guide that were synonymous in meaning, with extent ratings that did not vary by more than 1 point (e.g., actual-self: friendly 3; own-ideal: friendly 4). Self-guide mismatches were defined as either synonymous attributes present in both the actual-self and self-guide, with extent ratings that varied by 2 or more points (e.g., actual-self: friendly 1; own-ideal: friendly 4); or antonymous attributes in the actual-self and self-guide (e.g., actual-self: unfriendly; own-ideal: friendly). Finally, nonmatches were defined as attributes that were present only in actual-self or the self-guide, but not in both.

Combining across these two dimensions of coding produced the following self-guide variables: identified matches and identified mismatches; introjected matches and introjected mismatches; and independent matches and mismatches. Nonmatches were not included in the present analysis.

The Symptom Checklist-90-Revised (SCL-90-R; Derogatis, 1983). This 90-item self-report measure asked participants to indicate the frequency of a wide range of psychological distress symptoms on a 5-point scale ranging from 0 (not at all) to 4 (extremely). This measure yields a global severity index of psychological distress and several specific distress subscales. For the purpose of this study, we focused only on the global index of distress and the interpersonal sensitivity subscale. Derogatis (1977) reported adequate test-retest and internal consistency reliability, and concurrent and discriminant validity for the SCL-90-R.

Revised Inventory of Interpersonal Problems (IIP; Alden, Wiggins, & Pincus, 1990). This 64-item self-report measure assesses a wide range of interpersonal problems. Participants were asked to respond to each item on a 5-point scale ranging from 0 (not at all) to 4 (very often). Eight interpersonal problem scales can be derived, corresponding to the circumplex model of interpersonal functioning. In addition, an overall score can be computed to provide an index of overall interpersonal difficulties. Adequate internal consistency, structural stability in independent samples, and convergent validity has been established (Alden, Wiggins, & Pincus, 1990). In the current study, we examined the overall level of interpersonal problems.

PROCEDURE

Participants were invited to complete the study to earn partial credit toward requirements for Introductory Psychology. Participants completed consent forms that described the study as investigating feeling, behaviors,
and self-concept. Measures were completed in random order in a small group setting. Upon completion of the measures, participants were provided with a written description of the research and the opportunity to contact the researcher regarding questions about the study and results.

RESULTS

COMPONENTS OF THE SELF-SYSTEM

Proportion of Parental Guide that is Identified versus Introjected. We first examined the percentage of self-guides that were classified into each of the six categories as described above. Forty percent of parental guides were classified as identified guides (i.e., shared between own and parental perspective) and 60% were classified as introjected guides (i.e., only represented in parental guide). Identified parental guides were significantly more likely to be maternal than paternal \(M = .43 \text{ vs. } M = .36; t(107) = 2.28, p < .05\), and were significantly more likely to match than mismatch the actual-self \(M = .19 \text{ vs. } M = .09\) for maternal guides respectively, \(t(107) = 3.15, p < .01\); \(M = .18 \text{ vs. } M = .06\) for paternal guides respectively, \(t(107) = 4.25, p < .001\). A relatively small proportion of identified guides were mismatches with the actual-self (15% and 12% of maternal and paternal identified guides respectively).

Introjected guides were significantly less likely to be maternal than paternal \(M = .57 \text{ vs. } M = .64, t(107) = 2.28, p < .05\), and were significantly more likely to be match than mismatch the actual-self \(M = .13 \text{ vs. } M = .04\) for maternal guides respectively, \(t(107) = 4.23, p < .001\); \(M = .14 \text{ vs. } M = .04\) for paternal guides respectively, \(t(107) = 3.72, p < .001\). However, in contrast to identified guides, the majority of introjected guides were mismatches with the actual-self (39% and 47% of maternal and paternal introjected guides respectively).

Proportion of Own Guide Comprised of Identified Parental Guides. Although less than half of all available parental guides were classified as identified, these guides nonetheless constituted 44% of own guides. The remaining 56% of own self-guides were independent and did not overlap with parental guides. Parental guides shared with the own standpoint were more likely to be maternal than paternal \(M = .36 \text{ vs. } M = .27, t(107) = 4.23, p < .001\), and they were more likely to be those that matched than mismatched the actual-self \(M = .16 \text{ vs. } M = .07\) for maternal guides respec-

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1. Not surprisingly, there is some degree of overlap between maternal and paternal self-guides (19%). Thus, the sum of parental guides identified as within the own regulatory system (i.e., sum of maternal and paternal guides: 63%) is greater than the average percentage of parental guides identified within the own self-regulatory system (44%).
tively, \( t(107) = 3.56, p < .001; M = .14 \) vs. \( M = .04 \) for paternal guides respectively, \( t(107) = 4.98, p < .001 \). Identified guides also included a proportion of guides not currently active in regulation of the actual-self (i.e., nonmatches, 13% and 9% for maternal and paternal identified guides respectively). These results indicate that there is a considerable overlap between own and parental self-guides, and that this overlap represents a substantial portion of all guides identified as one's own.

**AFFECTIVE AND INTERPERSONAL IMPORTANCE OF SELF-REGULATORY GUIDES**

We hypothesized that identified and independent self-guides would be more predictive of emotional distress and interpersonal functioning than would introjected guides. Zero order correlations between self-guide variables (independent matches; independent mismatches; identified matches, identified mismatches; introjected matches, introjected mismatches) and dependent measures are presented in Table 1.

Results support our prediction that identified and introjected guides are more strongly related to functioning than are independent guides. Specifically, congruency (i.e., matches) between the actual-self and identified guides predicted marginally lower levels of distress, interpersonal sensitivity, and interpersonal problems. In contrast, discrepancy (mismatches) between the actual-self and identified guides predicted significantly higher levels of distress, interpersonal sensitivity and interpersonal problems. Similarly, congruency between the actual-self and independent guides predicted significantly lower levels of distress, interpersonal sensitivity and interpersonal problems while discrepancy predicted significantly higher levels of distress, interpersonal sensitivity, and interpersonal difficulty. Congruency and discrepancy between the actual-self and introjected guides was not significantly related to the dependent variables.

To further test the specificity of the relationships between identified, introjected, and independent guide discrepancy with dependent measures, self-guides were simultaneously regressed on to SCL-90 psychological distress, interpersonal sensitivity, and IIP total interpersonal problems scores.

The pattern of results again confirmed our hypotheses: The only significant predictors to emerge in the analysis were identified and independent guides (see Table 2). Specifically, discrepancy between the actual-self and identified guides predicted significantly higher levels of psychological distress and interpersonal sensitivity. Congruency between the actual-self and identified guides predicted significantly lower levels of interpersonal sensitivity. Similarly, congruency between the actual-self
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Note: *p < .10, **p < .05, ***p < .01, ****p < .001.
and independent guides predicted significantly lower levels of psychological distress and interpersonal sensitivity, and discrepancy between the actual-self and independent guides predicted significantly higher levels of interpersonal problems. Introjected guides were not significant predictors.

GENDER DIFFERENCES IN REGULATORY SIGNIFICANCE OF SELF-GUIDES

We predicted that females are more strongly influenced by identified guides than by independent guides, and that males are more strongly influenced by independent guides than by identified guides. Before we examined sex differences in the psychological impact of self-guides, we first examined sex differences in the proportion of identified, introjected and independent guides. Beginning with an assessment of all available parental guides we found that comparable proportions were classified as identified and introjected for males and females (identified guides: 39% vs. 43% for males and females respectively; introjected guides: 57% vs. 61% for males and females respectively). No significant sex differ-
ences were found in the proportion of maternal or paternal guides (match, mismatch, or nonmatch) classified as identified or introjected.

Identified parental guides constituted a substantial proportion of own guides for both males and females (45% vs. 46% for males and females respectively). No significant sex differences were found in the proportion of the own guides that was comprised of maternal or paternal guides (match, mismatch, or nonmatch). Thus, females did not identify or introject a greater or lesser percentage of parental guides than did males, nor did females' versus males' own guides contain different proportions of parental guides. This does not preclude the possibility, however, that the psychological relevance of identified guides is different for males and females. Zero-order correlations for males and females separately (see Table 1) suggest that the relevance of identified and independent guides was not equivalent for males and females. For females, identified matches were marginally significantly correlated with lower levels of distress, interpersonal sensitivity, and interpersonal problems, while identified mismatches were significantly correlated with increased levels of distress, interpersonal sensitivity and interpersonal problems. In contrast, for males identified matches were not significantly correlated with dependent variables. Significance testing indicated that the correlation between identified mismatches and interpersonal sensitivity was significantly larger for females ($r = .43$) as compared to males ($r = .02$), ($z = 2.10, p = .01$, two-tailed). Similarly, the correlation between identified mismatches and distress, and the correlation between identified mismatches and interpersonal problems was marginally significantly larger for females ($r = .25$ and $r = .40$ respectively) as compared to males ($r = -.04$ and $r = .09$ respectively), ($z = 1.62, p = .06$; two-tailed and $z = 1.40, p = .10$; two-tailed, respectively).

Turning to results for independent guides, a similar pattern of correlations between independent matches, mismatches and dependent variables was observed for males and females. However, the magnitude of correlations was generally larger for males; the correlation between independent matches and interpersonal problems was marginally significantly larger for males ($r = -.44$) than for females ($r = -.15$) ($z = 1.53, p = .06$; two-tailed).

To further examine predicted gender differences in guide relevance, separate regression analyses were completed for male and female participants. In each analysis, all guide types were entered simultaneously to identify the unique contribution of each guide type. Results for males versus females supported the hypothesis of gender-specific guide relevance. For males, congruency between the actual-self and independent guides predicted marginally significantly lower levels of psychological distress and interpersonal problems (see Table 3). Neither identified nor introjected guides significantly predicted functioning. For females,
discrepancy between the actual-self and identified guides predicted significantly higher levels of distress, interpersonal sensitivity, and marginally higher levels of interpersonal problems (see Table 4). Congruency between the actual-self and identified guides predicted significantly lower levels of interpersonal sensitivity. In contrast to the result for males, independent guides were not a significant predictor of functioning in females. Introjected guides also did not emerge as a significant predictor for females.

Further analyses were completed for males and females, differentiating between identified and introjected maternal versus paternal guides. Again, results for males confirmed the significance of independent guides in predicting functioning. Regression analyses entering identified maternal, introjected maternal, and independent guides revealed that independent matches predicted significantly lower levels of distress ($pr = -.41, p < .05$), interpersonal sensitivity ($pr = .38, p < .05$), and marginally fewer interpersonal problems ($pr = -.34, p = .08$). Similarly, analyses entering identified paternal, introjected paternal, and independent guides showed that independent matches predicted margin-
ally lower level of distress \( (pr = -.32, p = .10) \). Neither maternal nor paternal identified or introjected guides were significant predictors.

For females, both maternal and paternal identified guides were predictive of functioning, replicating the pattern of results found when these guides were collapsed. Contrary to the overall pattern of results, however, introjected maternal guides were also found to be a significant predictor. Specifically, regression analyses entering maternal identified, maternal introjected and independent guides revealed that identified and introjected mismatches predicted significantly higher levels of distress \( (pr = .31, p < .01 \) and \( pr = .28, p < .05 \) respectively) and interpersonal sensitivity \( (pr = .50, p < .0001 \) and \( pr = .29, p < .05 \) respectively). Identified guides that matched the actual-self predicted marginally lower levels of interpersonal sensitivity \( (pr = -.27, p < .05) \). Regression analyses entering paternal identified, paternal introjected, and independent guides revealed that identified matches predicted significantly lower levels of distress \( (pr = -.27, p < .05) \) and interpersonal sensitivity \( (pr = -.29, p < .05) \), while paternal mismatches predicted significantly higher levels of distress \( (pr = .38, p < .01) \) and interpersonal sensitivity \( (pr = .38, p < .01) \). Nei-
ther independent nor introjected paternal guides were significant in predicting functioning.

DISCUSSION

The overall pattern of findings show that perceived parental guides play a significant role in self-regulation when these guides are shared as one’s own. Specifically, discrepancy between the actual-self and perceived shared or identified guides predicted higher levels of psychological distress and interpersonal sensitivity; congruency between the actual-self and perceived shared guides predicted significantly lower levels of interpersonal sensitivity. In contrast, the relationship between the actual-self and nonshared or introjected guides was not significant in predicting psychological or interpersonal functioning. These results suggest that parental guides not fully integrated into the self are not particularly important in self-regulation. Independent self-guides, those guides nominated as one’s own but not perceived as shared with parents, were also significant in predicting emotional and interpersonal functioning. We found that congruency between the actual-self and independent guides predicted lower psychological distress and interpersonal sensitivity, while discrepancy predicted increased interpersonal problems. Independent guides likely originate from diverse sources, such as peer relationships, romantic relationships, and general social standards. Thus, it is important to note that the guides we have classified as independent in this study may only be “independent” relative to perceived parental guides. It is possible that independent guides in the current study were important predictors of functioning because they represent a perceived shared definition of self, with significant individuals other than one’s parents. It is important that future research investigate the diverse interpersonal and social contexts that provide standards which may be internalized into the self.

Some evidence of gender differences emerged in the study. Although males and females identified similar proportions of parental guides, identified guides did not hold equal relevance for self-regulation. Males were influenced by the relation between their actual-self and their own independent rather than identified guides. When males perceived their actual-self as congruent with their independent guides, they reported less distress and fewer interpersonal problems. These results were consistent, regardless of whether our analyses focused on maternal or paternal guides. In contrast, females were influenced by identified rather than independent guides. When females perceived their actual-self as discrepant from identified guides, they reported higher levels of distress,
interpersonal sensitivity, and more interpersonal problems. When they perceived their actual-self as congruent with identified guides, they reported less interpersonal sensitivity. Identified guides were significant in female self-regulation, regardless of whether they were maternal or paternal in origin. Interestingly, maternal but not paternal introjected guides that mismatched the actual-self also predicted distress and interpersonal sensitivity in females.

It is important to view our gender difference findings as preliminary, particularly given the small sample size of males in the study. Although we did not find a gender difference in the extent to which independent and identified guides were represented in the self-concept, we did find some evidence that these guides were differentially important for males and females. Our results are consistent with theories that stress the relational context in which females develop a sense of self (Jordan et al., 1991). According to this view, female self-development emerges within a context that emphasizes communality with others, particularly mothers, rather than distinctiveness. As a consequence, women tend to experience and define themselves in terms of their relationships with others, and their sense of self-worth is closely connected with their experiences within intimate relationships. Our finding regarding the relevance of maternal guides, regardless of whether they were identified or introjected, is particularly intriguing in pointing to the special significance of mother-daughter relationships in women’s self-development. We found that maternal guides influenced how women evaluated themselves, regardless of whether they shared or accepted these guides as their own. This was not the case for paternal guides; only paternal guides that were perceived as shared or identified were significant predictors. The findings are consistent with Surrey’s (1991) view that mother-daughter relationships involve a process of “interactive validation” in which mothers and daughters move from their own to each other’s perspectives depending on relational needs. If this process indeed occurs, it would increase the relevance of all maternal guides, regardless of whether or not they are adopted as one’s own. This is precisely the pattern of results we found for women in relation to maternal guides.

The tendency to self-regulate in terms of close relationships likely carries benefits and liabilities. Close relationships can be a source of support during times of stress. But there are risks. If shared self-guides become overly influential in self-regulation, self-worth may rest on perceived approval from others, and more generally on the quality of close relationships. It is possible that a gender difference self-regulatory style contributes to women’s greater vulnerability to depression. The ten-
dency of women to self-regulate in terms of intimate relationships, combined with ruminative coping strategies (Nolen-Hoeksema, 1993, 1996), may increase risk for depression. The risk may be particularly acute if women become overly focused on how to reconstruct themselves to be congruent with their relational context at the cost of employing other effective means of coping. Understanding the tendency of women to self-regulate in relational terms has implications for developing specific types of therapeutic interventions that may be helpful in alleviating depression (Moretti, Higgins, & Feldman, 1990).

Our findings are also consistent with Cross and Madson’s (1997) view that males are socialized to construe the self in terms of independence and autonomy, whereas females are socialized to construe the self in terms of intimate relationships. But, as previously noted, our definition of independent guides rested on participants’ perception that their parents did not share these guides. This does not rule out the possibility that “independent” guides were shared with a broader social sphere, as suggested by Baumeister and Sommer (1997). This possibility is supported by research investigating guide differentiation and conflict during adolescence (Higgins & Loeb, 1995; Higgins, Loeb & Moretti, 1995). Specifically, this research showed that discrepancy between the actual-self and peer self-guides decreased more for boys than girls between Grades 8 and 9, while discrepancy between the actual-self and parental guides increased more for boys than girls during this period. In other words, boys more than girls moved away from parental guides and toward peer guides. Thus, our finding that males are more highly influenced than females by “independent” guides may simply be a reflection of a gender difference in the importance of self-regulatory guides based on a broader social sphere. It is also important to emphasize that our findings do not suggest that relationships are important for females but unimportant for males. As Baumeister and Sommer (1997), the self-related meaning of relationships can be different for males and females without implying a gender difference in need for relatedness.

The methodology outlined in this article provides a new approach for studying the idiographic significance of internal self-other representations. It adds to the growing research on interpersonal aspects of self-representation (Aron, Aron, Tudor & Nelson, 1991; Davis, Conklin, Smith & Luce, 1996; Moretti et al., 1996) by differentiating the distinct ways in which internal representations of others influence self-regulation. This work integrates important concepts from psychodynamic, relational, and social-cognitive theories, and provides an innovative approach for understanding the self. There are several
limitations inherent in the current approach that should be considered in future research. First, the current methodology relies on participant’s self-reports to assess the self-system, and emotional and interpersonal problems. It is unlikely that participants are aware of the relations between self-state representations that underlie the structure of the self-regulatory system because participants are never asked to directly compare or contrast attributes of one self-state representation with another. Research on the effects of priming self-discrepancies shows the impact of discrepancies on affect occurs in the absence of awareness of the discrepancies (Strauman, 1989; Strauman & Higgins, 1987). Nonetheless, even though it is difficult to stipulate precisely how a self-report bias could account for the findings, such a bias cannot be completely ruled out. Second, we measured perceived “shared reality” rather than objective shared reality. Clearly, the perceived reality that we hold of ourselves in relation to others has a profound impact on how we feel and behave, but the “real” aspects of interpersonal relationships also play an important role. Thus, it would be important to measure self-guides as reported by individuals and their significant others in future studies. Finally, we have focused on gender differences in the psychological relevance of internal representations of others, but it is likely that these differences represent individual differences in socialization experiences. Thus, it is important that future researchers directly examine the socialization experiences that give rise to individual differences in self-regulatory orientation. Longitudinal studies provide a more sensitive method for detecting the effects of socialization experiences on self-regulation than do cross-sectional designs, as implemented in the current study.

As previously noted, there are trade-offs—costs and benefits—to different regulatory styles. North American society and traditional psychodynamic models tend to equate psychological maturity and health with greater independence. One might argue, however, that both a clear differentiation of self from others, as well as an appreciation of the relatedness between self and others, characterize psychological maturity. This process is a dynamic interaction between the individual and interpersonal and social ecology which involves both the integration of existing self-regulatory possibilities, and the exploration of new self-regulatory possibilities. Ultimately, the emergence of a self-regulatory system that represents a fluid but integrated shared reality about the self with significant others, including parents, peers and partners—and aspects of society in general—is most likely beneficial to psychological health.
REFERENCES


