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# Self-Discrepancies and Affect: Incorporating the Role of Feared Selves

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*The authors examined ought, ideal, and feared self-discrepancies as predictors of agitation- and dejection-related affects. Overall, discrepancy from feared selves predicted anxiety and guilt, preempting the role of discrepancies from ought selves; ideal and feared discrepancies both predicted depression. Further analyses revealed interactions between actual-ought and actual-feared discrepancies in predicting anxiety and guilt. Among participants who were relatively near their feared selves, discrepancies from ought selves were unrelated to these affects. In contrast, among those whose feared selves were more distant, ought discrepancies did predict agitation-related affect, consistent with self-discrepancy theory. Discussion centers on a view in which an avoidance motive (feared self) dominates anxiety and guilt if the feared element is nearby but in which an associated approach motive (ought self) dominates anxiety and guilt if the feared element is more remote.*

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**H**ow people represent the self and how those representations influence affective experience have been the focus of several recent theories (e.g., Higgins, 1987, 1996; Linville, 1987; Markus & Nurius, 1986; Strauman & Higgins, 1993). Self-discrepancy theory (Higgins, 1987, 1996) is particularly intriguing because it provides a conceptual basis for differentiating dysphoric feelings from anxious feelings—both in terms of underlying causes and in terms of the nature of the feeling state. In brief, this theory assumes that people hold several distinct kinds of self-guides, that is, values against which people compare themselves. The affective consequences of the comparisons are predicted to differ as a function of which self-guide is being used in the comparison.

## SELF-DISCREPANCY THEORY

Two kinds of self-guides are of particular importance in self-discrepancy theory: ideals and oughts. The ideal self is a positive point of reference made up of qualities the person desires to embody. Ideals are aspirations, hopes, and positive wishes for the self. Ideals might be viewed as incentives. Living up to an ideal means attaining a value that is intrinsically desirable. Self-discrepancy theory holds that discrepancies between the perceived actual self and the ideal self lead to the experience of dysphoria and dejection. In this theory, these affects represent a perceived failure to attain rewards (see also Finlay-Jones & Brown, 1981).

Ought selves are defined by a sense of duty, responsibility, or obligation. An ought self is a self that one feels compelled to be rather than intrinsically desires to be. The ought self is a positive value in the sense that people wish to conform to it. However, the ought self seems derived in part from punishment. That is, living up to an ought self means being a particular kind of person so as to avoid an aversive experience such as self-disapproval or the disapproval of others. Oughts thus seem intrinsically to have a dual-motive quality (see Figure 1): They

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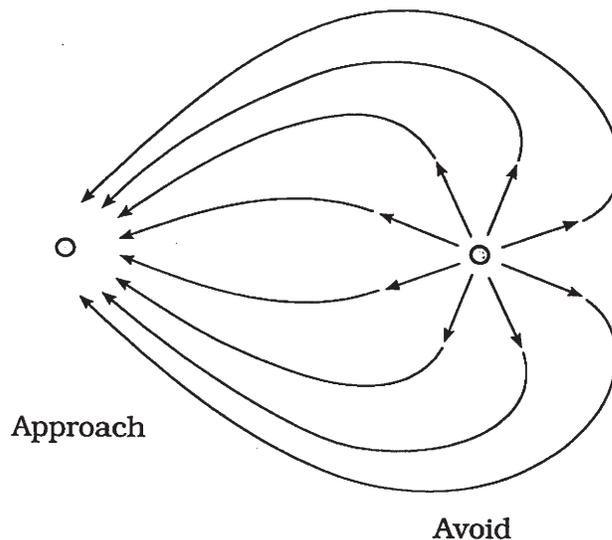
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incorporate an attempt to avoid an undesired value by approaching a desired value. Although there are many ways to conceptualize this combination, we have viewed it as a discrepancy-enlarging feedback process being captured by a discrepancy-reducing feedback process (Carver & Scheier, 1998).

Self-discrepancy theory holds that discrepancies between the actual self and the ought self yield anxiety and guilt. In this view, then, anxiety arises when there is a perceived failure to fulfill an obligation (or to avoid an impending punishment). Because self-discrepancy theory was initially framed entirely in terms of values to approach (ideals and oughts), there remains some ambiguity about which of the motives behind an ought actually underlies the experience of anxiety: the approach motive or the avoidance motive.

Higgins (1987, 1996) and his collaborators (e.g., Higgins, Bond, Klein, & Strauman, 1986) have collected considerable support for the prediction that actual-ideal discrepancies have unique associations (i.e., when actual-ought discrepancies are controlled) with depression and dejection and that actual-ought discrepancies have unique associations with anxiety and agitation. Also fitting this line of reasoning, Clark, Beck, and Brown (1989) found in psychiatric patients that depression was uniquely associated with thoughts of loss and failure (failure to attain rewards), and anxiety was uniquely associated with thoughts of harm and danger (threat of punishers). Further evidence that depression and anxiety have different cognitive concomitants has been reported by others (e.g., Ahrens & Haaga, 1993; Dalglish & Watts, 1990; Greenberg & Alloy, 1989; Greenberg & Beck, 1989; Mineka & Sutton, 1992; Strauman, 1989; Wickless & Kirsch, 1988; Young et al., 1996).

Although based initially on issues pertaining to discrepancies with respect to the desired comparison points (ideals and oughts), self-discrepancy theory has evolved in the past few years. In particular, Higgins and his collaborators have begun to explore in greater depth the avoidance aspect of the dynamics behind the ought self. For example, Higgins and Tykocinski (1992) reported evidence from an incidental memory task that people whose self-structure was dominated by actual-ought discrepancies were focused on avoiding negative occurrences. Those whose self-structure was dominated by actual-ideal discrepancies, in contrast, appeared focused on positive goals. Similarly, Higgins, Roney, Crowe, and Hymes (1994) reported that, in choosing strategies from a set of available options framed as “do” and “don’t” statements, people whose self-structure was dominated by actual-ought discrepancies chose more strategies with an avoidance orientation than did those whose self-structure was dominated by actual-ideal discrepancies.



**Figure 1** Self-regulation sometimes involves simultaneously a desire to avoid a proscribed or punished value and a desire to approach a positive value. The avoidance impulse is relatively directionless—that is, movement is away from the negatively valenced value, in any direction—but it is given an affirmative form by being captured into the approach tendency.

SOURCE: Adapted from Carver and Scheier (1998). Reprinted with permission from Cambridge University Press.

In recent years, Higgins (1996, 1997) has begun to write about what he calls promotion and prevention focuses underlying behavior (see also, e.g., Higgins, Shah, & Friedman, 1997), which reflect approach and avoidance motives. In principle, either sort of focus could apply to either an ought or an ideal. That is, one could try to promote an ought in oneself, but one could also try to avoid a punishment. Similarly, one could try to promote an ideal in oneself, but one could also try to prevent the failure of an ideal.

In practice, however, the two focuses appear to emerge differentially with respect to the two kinds of self-guides. Specifically, promotion focus is more common for self-regulation with respect to ideals; prevention focus is more common for self-regulation with respect to oughts (e.g., Higgins et al., 1997). This link between prevention and oughts appears to fit the characterization earlier of ought-based self-regulation as dealing with avoidance as much as with approach.

#### *Approach and Avoidance Dynamics*

In this study, we sought to look more closely at an aspect of the internal dynamics of ought-based self-

regulation. In particular, we examined the role of the approach (or promotion) motive and the role of the avoidance (or prevention) motive in the affective experiences associated with discrepancies from this self-guide. We approached this question by asking whether there was another self-guide operating that had been disregarded in earlier tests of the theory.

A good candidate for this role is the feared self, an entity postulated by Markus and Nurius (1986) in their discussion of possible selves. The possible-self model shares substantial ground with self-discrepancy theory, although the overlap is rarely commented on. Both theories posit a working model of the actual self, and both assume an ideal self (or its equivalent, the hoped-for self) (Markus & Nurius, 1986). Both also posit that there are additional representations that influence various kinds of self-regulatory activities. Whereas self-discrepancy theory placed an emphasis on oughts, Markus and her colleagues placed an emphasis on the feared self—a set of qualities the person wants not to become but is concerned about possibly becoming (Oyserman & Markus, 1990).

Markus and her colleagues (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Oyserman & Markus, 1990) argue that a representation of a feared self motivates the person to act to deviate from that representation to ensure that the feared qualities never materialize. This sounds very similar to the motivational force that, by strong implication, underlies the ought self. The feared self is a point of comparison that is undesired and punishing, leading to efforts to escape from or avoid it. These efforts, in turn, may be given form by the creation of an ought self, which provides a place of safety where the feared possibilities cannot come to pass (see Figure 1).

If this were so, one would expect some inverse association between what constitutes the ought self and the feared self. We would not necessarily expect them to be opposites. Oughts provide positive self-structures to aim for that incorporate the important feature of being incompatible with the feared self. Although this feature may be critical in causing a value to be adopted as an ought self, it is not the only determinant of the ought. Thus, several people with the same fear (e.g., fear of being unpopular) may develop very different ought selves (e.g., be a member of a social organization, be a volunteer worker, be talkative in social settings), each of which can prevent that feared self from being manifested.

#### *Does One Motive Have Primacy?*

The preceding discussion of dual-motivational processes within ought-based self-regulation raises a question: Is one of the two processes more important than the other in creating anxious affect? More con-

cretely, does anxiety arise primarily because the person is discrepant from the ought self (the prediction of self-discrepancy theory)? Or does anxiety arise primarily because the person is not discrepant enough from the feared self? If so, after discrepancies from the feared self were taken into account, discrepancies from the ought self might no longer matter.

One previous study provides information on this issue, but the information is limited. Ogilvie (1987) assessed relations between the actual self and two comparison points: the ideal self (“how I would like to be”) and what he called the undesired self (“how I hope to never be”). He then related the discrepancies that participants reported regarding each of these to their degree of life satisfaction. He found that discrepancies regarding the undesired self were more robust predictors of life satisfaction than were discrepancies regarding the ideal self (see also Ogilvie & Clark, 1992).

The problem with this study as it pertains to the question we are raising here is that it included too few measures. It did not distinguish among affect qualities (agitation vs. dejection-related affects), and it did not include the ought self as a comparison point. Thus, it is unclear whether Ogilvie’s (1987) finding pertains to agitation-related affects, to dejection-related affects, or to both. The research reported here clarified these points by assessing distinct affect qualities and by assessing the ought self as well as ideal and feared selves.

#### *Variations in Motive Salience*

We also examined two more issues here. First, although it is possible that one motive always matters more to anxiety (or indeed to other affects), it is also possible that this picture is too simple. Motives may differ in importance or impact in different circumstances. Perhaps when a person is close to an undesired value (thus in danger of pain or punishment), the salient motive is to escape. If there is distance from the undesired value, on the other hand, escape may be less salient and desired values more salient (see Figure 1). The person in this situation may focus more on moving toward the desired values, and approach issues may be more relevant to affective experience.

This reasoning suggests that discrepancies from the feared self should be the primary predictor of agitation-related (fear-based) affects among people who see themselves as close to the feared self. Discrepancies regarding positive goal values may play a larger role in affective experience among people who do not see themselves as close to the feared self. Among these persons, actual-ought discrepancies may emerge as a better predictor of agitation-related affects. This pattern would yield an interaction between actual-feared discrepancies and actual-ought discrepancies.

Finally, we examined a somewhat broader array of affects than is typical of self-discrepancy research. Self-discrepancy theory is explicit about anxiety being an agitation-related affect; guilt also has been treated as an agitation-related affect inasmuch as it reflects anticipation of sanctions (Strauman & Higgins, 1987). Although there is a less explicit basis in self-discrepancy theory for this, a case can also be made that contentment is agitation related, standing at the opposite end of the affect dimension (cf. Carver & Scheier, 1998). In the same way, self-discrepancy theory treats depression as the prototypical dejection-related affect, but a case can be made that happiness stands at the opposite end of the dejection-related affect dimension. All these affects were examined here.

#### METHOD

Participants were 85 undergraduates from the University of Miami (27 male, 56 female, 2 who did not record their gender), each of whom completed two separate group sessions. Each session was presented as one in which the participants were simply to complete a variety of different measures (which in fact was the case).

#### *Selves Questionnaire*

In the first session, participants completed the Selves Questionnaire, which we adapted somewhat from the form in which it is typically used by Higgins and his collaborators (e.g., Higgins, 1987; Higgins et al., 1986). On the first page were general orienting instructions for the task. The instructions encouraged participants to work slowly and carefully and to pause and rest if they felt a loss of concentration. On three subsequent pages, participants were given descriptions of the nature of three kinds of self-guides (ought, ideal, and feared self). For each, they were requested to list seven of their own traits that fit the description (all participants did so). All selves listed in this study were to be "own" selves, as opposed to selves that significant others such as parents have in mind for the respondent. Because we were proceeding primarily within the self-discrepancy framework, we asked participants to list traits rather than selves that might potentially extend beyond the framework of traits (e.g., Oyserman & Markus, 1990).

The description of the ought self was as follows:

Your ought self is the kind of person you believe you have the *duty* or *obligation* to be. It's defined by the personality traits you think you ought to possess, or feel obligated to possess. It's not necessary that you actually have these traits now, only that you believe you ought to have them.

The description of the ideal self was as follows:

Your ideal self is the kind of person you'd really *like* to be. It's defined by the personality traits you would ideally like to have. It's not necessary that you actually have these traits now, only that you believe you want to have them.

The description of the feared self was as follows:

Your feared self is the kind of person you *fear* being or *worry* about being. It's defined by the personality traits you think you might become in the future but that you'd rather *not* become. It's not necessary that you have these traits, only that you want to avoid having them. (cf. Oyserman & Markus, 1990).

After this came several pages on which participants were asked to make ratings regarding discrepancies. On the first of these pages, participants were told to go back to their list of ought selves and to copy each one onto a line on the later page. Then, they rated how similar they thought they presently were to each of these ought traits using a scale ranging from 1 (*I am just like this trait*) to 7 (*I am the opposite of this trait*). On the next page, participants were told to go back to their list of ideal selves, to copy each one onto a line on the later page, and to rate how similar they thought they presently were to each of those ideal selves. On the final page, participants were told to go back to their list of feared selves, to copy each one onto a line on the later page, and to rate how similar they thought they presently were to each of those feared selves.

Thus, participants generated their own reports of discrepancies with respect to ideal, ought, and feared selves. We should note that most prior research on self-discrepancy theory asked participants simply to create lists of ideals, oughts, and actuals; the researchers then compare the lists for matches and opposites. Our procedure allows participants to come to their own judgments about how closely they resemble the various self-guides, which we believe is more sensitive to smaller degrees of discrepancy.

#### *Affects Balance Scale*

A second session occurred approximately 2 weeks later. This session took a portion of a class meeting and was conducted by a person other than the one who collected the Selves Questionnaire. Measures completed in this session included the Affects Balance Scale (ABS) (Derogatis, 1975), a 40-item instrument composed of feeling-descriptive adjectives. The ABS has eight five-item subscales, each of which assesses a particular quality

TABLE 1: Intercorrelations of Measures: Affects Balance Scales and Self-Reported Discrepancies Regarding Ideal, Ought, and Feared Selves

	Anxiety	Guilt	Contentment	Depression	Happiness	Ideal Discrepancy	Ought Discrepancy	Feared Discrepancy
Anxiety								
Guilt	.70****							
Contentment	-.62****	-.59****						
Depression	.69****	.80****	-.67****					
Happiness	-.41****	-.50****	.77****	-.66****				
Ideal discrepancy	.23**	.19	-.34***	.31***	-.34***			
Ought discrepancy	.21*	.28**	-.30***	.22**	-.30***	.58****		
Feared discrepancy	-.35****	-.36****	.38****	-.52****	.38****	-.29****	-.32****	
Mean	13.25	9.60	16.56	10.34	17.04	20.34	19.96	38.53
SD	3.40	3.73	3.55	3.97	3.51	7.30	7.20	7.57
Alpha	.73	.85	.84	.88	.88	.75	.73	.77

\* $p < .06$ . \*\* $p < .05$ . \*\*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\*\* $p < .001$ .

of affect. Participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they had had each of the feelings during the past week, including today, using response options that ranged from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*always*).

The target scales for this study were those assessing agitation-related affects (anxiety, guilt, contentment) and dejection-related affects (depression and happiness; the remaining items were included as distractors during administration). ABS items measuring anxiety are *nervous*, *timid*, *tense*, *anxious*, and *afraid*; those measuring guilt are *regretful*, *blameworthy*, *ashamed*, *guilty*, and *remorseful*; those measuring contentment are *pleased*, *calm*, *satisfied*, *relaxed*, and *contented*. The items measuring depression are *sad*, *hopeless*, *worthless*, *miserable*, and *unhappy*; those measuring happiness are *happy*, *glad*, *cheerful*, *delighted*, and *joyous*.

## RESULTS

All discrepancies measured in this study are between actual selves and some self-guide as a comparison value. For this reason and for the sake of simplicity in communication, our description of results omits the term actual from the labels of all three types of discrepancy. Participants' ratings of their ought discrepancies were summed across the seven ought selves; the same procedure was used for ratings of discrepancies pertaining to ideal selves and feared selves.

Summary data for ABS scales and correlations among the scales are in Table 1. The inverse correlation between ought discrepancies and feared discrepancies was relatively modest. Indeed, the relation between ideal discrepancies and feared discrepancies was nearly as strong. As usual, there was a strong positive association between ideal discrepancies and ought discrepancies.

### Agitation-Related Affects Overall

Analyses were conducted separately for each affect, starting with agitation-related affects. As is typical of self-

discrepancy research, we began by examining simple correlations between the affect and various discrepancies, then added increasing controls for discrepancies other than the one of interest. Correlations of ought, ideal, and feared discrepancies with the ABS scales pertaining to agitation-related affect are in the first three columns of Table 1 (because the data yielded no significant gender main effect or interaction, findings are combined across gender throughout). As can be seen there, ought discrepancies and feared discrepancies were related to all three affects (though the link between ought discrepancies and anxiety was only marginal). Ideal discrepancies were also related to two of the three agitation-related affects, particularly contentment.

Self-discrepancy theory holds that ought discrepancies relate to agitation-related affects when controlling for ideal discrepancies. To test this, we computed partial correlations between ought discrepancies and these affects controlling for ideal discrepancies (see Table 2); we also computed similar partial correlations (controlling for ideal discrepancies) between feared discrepancies and these affects. With ideal discrepancies controlled, ought discrepancies remained significantly related to guilt (fitting self-discrepancy theory) but not to anxiety or contentment. The effects of this control on the associations between the same affects and feared discrepancies were minor.

Self-discrepancy theory also predicts that when controlling for ought discrepancy, there should be only minimal associations between agitation-related affect and ideal discrepancies. Supportive of this, when ought discrepancies were controlled, ideal discrepancies no longer related significantly to anxiety,  $r = .14$ . Ideal discrepancies did, however, continue to relate to contentment,  $r = -.21$ ,  $p < .03$ , which (if contentment is agitation-related) self-discrepancy theory would not predict. This is the first of several indications that contentment did not act as though it were an agitation-related affect in our sample.

**TABLE 2: Partial Correlations of Ought and Feared Discrepancies With Presumed Agitation Related Affects and Partial Correlations of Ideal and Feared Discrepancies With Presumed Dejection Related Affects**

<i>Affect</i>	<i>Partial r With Ought Discrepancy</i>	<i>Partial r With Ideal Discrepancy</i>	<i>Partial r With Feared Discrepancy</i>
Agitation-related affects			
Partiallying out ideal discrepancies			
Anxiety	.09		-.30***
Guilt	.22**		-.33***
Contentment	-.14		.31***
Additionally partiallying feared			
Anxiety	.03		
Guilt	.17		
Contentment	-.08		
Additionally partiallying ought			
Anxiety			-.29***
Guilt			-.30***
Contentment			.29***
Dejection-related affects			
Partiallying out ought discrepancies			
Depression		.23**	-.48****
Happiness		-.21**	.31***
Additionally partiallying feared			
Depression		.19**	
Happiness		-.18*	
Additionally partiallying ideal			
Depression			-.47****
Happiness			.29***

\* $p < .06$ . \*\* $p < .05$ . \*\*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\*\* $p < .001$ .

Our particular interest in these analyses was in the relative potency of ought and feared discrepancies. Thus, the next step was to test ought and feared discrepancies against each other by computing each one's relations to these affects, controlling for the other (and retaining the control for ideal discrepancy). In these tests (second tier of Table 2), the association of ought discrepancies with guilt was no longer significant after controlling for feared discrepancies, and neither of the other correlations approached significance. In contrast, when controlling for ought discrepancies, the relations of feared discrepancies to all three affects remained significant. Thus, feared discrepancies were more robust predictors of agitation-related affects overall than were ought discrepancies. In these analyses, feared discrepancies preempted the predictive role of ought discrepancies.

Because we had found that contentment was related to ideals rather than oughts, we also examined the relation of ideal discrepancy with contentment, controlling for both ought and feared discrepancies. This test yielded a nearly significant association,  $r = -.18$ ,  $p = .051$ . This unique link of contentment to ideal discrepancy further suggests that contentment was not behaving as an agitation-related affect.

#### *Dejection-Related Affects Overall*

We then turned to dejection-related affects. Correlations of ought, ideal, and feared discrepancies with the relevant ABS scales—depression and happiness—are in the fourth and fifth columns of Table 1. All three types of discrepancy related to both affects. Self-discrepancy theory holds that ideal discrepancies predict dejection-related affects when ought discrepancies are controlled. To test this, we computed partial correlations between ideal discrepancies and dejection-related affects controlling for ought discrepancies (third tier of Table 2); we also computed partial correlations between feared discrepancies and dejection-related affects, controlling for ought discrepancies. Given these controls, both ideal discrepancies and feared discrepancies remained significantly related to both affects. As predicted by self-discrepancy theory, controlling for ideal discrepancies caused ought discrepancies no longer to relate to either affect  $r_s = .05$  and  $-.13$ .

The next step was to compute associations of ideal and feared discrepancies with these two affects, in each case controlling for the other (along with ought discrepancies). In these tests (fourth tier of Table 2), ideal discrepancies significantly predicted depression and was a

near significant predictor of happiness. Feared discrepancies remained a significant predictor of both affects.

#### *Exploring Motivational Salience: Agitation*

As noted in the introductory paragraphs, it may be argued that when a person is close to an undesired value, the primary motive is to escape from it. For a person who has some distance from the undesired value, this motive may become less salient. Desired values may become correspondingly more salient, and these values may take over as influences on feelings as well as motivation. On this basis, we hypothesized that actual-feared discrepancies may be the primary predictor of agitation-related affects among people who see themselves as near their feared selves, whereas discrepancies regarding oughts may play a more important role among people who do not see themselves as being near their feared selves. This reasoning predicts an interaction between feared discrepancies and ought discrepancies, such that ought discrepancies play a greater predictive role when feared discrepancies are large than when they are small.

This reasoning was explored by hierarchical regression analyses. The first step of each analysis simultaneously entered ought, ideal, and feared discrepancies. The second step entered terms corresponding to an ought discrepancy by feared discrepancy interaction and an ideal discrepancy by feared discrepancy interaction. These terms were computed by centering, then multiplying, the variables contributing to the interaction (Aiken & West, 1991).

The analysis for anxiety yielded a significant effect for feared discrepancy,  $\beta = -.36$ ,  $p < .002$ , and a significant interaction between feared discrepancy and ought discrepancy,  $\beta = .33$ ,  $p < .02$ . The overall equation was significant,  $F(5, 79) = 4.74$ ,  $p < .001$ , adjusted  $R^2 = .18$ . No other term in the equation approached significance ( $\beta$  for ideal discrepancy = .14,  $\beta$  for ought discrepancy = .08,  $\beta$  for the ideal-feared interaction = -.03).

The form of the significant interaction was examined by procedures described by Aiken and West (1991) for simple slope analyses. This procedure entails choosing conditional values of one predictor (by convention, 1 *SD* above and below the mean) (Cohen & Cohen, 1983) and regressing anxiety on the remaining predictors (as a group) at these conditional values (see Aiken & West, 1991, pp. 18-21, for a description of computational procedures). In this case, we regressed anxiety on all other predictors at 1 *SD* above and below the mean of feared discrepancy. The coefficient obtained for ought discrepancy and the constant for the equation define the simple effect of ought discrepancy at each conditional value of feared discrepancy. This procedure revealed that ought discrepancy did not play a predictive role when feared discrepancy was low (indeed, what association existed

was inverse,  $\beta = -.25$ ,  $p = .17$ ). When feared discrepancy was high, however, the predictive effect of ought discrepancy was substantial,  $\beta = .40$ ,  $p < .04$ .

Analysis of guilt yielded a pattern very similar to this. The final regression analysis yielded an effect for feared discrepancy,  $\beta = -.35$ ,  $p < .002$ , a significant interaction between feared discrepancy and ought discrepancy,  $\beta = .28$ ,  $p < .04$ , and a marginally significant effect of ought discrepancy,  $\beta = .23$ ,  $p = .064$  (the other two  $\beta$ s were .02 and .01). The overall equation was significant,  $F(5, 79) = 5.12$ ,  $p < .001$ , adjusted  $R^2 = .20$ . Examination of the interaction by simple slope analyses revealed that at 1 *SD* below the feared discrepancy mean, ought discrepancy played no predictive role ( $\beta = -.04$ ). In contrast, when feared discrepancy was high, ought discrepancy played a substantial role,  $\beta = .51$ ,  $p < .007$ .

Analysis of contentment produced only a main effect for feared discrepancy,  $\beta = .31$ ,  $p < .006$ , and a marginal effect of ideal discrepancy,  $\beta = -.21$ ,  $p = .082$ , equation  $F(5, 79) = 4.84$ ,  $p < .0007$ , adjusted  $R^2 = .19$ . No other effect approached significance ( $\beta$ s ranged from .09 to .12).

#### *Exploring Motivational Salience: Dejection*

We then turned to dejection related affects. We began to analyze depression and happiness with two-step hierarchical regression analyses. The patterns obtained in these analyses were similar for these two affects and similar in each case to that found for contentment. Analysis of depression yielded an effect for feared discrepancy,  $\beta = -.50$ ,  $p = .0001$ , and a near-significant tendency for ideal discrepancy,  $\beta = .21$ ,  $p = .076$ , with no other effect approaching significance ( $\beta$ s = .12, .05, and -.02), equation  $F(5, 79) = 7.44$ ,  $p < .0001$ , adjusted  $R^2 = .28$ . Analysis of happiness yielded an effect for feared discrepancy,  $\beta = .27$ ,  $p = .02$ , and a near-significant tendency for ideal discrepancy,  $\beta = -.20$ ,  $p = .10$ , with no other effect approaching significance (the remaining  $\beta$ s ranged from .07 to -.14), equation  $F(5, 79) = 4.32$ ,  $p < .002$ , adjusted  $R^2 = .16$ . Given the failure of interactions to materialize, no follow-up tests of simple slopes were conducted.

#### DISCUSSION

The findings of this study are generally consistent with the conceptual picture we presented in the introduction. The findings extend and amplify on the results of previous research by Higgins and his colleagues (e.g., Higgins, 1987, 1989; Higgins et al., 1986; Strauman & Higgins, 1993) by including an examination of the role of the feared self. They extend on results of previous research by Ogilvie (1987) by including an examination of the ought self as well as the ideal self and by differentiating among several qualities of affect. The findings make several points—some bearing on agitation-related affects and others bearing on dejection-related affects.

### *Agitation-Related Affects*

When considering the sample as a whole, discrepancies from ought selves were associated with agitation-related affects, but those associations were much less robust than were those pertaining to discrepancies from feared selves. In effect, when both discrepancies were considered at the same time in predicting these affective qualities, deviations from the feared self preempted the predictive role of deviations from the ought self.

This picture is actually somewhat misleading, however. Subsequent analyses that included tests of an interaction between types of discrepancy revealed a more differentiated picture. Among people who were relatively near their feared selves, proximity to the ought self was not a predictor of anxiety or guilt at all. Among people who were farther from the feared self, however, the impact of the feared self faded away, and a predictive role emerged for discrepancies from the ought self. To characterize this pattern differently, among people who were relatively distant from the feared self, the prediction of self-discrepancy theory was nicely upheld. Among those closer to their feared selves, the prediction of self-discrepancy theory was not upheld at all.

This pattern appears consistent with the dynamic of the analysis we presented in the introduction to this article (see Figure 1). When a person is too near the feared value, what matters is getting away from it. In this circumstance, apparently the escape motive is also what generates agitation-related affect. Only if some distance has been attained are approach goals salient and thus more relevant to affective experience. In the latter portion of the self-regulatory map, how close one is to the valued goal matters more. In that zone of self-regulation, the positive goal of the ought self asserted its predictive power with regard to anxiety and guilt.

### *Dejection-Related Affects*

Dejection-related affects behaved differently. Consistent with self-discrepancy theory, discrepancies from ideal selves predicted these affect qualities, even when discrepancies from the feared self (and the ought self) were considered simultaneously. Furthermore, depression and happiness related to ideal discrepancies in the same pattern but in opposite directions, as we had hypothesized. This suggests that it is reasonable to think of happiness as reflecting the positive end of a dejection dimension (Carver & Scheier, 1998). Discrepancies from the feared self also played an important role in predicting these two affects, but deviations from the feared self did not *preempt* the role of deviations from the ideal self. Nor was there an interaction between ideal discrepancies and feared discrepancies in predicting these affects. Thus, the predictive role of ideal discrepancies on depression and happiness did not depend on how far

the person was from the feared self, as was true of ought discrepancies and agitation-related affects.

The involvement of feared-self discrepancies in dejection-related affect deserves further comment. Although feared-self discrepancies did not preempt the role of discrepancies from the ideal self, the strength of its separate effect came as something of a surprise. Perhaps it should not have been surprising given Ogilvie's (1987) finding that proximity to the undesired self was the best predictor of life satisfaction. However, our theoretical view of ideals did not prepare us to expect it.

The direct message here appears to be that an avoidance motivational push is an important contributor to depression as well as to anxiety despite its closer conceptual link to anxiety. A slightly less direct message is that ideal-based self-regulation and ought-based self-regulation both may involve a push away from as well as a pull toward (cf. Higgins, 1996, 1997). How pervasive this dual process is and differences in how it plays itself out in ought-based versus ideal-based self-regulation would seem to be important topics for further study.

We should note, in this regard, the possibility that our measure of feared selves was less differentiated than it was intended to be. In particular, we must consider the possibility that the feared self as we assessed it included both punishment-based concerns (which we intended to assess) and failure-to-attain concerns (which we did not intend to assess). Conceptually, the latter is what should pertain to dejection-related affect (Carver & Scheier, 1998; Higgins, 1996, 1997). Conflation of the two would account for the involvement of the feared self in dejection affects. It would not, however, account for the interactive effects for agitation but not dejection. Future research should consider how to assess more precisely and distinctly these two classes of undesired values.

One further point deserves comment here. Specifically, various aspects of the analyses suggest that participants responded to contentment as a dejection-related affect. We began this study assuming that contentment is the conceptual opposite of agitation-related affects (Carver & Scheier, 1998), but our participants did not treat it in that way. They treated contentment as equivalent to happiness (with which it also strongly correlated). Whether the similar construal of these affects is idiosyncratic to this sample or whether it has deeper implications must be determined by further investigation.

### *Implications Regarding Self-Regulatory Models and Self-Discrepancy Theory*

The findings of this research appear supportive of the way of construing ought self-guides illustrated in Figure 1. This portrayal is one in which two motivational forces are at work: one creating movement away from a reference point, the other creating movement toward a reference

point. The avoidance force appears to be more pressing than the other. When a person is too close to an undesired state, there is strong motivation to escape (see Nowak, Lewenstein, & Takowski, 1993, for a dynamic systems treatment of this theme). This is consistent with the notion that people attend more to negative phenomena than to positive phenomena and with the idea that evolution places a greater premium on avoiding danger than on attaining desired ends (Pratto & John, 1991; Taylor, 1991).

The approach force is also important, although less pressing. Once there is distance between the actual self and the feared self, there is less reason for concern about its proximity. In this zone of self-regulation, the person can attend more closely to the desired values that ultimately are also important in guiding behavior, even behavior that has avoidance at its motivational core. When people are in this zone, oughts exert stronger influence on anxiety and related feelings.

The pattern of findings emerging from this study also contributes to self-discrepancy theory. There is an appealing symmetry to the idea in that theory that negative feelings of anxiety and depression arise from failures to match the self to two different classes of positive goal values. However, the psychological appeal of the symmetry may be at least a little misleading. In some respects, the hidden partner in the motivational dynamic is as important as the visible partner.

To focus for a moment on the findings from the full sample, discrepancies from the feared self preempted the role of the discrepancies from the ought self in predicting anxiety and guilt overall, suggesting that avoidance is somehow inherent in ought-guided approach. Although discrepancies from the feared self also played a role in prediction of depression in these overall analyses, the role was supplemental rather than preemptive. This suggests that although avoidance occurs along with ideal-guided approach, it occurs in parallel with it rather than being intrinsically bound up with it.

This characterization is consistent with findings recently reported by Higgins and his collaborators. As indicated in the introduction, they have also begun to explore the avoidance aspect of the dynamics behind the ought self, though in different ways than we did here. Higgins and Tykocinski (1992) showed that people whose self-structure reflects discrepancies between actual and oughts (but not between actual and ideals) process information differently from people whose self-structure reflects discrepancies between actual and ideals (but not between actual and oughts). Those participants read an essay about a person and 10 minutes later were asked to reproduce the story. Participants whose self-structure was dominated by actual-ought discrepan-

cies were better than other participants at recalling parts of the story pertaining to either the occurrence or avoidance of negative events, consistent with the idea that they are focused psychologically on avoiding negative goals. Participants whose self-structure was dominated by actual-ideal discrepancies were better at recalling parts of the story pertaining to positive events, consistent with the idea that they focus psychologically on positive goals.

It is noteworthy that the superior recall of ideal-dominated participants in that study was most pronounced for recall of the nonoccurrence of positive events. This seems to suggest that these ideal-dominated people are as interested in avoiding such nonoccurrences as they are interested in attaining occurrences. This would be consistent with the finding from the study reported here that both actual-ideal and actual-feared discrepancies make separate contributions to prediction of dejection-related affects.

In closing, we note that the study reported here helps to bring together three literatures that have for the most part stood separate from one another. The most obvious of the three is self-discrepancy theory. In this research, however, we have drawn connections between that literature and the possible-self construct (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Oyserman & Markus, 1990) and between both of these literatures and an analysis of self-regulation based on feedback processes (Carver, Lawrence, & Scheier, 1996; Carver & Scheier, 1998). We see the cross-fertilization that can emerge from links of this sort as an important part of the theory-building enterprise.

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