CHAPTER 21

The Effects of Social Relationships on Self-Regulation

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The last few decades of the 20th century were fat times for self-regulation research. Scholars introduced exciting new theories and research methods that reverberated throughout psychology and beyond. Most of this research examined individuals who set goals, sought to achieve them, and monitored their progress, all largely by themselves (for a review, see Baumeister, Heatherton, & Tice, 1994). The research largely neglected the role of social relationships in influencing self-regulatory processes.

This intrapersonal emphasis contrasted sharply with major approaches to self-regulation outside of the ivory tower. For example, Alcoholics Anonymous, which is one of the most famous and influential approaches to understanding self-regulation, accepts as a core tenet that individuals cannot conquer their destructive drinking behavior without help from other people. According to the opening sentence the organization's website, "Alcoholics Anonymous is a fellowship of men and women who share their experience, strength and hope with each other that they may solve their common problem and help others to recover from alcoholism." In short, self-regulation, at least insofar as destructive drinking is concerned, requires help from others.

Over the past decade, a growing body of research has emerged to support the idea that social relationships have strong and wide-ranging effects on people's self-regulatory success (see Vohs & Finkel, 2006), and one goal of this chapter is to review this research. Our second goal is to incorporate into our review of this topic disparate findings (from various subdisciplines of psychology) that have not typically been conceptualized in terms of the effects of social relationships on self-regulation. Our third and final goal is to identify largely neglected research topics linking social relationships to self-regulation.

Toward these goals, we adopt Carver and Scheier's (1982) model of self-regulation as an organizing framework (also see Baumeister, Schmeichel, & Vohs, 2007). In particular,

our review focuses on three key components of self-regulation: (1) *goal setting and initiation*, or the processes by which individuals decide which goals to pursue; (2) *goal operation*, or the processes by which individuals alter their thoughts, feelings, or behaviors to make progress toward achieving their goals; and (3) *goal monitoring*, or the processes by which individuals evaluate the degree to which they are making progress toward achieving their goals and are likely to make progress in these efforts in the future.

We begin by defining terms and addressing issues of scope. The term *self-regulation* refers to the processes by which the self alters its own responses or inner states in a goal-directed manner (see Baumeister et al., 2007). We use the terms *self-regulation* and *goal pursuit* interchangeably. Our primary focus is on the influence that *close* relationship partners, also called *significant others* (romantic partners, parents, etc.), have on people's self-regulation. However, we also review research involving nonclose relationship partners (even strangers) when the available research involving close relationship partners is sparse and the processes at play are likely to be relevant to close relationships. Such topics often suggest promising directions for future research.

INTERPERSONAL INFLUENCES ON GOAL INITIATION

We begin by discussing interpersonal influences on the first component of goal pursuit—the preliminary processes people employ to set or initiate goals (Carver & Scheier, 1982). In this broad category of *goal initiation*, we include both fully deliberate processes, such as explicit goal setting, and nondeliberate processes, such as automatic goal activation. Research over the past decade has established that although goal activation frequently emerges via internal and independent processes, it can also emerge via interpersonal processes. Relationship partners can influence goal initiation by assigning goals, inspiring goals, or triggering goals.

Assigning Goals

A quick review of experimental research on self-regulation makes clear that other people can initiate one's goals: Although many self-regulation studies examine participants' ongoing real-life goal pursuits (e.g., Fishbach, Friedman, & Kruglanski, 2003; Fitzsimons & Shah, 2008), many others examine goals initiated in response to experimental manipulations. As an example, consider the classic delay of gratification experiments (Mischel, 1974; Mischel, Shoda, & Rodriguez, 1989). The experimenter assigned children the goal of resisting the impulse to consume an inferior reward in the moment (e.g., one marshmallow) to earn a superior reward later in the session (e.g., two marshmallows). Similarly, studies of implementation intentions sometimes involve the experimenter assigning goals to participants (e.g., assigning students the goal of writing a report during a busy holiday; Gollwitzer & Brandstätter, 1997).

Organizational and developmental psychologists have explored this process of explicit goal assignment outside of the laboratory. According to an extensive review of goal setting in organizations (Locke & Latham, 1990, 2002), when goals are externally assigned (i.e., the manager sets the goal for the employee), they shape performance just as strongly as when goals are "participatively set" (i.e., the employee takes part in the goal setting), as long as the goal's purpose is explained (Latham, Erez, & Locke, 1988).

Externally assigned goals influence performance by changing the employee's goal setting and sense of self-efficacy. For example, when a supervisor assigns a particularly challenging goal, this improves performance, because it increases both the ambitiousness of the employee's goal and the employee's self-efficacy (see Locke & Latham, 2002); after all, employees whose supervisor assigns them a challenging goal can typically conclude that the supervisor believes they can accomplish it. Similarly, parentally assigned goals can shape children's goal setting and subsequent performance (Caulkins, Smith, Gill, & Johnson, 1998; Marjoribanks, 1979; Zimmerman, Bandura, & Martinez-Pons, 1992), although the mechanisms through which parents' achievement-relevant goal setting impacts children's own goal initiation are not well understood (Martinez-Pons, 2002; Zimmerman et al., 1992).

Inspiring Goals

In addition to assigning explicit goals, relationship partners can also affect one's goal initiation by serving as models of behavior that can inspire the adoption of new standards. According to social learning theory (Bandura, 1986), one can adopt new goals by observing and imitating the actions of a model. Modeled goal pursuits that lead to positive outcomes for the model are especially likely to motivate one to adopt the new action (Bandura, 1986; Zimmerman & Koussa, 1979), presumably because one also seeks the positive end states associated with performing that action. A number of studies have demonstrated that close relationship partners can inspire one's goals via modeling. For example, parents who modeled good self-regulation had children with stronger academic self-regulation and academic achievement than parents who did not (Martinez-Pons, 2002), and parents who modeled good exercise behavior had children with better fitness habits than parents who did not (Davison, Cutting, & Birch, 2003).

Triggering Goals

The preceding discussion notwithstanding, people frequently initiate goals on their own. Indeed, people are often alone, absorbed in their own thoughts, when goals come to mind and motivate goal pursuit. Are these situations outside the influence of social relationships? Over the past decade, scholars have employed social cognitive procedures to demonstrate empirically that goal-relevant actions, even when they are initiated and pursued in isolation, are often socially triggered.

In particular, research on automatic goal pursuit has suggested one route through which relationship partners can shape goal initiation. Individuals repeatedly initiate and pursue specific goals in the company of the same significant others, such as romantic partners, colleagues, and family members. Over time, due to this repetition, individuals develop strong associations between these goals and these significant others (Miller & Read, 1991; Moretti & Higgins, 1999). Based on these strong associations, exposure to those significant others can be sufficient to activate the linked goal, which, once activated, can subsequently shape perception and behavior. Thus, the presence of significant others can trigger goal-directed action, even in the absence of any awareness on the part of goal pursuers, who likely perceive their actions as unaffected by external influence (Wegner & Wheatley, 1999).

Importantly, research has shown that this process can be triggered without the physical presence of significant others; their mere psychological presence has been shown to be sufficient to trigger goals and initiate goal-directed behavior (Andersen, Reznik, & Manzella, 1996; Fitzsimons & Bargh, 2003; Shah, 2003a). This idea was first explored in the context of studies on transference, which found that when a new person resembled a significant other, motivation toward the significant other was transferred to the new person (Andersen et al., 1996). For example, in one study, participants reported stronger approach goals toward a stranger who resembled a positive significant other and stronger avoidance goals toward a stranger who resembled a negative significant other.

Building on those findings, research has demonstrated that simply reminding people of their significant others produces goal-directed behavior—from helping behavior to achievement-oriented behavior—in line with goals associated with those others (Fitzsimons & Bargh, 2003; Shah, 2003a). When participants were primed with close relationship partners, the goals they commonly pursued within those relationships became active and guided behavior. For example, one study examined how significant other priming affected college students' motivation to perform well on an academic achievement task (Fitzsimons & Bargh, 2003). In a mass testing session, participants reported the goals they commonly pursued with each of a number of important relationship partners, including their mothers. Researchers grouped participants into two categories: those who spontaneously reported a goal to achieve academically to please their mothers, and those who did not mention such a goal with their mothers. In a laboratory session later in the term, participants completed a supraliminal priming procedure, in which they described either their mothers' physical appearance or their path to school, then performed an academic achievement task. Participants primed with their mothers significantly outperformed control participants, but only if they had reported a goal to achieve academically to please their mothers. The impact of significant others on individuals' goal-directed action was further shown to depend on features of the relationship. For example, in one study, only participants who believed their fathers cared about their academic performance and reported a close relationship with him responded to subliminal primes *father* and *dad* by working harder on an academic achievement task (Shah, 2003a).

Of course, not everyone hopes to please every relationship partner, or seeks to fulfill every relationship partner's goals. As such, thinking about others will not always lead individuals to behave in line with the others' goals. For example, when individuals perceive significant others as controlling, they can react against the goals of those others (Chartrand, Dalton, & Fitzsimons, 2007). In one study, participants primed with a controlling significant other who wanted them to work hard subsequently solved fewer anagrams than participants primed with a controlling other who wanted them to have fun. Similarly, participants who scored high in the individual-difference tendency toward psychological reactance (Brehm, 1966) also responded to priming by significant other priming by pursuing goals counter to the desires of their loved ones (Chartrand et al., 2007).

Complementing this research demonstrating that activating representations of relationship partners can influence goal pursuit in a specific goal context is research demonstrating that activating relationship insecurities can alter individuals' general motivational orientation (Cavallo, Fitzsimons, & Holmes, 2009, 2010). Several studies showed that worries about a romantic partner's dedication can temporarily prompt individuals

to initiate and pursue safety-oriented goals in general, outside of the relationship. For example, when participants were led to doubt their romantic partners' commitment, they chose more cautious financial investments and showed greater accessibility of safety-related constructs.

Just thinking about close relationships, then, can initiate goal pursuit and shape behavior outside of the relationship context. In addition, simply watching another person pursue a goal can trigger goal-directed action on the part of the observer. In *goal contagion*, individuals automatically infer goals underlying others' actions and subsequently pursue those goals themselves (Aarts, Gollwitzer, & Hassin, 2004; see Papies & Aarts, Chapter 7, this volume). In one study, half of the heterosexual male participants read a story in which the main character's actions implied he was pursuing a goal to have casual sex, while another half read a story with similar content that did not imply such a goal. Participants then had the opportunity to ingratiate themselves to another student by working to improve a task allegedly designed by that student. Participants who read a story implying the goal of seeking casual sex were more helpful, but only when they believed the other student was female, suggesting that their actions might have been guided by an underlying goal to seek sex themselves. Although these experiments involved fictional characters, we believe they have implications for close relationships. Given their high interdependence, close relationship partners are frequently and repeatedly exposed to each other's goal pursuits. As such, over time, such partners may be particularly likely to adopt each other's goals without conscious intention.

In summary, these programs of research suggest that the goals that people initiate and choose to pursue are shaped by the presence—physical or psychological—of others. Of course, people are not passive copycats who mimic every action pursued by others, nor are they mindless automatons who pursue every goal activated by others. To date, little research has examined the limiting or boundary conditions of these phenomena, or of priming effects more broadly. Future research could fruitfully explore the psychological and social situations most and least likely to imbue people with the ability to trigger goals in others.

INTERPERSONAL INFLUENCES ON GOAL OPERATION

Once individuals have set and initiated a goal, they must pursue some goal-relevant course of action to make progress toward achieving it. In this section, we discuss interpersonal influences on the second component of goal pursuit—the mechanisms by which individuals seek to reduce discrepancies between their current and their desired states (Carver & Scheier, 1982). In this broad category of *goal operation*, we review evidence that relationship partners can influence individuals' success at achieving such discrepancy reduction. A relationship partner can have such an effect by providing social support, influencing one's psychological resources, influencing one's motivation, or altering one's goal-pursuit strategies. Our review focuses more on the former two processes (social support and resources) than on the latter two (motivation and strategies), because they have garnered considerably more attention in the scholarly literature. (A fifth process, in which a relationship partner fosters appropriate disengagement from one's goals, has been largely neglected.)

Providing Social Support

A general means by which interpersonal processes affect the operation stage of self-regulation is via *social support*, which we define broadly as a suite of interpersonal processes whereby another person helps an individual engage in effective self-regulation. Social support has been particularly well-studied in the domain of health behaviors (see Reblin & Uchino, 2008). Because virtually all of us seek to be healthy and fit rather than unhealthy and flabby, and because self-regulatory failures in health-related domains (e.g., overeating, lack of exercise, smoking) are rampant (see Baumeister, Heatherton, & Tice, 1994), the effects of social processes on health behaviors are prototypical examples of how such processes can promote effective self-regulation. For example, individuals with strong social support adhere better to medical regimens than do individuals with weak social support (for a meta-analytic review, see DiMatteo, 2004). Such individuals also exercise more, engage in more physical activity in general, sleep more regular hours, are more likely to use seat belts when driving, consume more fruits and vegetables, and are more likely to quit smoking (Allgöwer, Wardle, & Steptoe, 2001; Cohen & Lichtenstein, 1990; Davison et al., 2003; Eyler et al., 1999; Novak & Webster, 2009; Reblin & Uchino, 2008). People with poorer social support die younger, and this association appears to be mediated in part through such health behaviors (Uchino, 2004). However, because much of this research is correlational, it remains unclear to what extent positive relationships promote good self-regulation in the health domain, and to what extent good self-regulation promotes positive relationships (for a review of researching examining the link between self-regulation and relationship functioning, see Fitzsimons & Finkel, Chapter 22, this volume).

Several lines of research suggest that the effects of social support on self-regulation are not limited to the domain of health behaviors. For example, individuals whose romantic partners strongly (vs. weakly) support and encourage their goals in domains such as academics, career, friendships, and fitness, have significantly greater confidence that these goals are achievable and are ultimately more likely to achieve them (Brunstein, Dangelmayer, & Schultheiss, 1996; Feeney, 2004). Research on the *dependency paradox* demonstrates that individuals who are willing to be dependent upon a romantic partner pursue their goals with greater autonomy than do individuals who are less willing to be dependent (Feeney, 2007). Thus, close others can positively impact goal progress.

Indeed, individuals who respond to an activated goal by selectively drawing closer to goal-supportive others are more successful in their goal pursuits over time than are individuals whose feelings of closeness to others' are unaffected by the others' goal support (Fitzsimons & Shah, 2008). In a study combining social cognitive and longitudinal procedures, first-year university students rated their closeness to achievement-instrumental and non-instrumental friends one time when achievement goals were primed and another time when they were not. Students who drew closer to their goal-instrumental friends when achievement goals were primed (relative to when such goals were not primed) adhered better to their studying goals and ultimately earned higher grades than their counterparts who did not.

An extended program of research on the Michelangelo phenomenon investigates one social support process through which relationship partners positively predict one's goal achievement. The *Michelangelo phenomenon* describes a process whereby a rela-

tionship partner "sculpts" one toward achieving on one's ideal-self goals—those goals that are essential to helping an individual become the person he or she aspires to become (Drigotas, Rusbult, Wieselquist, & Whitton, 1999; for a review, see Rusbult, Finkel, & Kumashiro, 2009). The metaphor underlying this phenomenon comes from Michelangelo Buonarroti's sculpting process. Michelangelo "conceived his figures as lying hidden in the block of marble. . . . The task he set himself as a sculptor was merely to extract the ideal form" (Gombrich, 1995, p. 313). The sculptor hammers, chisels, and polishes the raw material to reveal the beautiful figure slumbering within.

Humans, too, have ideal forms (Higgins, 1987; Markus & Nurius, 1986), and although humans are better equipped than blocks of marble to grow toward their ideal self without external intervention, research on the Michelangelo phenomenon suggests that close relationship partners can facilitate such growth. To the degree that such a partner views one as already approximating one's ideal self and behaves in accord with this view, one grows over time toward this ideal. Such personal growth positively predicts individuals' personal and relational well-being (Drigotas, 2002; Drigotas et al., 1999).

Scholars interested in the circumstances under which the sculpting process is most successful have examined aspects of (1) the sculptor (the relationship partner), (2) the raw material/sculpture (the self), or (3) the fit between the sculptor and the raw material/sculpture (the interaction between the relationship partner and the self). For example, one study of committed relationship partners demonstrated that dispositional tendencies in either the sculptor or the sculpture to move with sustained dedication from one goal state or strategy to another (*locomotion* tendencies; see Kruglanski et al., 2000) facilitated both growth toward the ideal self and relationship well-being, presumably because high locomotion tendencies promote action and change (Kumashiro, Rusbult, Finkenauer, & Stocker, 2007). This study also demonstrated that dispositional tendencies in either the sculptor or the sculpture, both to evaluate which goals and goal pursuit strategies are optimal and to appraise goal performance (*assessment* tendencies), inhibited growth toward the ideal self and relationship well-being, presumably because high assessment tendencies promote extensive evaluation and stasis.

Other research has explored characteristics of the relationship between the sculptor and the sculpture that influence Michelangelo processes. For example, one recent series of studies tested the hypothesis that the Michelangelo phenomenon works especially smoothly to the extent that the sculptor approximates the sculpture's ideal self (Rusbult, Kumashiro, Kubacka, & Finkel, 2009). When the sculptor does so, he or she tends to be successful at affirming the sculpture, which in turn predicts both the sculpture's growth toward the ideal self and relationship well-being, including a reduced likelihood of breakup.

Influencing Resources

A second means by which interpersonal processes affect the operation stage of self-regulation is by influencing individuals' psychological resources. An influential theory suggests that self-regulation functions like a muscle (Baumeister, Vohs, & Tice, 2007; Muraven & Baumeister, 2000). According to this "strength model" of self-regulation, all acts of deliberate self-regulation require that individuals tap into a limited and depletable resource called *self-regulatory strength.* Just as physical exertion can deplete muscular

strength, self-regulatory exertion can deplete self-regulatory strength, which can impair one's self-regulatory efforts.

A large body of evidence demonstrates that various interpersonal processes influence the degree to which the interactants subsequently possess limited versus plentiful self-regulatory strength. Research on *high-maintenance interaction*, which refers to the degree to which social interaction requires energy exertions beyond those required to perform the task itself, demonstrates that effortful social interaction can deplete self-regulatory resources (Finkel et al., 2006). In one study, research participants performed a 3-minute, collaborative maze task with a research confederate. The experimenter gave the participant a computer joystick and assigned her the task of navigating the maze. To make the maze task collaborative, the experimenter placed a visual occlusion between the participant and the computer screen, explaining that the other participant—actually the research confederate—would talk the participant through the maze task (e.g., "Up, left, left, right, down"). By random assignment, half of the participants experienced a low-maintenance interaction in which the confederate's instructions made the interaction efficient, whereas the other half experienced a high-maintenance interaction in which the confederate's instructions made the interaction inefficient (e.g., "Wait, hold on, go back, I meant left"). Relative to participants who had experienced the low-maintenance interaction, participants who had experienced the high-maintenance interaction subsequently were both lazier (they were more likely to prefer a simple, unrewarding activity to a challenging, potentially rewarding one) and more mentally unfocused (they solved fewer anagrams).

Dozens of additional studies have demonstrated this high-maintenance interaction effect across diverse forms of interpersonal interaction. For example, relative to participants engaging in easy, well-practiced forms of self-presentation, participants engaging in challenging, novel forms were more depleted, persisting for less time on an arithmetic task (Vohs, Baumeister, & Ciarocco, 2005). Relative to either nonbiased white participants or white participants engaging in a same-race interaction, racially biased white participants engaging in a interracial interaction were more depleted, exhibiting greater cognitive interference on the Stroop (1935) color-naming task (Richeson & Shelton, 2003; Richeson & Trawalter, 2005). Relative to participants who were subtly and nonverbally mimicked (an affiliation cue) by an interaction partner from whom they expected warm treatment (an employee or a same-race interaction partner), participants who were mimicked by an interaction partner from whom they did not expect such treatment (a supervisor or a cross-race interaction partner) were more depleted, exhibiting greater Stroop interference (Dalton, Chartrand, & Finkel, in press). Relative to male participants who had just interacted with another male, male participants who had just interacted with a female were more depleted, exhibiting impaired performance on concentration-intensive tasks, especially to the degree that participants perceived the female as attractive or were trying to make a good impression on her (Karremans, Verwijmeren, Pronk, & Reitsma, 2009); female participants did not show a parallel effect.

A related line of research demonstrates that being socially excluded impairs one's self-regulation (Baumeister, DeWall, Ciarocco, & Twenge, 2005). For example, relative to participants who had just been socially included, participants who had been socially excluded were more depleted, eating more than twice as many fattening cookies.

An intriguing new program of research demonstrates that merely empathizing with another person who is exerting self-control can be sufficient to deplete one's self-regulatory

resources (Ackerman, Goldstein, Shapiro, & Bargh, 2009). In one study, participants read a first-person account of a waiter or waitress who arrived to work hungry, worked at a high-quality restaurant, and was not allowed to eat on the job. Participants then indicated how much money they would be willing to spend on a series of luxury goods. Half of the participants simply read the story (low perspective-taking condition), whereas the other half immersed themselves in the story as if they actually were the hungry waiter or waitress (high perspective-taking condition). Building upon previous work demonstrating that depleted individuals are willing to pay more than nondepleted individuals for luxury goods (Vohs & Faber, 2007), participants in the high perspective-taking condition subsequently reported a willingness to spend more money on these luxury goods than did participants in the low perspective-taking condition (Ackerman et al., 2009).

Fortunately, the effect of social processes on people's self-regulatory resources is not always negative. Recent research suggests that other people can sometimes bolster people's self-regulatory strength. For example, participants assigned to act out target terms such as *Olympics* and *helicopter* while playing charades (a game where the performer acts out the target terms, trying to get the guesser to identify them correctly) experienced bolstered strength, exhibiting a significant increase in handgrip persistence from before to after the game if the guesser was well-synchronized with them, but not if the guesser was not (Knowles, Finkel, & Williams, 2007). In another series of studies, relative to participants who were primed with thoughts about nonfamilial topics, participants who were primed with thoughts about a close family member appeared to be less depleted, as demonstrated by superior performance on language and math tasks, and by greater restraint when tempted by unhealthy cookies (Stillman, Tice, Fincham, & Lambert, 2009).

Influencing Motivation

A third means by which interpersonal processes affect the operation stage of self-regulation is by influencing individuals' motivation to achieve a given goal. Research has shown that relationship partners can sometimes increase motivation. For example, other people can serve as an inspiration or a role model for one's goal pursuits, especially insofar as (1) those people are successful in a domain that is important to the self, (2) their achievement does not seem unattainable, and (3) they encourage strategies that match the self's general motivational orientation to pursue desirable outcomes rather than avoid undesirable outcomes (Lockwood, Jordan, & Kunda, 2002; Lockwood & Kunda, 1997; cf. Tesser, Millar, & Moore, 1988). In these circumstances, role models can motivate individuals to expend more effort and to persist longer toward goal achievement than they otherwise would.

In addition to increasing individuals' motivation, relationship partners can (unintentionally) decrease it. They can exacerbate the gap between individuals' goal-relevant intentions (e.g., intending to read law periodicals regularly to reach the goal of becoming a lawyer) and behavior (e.g., actually reading the periodicals) (Gollwitzer, Sheeran, Michalski, & Seifert, 2009). In several experiments, people were less likely to follow through on their goal-relevant intentions when others were made aware of these intentions. It seems that having other people recognize one's intentions can be satisfying in and of itself, diminishing the need to work hard toward goal achievement.

Altering Strategies

A fourth means by which interpersonal processes affect the operation stage of self-regulation is by influencing the goal pursuit strategies people employ. For example, a romantic partner might help one improve one's study habits in advance of a major exam. To date, this topic has been largely neglected. However, some of psychology's classic findings provide compelling illustrations of how other people can promote or impair one's self-regulation by fostering one strategy over another. For example, the research on delay of gratification discussed earlier demonstrates that an experimenter not only can set goals for children but also that his or her strategic advice influences how successful children are at resisting the temptation to indulge immediately in the inferior reward to earn a superior reward a little while later (Mischel, 1974; Mischel et al., 1989). Whereas children who were instructed to think about the rewards (e.g., the taste and texture of the marshmallows) while waiting exhibited poor delay performance, children who were instructed to think fun, distracting thoughts exhibited impressive delay performance.

This delay of gratification research provides compelling evidence that relationship partners can promote or impair individuals' self-regulatory success by altering the strategies those individuals employ. Investigating such strategic processes in close relationships, and perhaps individuals' reactance to receiving strategic advice from significant others (Brehm, 1966), is a promising direction for future research.

INTERPERSONAL INFLUENCES ON GOAL MONITORING

Once individuals have operated on the environment in an attempt to make progress toward their goals, they frequently benefit from discerning the degree to which their efforts have been successful thus far and evaluating their likelihood of future success. In this section, we discuss interpersonal influences on the third component of goal pursuit—the evaluative processes people employ to ascertain whether their operating processes are actually helping them progress toward achieving their goals, and the degree to which they feel confident that their goal pursuit efforts will be effective in the future (Carver & Scheier, 1982). *Goal monitoring* involves individuals' thoughts, feelings, and perceptions about goals and their progress thus far, as well as their expectations about the likelihood of future progress. The goal-monitoring process helps goal pursuers decide how much effort to devote to the goal and what goal pursuit strategies might be most effective. Relationship partners can influence goal monitoring (either by doing the monitoring themselves or by influencing individuals' monitoring tendencies) by helping to evaluate both goal progress to date and the likelihood of goal progress in the future.

Evaluating Goal Progress

Some of the best research on the role of relationship partners in monitoring one's goal progress has taken place in the health domain. For example, research has examined the impact of parental monitoring of their child's adherence to the prescribed medical regimen for managing the child's diabetes (Anderson, Ho, Brackett, Finkelstein, & Laffel, 1997; La Greca et al., 1995). Relative to children whose parents were less involved in blood glucose monitoring and insulin administration, children with more involved par-

ents exhibited better metabolic control. These effects of parental involvement in blood glucose monitoring appear to be mediated by their effects on the child's monitoring of his or her own blood glucose (Anderson et al., 1997).

In the achievement domain, research has tested the influence of relationship partners on people's interest in accurate (vs. defensively biased or incomplete) goal monitoring. In a recent pair of studies, students at a prestigious university took a challenging (and bogus) intelligence test and received feedback that their performance was "poor" (Kumashiro & Sedikides, 2005). Participants then indicated the degree to which they wanted to learn more about their poor performance. This information would allegedly improve their ability to monitor their performance and perhaps help them develop strategies for reducing the discrepancy between their goal to exhibit intelligence and their ostensibly weak performance on this intelligence test. Students who brought to mind a close, positive relationship partner were subsequently more willing to learn about the nature of their poor performance than were students who brought to mind either a close, negative relationship partner or a nonclose relationship partner. Given that most (and likely all) of these students possessed the goals both to be intelligent and to perform tasks in a way that demonstrates this intelligence, this bolstered willingness to learn more about their poor performance suggests that close, positive relationship partners make people willing to attend to information that is valuable for monitoring their goal progress, even when such monitoring is likely to portray important aspects of the self in a harsh light.

In addition to research on health and intelligence, scholars interested in caregiving have also examined relationship partners' progress monitoring tendencies. For example, research on adult attachment theory suggests that monitoring of partners' progress toward important goals is an inherent part of responsive caregiving (Feeney & Collins, 2001). A responsive caregiver provides the right amount and type of support for the current needs of the partner; failure to do so—for example, by providing a small amount of support when the partner's needs are high, or a large amount when the partner's needs are low—can produce negative relationship outcomes (Dakoff & Taylor, 1990; Feeney & Collins, 2001). Indeed, accurate monitoring of the partner's needs for support when pursuing a stressful or difficult goal may be essential for the successful provision of responsive support. In one experiment, participants who believed their partners were highly nervous about an upcoming speech provided stronger levels of emotional support than participants who believed their partners were less nervous (Feeney & Collins, 2001). This modulation suggests that participants were aware of and responsive to their partners' expectations and worries about their performance, an awareness that required monitoring of his or her goal progress.

Finally, close relationship partners often share information with each other about their goal performance, which provides an opportunity for partners to affect each other's goal monitoring. For example, when partners respond enthusiastically (vs. neutrally) to news of individuals' good performance, those individuals tend to regard the event more positively (Reis et al., 2009).

Evaluating the Likelihood of Future Success

An important part of the goal monitoring process is assessing whether one is likely to make substantial goal progress in the future. Several lines of research investigate the role of other people in helping individuals make such assessments. For example, in a recent

study in the social cognitive tradition, relative to individuals who had been subliminally primed with the names of significant others who had low expectations for their self-regulatory success, individuals who had been subliminally primed with the names of significant others who had high expectations for their self-regulatory success believed that they were more likely to attain their goals. Consequently, they persisted longer in their goal pursuit behavior and were more likely to experience goal success (Shah, 2003b).

Other research also examines the role of relationship partners in altering assessments of one's ability to achieve successful goal-pursuit in the future, even though this research typically is not couched in such terms. For example, research on social comparison processes has revealed that people often compare their goal-directed performance to the performance of romantic partners, friends, family members, and colleagues (Pinkus, Lockwood, Schimmack, & Fournier, 2008). Social comparison is essentially a monitoring process: By looking at others' performance, people gain information about not only their own relative performance but also their likelihood of future relative success or failure. Typically, after comparing their own performance to the performance of more successful others (upward comparisons) in self-relevant domains, individuals report lower self-efficacy and show decreased motivation; after comparing their own performance to the performance of less successful others (downward comparisons) in self-relevant domains, individuals report higher self-efficacy and show increased motivation (Festinger, 1954; Suls, Martin, & Wheeler, 2002; Tesser, 1988; Wood, 1989). In close romantic relationships, however, these tendencies are diminished or even reversed (Beach et al., 1998; Pinkus et al., 2008). For example, in several studies, people responded more positively when comparing their own performance upward (vs. downward) to the performance of close romantic partners in self-relevant domains (Lockwood, Dolderman, Sadler, & Gerchak, 2004; Pinkus et al., 2008). Within close relationships then, upward comparisons may not consistently lower self-efficacy and motivation, because the other can be seen as an extension of the self, with shared fate.

According to social comparison theory, then, people look to others' actions to assess their own relative progress (Festinger, 1954). According to another classic theory—social learning theory—people also look to the *consequences* of others' actions to determine expectations of their own success (Schunk, 1987; Schunk & Zimmerman, 1997): When similar others succeed, observers infer that their own success is likelier; thus, they have higher self-efficacy and motivation. When similar others struggle, observers infer that that their own success is less likely; thus, they have lower self-efficacy and motivation. Modeled goal pursuit can thus provide valuable goal-monitoring information.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, we have reviewed the burgeoning literature on the effects of social relationships on self-regulation. This review has demonstrated that relationships affect all three components of self-regulation—goal setting and initiation, goal operation, and goal monitoring—in powerful and diverse ways. It has also identified several areas where no research yet links close relationships to self-regulation. Indeed, it is best to conceptualize this review as a snapshot of a research area at about 10 years of age. The good news is that this area is maturing quickly. Given the rapidly expanding rate of research linking social relationships to self-regulation, we look forward to seeing the updated coverage

of this topic in the third edition of this *Handbook*, because that version will surely fill many of the empirical gaps in the present version and incorporate exciting and heretofore unimagined new developments.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The writing of this chapter was supported by a National Science Foundation grant (No. 719780) awarded to Eli J. Finkel and a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada grant awarded to Gráinne M. Fitzsimons. Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the funding agencies. Authorship ordering was determined by flipping a Loonie.

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