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Relational discrepancies and emotion: The moderating roles of relationship  
type and relational discrepancy valence

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Abstract

Relational discrepancy theory (Robins & Boldero, 2003) proposes that discrepancies in the extents to which relational partners meet relational standards are associated with emotions and that perceiving relationships in specified ways moderates associations. In a range of relationships, ideal relational discrepancies were associated with dejection and ought relational discrepancies with agitation (Study 1), associations moderated by relationship type. Discrepancy valence also moderated ideal discrepancy associations. Similar associations were found in friendships, moderated by relationship type (Study 2). Finally, relationship type and valence moderated associations in relationships with supervisors but not colleagues (Study 3). These results support RDT propositions.

(Word count: 98)

Keywords: relational discrepancies, emotion, relationship type, discrepancy valence

Humans are social beings, typically having many simultaneous relationships, some of which last years. There is no doubt that these relationships are important sources of emotion. However, little is known about why different emotions are experienced in relationships (Simpson, Collins, Tran, & Haydon, 2007). Several theories propose that emotions are experienced when individuals believe their partner or the relationship is not consistent with their expectations (e.g., Emotions-in-Relationships Model, Berschied, 1983; the Ideal Standards Model, Simpson, Fletcher, & Campbell, 2001). However, these arguments do not specify which types of emotion are experienced.

There are two distinct clusters of negative emotions; dejection- and agitation-related emotions (see Higgins, 1987, for a review). Drawing on Self-discrepancy theory (SDT; Higgins, 1987), which proposes that discrepancies between different self aspects have specific emotional consequences, we advanced Relational Discrepancy Theory (RDT; Robins & Boldero, 2003). This theory, although setting out to explain the emergence of social structure, also proposed that dejection- and agitation-related emotions result from discrepancies between relational partners in the extents that they are meeting two relational guides; the ideal and the ought relational guides. Although some preliminary research supported these propositions (Croyle, 2001), they remain largely untested. The present three studies examined the propositions that unique associations exist between relational discrepancies and dejection- and agitation-related emotions, and that these associations are stronger when a relationship is viewed as an exchange relationship rather than when it is viewed as an interdependent relationship. They also examine whether discrepancy valence (i.e., whether individuals believe they are better or worse than their partner at meeting relational guides) is an additional moderator in relationships with an assumed hierarchy (as in workplaces).

*Relational discrepancies and negative emotions*

RDT proposes that perceived discrepancies are important determinants of emotional outcomes in relationships. This proposition is not new. The ideal standards model (Simpson, Fletcher, & Campbell, 2001) proposes that discrepancies between one's perceptions of one's actual partner and relationship and one's ideal partner and relationship are the basis of evaluations of partner and relationship quality, including affective responses such as relationship satisfaction. Fletcher, Simpson, Thomas, and Giles (1999) found that smaller ideal-partner discrepancies are associated with more favourable ratings. Across the first year of dating, smaller ideal-partner discrepancies are associated with greater relationship quality whereas larger discrepancies are associated with relationship dissolution (Fletcher, Simpson, & Thomas, 2000).

However, RDT differs from other relationship discrepancy models which focus on differences between a partner and some relationship ideal (e.g., Simpson et al., 2001) or differences between an actual relationship and particular comparison levels (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). RDT proposes that individuals compare the extents to which they and their partner possess the qualities and attributes that make up their relational guides. When these differ relational discrepancies exist.

Consistent with the ideal standards models, RDT proposes that what individuals would like to have in a relationship (the ideal relational guide) is an important relationship standard. Additionally, consistent with SDT, RDT proposes that the ought relational guide (how one ought to be in relationships) is also important. Relational discrepancies with respect to these two guides are proposed to be associated with specific types of emotional consequences; consistent with SDT propositions (Higgins, 1987).

According to SDT, because the ideal guide represents positive outcomes, ideal discrepancies represent their absence and result in dejection-related emotions (e.g.,

depression). On the other hand, discrepancies with the ought guide represent the presence of negative outcomes and result in agitation-related emotions (e.g., anxiety). Larger discrepancies are associated with more intense emotions, especially when they have self-regulatory significance (Higgins, 1987, 1989). Adapting these principles to relationships, RDT proposes that ideal relational discrepancies result in dejection-related emotions and ought relational discrepancies in agitation-related emotions, with larger discrepancies being associated with more intense emotions. Accordingly, it goes further than other discrepancy models by specifying the distinct emotion types associated with the two types of relational discrepancies.

Past research supports the proposition that perceiving that one is different to a relational partner is associated with negative emotions. Individuals asked to focus on how they and close relationship partners are similar report positive emotions whereas those who focus on differences report negative emotions (Tesser, Beach, Mendolia, Crepez, Davies, & Pennebaker, 1998). However, no research has examined the associations between ideal and ought relational discrepancies and dejection and agitation.

Relational discrepancies are conceptually related to personal discrepancies and perceptions of partner's personal discrepancies. Figure 1 shows the two possible configurations of relational discrepancies and personal discrepancies, depending on whether the personal or partner discrepancy is larger.

Individuals' personal discrepancies, because they are self-discrepancies, are associated with negative emotions, with discrepancies with ideals being associated with dejection and those with oughts being associated with agitation (see Boldero & Francis, 1999; Higgins, 1999; for reviews). Campbell, Simpson, Kashy, and Fletcher (2001) found that individuals' ratings of their partners' actual selves relative to their ideal standards were negatively associated with relationship quality, a composite measure including

relationship satisfaction. Thus, perceived partner discrepancies should be associated with negative emotions. RDT's claim is that relational discrepancies are an additional effect, reliably associated with negative emotions after controlling for personal and partner discrepancies. The theory makes this claim because when individuals compare themselves and a partner, the result indicates their relative performance. This is also an indicator of how the relationship is faring. Thus, when this comparison indicates that they are different, negative emotions result (Tesser et al., 1998) and these would be additional to any emotions associated with personal or partner discrepancies which indicate how the individuals are faring.

### *The impact of discrepancy valence*

Figure 1 shows the two types of discrepancy valence, namely, when individuals believe they are better than a partner at meeting a relational guide (i.e., a positively-valenced discrepancy) and when they believe they are worse (i.e., a negatively-valenced discrepancy). Robins and Boldero (2003) made no specific predictions about the impact of the valence of relational discrepancies on associations between relational discrepancies and emotions. Furthermore, the impact of discrepancy valence is unclear because of the role of equity in relationships. According to Equity theory (Walster, Berscheid, & Walster, 1973), individuals who receive relatively more or less than they contribute to a relationship feel dissatisfied. Thus, it is possible that relational discrepancies have negative emotional consequences, irrespective of valence. This association occurs in many relationship contexts (e.g., Buunk & Mustaers, 1999; Peters & van den Bos, 2008). However, in some relationships there are expectations that one partner should be "better" or "worse" than the other and violations of this expectation may be associated with negative emotions. For example, in work relationships, believing that one is better than a better-paid supervisor may lead to anger. So, in cases where

there are particular expectations of relative standings with regard to relational guides, discrepancy valence may moderate associations between relational discrepancies and negative emotions.

*Relationship type as a moderator of relational discrepancy-emotion associations*

RDT proposes that relational discrepancies do not have the same associations with emotions in all relationships. Specifically, it predicts that associations are reduced if the nature of the relationship is consistent with these discrepancies.

In certain relationships it is “accepted” that one partner will be better than the other at meeting the relational guides, relationships typified by Fiske’s (1991; 1992) *authority ranking* (AR) relational model. In these relationships (e.g., academic-graduate student), relational partners are interdependent, with one being “the leader” who guides and advises “the follower”. In other relationships, partners are not preoccupied with individual performance but view the relationship from a communal perspective (e.g., teams); Fiske’s *communal sharing* relational model (CS). Here individuals are also interdependent but contribute different things to the relationship. The essential difference between AR and CS relationships is that, although both are based on interdependence, in CS relationships partners are equivalent whereas in AR relationships they are not (Haslam, 1994).

In contrast, there are relational models where balance and exchange are important. Fiske (1991; 1992) identified the *equality matching* (EM) relational model, where individuals are expected to contribute equal amounts to the relationship (e.g., academic collaborators), and the *market pricing* (MP) relational model, in which partners are oriented to socially-meaningful ratios, such as wages (e.g., employer-employee relationships). Because of the focus on balance and exchange, RDT proposes that

relational discrepancies are more strongly associated with negative emotions in these relationships than in interdependent relationships.

This proposition is consistent with intuitive beliefs about how individuals feel in certain relationships. In hierarchically organized work-places employees do not object to a supervisor earning more and married couples happily purchase joint property even though one partner contributes more financially. However, students feel “used” when study partners do not “pull their weight” and customers feel angry when service-providers overcharge.

This is also consistent with preliminary empirical findings. Francis (1997) assessed discrepancies between individuals’ beliefs about how they actually are and how their work supervisor thinks they ought to be. She found that associations between discrepancies and negative emotions were weaker in interdependent relationships than in exchange relationships.

Such moderation effects are also consistent with the results of studies investigating the modification of Tesser’s (1988) self-evaluation maintenance (SEM) model for romantic relationships (Beach & Tesser, 1995). SEM proposes that when one is outperformed by a relational partner in domains important to one’s self-definition, negative emotions are experienced whereas when one outperforms a relational partner positive emotions are experienced. Moreover, emotions are more intense to the extent that the relationship is close. Beach and Tesser proposed, however, that in romantic relationships these emotions may be mitigated by sympathetic responses towards the partner. Beach, Tesser, Fincham, Jones, Johnson, and Whitaker (1998) found that married individuals reported feeling better about being outperformed by, rather than outperforming, their partner in domains that were highly relevant to their partner. In contrast, in high self-relevance domains, they generally reported more negative affect when they were outperformed by their partner. These results suggest that the negative

consequences of being outperformed can be attenuated in some circumstances. Consistent with RDT, Beach et al. (1998) commented that “as couples become more interdependent and communal in orientation they appear to become more motivated or more adept at extending empathy and sympathy toward the partner in the more difficult, high self-relevance areas” (pp. 935-936).

However, in some relationships, the acknowledgment of hierarchy may be problematic and relational discrepancies may be associated with negative emotions. For example, in employment settings performance is often scrutinised by others external to a relationship. For instance, a supervisor may assess the performance and control the outcomes of two work colleagues. In such circumstances, individuals who acknowledge that they are not as good as a colleague may feel insecure about retaining their jobs or gaining promotion or other benefits. So accepting a lesser “follower” role and giving a relationship a hierarchical (AR) quality may not diminish negative emotion.

Negative consequences may also occur for those who believe that they are better than colleagues. They may be annoyed or frustrated by colleagues who are “not pulling their weight”, particularly if this discrepancy is not recognized by the formal hierarchy of an organization and the structure of work arrangements.

Accordingly, in competitive, scrutinised environments acceptance of AR relationships may not, in fact, ameliorate negative emotions. It is only when competition is dissolved in team-like structures that moderation of negative emotions may occur. However, if the relationship is viewed as communal, with colleagues jointly contributing to successful performance, relational discrepancies are unlikely to be associated with negative emotions. Thus, we argue that in workplaces and other settings where relationships are imposed on individuals and where competition, external scrutiny, and rewards are commonplace, discrepancy-emotion associations will not be reduced in AR relationships, whereas in CS relationships they will. In contrast, in more freely chosen

relationships, with fewer external structures and scrutiny, both AR and CS relationships will have moderating effects.

Finally, it is possible that that the proposed moderation by relationship type may be different for the two types of discrepancy-emotion associations. Self-regulation with respect to the ideal self-guide satisfies nurturance or growth needs whereas self-regulation with respect to the ought self-guide satisfies security needs (Higgins, 1996). Shah and Higgins (1997) proposed that “ought” goals are necessities for survival whereas “ideal” goals are growth needs whose accomplishment is not necessary. They reasoned it was more imperative to achieve ought than ideal goals. In four studies they found that individuals pursued important ought goals, regardless of perceived achievement expectancy, whereas important ideal goals were pursued as a function of expectancy. This difference between what “is” and “is not” necessary suggests it may be more difficult to ameliorate negative emotions associated with absent necessities (i.e., ought relational discrepancies) than those associated with absent but desired achievements (i.e., ideal relational discrepancies).

### *The current studies*

The current studies were designed to provide the first test of two RDT propositions, specifically, that ideal and ought relational discrepancies are uniquely associated with dejection and agitation, respectively, and that relationship type moderates these associations. They also examined moderation by discrepancy valence which we predicted would occur in relationships with an assumed hierarchy. Study 1 examined the proposed unique associations of ideal and ought relational discrepancies with dejection and agitation and whether these occur when associations with personal and partner’s personal discrepancies are statistically controlled. It also examined moderation by relationship type and whether discrepancy valence was an additional

moderator. A range of relationships were sampled to establish the wide applicability claimed by Robins and Boldero (2003). Studies 2 and 3 examined these propositions but focussed on specific relationships; friendships (Study 2) and relationships with supervisors and colleagues in workplaces (Study 3). These relationships were chosen to allow a detailed examination of the impact of discrepancy valence in relationships that have an assumed hierarchy (i.e., between supervisors and supervisees) compared with those that do not (i.e., relationships with friends and colleagues). Finally, by considering relationships in which there is no assumed hierarchy and where acknowledgment of hierarchy has few consequences outside the relationship (i.e., friendships) and those where it does (i.e., collegial relationships), the proposed limitation to the moderation by hierarchical acknowledgment could be examined.

### Study 1

This study examined whether ideal relational discrepancies are uniquely associated with dejection and ought relational discrepancies with agitation, and that these associations occur when individuals' and partners' personal discrepancies are statistically controlled. It also examined the moderating impact of relationship type on discrepancy-emotion associations. To ensure that both exchange and interdependent relationships were sampled, participants were asked to consider a relationship characterised by *one* of Fiske's (1991, 1992) four relational models. As hierarchical relationships can involve individuals who are either superior or inferior to a relational partner, we asked some participants to focus on a relationship in which they were the "leader" (AR-L) and others to focus on a relationship in which they were the "follower" (AR-F). Finally, it explored whether discrepancy valence moderates discrepancy-emotion associations.

*Method*

*Participants.* Two hundred and forty-five students, 48 males (20%) and 196 females enrolled in a psychology subject at the University of Melbourne participated as part of a class exercise. They ranged in age from 18 to 53 years ( $M = 21.23$  years,  $SD = 4.63$ ).

*Procedure.* In one of their regularly scheduled classes, participants completed a questionnaire assessing the target factors. Before completing this, they read a description of a relationship exemplifying one relational model (Haslam, 1994), were asked to select a current relationship with similar features, and to respond with respect to this relationship. In all, 51 participants (21%) read the CS description, 52 (21%) the EM description, 49 (20%) the MP description, 50 (20%) the AR-L description, and 43 (18%) the AR-F description.

*Materials.* The questionnaire assessed the following factors:

Relational and personal discrepancies were measured using a modified version of Francis, Boldero, and Samball's (2006) idiographic self-lines technique. Participants were asked to think of up to five qualities they would ideally like to have and five they should or ought to have in their relationship. We focused on participants' own qualities as we wanted those that had self-regulatory significance. Participants then identified the antonym of each attribute and, on a 70 mm vertical line joining the attribute and its antonym, indicated where both they and their relational partner were currently located (their own and their partner's actual selves) with respect to the attribute.

Ideal and ought relational discrepancies were assessed using the absolute mean difference (in mm) across attributes between the position indicated for participants' actual selves and those of their relational partners. This was done separately for ideal and ought guides (as in Figure 1). Personal and partners' personal ideal and ought

discrepancies were assessed by taking the distance from the top of the line to the position indicated for the participant's actual self (personal discrepancies) and to the position of the partner's actual self. Internal consistencies were adequate,  $\lambda$ 's < .65.<sup>1</sup>

Discrepancy valence (i.e., whether a participant reported that they were better or worse than their partner at meeting the relational guides) was also recorded.

Relationship Type. The Modes of Relationship Questionnaire (MORQ; Haslam & Fiske, 1999), which assesses the extent to which a relationship is characterized by each of Fiske's (1991) four relational models, was used to check whether participants reported on exchange (i.e., EM or MP) or interdependent (i.e., CS or AR) relationships in response to the relational model descriptions. In all there were five subscales, each comprising 6 items (see Appendix 1). Participants indicated extent to which the items described the relationship on 7-point Likert scales, ranging from *not at all* (0) to *very much* (6). The mean across the items for each subscale comprised the measure of the applicability of each relational model to the relationship. All scales had adequate internal consistency,  $\lambda$ s > .62.

Emotions experienced in relationships. Participants indicated the extent to which they experienced 32 positive and negative emotions in their relationships on 4-point Likert scales, from *not at all* (0) to *very much* (3). As RDT makes predictions about negative emotions, positive emotions were used as filler items. Principal components analysis was used to determine the structure underlying responses to negative emotion items. The scree plot suggested that a two factor-solution was most appropriate. These factors accounted for 59.0% of the variance in responses. Items that had either high or low loadings on both factors were eliminated. The loadings of remaining items suggested that the factors reflected dejection (i.e., burdened, disappointed, discouraged, displeased, inadequate) and agitation (i.e., angry, annoyed, tense, trapped, worried), the emotions proposed by Higgins (1987) to be associated with ideal

and ought self-discrepancies. Mean responses to the items on each were calculated. Both scales had adequate internal consistency: dejection,  $\lambda < .72$ ; agitation,  $\lambda < .88$ .

### *Results and Discussion*

*Descriptive summary.* On average, participants reported small ideal,  $M = 6.70$ ,  $SD = 7.19$ , and ought relational discrepancies,  $M = 7.34$ ,  $SD = 8.76$ . Approximately half reported their partners as better than they were at meeting relational guides; ideal, 55%, ought, 50%. They also reported relatively large personal ideal,  $M = 21.19$ ,  $SD = 10.80$ , and ought,  $M = 21.27$ ,  $SD = 12.94$ , and partner ideal,  $M = 19.11$ ,  $SD = 10.35$ , and ought  $M = 20.55$ ,  $SD = 12.41$ , discrepancies. Participants reported low levels of dejection,  $M = .49$ ,  $SD = .57$ , and agitation,  $M = .47$ ,  $SD = .56$ .

Participants gave higher ratings on the CS scale,  $M = 3.59$ ,  $SD = 1.25$ , and lower ratings on the two AR scales (leader,  $M = 1.72$ ,  $SD = 1.31$ , and follower,  $M = 1.79$ ,  $SD = 1.59$ ) than on the EM,  $M = 2.82$ ,  $SD = 1.16$ , and MP scales,  $M = 2.82$ ,  $SD = 1.03$ , scales,  $F(4, 240) = 97.69$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .62$ , regardless of relational model description, suggesting biased reporting of the extent to which the models described relationships (Haslam, personal communication). Thus, we calculated normal deviate scores for each scale. These revealed that the elicited relationships were consistent with the relationship description provided (see Table 1). As a result, we classified relationships as exchange or interdependent relationships using the relational mode descriptions provided.

*Effects of relational discrepancies over and above personal and partner discrepancies.* Before considering effects of valence and relationship type, we investigated whether personal, partner, or relational discrepancies were associated with emotions. In particular we were interested in whether relational discrepancies had effects over and above those of the other two discrepancy types.

The absolute value of ideal and ought relational discrepancies along with ideal and ought personal and partner discrepancies were included in two regressions. Dejection was associated with ideal relational discrepancies,  $\beta = .17, p < .01$ , but neither personal nor partner ideal discrepancies. Agitation was associated with all three ought discrepancies. Personal,  $\beta = .16, p < .01$ , and relational discrepancies,  $\beta = .14, p < .01$ , were positively associated (i.e., larger discrepancies were associated with more intense agitation) and partner's discrepancies were negatively associated,  $\beta = -.17, p < .001$ .

This last result, although not central to our investigation, was unexpected. It indicates that once personal and relational discrepancies are controlled, larger partner discrepancies are associated with less agitation. It seems that people are less agitated the more their partners do not live up to ought guides, suggesting there may be positive emotional benefits of comparison with a partner who is not a strong performer. This aside, the results indicate that relational discrepancies are associated with negative emotions after controlling for personal and partner discrepancies. With these associations established, subsequent analyses focussed solely on relational discrepancies.

*Relational type and discrepancy valence as moderators of associations between relational discrepancies and emotion.* To test RDT's predictions that ideal and ought relational discrepancies are uniquely associated with dejection and agitation and that relationship type moderates these associations, emotions were regressed on both the absolute values of ideal and ought relational discrepancies (Step 1), the main effects of relationship type (interdependent coded -1, exchange +1) (Step 2), and the two-way interaction between the appropriate relational discrepancy (e.g., ideal relational discrepancy in the case of dejection) and relationship type (Step 3). To examine whether discrepancy valence was an additional moderator, the main effect of this factor (negative coded -1, positive coded +1) was included on Step 2, its interaction with the

appropriate discrepancy on Step 3, and the three-way interaction between the discrepancy, relationship type, and discrepancy valence on Step 4. As emotions were skewed, the analyses were conducted in conjunction with optimal scaling.<sup>2</sup> Following Aiken and West (1991), we centred discrepancies before calculating interaction terms. The 10 participants who reported no ideal discrepancies and the 17 who reported no ought discrepancies were omitted from the analyses.

The models including only main effects of ideal and ought relational discrepancies (Step 1) accounted for significant variance in both emotions (dejection,  $R^2 = .10$ ,  $p < .001$ ; agitation,  $R^2 = .07$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Consistent with RDT propositions, dejection was positively associated with ideal relational discrepancies,  $\beta = .26$ ,  $p < .001$ , and agitation with ought relational discrepancies,  $\beta = .24$ ,  $p < .001$ . The second step of both analyses did not account for additional variance in either emotion. The third steps explained additional variance (dejection,  $\Delta R^2 = .04$ ; agitation,  $\Delta R^2 = .03$ ,  $p < .05$ ) whereas the fourth did not.

Relationship type moderated the impact of ideal and ought relational discrepancies on dejection and agitation;  $\beta = .48$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\beta = .17$ ,  $p < .05$ , respectively. Simple slope analyses revealed that, consistent with predictions, dejection was associated with ideal relational discrepancies,  $t(211) = 3.09$ ,  $p < .05$ , and agitation with ought relational discrepancies,  $t(219) = 4.56$ ,  $p < .05$ , in exchange relationships but not in interdependent ones (dejection,  $t(211) = 1.08$ , *ns*; agitation,  $t(219) = .89$ , *ns*) (see Figure 2).

Discrepancy valence moderated the association of ideal relational discrepancies with dejection,  $\beta = .47$ ,  $p < .001$ , but not of ought relational discrepancies with agitation. For those who reported they were better than their partner at meeting the ideal guide, the association was significant,  $t(211) = 3.42$ ,  $p < .05$ , whereas for those who were worse, it was not  $t(211) = 1.76$ , *ns*; (see Figure 3). This possibly occurred because of

the sampling of a broad range of relationships, including some employment relationships where there is an assumption of hierarchy. Violation of this assumption in the form of believing that one is better than one's supervisor would likely be associated with negative emotions. The absence of a moderating effect of valence for ought relational discrepancies may have occurred because of the survival needs represented by these discrepancies (Shah & Higgins, 1997). It does not matter whether you or partner are better or worse when survival needs are concerned.

Because of a possible impact in this Study of workplace relationships on associations between relational discrepancies and negative emotions, Study 2 was designed to examine relational discrepancies in relationships that are freely chosen, namely friendships.

### Study 2

This study examined the impact of ideal and ought relational discrepancies on negative emotions experienced in friendships and the proposed moderation by relationship type. Consistent with Study 1, we predicted that ideal relational discrepancies would be uniquely associated with dejection and ought relational discrepancies with agitation, and that these associations would occur in exchange relationships but not in interdependent ones. Finally, we predicted that, because friendships do not involve assumed hierarchies, discrepancy valence would not moderate associations.

*Method*

*Participants.* Eighty individuals, 32 males (36%), 57 females (64%), and one participant who did not specify gender, participated either in partial fulfilment of course research participation requirement ( $n = 38$ ) or in response to a request from one of the investigators or an acquaintance ( $n = 42$ ). Participants ranged in age from 17 to 44 years ( $M = 20.25$  years,  $SD = 3.93$ ).

*Materials and procedure.* The materials and procedure were identical to those of Study 1 with the one exception. Participants did not read relationship descriptions, rather they were asked to focus on a relationship with a friend. They completed the questionnaire either independently or in small groups.

*Results and Discussion*

*Descriptive Summary.* Participants reported smaller absolute ideal,  $M = 4.34$ ,  $SD = 5.32$ , than ought,  $M = 6.66$ ,  $SD = 7.50$ , relational discrepancies,  $F(1, 79) = 13.16$ ,  $p \leq .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .14$ . Twenty-four (30%) reported that they were closer to their ideal guide than their friend, whereas 51 (64%) reported their friend as closer than they were. The remaining five (6%) reported no difference in the extent to which they and their friend were meeting this guide. Similarly, 19 (25%) reported that they were closer to their ought guide than their friend, whereas 56 (75%) reported that their friend was closer than they were. The remaining five (6%) reported no difference in the extent to which they and their friends were meeting this guide. Thus, consistent with research examining perceptions of close others (e.g., Gagné & Lydon, 2004), there was evidence of a bias towards viewing friends as better than oneself with respect to both guides.

Examination of the extents to which the friendships reported were characterized by the relational modes revealed a reluctance to characterize these relationships using other than the CS model. Accordingly, as in Study 1, we calculated normal deviate

scores for each model and used the largest of these to classify relationships as exchange or interdependent relationships. In all, 46 (58%) were classified as interdependent and 34 (42%) as exchange relationships. Interestingly, consistent with the RDT proposition that relational discrepancies are better tolerated in interdependent relationships, ideal and ought relational discrepancies differed as a function of relationship type,  $F(1, 78) = 5.02, p = .028, \eta_p^2 = .06$ . Larger discrepancies of both types were reported in interdependent relationships (ideal,  $M = 4.80, SD = 6.00$ ; ought,  $M = 8.59, SD = 8.59$ ) than in exchange relationships (ideal,  $M = 3.69, SD = 4.21$ ; ought,  $M = 6.66, SD = 7.50$ ). Finally, participants reported experiencing low levels of dejection,  $M = .29, SD = .33$ , and agitation,  $M = .27, SD = .44$ , in their relationships.

*Relationship type and discrepancy valence as moderators of associations between relational discrepancy magnitudes and emotions experienced in friendships.* As in Study 1, we investigated whether relational discrepancies were uniquely associated with negative emotions, and whether associations were moderated by relational type or discrepancy valence using hierarchical regression analyses. It was not possible to examine the joint moderation by these factors as there were insufficient participants who had negative discrepancies in exchange relationships (both  $n \leq 11$ ). However, as joint moderation did not occur in Study 1, we reasoned this was not problematic. There was sufficient power, however, to investigate the moderating effects in separate analyses. Thus, we performed two sets of hierarchical regression analyses; one examining moderation by relationship type, the second by discrepancy valence. As emotion scores were skewed, the analyses were conducted in conjunction with optimal scaling. The five individuals who reported no ideal or ought relational discrepancies were excluded from the discrepancy valence moderation analyses.

Emotions were regressed, in order, on the main effects of absolute relational discrepancy magnitudes (Step 1), the main effects of relationship type or discrepancy

valence (Step 2), and the two-way interaction of the appropriate relational discrepancy magnitude and the moderator of interest (Step 3). Discrepancy magnitudes were centred on their means before calculating interaction terms.

Consistent with predictions, dejection was associated with larger ideal relational discrepancies,  $\beta = .78, p < .001$ , and agitation with larger ought relational discrepancies,  $\beta = .49, p < .001$ . Dejection was also associated with smaller ought relational,  $\beta = -.26, p < .05$ , which was likely a result of the high correlation between the two discrepancies,  $r(80) = .65, p < .001$ . Further, relationship type moderated associations with ideal,  $\beta = .36, p < .001$ , and ought,  $\beta = .23, p < .001$ , discrepancies whereas discrepancy valence did not. Consistent with RDT, associations were stronger in exchange relationships (dejection,  $t(78) = 9.01, p < .05$ ; agitation,  $t(78) = 4.59, p < .05$ ) than in interdependent relationships (dejection,  $t(78) = 3.92, p < .05$ ; agitation,  $t(78) = 2.41, p < .05$ ) (see Figure 4).

This study provides evidence for RDT's propositions in relationships in which there are no assumed hierarchies and which are freely chosen. Relational discrepancies were uniquely associated with negative emotions and these associations were moderated by relationship type but not discrepancy valence. Specifically, the associations between relational discrepancies and emotions were weaker in friendships characterized by interdependence than exchange. Moreover, the absence of moderation by discrepancy valence suggests that the moderating effect found in Study 1 was a result of the inclusion of a broad range of relationships, some of which had assumed hierarchies. We argued that in such relationships, discrepancy valence may be important. However, neither this Study nor Study 1 provides conclusive evidence for this argument.

Study 3 was specifically designed to test this proposition by examining the associations between relational discrepancies and emotions in relationships with supervisors in the workplace. In addition, by examining these associations in

relationships with work colleagues it was possible to test our argument that, in contexts where relationships are not so freely chosen and where competition and third party scrutiny are commonplace, acknowledging a relationship as hierarchical (i.e., AR) may not ameliorate negative emotions.

### Study 3

This study examined the impact of relational discrepancies on negative emotions experienced in relationships with supervisors and colleagues. We predicted that, because work relationships with supervisors involve assumed hierarchies whereas those with colleagues do not, discrepancy valence would moderate associations in supervisory but not collegial relationships, such that for those who believe they are better than a supervisor at meeting relational guides, associations with negative emotions would be stronger than for those who believe they are worse. Finally, because relationships with colleagues are open to scrutiny by those who control outcomes (e.g., supervisors), we predicted that acknowledging that a relationship with a colleague is hierarchical would be associated with negative emotions.

#### *Method*

*Participants.* One hundred and seventeen students, 88 females (75%) and 29 males (25%) enrolled in a psychology subject at the University of Melbourne, who had not participated in Studies 1 or 2, participated as part of a research participation requirement. All were in some form of paid employment. They ranged in age from 17 to 50 years ( $M = 21.37$  years,  $SD = 5.76$ ).

*Materials and Procedure.* The questionnaire had two sections: One assessed the factors in the relationship participants had with a work supervisor, the other with respect to a relationship with a work colleague. The measures were identical to those used in

Study 2. The order of presentation of the questionnaire sections was counterbalanced. Participants were tested in groups of up to 20.

### *Results*

*Descriptive Summary.* Participants reported small absolute ideal and ought relational discrepancies (supervisor, ideal,  $M = 7.32$ ,  $SD = 6.62$ , ought,  $M = 6.74$ ,  $SD = 6.45$ ; colleague, ideal,  $M = 3.64$ ,  $SD = 4.16$ , ought,  $M = 4.36$ ,  $SD = 4.82$ ). Larger discrepancies of both types were reported in relationships with supervisors than with colleagues,  $F(1, 110) = 31.43$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .222$ . Participants reported low levels of emotions (supervisor, dejection,  $M = .70$ ,  $SD = .62$ , agitation,  $M = .70$ ,  $SD = .71$ ; colleague, dejection,  $M = .35$ ,  $SD = .43$ ; colleague, agitation,  $M = .30$ ,  $SD = .43$ ). As we expected no bias in reporting the extent to which the relationships were described by the four relational models, we classified these using the highest score on the relational model scales. In all, 97 (83%) supervisor relationships were characterized as interdependent whereas 75 (55%) collegial relationships were thus classified.

*Discrepancy valence and relationship type as moderators of associations between relational discrepancies and emotions.* We examined whether relational discrepancies with supervisors and colleagues were uniquely associated with emotions and whether relationship type moderated these associations. In addition, because of the hierarchical nature of relationships with supervisors, where there may be expectations that the supervisor is “better”, it was possible that relational discrepancies would be more strongly related to emotions when this expectation is violated (i.e., positive discrepancies). Based on Study 1 results, we expected that this would occur for ideal but not ought relational discrepancies. Finally, we investigated whether in collegial relationships relationship type moderates the associations between negative emotions and relational discrepancies in the manner proposed by RDT (i.e., weaker associations

in both AR and CS relationships) or whether weaker associations only occurred in CS relationships.

We performed two sets of hierarchical linear regression analyses. The first examined moderation by relationship type and the second by discrepancy valence. We also examined moderation of the discrepancy-emotion associations by relationship type in collegial relationships where the comparison was between CS and the other three types. As emotion scores were skewed, the analyses were conducted in conjunction with optimal scaling.

Ideal relational discrepancies were uniquely associated with dejection,  $\beta = .23$ ,  $p < .01$ , and ought relational discrepancies with agitation,  $\beta = .23$ ,  $p < .05$ , in collegial relationships, and with agitation,  $\beta = .33$ ,  $p < .001$ , but not dejection, in supervisory relationships. Neither the main effects of relationship type nor discrepancy valence predicted additional variance. However, the entry of the interaction terms on the third steps, accounted for additional variance in relationships with supervisors,  $\Delta R^2$ s  $< .04$ ,  $p < .05$ , but not with colleagues. Both relationship type and discrepancy valence moderated the impact of ideal and ought relational discrepancies on dejection and agitation, respectively, in supervisory relationships,  $\beta$ s  $< .23$ ,  $p < .05$ .

Simple slope analyses revealed that ideal and ought relational discrepancies were associated with dejection and agitation, respectively, when supervisory relationships were exchange relationships (dejection,  $t(110) = 4.78$ ,  $p < .05$ ; agitation,  $t(110) = 4.80$ ,  $p < .05$ ) but not when they were interdependent (dejection,  $t(110) = .44$ ,  $ns$ ; agitation,  $t(110) = .92$ ,  $ns$ ) (see Figure 5). Similarly, the associations occurred when participants reported they were better than supervisors at meeting relational guides (dejection,  $t(106) = 3.26$ ,  $p < .05$ ; agitation,  $t(110) = 4.06$ ,  $p < .05$ ) but not when they were worse (dejection,  $t(110) = .87$ ,  $ns$ ; agitation,  $t(110) = .79$ ,  $ns$ ) (see Figure 6).

The moderation by relationship type in supervisory relationships is consistent with RDT predictions and the results of Studies 1 and 2. Similarly, the discrepancy valence moderation effect in these relationships was what we expected; being better, not worse, than a supervisor is associated with negative emotions. Interestingly, this occurred not only for ideal relational discrepancies, as in Study 1, but also for ought relational discrepancies. Thus, in these hierarchical relationships when a supervisor does not meet either relational guide, whether it entails either “growth” or “survival” needs (Shah & Higgins, 1997), relational discrepancies are associated with negative emotions, possibly because supervisors control positive and negative outcomes for supervisees.

The failure to find a moderating impact of relationship type on discrepancy-emotion associations for colleagues, although inconsistent with RDT propositions, was not unexpected. This suggested that our argument about the problematic nature of acknowledging hierarchy among colleagues in workplace relationships may be correct. We tested this by recoding relationship type in collegial relationships (CS relationships coded -1 and the other three types were coded +1) and conducting two additional analyses.

The results did not change for associations with dejection. However, for agitation, the entry of the interaction term on the third step accounted for additional variance,  $\beta = .39$ ,  $\Delta R^2_{\text{chn}} = .03$ ,  $p < .05$ . In CS relationships, ought relational discrepancies were unrelated to agitation,  $t(110) = .87$ , *ns*, whereas in AR, EM, or MP relationships they were,  $t(110) = 3.36$ ,  $p < .05$  (see Figure 7).

Thus, in collegial relationships characterized by communality, ought relational discrepancies are not associated with negative emotions whereas ideal relational discrepancies are. This result suggests that individuals who perceive differences with their colleagues in regard to growth needs feel more dejected. This makes sense in the specific context of organizations: an individual wanting more (or less) growth cannot

necessarily achieve this through collegial action as individual aspirations are typically met by senior staff, not colleagues. However, individuals in team-like CS relationships are not agitated when they contribute different amounts to survival needs than a colleague, whereas individuals who acknowledge that the relationship is hierarchical (i.e., an AR relationship) are more likely to be agitated when larger relational discrepancies exist.

Together, these results indicate that, consistent with RDT propositions, relational discrepancies are associated with negative emotions experienced in workplace relationships with supervisors and colleagues. Again, ideal relational discrepancies were uniquely associated with dejection and ought relational discrepancies with agitation.

These associations were moderated by relationship type and discrepancy valence in supervisory relationships. Consistent with Study 1 and 2 results, for individuals who acknowledged the interdependent nature of this relationship, relational discrepancies were not associated with negative emotions. However, in exchange relationships they were. In addition, because supervisors are expected to be better at meeting relational guides, when this expectation was violated, discrepancies were associated with negative emotions.

In the case of collegial relationships where there are no assumed hierarchies, consistent with predictions and Study 2 results, discrepancy valence did not moderate associations. Moreover, in these relationships, relationship type (i.e., interdependence vs. exchange) did not moderate discrepancy-emotion associations in the same way as in Studies 1 and 2. Rather, only in communal relationships were ought relational discrepancies unrelated to agitation. However, ideal relational discrepancies were related to dejection regardless of relationship type, suggesting that survival needs among colleagues can be addressed in communal relationships whereas growth needs

cannot. This highlights the importance of formal structures within organizations that provide specific rewards in terms of performance and growth.

### *General Discussion and Conclusions*

The present studies tested two RDT propositions; that discrepancies in the extent to which individuals believe they and their partners are meeting ideal relational guides are uniquely associated with dejection whereas perceived discrepancies with ought relational guides are uniquely associated with agitation, and that relationship type moderates these associations, with weaker associations occurring in interdependent relationships than in exchange relationships. The studies also examined the moderating role of discrepancy valence and the effects of hierarchical relationships in the workplace where this has consequences outside the relationship.

RDT is the first theory to propose that different types of perceived discrepancies with relational guides are associated with specific types of emotions. Other models (e.g., the ideal standards model, Simpson et al., 2001) specify that discrepancies, regardless of the standard used to evaluate a relational partner or the relationship, are related to negative affect generally. Drawing on SDT (Higgins, 1987), RDT proposes that ideal relational discrepancies are uniquely associated with dejection and ought relational discrepancies are uniquely related with agitation.

This proposition was confirmed in all three studies, although in Study 3 associations occurred in particular ways that were consistent with the nature of a workplace. Moreover, in Study 1, associations occurred when those with personal and partner's personal discrepancies were statistically controlled. Taken together, our results provide clear evidence for the proposed differential associations of relational discrepancies with emotions proposed by RDT.

The proposed moderating effects of relationship type, were, for the most part, found. Stronger associations between relational discrepancies and emotions were found in exchange relationships than in interdependent relationships in a range of relationships (Study 1), in friendships (Study 2), and in supervisory relationships (Study 3). Consistent with our speculations about relationships where the acknowledgment of hierarchy may be problematic, this was not found in collegial relationships (Study 3). Rather discrepancy-emotion associations were only attenuated in CS relationships. In addition, in friendships moderation was only partial, with relational discrepancies still associated with emotions in interdependent relationships.

Although not inconsistent with RDT's propositions, this finding is interesting. This may be a function of relationship investment. With greater investment, individuals might be sensitive to relational discrepancies, regardless of how the relationship is viewed. Alternatively, it is possible that the types of attributes and qualities that are part of friendship relational guides are those which have greater consequences. For example, friends provide emotional support during difficult times (Fehr, 2004; Stanton-Salazar & Spina, 2005). Because of this, inequalities in such attributes may remain problematic in all relationships, regardless of their type.

We also speculated that, consistent with Shah and Higgins' (1997) findings, associations with ought relational discrepancies may be less susceptible to moderation than those with ideal relational discrepancies. Mixed evidence for this was found. In collegial relationships, moderation only occurred for ought relational discrepancies in CS relationships. We argued that this could be understood by considering the implications of formally acknowledging hierarchy in relationships where outcomes are controlled by individuals outside the relationship and by how survival and growth needs are met in these situations. As the ought guide represents necessary survival needs (Shah & Higgins), these can be met in relationships that emphasize communality rather than

difference, thus ameliorating associated agitation. However, as individuals' growth needs in the workplace are dependent on recognition by more senior staff, viewing the relationship as communal does not ameliorate associated dejection.

Finally, we explored moderation by discrepancy valence. In Study 1, moderation of ideal discrepancy-dejection associations, independent of the impact of relational mode, occurred. We argued that this likely reflected the sampling of relationships involving assumed hierarchies, like the supervisory relationships sampled in Study 3, in which moderation of associations with both discrepancy types were found. When there is an expectation that a partner will be better than oneself, being better is associated with negative emotions. The failure to find this moderation in Study 2 in friendships and in collegial relationships in Study 3 likely reflects the fact that these relationships are assumed to be non-hierarchical. Thus, consistent with our arguments based on equity theory (Walster et al., 1973), in these relationships discrepancy valence does not moderate discrepancy-emotion associations.

These studies have some limitations. First, they are correlational, so provide no evidence for causal links between relational discrepancies and emotions. Only an experimental design in which individuals are led to believe that they and a relational partner are better or worse at achieving a relational goal would provide clear evidence of a causal link. Similarly, RDT proposes that psychologically transforming an exchange relationship into one characterized by interdependence reduces the impact of relational discrepancies. This dynamic resolution could not be observed in the present cross-sectional studies. A prospective longitudinal design is required to investigate whether such transformations occur in relationships when relational partners are confronted with relational discrepancies. Finally, although we investigated a range of relationships, our participants were students who may have had little commitment to some of the relationships sampled. The propositions of RDT, thus, require examination in committed

relationships, such as romantic relationships or relationships in the workplace of those employed full-time.

These limitations aside, the current results have implications. First, as the two clusters of negative emotions investigated were differentially associated with relational discrepancies, they suggest possible mechanisms whereby these emotions are experienced in relationships. We suggest that future research could profitably consider specific emotion types when investigating other types of discrepancies. For example, our results suggest that discrepancies between individuals' views of their relationship partners with respect to ideal standards should be associated with dejection-related emotions, a proposal originally made by Higgins (1987), not just lower relationship quality (Campbell et al., 2001). Similarly, the moderation by relationship type suggests that viewing relationships as interdependent may alleviate negative emotions when there are discrepancies with ideal standards. Finally, the results concerning discrepancy valence suggest that assumed hierarchies are important. Future research could examine how viewing relationships in particular ways, including assuming a hierarchical structure, moderate the associations of beliefs about how individuals are with respect to relational guides or standards with relationship outcomes, including emotions.

In summary, these studies provide evidence for two basic RDT propositions. They suggest that RDT may be useful for understanding why different types of emotions are experienced in relationships and when these emotions are or are not experienced. These propositions involve relationship cognitions, specifically what individuals want and believe they should be like in their relationships, and individuals' evaluations of themselves and their relationship partners with respect to these. Investigation of relational discrepancies is likely to increase our understanding of the role these cognitions and evaluations play in relationships.

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Table 1

Standardized normal deviate ratings on Fiske's relational models as a function of relationship description (Study 1)

Relationship Description	Relational Model				
	Communal Sharing	Equality Matching	Market Pricing	Authority Ranking - Leader	Authority Ranking - Follower
Communal Sharing	.51 (.76)	-.16 (.94)	-.44 (.92)	-.23 (.78)	-.33 (.72)
Equality Matching	.11 (.73)	.55 (.89)	.07 (.93)	-.33 (.76)	-.39 (.66)
Market Pricing	-.66 (1.23)	-.39 (.96)	.26 (1.33)	-.37 (.97)	.53 (1.24)
Authority Ranking – Leader	-.03 (.90)	.13 (.94)	.05 (.72)	1.11 (.98)	-.46 (.53)
Authority Ranking – Follower	.04 (.92)	-.21 (1.03)	.07 (.92)	-.28 (.58)	.80 (.92)

*Note:* Standard deviations are shown in parentheses.

Table 2  
 Mean ratings on Fiske's relational models as a function of relationship (Study 3)

Relationship	Relational Model				
	Communal Sharing	Equality Matching	Market Pricing	Authority Ranking - Leader	Authority Ranking - Follower
Supervisor	2.23 <sup>a</sup> (1.07)	1.82 <sup>b</sup> (1.07)	2.88 <sup>c</sup> (1.07)	.91 <sup>d</sup> (.87)	4.30 <sup>e</sup> (1.27)
Colleague	3.38 <sup>f</sup> (1.08)	3.01 <sup>c</sup> (1.18)	2.76 <sup>c</sup> (1.10)	1.98 <sup>b</sup> (1.30)	1.56 <sup>b</sup> (1.34)

*Note.* Standard deviations are shown in parentheses. Entries with identical superscripts do not differ significantly,  $p < .05$ .

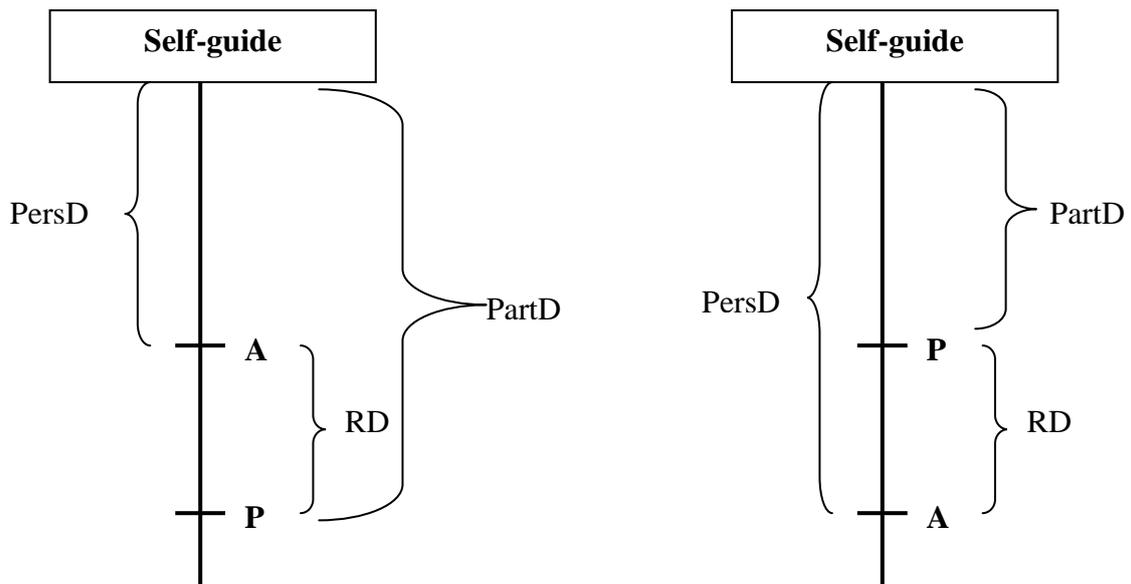


Figure 1

*Relational and personal discrepancies in positive and negative valenced relations.*

(Note: 'A' = Participant's actual self; 'P' = Participant's perception of partner's actual self; 'RD' = relational discrepancy; 'PersD' = participant's personal discrepancy; 'PartD' = partner's personal discrepancy)

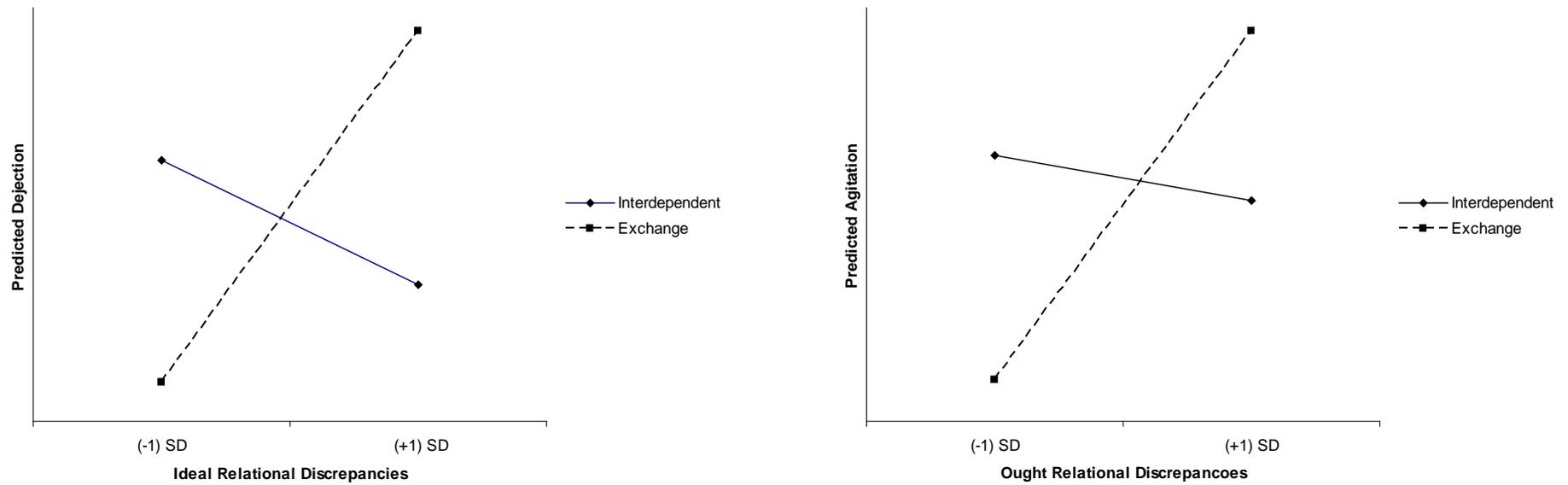


Figure 2

The relationship between ideal relational discrepancies and dejection (left panel), and ought relational discrepancies and agitation (right panel), showing the moderating impact of relationship type (Study 1)

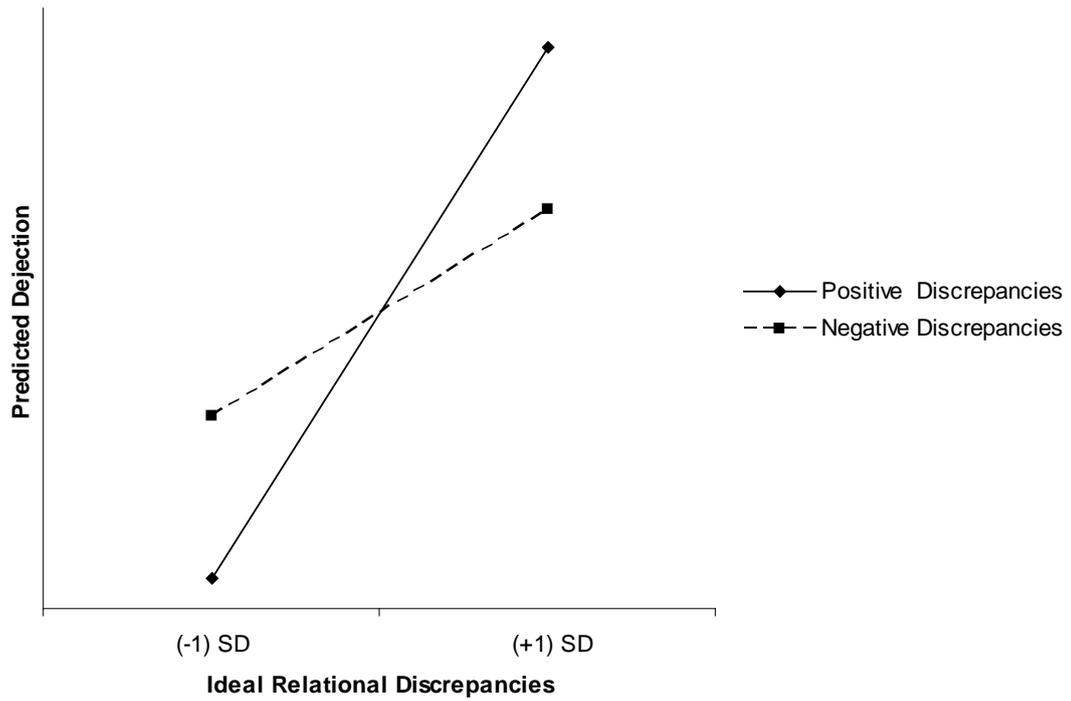


Figure 3

The relationship between ideal relational discrepancies and dejection showing the moderating impact of discrepancy valence (Study 1)

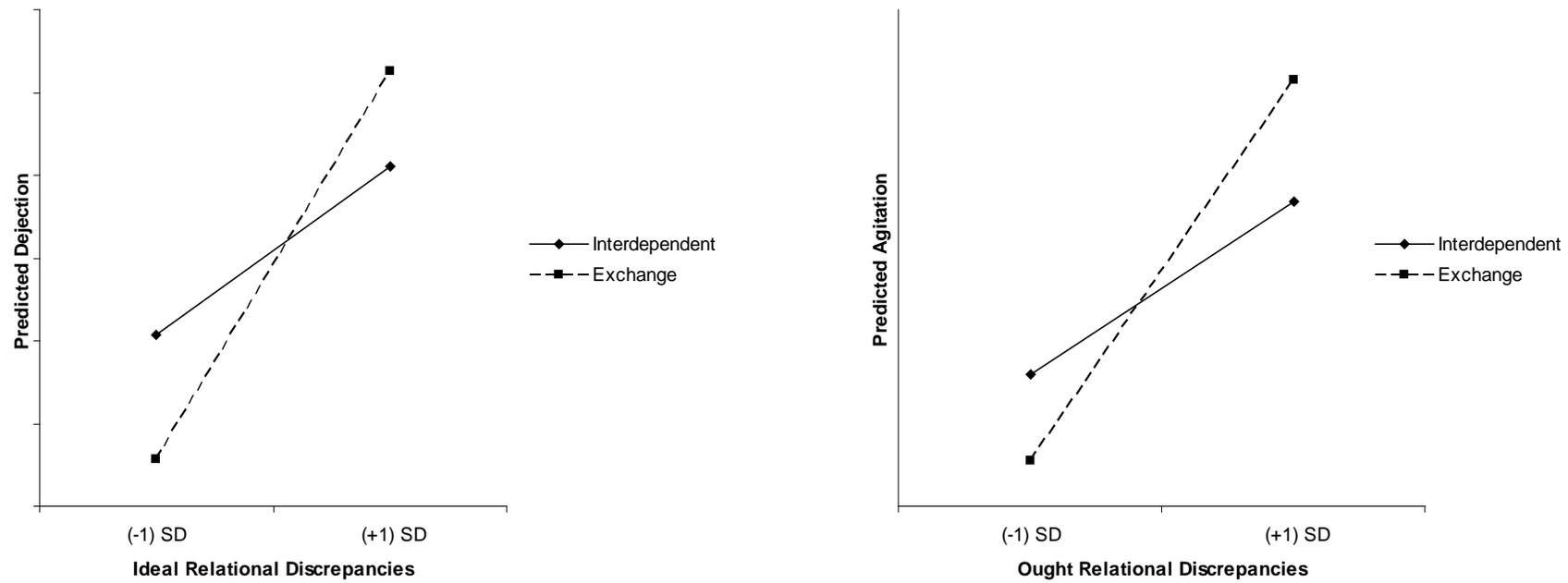


Figure 4

The relationship between ideal relational discrepancies and dejection (left panel), and ought relational discrepancies and agitation (right panel), showing the moderating impact of relationship type (Study 2)

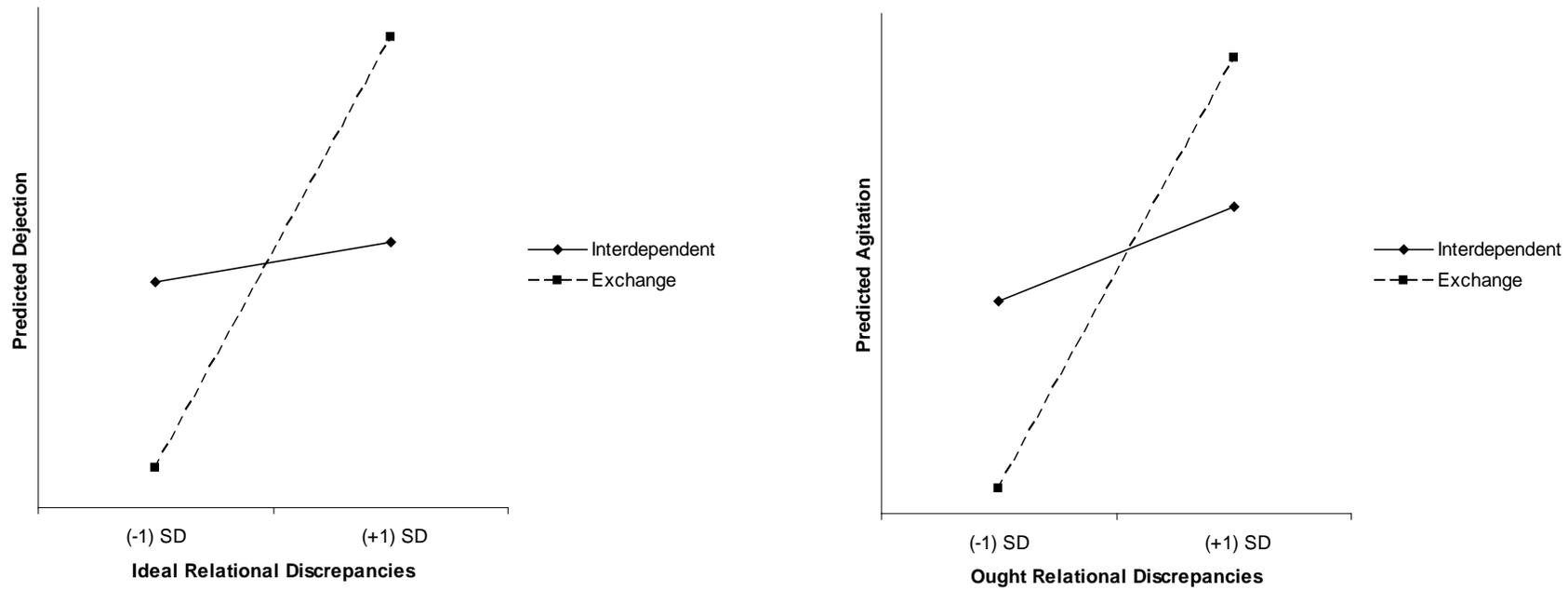


Figure 5

The relationship between ideal relational discrepancies and dejection (left panel), and ought relational discrepancies and agitation (right panel), showing the moderating impact of relationship type (Study 3)

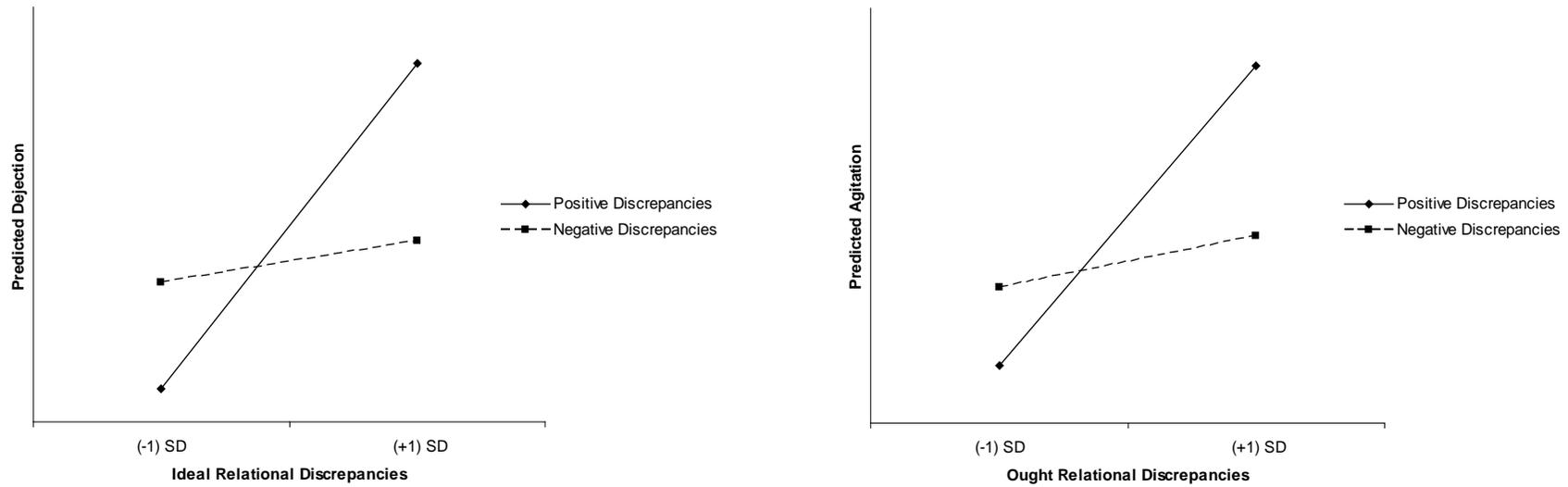


Figure 6

The relationship between ideal relational discrepancies (left panel), and ought relational discrepancies and agitation (right panel), showing the moderating impact of discrepancy valence (Study 3)

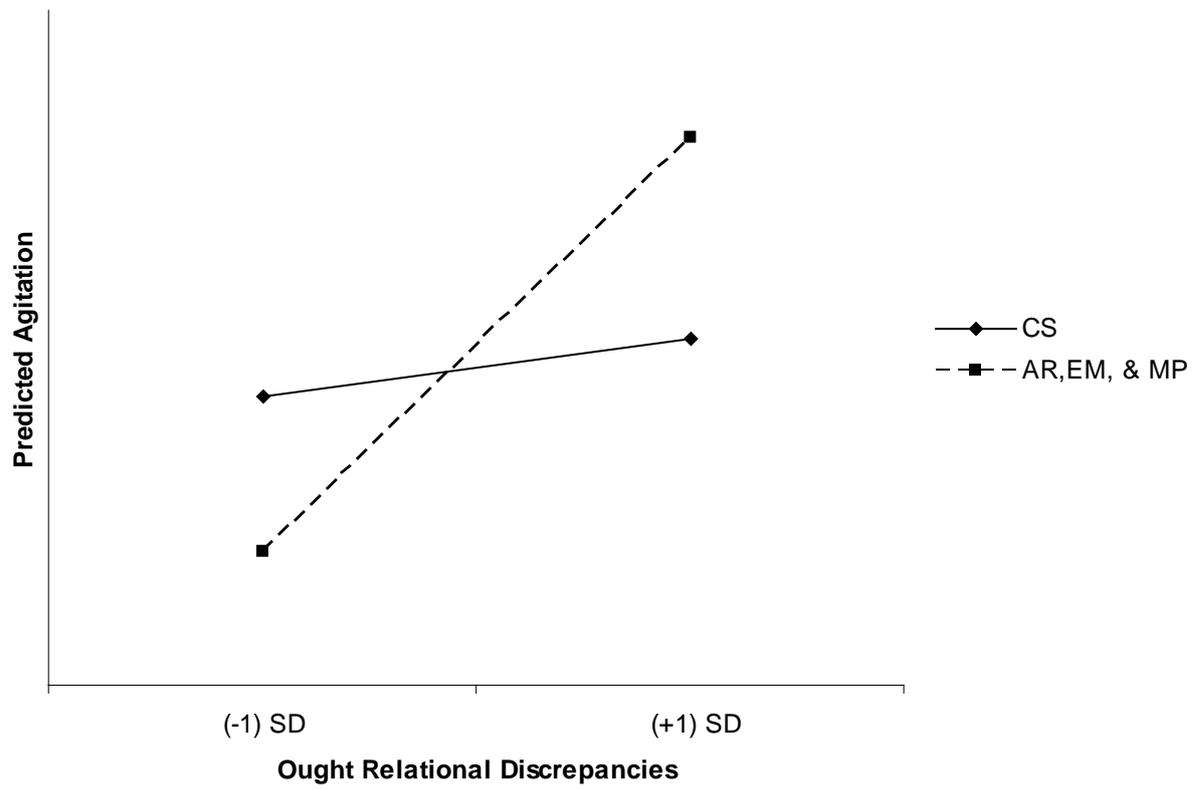


Figure 7

The relationship between ought relational discrepancies and agitation, showing the moderating impact of relational mode in collegial relationships (CS vs. AR, EM, & MP) (Study 3).

## Appendix 1

Sample items from Haslam and Fiske's (1999) Modes of Relationships Questionnaire (MORQ)

Relational Mode	Sample Item
Authority Ranking - Leader	You are above the other person in a kind of hierarchy.
Authority Ranking - Follower	The other person makes the decisions and you generally go along.
Communal Sharing	The two of you are a unit: you belong together.
Equality Matching	If one person does what the other wants, next time the second person should do what the first person wants.
Market Pricing	With this person, you make decisions according to the ratio of the benefits you get and the costs to you.

## Footnotes

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<sup>1</sup>Coefficient  $\alpha$  (Cronbach, 1951) is not usually the best index of reliability. All calculated indices of reliability are estimates of the true reliability and are lower-bound estimates. The most accurate estimate is, therefore, the highest. Guttman (1945) outlined six different ways of estimating reliability, including coefficient alpha his third lower bound estimate of reliability. The use of his best estimate,  $\lambda$ , did not become routine, however, because of the complexity of calculation (which is no longer a problem). Traub (1994), in a review of reliability estimation, recommended that should coefficient  $\lambda$  be used in preference to coefficient  $\alpha$ .

<sup>2</sup>Optimal scaling (Young, De Leeuw, & Takane, 1976), as implemented in the categorical regression procedure available in SPSS, is a procedure that transforms variables in a manner that optimizes their relationships with other variables. This procedure can capitalize on unique features in the data, leading to overfitting of any model. However, this is less likely to happen when there are moderate numbers of cases per variable and when data were assumed to be ordinal, which was the case here and in the two subsequent studies. We further restricted this possibility by constraining transformations to be smooth as well as increasing (i.e., 'spline-ordinal'; Winsberg & Ramsay, 1980). The procedure standardizes all variables (i.e., they have a mean of 0 and a standard deviation of 1).