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The Relational Self Revealed: Integrative Conceptualization and Implications for Interpersonal Life

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The authors offer a new, integrative conceptualization of the relational self based on a synthesis of recent approaches to the self and significant others. This conceptualization provides a sharper and fuller definition of the relational self than does any existing approach alone and a common framework to interpret findings from separate literatures. The authors then present 5 propositions and evidence to support the thesis that relational selves exert a pervasive influence on interpersonal life. Specifically, relational selves (a) shape a wide range of psychological processes and outcomes, (b) exert their influence automatically, (c) serve basic orientation and meaning functions, (d) provide continuity and context-specific variability in personality, and (e) carry implications for psychological well-being. Discussion focuses on remaining issues and implications for future research.

Keywords: relational self, significant others, self-concept, close relationships

Epitomized by William James's (1890) early and oft-cited assertion that an individual has "as many different social selves as there are distinct groups of persons about whose opinion he cares," the basic notion that significant others influence the self is nearly as old as the discipline of psychology itself. However, over the years, interest in the influence of significant others on the self has waxed and waned. Moreover, different traditions and theories have conceptualized this influence in a wide variety of ways, often providing important pockets of insight rather than an integrative perspective. At present, the need for synthesis seems especially pressing, as the past decade and a half has witnessed an explosion of theorizing and research on the link between the self and significant others.

In this article, we offer a new, integrative conceptualization of the *relational self*—the self in relation to significant others. To do so, we carefully sort through the latest theory and evidence on the influence of significant others on the self, synthesizing and drawing distinctions where needed. We then present the thesis that the current state of evidence substantiates, and does so better than ever before, the view that relational conceptions of the self are central to understanding human behavior as it unfolds in the course of daily interpersonal life.

To begin, we give a brief historical sketch of relevant theory and research. Then, in the first major section, we define the relational self and point to supportive evidence from several recent literatures. By bringing together the unique elements of these separate bodies of work under a single rubric—the relational self—our synthesis yields a fuller portrait of the relational self than offered by any one existing body, as well as a shared language and set of principles to interpret findings emerging from each literature. Moreover, it establishes an identifiable literature on the relational self that serves as a much-needed counterweight to historically emphasized literatures on individual and collective conceptions of the self. To conclude this section, we distinguish the relational self from other self-related constructs involving significant others, as well as from constructs in the broader self literature.

In the second major section, we present the thesis that relational selves play a pervasive role in interpersonal life in the form of five propositions and accompanying evidence. Specifically, relational selves (a) shape a broad constellation of psychological processes and outcomes, (b) are often activated automatically, (c) serve fundamental orienting and meaning functions, (d) provide a basis for coherence and continuity in personality as well as context-specific variability, and (e) carry significant implications for psychological well-being. We end with a discussion of remaining questions and issues, along with the future directions they suggest. As the field enters the next phase of inquiry on relational aspects of the self, we hope our efforts will reveal the truly fundamental role that relational selves play in our day-to-day social interactions and shape future theory and research accordingly.

A Brief Historical Sketch

Although philosophers reflected on the social nature of the self well before psychology was a formal discipline, it was still over a century ago that James (1890) offered the concept of the "social me" to refer to aspects of the self experienced in relation to individuals and groups whose opinions are valued. Thus, the link between the self and significant others has long been a topic of psychological inquiry. The present article focuses on evidence from the past decade and a half, partly because prior work has been reviewed over the years (e.g., Felson, 1993; Markus & Cross, 1990; Shrauger & Schoeneman, 1979) but mainly because the recent literature has, in and of itself, reached a critical mass that calls out for integration. Moreover, recent theoretical and empiri-

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cal advances are what best substantiate our thesis that relational selves play a fundamental role in daily social life. Nonetheless, we first provide a brief history to locate our thinking in a broader, historical context.

Subsequent to James's (1890) early writings, psychologists and other social scientists continued to tackle the role of others in shaping the self. Particularly notable was work in the symbolic interactionist tradition. Symbolic interactionists share a basic concern with the relationship between the person and society and the belief that the two are mutually constructed in the course of social interaction (for a review, see Stryker & Statham, 1985). In Cooley's (1902) words, the person and society are two sides of the same coin. In terms of the self, Cooley used the term *looking-glass self* to capture the idea that people perceive themselves through the eyes of others, particularly important others.

Mead (1934) echoed Cooley's (1902) belief that the self is shaped by the anticipated and observed responses of others, though he tended to emphasize the influence of important social groups and society at large. Also, whereas both James (1890) and Cooley focused on emotions or feelings about the self, Mead emphasized the cognitive underpinnings of the self, such as the crucial role of perspective taking. To Mead, the emergence of the self entails an individual "taking the attitudes of other individuals toward himself within a social environment or context of experience and behavior in which both he and they are involved" (p. 203). That is, the individual takes the role of the other and "becomes an object to himself" (p. 138). Role taking was also central to Goffman's (1959) work on self-presentation. To Goffman, the nature of the self depends on the role one is playing for the current audience.

Outside the symbolic interactionist tradition, J. M. Baldwin (1897, 1911) argued that personality development is inextricably tied to the course of one's relationships, noting that the "give-and-take between the individual and his fellows . . . we may call the dialectic of personal growth" (J. M. Baldwin, 1911, p. 28). On the mechanisms through which one develops a sense of selfhood, he remarked that "very many of the particular marks which I now call mine, when I think of myself . . . I have first found them in my social environment, and by reason of my social and imitative disposition, have transferred them to myself by trying to act as if they were true of me, and so coming to find out that they are true of me" (J. M. Baldwin, 1897, p. 11). As another example, Sullivan (1953) posited that personality arises from one's experiences in interpersonal encounters with significant others—that is, from "the relatively enduring pattern of recurrent interpersonal situations [that] characterize a human life" (Sullivan, 1953, p. 110–111). Such interpersonal situations provide a forum for the satisfaction of one's needs, and whether one's needs are satisfied, as well as how others in the situation react to oneself, shape one's beliefs about the self.

Despite such early interest in the self and significant others, attention to this topic waned in the mid-20th century, as the study of the self as a whole fell out of fashion in an intellectual environment biased toward behaviorist views. However, with the cognitive revolution of the 1970s and onward through the 1980s, the self recaptured interest. During this period, social psychologists studied the structural and processing properties of the self (Markus, 1977; Rogers, Kuiper, & Kirker, 1977) and made great strides on affective and motivational bases of the self, as seen in work on self-esteem (Coopersmith, 1967; Rosenberg, 1965; Wylie, 1974), self-affirmation (Steele & Liu, 1983), self-evaluation maintenance (Tesser, 1986), and self-verification (Swann, 1983).

Throughout this period, social influences certainly played a role in social–psychological theorizing on the self in the form of, for example, standards of comparison (e.g., Wills, 1981; Wood, Taylor, & Lichtman, 1985), audiences for self-presentation (e.g., Schlenker & Leary, 1982), and individual differences in the tendency to adjust the self to the social situation (Snyder, 1974). This period also saw the emergence of social identity theory (Tajfel, 1982) and, soon after, self-categorization theory (Turner, 1985), with both focused on the influence of social groups on the self. However, these different areas of inquiry tended to develop independently, creating pockets of knowledge about the social nature of the self.

In 1990, Markus and Cross attempted to bring order to the extant literature on interpersonal bases of the self. In their review, they articulated three ways in which the self is interpersonal. First, others' thoughts, feelings, and behaviors may be internalized and experienced as one's own. For example, children internalize parents' attitudes and behaviors as part of the process of socialization. Second, others are used in the evaluation and maintenance of the self. An example here is the role that others play in shaping standards for the self (Higgins, 1987) and important life goals or tasks (Cantor & Kihlstrom, 1987). Finally, others may be interdependent parts of the self; that is, others do not function as internalized guides nor as external frames of reference, but rather, the self exists only in the context of others. Markus and Kitayama's (1991) interdependent self-construal exemplifies this view.

Markus and Cross's (1990) review provides a useful demarcation between past work and the upsurge in attention to the influence of significant others on the self that has occurred in recent years. Although multiple forces likely conspired to bring about this recent rise, particularly influential was the merging of the close relationships and social cognition fields that began in the late 1980s. This merging gave birth to a new discipline, often referred to as *interpersonal* or *relationship cognition* (Reis & Downey, 1999). Common in this discipline are conceptualizations of close relationships in terms of mental representations of the self and significant others (e.g., Andersen & Cole, 1990; M. W. Baldwin, 1992). During this same time period, evidence for cross-cultural variability in the interpersonal nature of the self grew (Cousins, 1989; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, 1989), helping to sustain broader interest in social bases of the self (e.g., Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Cross, Bacon, & Morris, 2000).

In their concluding remarks, Markus and Cross (1990) argued that others shape the individual "both early in life, as the individual constructs a core sense of self, and throughout life, as the actual, anticipated, or remembered evaluations and concerns of significant others are continually organized into the working self-concept" (p. 602). In the pages that follow, we pick up roughly where they left off, carefully sorting through and drawing on the latest theory and research to articulate a new, integrative conceptualization of significant others' influence on the self organized around the construct of the relational self. We then demonstrate how recent advances and empirical findings indicate that relational influences on the self may be even more far-reaching than Markus and Cross suggested.

Conceptualization of and Evidence for the Relational Self

Before defining the relational self, it may be useful to briefly discuss terminology and establish some boundaries for our synthesis. On terminology, numerous terms have been used through the years to refer to social aspects of the self, among them *public self* (Greenwald & Pratkanis, 1984), *interpersonal self* (Markus & Cross, 1990), *social self* (Brewer, 1991), *interdependent self-construal* (Markus & Kitayama, 1991), *relational self* (Andersen & Chen, 2002; Brewer & Gardner, 1996), and *relational-interdependent self-construal* (Cross et al., 2000). Although all refer to social bases of the self in some manner, differences remain. For example, some connote the impact of general others on the self, whereas others refer to the influence of specific individuals (e.g., parent).

We use the term *relational self* because it captures the influence of significant others, which is our focus, better than either social self or interpersonal self, which tend to connote broader social influences (e.g., societal). Also, the latter terms have been used more often and thus carry various prior meanings that may or may not refer to the specific link between the self and significant others. Finally, the term relational self, unlike some of the other terms, does not connote individual differences in the degree to which the self is shaped by significant others, which fits our view that the relational self pertains to all people, not just particular segments of the population.

On boundaries for our synthesis, we draw on recent approaches focused on significant others, but not ones concerned with the influence of other social entities (e.g., groups). By *significant others* we mean actual (vs. hypothetical) individuals whom one knows (vs. just met), with whom one feels some degree of closeness, and usually with whom one shares a relationship that can be normatively (e.g., friend) or idiosyncratically labeled (e.g., my closest high school friend).

Conceptual Underpinnings of the Relational Self

What is the relational self? To begin, the relational self reflects who a person is in relation to his or her significant others. On a phenomenological level, a person's relational self with, for example, his or her mother is the "me when I'm with mom." In more concrete terms, the relational self (a) is self-knowledge that is linked in memory to knowledge about significant others, (b) exists at multiple levels of specificity, (c) is capable of being contextually or chronically activated, and (d) is composed of self-conceptions and a constellation of other self-aspects that characterize the self when relating to significant others. Below, we elaborate on these key features of our conceptualization of the relational self and then describe support for them from several recent literatures. Although each of these literatures offers evidence for at least some of the features of our conceptualization, organizing these separate bodies of work around a single construct—the relational self—results in a more comprehensive and richer framework within which to study the self in relation to significant others.

On a mental representational level, relational selves are composed of self-knowledge that is distinguishable from, but linked in memory to, knowledge about significant others. This assertion that relational-self knowledge is distinct is important because it sets the present conceptualization of the relational self as the self in relation to significant others apart from theories that posit the incorporation or internalization of aspects of significant others into the self. The self in these theories is not what we mean by the relational self, a point we will discuss in more depth in later sections.

Consistent with a large literature indicating that abstract, general social knowledge, as well as highly specific forms of such knowledge, are stored in memory (e.g., E. R. Smith, 1990; E. R. Smith & Zárate, 1992), the present conceptualization maintains that most people possess multiple relational selves and that these selves exist at varying levels of specificity. Specifically, a *relationship-specific relational self* designates the self in relation to a specific significant other, whereas a *generalized relational self* is akin to a summary representation of the self in the context of multiple relationships. These relationships may involve either a single, normatively defined relationship domain (e.g., "me when I'm with family members") or idiosyncratic groupings of relationships (e.g., "me when I'm with close others of my same age" or "me when I'm with my poker buddies"). Finally, in addition to relationship-specific and generalized relational selves, people may possess a *global relational self*, which denotes conceptions and aspects of the self in relation to significant others as a general class of individuals.

Paralleling the different levels of specificity possible for relational selves, the significant-other knowledge to which relational self-knowledge is linked may be knowledge about a specific significant other, knowledge abstracted from experiences with multiple significant others around whom the self is similar, or knowledge about significant others in general. Regardless of level of specificity, because relational-self knowledge is linked in memory to significant-other knowledge, activation of the latter should spread to, and thereby activate, associated relational selves.

Regarding when relational selves are activated, the present conceptualization draws on the notion of the working self-concept, which refers to whatever self-aspects are accessible in the current context (Markus & Kunda, 1986). This notion emerged in the 1980s amid growing consensus that the self is multifaceted, rather than a single, monolithic entity (Kihlstrom & Cantor, 1984; Linville, 1987). There was also growing recognition that it was neither feasible nor adaptive for a person's entire array of self-knowledge to be accessible all at once (Markus & Wurf, 1987). Invoking working self-concept notions, we argue that cues in the immediate context that denote the actual, imagined, or symbolic presence of a significant other, or the relational dynamics between the self and other, should alter the content of the working self-concept, just as other contextual cues do (e.g., McGuire & Padawer-Singer, 1976). More specifically, such cues should shift the working self-concept toward the relevant relational self—the "me" when relating to the relevant significant other(s). For example, a phone call from a significant other, a whiff of the perfume or cologne of the other, or facing circumstances (e.g., threat) that call for the support of the other may all serve as contextual activators of relational selves.

Alongside these working self-concept assumptions, the present conceptualization adheres to the principle that repeated, frequent activation of any knowledge construct increases its baseline or chronic level of activation readiness (Higgins, 1989, 1996; Higgins, King, & Mavin, 1982). The higher the chronic accessibility of a construct, the less contextual cuing is required for its activation (Higgins & Brendl, 1995). Thus, although the activation of

relational selves is influenced by immediate, contextual cues, frequent contextual activation of a relational self should result in its chronic accessibility, rendering it more likely to be activated in any given context. Also, frequently activated relational selves should have higher baseline accessibility levels and thus should be more likely to characterize the working self-concept, relative to less frequently activated ones.

Finally, relational selves are composed of attribute- and role-based conceptions of the self in the context of the relevant significant others. These attributes and roles are derived idiographically as well as from cultural role prescriptions (Clark & Mills, 1979; Fiske, 1992). For example, a person's self in relation to his or her younger sibling might include idiographic attributes such as "jokester" and "fun-loving" as well as normative roles such as "authority figure." It is important to note that relational selves also contain affective material, goals and motives, self-regulatory strategies, and behavioral tendencies. That is, they include positive and negative self-evaluations, the affect and emotions one experiences when relating to a significant other, the goals one pursues in the relationship with the other, the self-regulatory strategies one uses in interactions with the other, and the behaviors one enacts toward the other. Thus, for example, a person's relational self with his critical mother may be composed of conceptions of the self as inferior, feelings of rejection, and the goal to please.

To summarize, relational selves refer to conceptions and aspects of the self specifically in the context of relationships with specific or multiple significant others or with significant others in general. Because of linkages between relational-self and significant-other knowledge, relational selves can be activated upon the activation of significant-other knowledge. Reflecting working self-concept notions, relational selves are activated by contextual cues, although the chronic accessibility of any given relational self increases its activation likelihood across contexts. When a relational self is activated, a person not only conceives of and evaluates himself or herself as the self he or she is when relating to the relevant significant other(s) but also exhibits associated affective, motivational, self-regulatory, and behavioral responses.

Recent Evidence for Relational Selves

What evidence is there for the relational self? Below we describe four literatures that provide, in varying degrees, evidence consistent with the present conceptualization of the relational self. We then compare and contrast these separate lines of research, while highlighting the potential benefits of using the proposed relational-self construct as a basis for synthesizing them.

Self-with-other representations. Theorizing and research on self-with-other representations offer some of the earliest evidence from the recent literature for the present conceptualization. A self-with-other representation is a "mental representation that includes the set of personal qualities (traits, feelings, and the like) that an individual believes characterizes his or her self when with a particular other person" (Ogilvie & Ashmore, 1991, p. 290). To measure self-with-other representations, Ogilvie and colleagues have asked research participants to idiographically name a large set of significant others and then to make attribute ratings of who they are when they are with each significant other (Ogilvie & Ashmore, 1991; Ogilvie & Rose, 1995). Each participant's significant other by attribute ratings matrix is then analyzed with hierarchical classes, a type of clustering analysis. In broad strokes, this analytic technique identifies clusters of both attributes and significant others. Self-with-other representations are denoted by associations between particular attribute clusters and particular significant others. The technique also reveals which significant others evoke the same self attributes.

The self-with-other representation construct itself, as well as research on it, offers support for several key features of the proposed conceptualization of the relational self. First, Ogilvie and Ashmore (1991) argued that "we not only internalize and mentally represent our selves and others; we also form images of what we are like and how we feel when we are with specific other people in our lives" (p. 286). Thus, like relational selves, self-with-other representations are composed of self-knowledge that is distinct from other, nonrelational self-knowledge, as well as from knowledge about significant others. Consistent with this, hierarchical classes analysis identifies attributes that individuals use to describe significant others but not themselves in relation to these important others.

Second, consistent with the view that relational selves vary in specificity, research has shown that some self-with-other representations involve a single significant other linked to a unique set of self attributes, whereas others designate a group of significant others linked to the same attribute set (e.g., Ogilvie & Ashmore, 1991). The latter, more generalized self-with-other representations are thought to develop when an individual repeatedly experiences the self similarly in relation to multiple significant others. For example, a person may have a representation of the self with a group of significant others around all of whom he or she feels needy. Research in this domain has yielded the only evidence that we know of that generalized self-with-other representations, or relational selves, can involve idiosyncratic groupings of relationships (e.g., best friend, ex-boyfriend, sister), as well as normatively defined relationship domains (e.g., family). Finally, research suggests that people may possess a global form of self-with-other representation that is composed of attributes that characterize the self with significant others as a whole (e.g., Ogilvie & Rose, 1995).

Third, the view that self-with-other representations are composed of sets of attributes that are linked to significant others fits the assumption that relational-self and significant-other knowledge are linked in memory. On the other hand, evidence for either the contextual or chronic activation of self-with-other representations, which are key features of the proposed conceptualization of relational selves, is lacking. Also lacking is evidence for affective, motivational, self-regulatory, and behavioral aspects of self-with-other representations. However, research on these representations provides clear evidence that relational selves are composed in part of attribute-based conceptions of the self in relation to significant others (Ogilvie & Ashmore, 1991; Ogilvie & Rose, 1995). Moreover, similar evidence can be found in a separate line of research that also used hierarchical classes analysis. Although the aim of this work was to chart out self attributes associated with social roles (e.g., teacher) and social identities (e.g., Catholic), self attributes associated with significant others (e.g., sister) were also assessed (Reid & Deaux, 1996; see also Deaux, Reid, Mizrahi, & Ethier, 1995).

Relational schemas. According to M. W. Baldwin (1992), a relational schema consists of schemas for the self and the significant other in the self–other relationship, linked by an interper-

sonal script. This script reflects the typical patterns of relating between self and others, derived from generalizations of similar past interpersonal experiences. More specifically, it is composed of if–then contingencies of interaction (e.g., "If I assert myself, then my mother will treat me with respect") that embody expectations about how significant others will treat and respond to the self. M. W. Baldwin (1997) argued that people derive rules of self-inference from repeated exposure to if–then contingencies. For example, repeated experience with the contingency "If I make a mistake, then others will criticize and reject me" may give rise to the self-inference rule "If I make a mistake, then I am unworthy" (p. 329).

The self-schema component of relational schemas possesses many of the core features of the proposed relational-self construct. First, the self schemas of relational schemas are distinct from schemas about significant others, and as they refer to the self specifically in the context of self–other relationships, they are distinct from a wide array of other possible kinds of self-knowledge.

Second, relational schemas exist at multiple levels of specificity. People may have relationship-specific ones (e.g., M. W. Baldwin, Keelan, Fehr, Enns, & Koh-Rangarajoo, 1996), implying that the self-schema component of relational schemas may refer to the self in relation to a specific other. Other work has assessed the relational schemas associated with particular individual differences. For example, low self-esteem individuals possess relational schemas that include expectations of being accepted upon succeeding and rejected upon failing (M. W. Baldwin & Sinclair, 1996). Although not explicitly stated, such relational schemas likely involve groupings of significant others or significant others in general. The relational selves embedded in such broader relational schemas, just like those in relationship-specific ones, are thought to be derived from repeated past experience with if–then dynamics that dictate particular evaluations and inferences about the self.

Third, the interpersonal script component of relational schemas fits the view that linkages exist between relational-self and significant-other knowledge. Indeed, a major contribution of relational schema work has been its specification of the if–then nature of these linkages. It is assumed that because of such linkages, activation of either the self or significant-other component of a relational schema should activate the other (M. W. Baldwin, 1992). In fact, research has shown that activation of a significant-other schema activates if–then contingencies that, in turn, influence the nature of self-evaluations and self-inferences (e.g., M. W. Baldwin, Carrell, & Lopez, 1990; M. W. Baldwin & Holmes, 1987). In relational-self terms, activation of a significant-other schema activates the associated relational self.

Fourth, to activate significant-other schemas, researchers have often had participants visualize a significant other or have exposed them to cues associated with a significant other (for a review, see M. W. Baldwin, 1997). More recent work has used classical conditioning techniques, whereby a novel cue (e.g., computer tone) is repeatedly paired with a particular relational schema, to later demonstrate the cued activation of the schema (e.g., M. W. Baldwin & Main, 2001). All of the above methodologies assume the activation of a relational schema depends at least in part on cues in the immediate context. In fact, M. W. Baldwin (e.g., 1992, 1997) has explicitly invoked working self-concept assumptions in his theorizing on the activation of relational schemas. In working self-concept terms, when contextual cues activate a significant-other schema, this triggers associated if–then self-inference rules that shift the working self-concept toward the self in the context of the relevant relationship. On the other hand, the relational schema literature also offers evidence that certain relational schemas may be chronically accessible (e.g., M. W. Baldwin, 1992; M. W. Baldwin et al., 1996), implying that at times, little contextual cuing is needed to activate certain relational schemas and the relational selves embedded in them.

Finally, theorizing on relational schemas supports the view that relational selves are composed of the attributes, evaluations, affect, goals, and behavior that characterize the self when relating to significant others (e.g., M. W. Baldwin, 1992; M. W. Baldwin & Dandeneau, 2005). Empirically speaking, research has shown that the activation of a significant-other schema and associated if–then dynamics leads to positive or negative self-inferences (e.g., "I am incompetent") and self-evaluations (e.g., "I am unworthy"), as noted. Although most of the empirical work on relational schemas has focused on such self-inferential and self-evaluative aspects, evidence for other self-aspects also exists. For example, research has shown that the cued activation of a relational schema leads people to behave in ways reflecting the if–then dynamics designated by the schema (e.g., M. W. Baldwin & Main, 2001).

Transference and the relational self. Transference refers to the phenomenon whereby assumptions and experiences learned in past relationships resurface in present-day relations (Freud, 1912/1958). In the social–cognitive model of transference (Andersen & Glassman, 1996), transference is defined in terms of the activation and use of a significant-other representation in an encounter with a new person. Over a decade of research has shown that when this occurs, the new person is perceived and responded to in ways derived from the representation, thus planting the seeds for the reemergence of aspects of the prior relationship with the new person (for a review, see Chen & Andersen, 1999).

In their recent theory linking transference to the self, Andersen and Chen (2002) argued that relational selves, defined as the self in relation to significant others, are activated upon the activation of a significant-other representation in an encounter with a new person. Accordingly, research on this theory has focused on the transference-based activation of relational selves. Although the present conceptualization of the relational self extends beyond the realm of transference, research in this domain offers evidence for many of the key features of our broader framework.

First, research has shown that people possess distinct knowledge about who they are in relation to specific significant others. For example, activation of a significant-other representation by virtue of a new person's resemblance to the relevant significant other led participants to describe themselves using attributes they had used to characterize the relational self associated with the specific other in a pretest session (Hinkley & Andersen, 1996). These attributes did not overlap with ones they had used to describe a different relational self in the prior session, thus attesting to the significant-other-specific nature of relational selves. On the other hand, because the social–cognitive model of transference treats significant-other representations as "*n*-of-one" exemplar representations (Andersen & Cole, 1990), all of the research on relational selves in the context of transference has focused on relationship-specific relational selves, leaving generalized and global relational selves unexamined.

Second, the transference-based theory assumes that linkages embodying the typical patterns of interaction between self and other exist in memory between each significant-other representation and knowledge designating the relevant relational self (Andersen & Chen, 2002). It is precisely because of such linkages that activation of a significant-other representation in an encounter with a new person spreads to the relevant relational self, thereby eliciting this self. For example, Hinkley and Andersen (1996) showed that activation of a significant-other representation led participants to evaluate the self as the self is typically evaluated in the context of the relevant significant-other relationship.

Third, the transference-based approach makes similar working self-concept assumptions (Andersen & Chen, 2002). Specifically, when a significant-other representation is activated, the working self-concept shifts toward the relevant relational self, leading people to relate to new others as they do with the significant other. Because transference refers to the resurfacing of past relationships in new ones, research has focused on the contextual activation of significant-other representations and associated relational selves by new people who resemble a significant other, whereas the proposed conceptualization encompasses a larger range of contextual activators of relational selves.

Fourth, research has shown that significant-other representations are chronically accessible (Andersen, Glassman, Chen, & Cole, 1995; Chen, Andersen, & Hinkley, 1999), implying that the relational selves that are linked to them possess a high baseline level of accessibility. Overall, then, the transference-based theory supports the view that relational selves can be contextually or chronically activated. Finally, the transference literature includes evidence that relational selves are composed of attribute- and role-based conceptions of the self in relation to significant others as well as self-evaluative, affective, motivational, self-regulatory, and behavioral responses that reflect the self when relating to significant others. We describe this evidence in later sections.

Attachment working models of the self. Attachment theory maintains that internal working models of the self and others are formed in the context of early interactions with attachment figures (Bowlby, 1969/1982). Drawing on the infant attachment literature (e.g., Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978), adult attachment researchers have assumed that relationships with caring and consistently responsive attachment figures foster the formation of secure working models: a model of the self as competent and worthy of love and of others as caring and available. In contrast, relationships with attachment figures who are inconsistently or not at all responsive give rise to insecure working models: a model of the self as incompetent and unworthy of love and of others as uncaring and unavailable (e.g., Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Hazan & Shaver, 1987).

Where is the relational self in attachment theory? Relational selves lie in working models of the self. Several points of elaboration are needed here. First, although the infant attachment literature and early theorizing on adult attachment focused on working models involving attachment figures, defined as individuals who serve a specific set of functions outlined by attachment theory (e.g., secure base), more recent work on adult attachment has shown the appropriateness of applying attachment theory to a broader circle of significant others, whether or not they meet all of the criteria for attachment figures (e.g., M. W. Baldwin et al., 1996; Pierce & Lydon, 2001). Thus, working models of the self can involve attachment figures or significant others more generally, which fits the present broader focus on significant others, attachment figures or otherwise.

Second, because most adult attachment research has treated attachment as an individual difference variable, working models of the self are sometimes treated as if they reflect the self-concept as a whole, while their relational nature recedes into the background. Of course, some aspects of early attachment experiences may become so internalized that, in fact, they can be aptly treated as general rather than relational self-conceptions. Research assessing self models with, for example, global self-esteem measures seems to fit this viewpoint (e.g., Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). We do not contend with the existence or importance of such general self-conceptions. Rather, the present focus is on those working models of the self that are both formed in the context of interactions with significant others and that do in fact designate the self in relation to these others. These self models possess many of the key features of the proposed relational-self construct. How so?

First, research has shown that working models of the self and significant others are distinct (e.g., Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994). Second, working models of the self exist at multiple levels of specificity. Specifically, research assessing individual differences in attachment with measures that refer to specific significant others (e.g., Hazan & Shaver, 1987) and groupings of significant others (e.g., Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998) can be seen as tapping, respectively, relationship-specific and generalized relational selves. In contrast, measures that refer to significant others as a whole provide evidence for global working models of the self, that is, global relational selves (e.g., Mikulincer, 1995).

Most adult attachment research has tended to focus on working models at only one level (relationship specific, generalized, or global), often without acknowledging this. However, recent work has begun to make explicit comparisons between two levels of working models. This work confirms that people possess both relationship-specific and global working models of the self (Cook, 2000; Cozzarelli, Hoekstra, & Bylsma, 2000; Pierce & Lydon, 2001; Trinke & Bartholomew, 1997) and that the overlap between the two is only modest to moderate (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Pierce & Lydon, 2001). Relationship-specific and global models also have differential predictive power, further underscoring that both levels of specificity exist (Cozzarelli et al., 2000).

Still other research has simultaneously examined relationship-specific, generalized, and global working models (Overall, Fletcher, & Friesen, 2003). Specifically, Overall et al. conducted confirmatory factor analyses on participants' ratings on a series of attachment measures that referred to significant others at varying levels of specificity. These analyses supported a three-tier, hierarchical model wherein the top tier was occupied by a global working model, the middle tier by relationship-domain models (i.e., family, friends, romantic partners), and the bottom tier by relationship-specific models (see also Collins & Read, 1994). This model emerged as superior to ones involving only global and relationship-specific tiers or only relationship-domain and relationship-specific tiers. Such findings support the view that people possess working models of the self, or relational selves, at multiple levels of specificity. It is worth noting, however, that we adhere to the view that generalized relational selves may involve either normatively defined relationship domains, such as the ones

Overall et al. examined, or idiosyncratic groupings of relationships (Ogilvie & Ashmore, 1991).

Third, attachment theory maintains that working models of the self and others, developed in the context of self–other interactions, are complementary and intertwined (Bowlby, 1973; Bretherton, 1985; Collins & Read, 1994). As such, it is often assumed that self and other models exert their effects in tandem. This assumption fits the view that linkages exist between relational-self and significant-other knowledge, such that activation of one form of knowledge activates the other, even though most attachment research does not explicitly refer to such linkages. Exceptions to this are studies in which individual differences in attachment are conceptualized in terms of relational schemas (M. W. Baldwin, Fehr, Keedian, Seidel, & Thomson, 1993; Mikulincer, Hirschberger, Nachmias, & Gillath, 2001). For example, research has shown that individuals with different attachment styles differ in the if–then contingencies they have stored as part of their relational schemas (M. W. Baldwin et al., 1993). By likening the self and significant-other schema components of relational schemas to internal working models of the self and others, this work suggests that if–then linkages exist between the latter, in line with the assumption that relational-self and significant-other knowledge are linked in memory.

Fourth, attachment theory and research support a working self-concept perspective on relational selves. Indeed, attachment theory posits that physical or psychological threats in the environment activate the attachment system and, thereby, working models (Bowlby, 1969/1982; see also Ainsworth et al., 1978; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003). According to the theory, a key function of attachment figures is to provide a safe haven in the face of threat; when threat is perceived, people should seek proximity to these figures. In line with this, research has shown that threat-related, semantic stimuli (e.g., failure, separation) increase the accessibility of representations of attachment figures (Mikulincer, Gillath, & Shaver, 2002). Although the accessibility of self-knowledge associated with these attachment figures was not assessed, the existence of linkages between relational-self and significant-other knowledge suggests that knowledge reflecting the self in relation to attachment figures is also activated in the face of threat. More direct evidence for the contextual activation of working models of the self, or relational selves, by threat-related cues can be found in research showing that threat (i.e., failure feedback) polarizes the self-evaluations that in part compose these models (Mikulincer, 1998a).

Fifth, adult attachment research supports the assumption that relational selves can be activated by either contextual cues or chronic sources of accessibility. For example, some researchers have defined individual differences in attachment in terms of the chronic accessibility of working models, while also recognizing that contextual cuing of working models can temporarily override chronically accessible ones (M. W. Baldwin et al., 1996; Mikulincer & Arad, 1999). To illustrate, research has shown that contextually priming secure working models by having participants think about a secure relationship with a significant other elicits the same pattern of responses among individuals who do and do not possess chronically accessible secure models (Mikulincer & Arad, 1999).

Finally, evidence supports the view that relational selves in the form of working models of the self are composed of attribute- and role-based conceptions of the self in relation to significant others, as well as self-evaluative, affective, motivational, self-regulatory, and behavioral aspects. For example, Mikulincer (1995) assessed working models of the self by asking participants to rate the self-descriptiveness of a list of positive and negative attributes. Although these ratings were analyzed mainly in terms of their valence (i.e., self-evaluative implications), the results also showed attachment differences in the attributes composing participants' self models. As another example, research on self-in-relation-with-an-attachment-figure representations—which refer to working models of the self during security-enhancing interactions with attachment figures—has shown that activation of these representations leads people to describe themselves using attributes that they had previously used to characterize these representations (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2004). Working models are also assumed to be highly affect laden (Bowlby, 1969/1982; Collins & Read, 1994; Pietromonaco & Barrett, 2000; Shaver, Collins, & Clark, 1996), and research we describe later supports this. In subsequent sections, we also discuss evidence for both self-regulatory and behavioral aspects of working models of the self.

Similarities and Differences

We now consider similarities and differences among the four literatures described above. In doing so, we highlight the utility of using the proposed relational-self construct as a basis for synthesis.

The four bodies of work could be compared and contrasted on many dimensions. For instance, psychodynamic influences can be seen in the theoretical traditions that gave rise to all of them. All four perspectives also make cognitive assumptions regarding the nature of self and other knowledge, although these assumptions have been more spelled out in work on relational schemas, transference, and attachment than on self-with-other representations. On another note, internal working models and self-with-other representations share some developmental roots, but attachment theory is uniquely grounded in ethological and evolutionary principles. Of course, dimensions that bear on the relational self are most critical. Thus, we compare and contrast the perspectives on three such dimensions.

Self–other linkages. First, although all of the literatures provide at least some support for the view that relational-self and significant-other knowledge are linked in memory, research on relational schemas and transference have been most explicit about the nature of these linkages. In these literatures, these linkages reflect more than a simple association between self and other knowledge; they embody typical patterns of self–other relating. In transference work, these patterns refer to aspects of the self–other relationship, such as the goals one pursues in the relationship, whereas relational schema researchers conceptualize these patterns as if–then contingencies, as described.

Differences among the literatures in their degree of specification of self–other linkages are significant in that they have led to different research emphases. However, we suggest that by bringing together these separate literatures under a single rubric, the proposed relational-self framework reveals various paths of integration and extension. For example, although all of the perspectives assume that relational self-knowledge is formed on the basis of repeated past experience with particular self-aspects in the context of significant-other relationships, the relational schema approach offers particular precision regarding the mechanisms underlying

the formation of relational selves. Namely, relational schema theory argues that people derive conceptions and evaluations of the self in relation to significant others through the use of if–then self-inference rules, as noted (M. W. Baldwin, 1992, 1997). These rules are viewed as procedural knowledge structures that dictate the self-inferences and self-evaluations that should follow, given particular kinds of responses from significant others. How might if–then self-inferences inform and extend the other literatures?

When transference occurs upon the activation of a significant-other representation, if–then self-inference rules derived from repeated interactions with the relevant significant other may be activated, thereby constituting a mechanism by which relational selves are constructed in transference contexts and, perhaps, perpetuated as relationships with new others develop over time. Regarding attachment, the research described earlier showing that individual differences in attachment correspond to different if–then contingencies (M. W. Baldwin et al., 1993) assessed contingencies of interaction, rather than if–then self-inference rules. Still, relational schema theory would predict that the evaluations and beliefs that compose working models of the self are the product of if–then self-inference rules, which are formed through repeated enactment of if–then contingencies in interactions with significant others.

The transference perspective on self–other linkages also suggests integrative pathways. For example, research on transference has shown that self–other linkages include goal elements—namely, the goals one typically pursues in relationships with significant others (Andersen, Reznik, & Manzella, 1996). To date, only indirect evidence for goal elements of relational schemas exists—namely, the self-evaluative and self-inferential consequences (e.g., "I am unworthy") that result from the activation of a relational schema and associated if–then dynamics (e.g., "When I fail, my father is angry with me") presumably reflect an overriding goal of some kind (e.g., acceptance). However, applying goal findings from transference research to the relational schema domain suggests the possibility of if–then knowledge designating the responses that significant others have to one's goal pursuits (e.g., "If I strive to advance in my career, my sister gets jealous") as well as the goals people pursue in response to a significant other's words or deeds (e.g., "If my dad criticizes me, I strive to not let it bother me").

Contextual cues. Second, although all of the literatures support the view that relational selves can be contextually activated, they have tended to focus on different contextual activation cues. One line of distinction can be drawn between transference and the other three perspectives. Because transference focuses on the resurfacing of aspects of past relationships in interactions with new others, transference research has used attribute-based cues in a new person that match attributes of a significant other to activate a significant-other representation and, by association, the relevant relational self. Thus, the activation cues used in this research emanate directly from new people with whom the relational self, once activated, subsequently interacts (Chen & Andersen, 1999).

In contrast, early relational schema work focused on activating relational selves in the actual or imagined presence of significant others themselves. For example, as noted, researchers have had participants imagine that they are interacting with an actual significant other. Thus, relational schemas, and the relational selves embedded in them, have often been activated by direct reference to significant others, rather than by cues embodied in a new person, as in the transference domain.

However, theorizing on relational schemas is certainly consistent with the prediction that relational schemas can be activated by significant-other cues in a new person. This theorizing also makes the unique prediction that if–then contingencies can serve as activation cues. For example, harboring certain expectations about an interaction partner's responses to the self (Pierce & Lydon, 1998) or being exposed to a pattern of interaction that resembles the if–then dynamics experienced with a significant other (M. W. Baldwin et al., 1993) can activate relational schemas. Finally, as noted, more recent relational schema research has documented the activation of relational schemas by previously novel cues that were repeatedly paired with the schemas (e.g., M. W. Baldwin & Main, 2001).

Similar to relational schema work, adult attachment research has shown that internal working models can be activated by having participants imagine interacting with a significant other (e.g., Mikulincer & Arad, 1999) or by exposing participants to cues denoting the interpersonal dynamics of a significant-other relationship (e.g., Mikulincer et al., 2001). However, attachment theory is unique in also specifying physical or psychological threats as potential contextual activators of working models of the self or, in other words, relational selves.

Overall, despite variations in the cues used to activate relational self-knowledge, we stress that all four perspectives concur that relational selves can be contextually activated, in line with working self-concept assumptions. In addition, far from obstructing synthesis, taking stock of such variations reveals ways in which the different approaches may extend one another. For example, transference research suggests that attachment working models may persist largely because they are activated not only in interactions with attachment figures themselves but also in encounters with new others who resemble these figures. Relational schema work suggests that in the course of one's daily encounters with new people, transference may occur, thus shifting the working self-concept toward the relevant relational self, even with people who bear no resemblance to significant others—if the if–then dynamics of these encounters resemble those experienced with significant others.

As another example, attachment research broadens the array of possible activation cues to include threat-related ones (e.g., failure), which should elicit the relationship dynamic of seeking support and protection from significant others. Of course, relational selves that involve attachment figures (who serve specific functions such as secure base) are probably more likely to be activated by threat-related cues than relational selves involving other significant others. As a final example, evidence that relational schemas can be activated by conditioned cues provides insights as to how to increase the frequency with which adaptive working models of the self are activated.

Level of specificity. Finally, the adult attachment literature has focused the most on individual differences. This difference is important because the relational selves in individual differences research tend to be broader, reflecting the self in relation to groupings of significant others or significant others as a general class of individuals. Thus, adult attachment research tends to speak more to generalized and global relational selves than to relationship-specific ones. At the opposite end of the spectrum is

transference research, which has focused exclusively on relationship-specific relational selves, with self-with-other representation and relational schema research falling in between.

In our view, it is precisely by casting the four approaches in terms of a single construct—the relational self—that differences in the level of specificity of the self-knowledge that each typically examines become apparent, thus compelling future researchers to assess what significance they may hold. We suggest that these differences shed light on possible ways to extend each literature. For example, coupling transference research on relationship-specific relational selves with relational schema and attachment work on generalized relational selves suggests the possibility of widening the scope of the transference phenomenon to include generalized relational selves. A newly encountered person may activate a more generalized significant-other representation (e.g., family members), thereby shifting the working self-concept toward conceptions of the self that have been similarly experienced with multiple family members in the past.

Distinguishing Relational Selves From Other Recent Perspectives on the Self and Significant Others

In this section, we distinguish the proposed relational-self construct from two other recent approaches to the self and significant others. The first is the inclusion-of-other-in-the-self (IOS) approach (Aron, Aron, Tudor, & Nelson, 1991), which posits that close relationships involve the incorporation of close others' resources, perspectives, and attributes into the self-concept. The closer a relationship is, the more the relationship partner has been included in the self. Research has shown, for example, that participants are quicker in judging whether an attribute describes them when the attribute is true of both themselves and a close other than when the attribute is true of only the self or the other. This response-latency pattern is stronger with increasing self–other closeness (Aron et al., 1991).

Does the self-concept into which close others have been included constitute a relational self, as presently defined? No. Why not? First, IOS is primarily a theory about close relationships, not the self (Aron & Fraley, 1999). Thus, whereas self-related predictions flow naturally from our relational-self framework, relationship-related predictions have been a major focus among IOS researchers. For example, research has examined the extent to which variations in the degree to which close others are included in the self predict relationship longevity and satisfaction (Aron, Aron, & Smollan, 1992).

Second, whereas the proposed framework treats relational-self and significant-other knowledge as distinct, a core IOS assumption is that closeness in relationships leads to the merging of, or overlap in, self- and significant-other representations. Indeed, the measure used to assess IOS-based closeness is composed of a single, pictorial item depicting seven pairs of circles, with one circle in each pair designating the self and the other designating a significant other (Aron et al., 1992). The circle pairs vary in the degree to which the self and significant-other circles overlap, with greater overlap corresponding to greater inclusion of the significant other in the self—that is, greater closeness.

This perspective departs from the view that relational-self knowledge is linked to significant-other knowledge. Rather, it connotes that including others reflects the internalization of significant others into the self-concept rather than conceptions of the self one is in relation to significant others. Indeed, although the IOS measure is usually administered with respect to a particular significant other, no contextual references are made with respect to the "self" circles in the measure, making it unclear to which self-aspects the self in IOS research refers. To illustrate, in research showing that entering a new relationship is associated with self-concept expansion, due partly to the inclusion of the new relationship partner, participants were asked to describe themselves without any reference to the new relationship (Aron, Paris, & Aron, 1995). Thus, it is unclear whether the self in this work refers to contextualized, relational self-conceptions. In fact, IOS theorizing is silent on whether contextual variations, relational or otherwise, have implications for the degree to which close others are included in the self. In contrast, variations in relational context are central to the present conceptualization.

Recent research examining relational self-conceptions on affiliation and control dimensions (Tiedens & Jimenez, 2003) offers another useful illustration of the distinction between IOS and the relational self. Adopting a relational schema approach, this research found that people's self-construals assimilate to their relationship partners on the affiliation dimension (agreeable–quarrelsome) but complement their partners on the control one (dominant–submissive), presumably because this pattern of self-construals fosters smooth interactions. Thus, this work concurs with the proposed view that relational self-conceptions specifically designate the self in relation to significant others. More important, the present approach readily accommodates conceptions of the self as either similar to or different from significant others, as what matters is how the self relates to significant others. In contrast, the IOS approach focuses on similar or overlapping self and significant-other conceptions, to the exclusion of complementary ones, which may well be equally characteristic of the relational self.

Overall, then, although the IOS approach and the proposed relational-self construct similarly posit that significant others influence the self, this influence takes different forms and has different implications. From an IOS perspective, significant others influence the self by being incorporated into the general self-concept, whereas from a relational-self standpoint, significant others prompt the formation of self-aspects that represent who the self is when relating with others. Thus, IOS may or may not afford predictions about how an individual will behave when relating to significant or new others, whereas relational selves provide a direct basis for predicting interpersonal responding.

Although IOS and the relational self are distinct, it is stimulating to consider ways in which they might intersect. For example, it is certainly possible for a person to interact with significant (or new) others in ways derived from significant others themselves; that is, relational selves may include some aspects of significant others, even though they are not defined simply in terms of these included aspects. As another example, perhaps relational-self and significant-other knowledge are especially tightly bound in close relationships, that is, when there is a high degree of inclusion of the other. Future research is needed to test this and other possible points of connection between the IOS and the present conceptualization of the relational self.

Another recent approach to the self and significant others is the relational–interdependent self-construal (Cross et al., 2000). Indi-

viduals who hold this self-construal define the self in terms of their close relationships. Cross et al. (2000) developed the Relational-Interdependent Self-Construal (RISC) scale to assess individual differences in this self-construal. Relative to low scorers on this scale, high scorers are more likely to consider the needs and opinions of significant others in their decision making and are judged as more open and responsive by interaction partners after a getting-acquainted interaction (Cross et al., 2000). Other work has shown that high RISC people selectively attend to, and thus better remember, relational information about other people (Cross, Morris, & Gore, 2002).

How does RISC relate to the relational self? Despite some points of convergence, such as the view that self- and significant-other knowledge are jointly activated, key differences remain. First, the RISC approach assumes individual differences in defining the self in relational terms, whereas the present approach assumes all people possess relational selves. Second, like IOS, the RISC construct connotes the incorporation of significant others into the self, rather than self-conceptions in relation to significant others. For high RISC people, "representations of important relationships and roles share the self-space with abstract traits, abilities, and preferences" (Cross et al., 2000, p. 791). Third, RISC refers to a global, higher order self structure, below which lower order, more specific self-schemas exist (Cross et al., 2002). Relational selves—relationship-specific, generalized, or global—are more akin to lower order self-schemas than to the central organizing structure that RISC is thought to be. Finally, unlike relational selves, knowing a person's score on the RISC scale does not provide any information on the precise content (e.g., attributes, goals, evaluations) of the person's selves in relation to his or her significant others, nor then does it allow one to predict which of the person's relational self-aspects are likely to be activated when a particular significant-other representation is.

How, though, might RISC be integrated with relational selves? In discussing the relevance of RISC to relational schemas and attachment working models, Cross et al. (2002) offered some hints. For example, relational schemas may be activated more often among high RISC people. Further, RISC differences may shape if–then rules. For instance, high RISC people may be more likely to link responses from a significant other that signal success or failure of their relationship to positive or negative self-evaluations, respectively. Regarding attachment, Cross et al. (2002) suggested that RISC may represent a global working model of the self that shapes more specific self models. Although at first glance this may suggest that global relational selves are tantamount to a relational–interdependent self-construal, it is important to bear in mind that the RISC approach is an individual differences one, whereas we believe that all people possess aspects of the self in relation to significant others.

In sum, there are more differences than similarities between the present conceptualization of the relational self and both the IOS and RISC approaches. Still, future research should explore the potentially important ways in which variations in both the inclusion of close others in the self and the relational–interdependent self-construal influence the nature and operation of relational selves.

Distinguishing Relational Selves From Individual and Collective Selves

Finally, we compare and contrast relational selves with individual and collective levels of self-representation. We are by no means the first to draw distinctions between different levels of self-representations. For example, social identity (Tajfel, 1981) and self-categorization theories (Turner, 1985) distinguish personal from social identities, as does optimal distinctiveness theory (Brewer, 1991). More recently, Brewer and Gardner (1996) offered a tripartite framework that distinguishes among individual, relational, and collective selves. Indeed, an entire edited volume has been devoted to the distinction between these three levels of self-representation (Sedikides & Brewer, 2001).

Relational self versus individual self. The individual self refers to aspects of the self that make a person unique and separate from others (Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Stapel & Koomen, 2001; Turner & Onorato, 1999). Although relational self-aspects may also be unique to the individual, relational selves involve a connection to, rather than separation from, others. Moreover, relational self-aspects evolve out of dyadic interactions with significant others, whereas individual self-aspects may or may not. Those individual self-aspects that do arise from such interactions do not constitute relational-self knowledge unless they become linked to significant-other knowledge. Such self–other linking should occur only when individual self-aspects are relevant or become relevant to the significant-other relationship and are repeatedly enacted in interactions with the significant other.

In working self-concept terms, although the activation of any self-aspect is influenced by cues in the immediate context, individual and relational selves should be activated by different sets of cues. As described in prior sections, relational selves are typically activated by cues denoting the significant other or relationship dynamics between the self and other. In contrast, any number of cues may activate individual self-aspects, depending on the nature of these self-aspects for a given person. For example, the office setting may activate conceptions of the individual self as hard-working and ambitious for the businessperson and is probably less likely to activate relational self-conceptions.

Evidence for the distinction between individual and relational selves exists. For example, research showed that individuals for whom the individual self is chronically activated judged an outperforming friend more harshly than an outperforming stranger (Gardner, Gabriel, & Hochschild, 2002), as predicted by the self-evaluation maintenance model (Tesser, 1986). However, individuals for whom a relational self was chronically or temporarily activated judged the friend more favorably than an outperforming stranger. Thus, when an outperforming friend was viewed as separate from the self (i.e., the individual self was activated), his or her performance posed a threat to the self, thus eliciting derogation of the friend. However, when the friend was viewed as linked to the self (i.e., a relational self was activated), this friend's performance was no longer threatening and was instead celebrated.

Relational self versus collective self. Collective selves, or social identities, refer to aspects of the self derived from social group memberships (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992; Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Turner, Oakes, Haslam, & McGarty, 1994). In short, they reflect the self as a group member. Like relational selves, then, collective selves entail some degree of connection with others. However, whereas relational selves involve a connection with a known, identifiable significant other or group of significant others, collective selves designate connections with individuals whose identities may not be known (Hogg & Turner, 1985; Prentice, Miller, & Lightdale, 1994). Also, although both relational and collective

selves may evolve out of dyadic interactions with others, these others are viewed as fellow individuals in the case of relational selves but as in-group members in the case of collective selves.

Relational and collective selves also differ in their activation cues. In general, significant-other-related cues should recruit relational, but not collective, self-aspects into the working self-concept. In contrast, collective selves are activated by any cue that renders one's group membership salient (e.g., Hogg & Turner, 1987; Simon, Hastedt, & Aufderheide, 1997). For example, being the only member of one's gender group in a group discussion about gender-related topics should activate gender-related collective self-aspects. More broadly, self-categorization theory argues that the activation of collective selves follows the principle of metacontrast (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987). That is, a collective self is activated when differences among members of one's in-group are perceived to be smaller than differences between the in-group and relevant out-group. Such perceptions of intra- and intergroup differentiation have no direct bearing on the activation of relational selves.

Relational selves also depart from collective selves in that conceptions of the self in relation to significant others are, on the whole, unique to the individual, whereas collective self-aspects are shared among in-group members. Indeed, self-categorization theory argues that when a collective self is activated, the individual becomes an interchangeable exemplar of the group (Turner et al., 1994). In other words, the individual engages in self-stereotyping, defining the self in terms of stereotypical group attributes (e.g., Hogg & Turner, 1987; Simon, Pantaleo, & Mummendey, 1995). In contrast, activation of a relational self does not lead the individual to become interchangeable with the relevant significant other (although the relational self may include some aspects of significant others, as noted above); rather, the individual becomes the self he or she is in relation to the relevant other.

Supporting the distinction between relational and collective selves, Brewer and Gardner (1996) primed either the relational or collective self by having participants read a paragraph in which the *we* pronoun repeatedly appeared in a story about either a small group of friends or a large group of strangers. Afterward, relative to nonprimed participants, small-group participants described themselves using more descriptors that referred to a specific relationship. In contrast, large-group participants used more collective self-descriptors. In short, the same *we* prime activated either the relational or collective level of self-definition, depending on the presence of relational or collective contextual cues. As another example, research suggests that people possess attachment working models of the self as a group member, just as they possess working models of the self in relation to significant others (E. R. Smith, Murphy, & Coats, 1999). Of greatest relevance, this work showed that internal working models for groups are distinct from relationship working models.

In sum, relational selves uniquely evolve out of dyadic interactions with significant others, and the cues that activate them tend to differ from those that activate individual and collective selves. As they specifically designate the self in relation to significant others, relational selves are uniquely informative about people's patterns of interpersonal responding with significant or new others.

Implications of Relational Selves in Everyday Interpersonal Life

Having laid out a new, integrative conceptualization of relational selves, along with supportive evidence, we now present the thesis that relational selves play a pervasive role in people's daily interpersonal lives, organized around five propositions. Namely, relational selves (a) shape a wide range of psychological processes and outcomes, (b) often exert their influence automatically, (c) serve fundamental orientation and meaning functions, (d) provide coherence and continuity in personality as well as context-specific variability, and (e) carry implications for psychological well-being. For each proposition, we pull evidence from the literatures noted above as well as from other work where relevant.

Relational Selves Shape a Wide Range of Psychological Processes and Outcomes

In this section, we review evidence for the influence of relational selves on affect and emotion, goals and motives, self-regulation and defense, and interpersonal behavior. Before we do so, several points of clarification regarding this evidence need to be made.

First, some of the literatures that we draw upon for support include findings that are more appropriately viewed as evidence for the influence of general relationship structures and processes, rather than the influence of relational selves per se. For example, some of the outcomes assessed in adult attachment research reflect the influence of people's beliefs about other people (i.e., working models of others) or about relationships in general, rather than beliefs about the self in relation to significant others (i.e., working models of self). In short, not all relationship cognition involves relational selves. As such, we are careful to focus mainly on research documenting self-related consequences and in which the influence of relational selves, rather than relationship structures and processes in general, is thus clear or can be safely assumed.

Second, having located relational selves in the self-schema component of relational schemas, and having reviewed evidence that the self- and significant-other components of relational schemas are jointly activated because of if–then contingencies, we treat evidence for the effects of activated relational schemas on self-related outcomes as evidence for the influence of the relational selves embedded in them. Similarly, given clear evidence in research on transference that activation of a significant-other representation in an encounter with a new person spreads to associated relational self-aspects, we treat evidence for transference influences on the self as evidence for the role of relational selves.

Third, there is considerable variation in the specificity of the working models that have been examined in adult attachment research. However, as results based on relationship-specific, generalized, and global working models generally converge, it seems appropriate to assume parallels in the affect, goals, self-regulatory responses, and behavioral tendencies associated with working models at different levels of specificity. For example, (contextually activated) relationship-specific working models elicit the same responses as (chronically accessible) global models (M. W. Baldwin et al., 1996; Mikulincer & Arad, 1999). Thus, we draw on research examining working models at all levels of specificity.

Finally, most adult attachment research has assessed working models of the self (and others) using individual difference mea-

sures. Although these measures may not be presented to respondents as measures of the self (relational or otherwise), many do inquire about who respondents are in relation to their significant others (e.g., "When romantic partners disapprove of me, I feel really bad about myself"; Brennan et al., 1998). More important, responses to these measures correlate in the expected manner with responses to measures that are explicitly about the self (e.g., Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Brennan et al., 1998; Hazan & Shaver, 1987). Thus, although attachment measures are not always billed as self measures, they do tap self-aspects and therefore speak to relational selves.

Affect and emotion. Affect and emotion are core aspects of daily self experience. Various forms of evidence for the affective influences of relational selves exist. For example, M. W. Baldwin et al. (1990) exposed highly religious Roman Catholic women to subliminal images of Pope John Paul II with a disapproving expression just after these women read a passage about a sexual situation. The subliminal images were intended to activate relational schemas involving the Pope, who was presumably a significant other to these women, and including the if–then contingency that if one finds forbidden topics (i.e., sex) enjoyable, then the Pope will disapprove. Consistent with this, the Roman Catholic women not only evaluated themselves more negatively but also reported higher negative affect (i.e., anxiety and tension) relative to a control group of women. That Roman Catholic women's self-evaluations were affected by the Pope-related cues indicates that the negative affect these women experienced was indeed associated with the relevant relational self.

Research on transference has shown the affective consequences of an activated significant-other representation and its associated relational self. For example, participants' facial affect was assessed during exposure to descriptors about an upcoming interaction partner (Andersen et al., 1996). These descriptors were designed so that the partner resembled one of the participants' own positively or negatively evaluated significant others and thus served as activation cues for the relevant significant-other representation and relational self. The results showed that participants expressed more pleasant facial affect when their representation of a positively rather than negatively evaluated significant other was activated. No such pattern was seen when the descriptors characterized a yoked participant's positive or negative significant other. Thus, this research suggests that transference elicits the affect that the self typically experiences in the context of the relevant significant-other relationship.

Research on role-based aspects of relational selves has shown that negative affect ensues when a significant-other representation is activated in an encounter with a new person whose role vis-à-vis the self is incongruent with the typical role relationship between the self and other (Baum & Andersen, 1999). That is, in the context of transference, negative affective consequences result when the self is unable to play the role that is usually played out in relation to the relevant significant other.

Attachment theorizing and research also suggest that relational selves influence affect. At the most basic level, compared with mental structures in general, internal working models are thought to be especially affect laden (Bowlby, 1969/1982). Indeed, attachment researchers have long been concerned with attachment-relevant emotions, such as fear of abandonment by an attachment figure or the joy of being reunited with an attachment figure after a separation (Ainsworth et al., 1978). Another central focus has been variation in how individuals with different attachment experiences regulate negative affect in interactions with attachment figures (Kobak & Sceery, 1988; Sroufe & Waters, 1977).

In the adult attachment domain, individual differences in attachment have been associated with differences in emotional expression (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991), emotional suppression (Fraley & Shaver, 1997), and discrete emotional responses such as anger (Mikulincer, 1998b). In such research, the causal direction of the observed relationships is often unclear. However, evidence for the causal role of internal working models exists. For example, research has shown that activated secure base schemas influence affect (Mikulincer et al., 2001). Defined as a relational schema, a secure base schema is a "representation of the self, the other, and the relationship interaction pattern" (p. 305). Its defining feature is if–then contingencies that embody the expectation that others will be available in times of distress. This research predicted that activated secure base schemas should elicit positive affect because they include such if–then contingencies as well as views of the self and significant others that are likely to have positive affective connotations. To test this, participants were subliminally exposed to pictures connoting security (e.g., a mother holding her baby), which served as activation cues for a secure base schema. They were then asked to evaluate various neutral stimuli. Relative to controls, primed participants exhibited more positive affective reactions to these stimuli. These results indicate that activated secure base schemas elicit the positive affect typically experienced by the self in relation to a significant other with whom one shares a secure relationship.

Research showing the affective influences of relational selves has largely focused on affect, not discrete emotions. However, in recent years, emotion researchers have shown increasing appreciation of the social bases of discrete emotions (e.g., Frijda & Mesquita, 1994; Keltner & Haidt, 1999; Shiota, Campos, Keltner, & Hertenstein, 2004). For instance, research indicates that displaying embarrassment after a social transgression appeases others (Keltner, Young, & Buswell, 1997). As another example, guilt may serve to motivate relationship-enhancing behavior and redistribute emotional distress within a relationship dyad (Baumeister, Stillwell, & Heatherton, 1994). In marriages, certain emotional expressions (e.g., contempt) may evoke patterns of spousal interaction that bode poorly for marital satisfaction and longevity (Gottman & Levenson, 1992).

These examples hint at the relevance of discrete emotions to relationships and, by implication, relational selves. Expanding on this, according to appraisal theories, emotions are elicited primarily when events are judged relevant to the characteristics, values, and goals of the self (Frijda, Kuipers, & ter Schure, 1989; C. A. Smith & Ellsworth, 1985). Thus, whenever a discrete emotion is experienced, relevant aspects of the self should be activated. This suggests that activation of relational selves should occur when discrete emotions are elicited in relationship contexts (see also Tice & Baumeister, 2001). For example, jealousy tends to be elicited in romantic relationships upon the perception of threat by a rival (Buss & Shackelford, 1997). Jealousy is thought to protect relationships from dissolution by motivating behaviors that limit one's partner's contact with rivals (Buss & Schmitt, 1993). We suggest that jealousy experienced in the face of potential rivals, and the relationship-protective motives and behaviors that this

emotion elicits, reflect the relational self associated with one's romantic partner.

Goals and motives. The influence of relational selves in daily social life can also be seen in the goals and motives that people pursue. Research suggests that goals are stored in memory as part of relational selves. For example, as noted, the transference approach argues that when a relational self is activated, the goals that one typically pursues in relation to the significant other are set into motion (Andersen & Chen, 2002). To illustrate, when a significant-other representation is activated, the motivation to approach or avoid the relevant significant other is played out in relation to new others (Andersen et al., 1996). Other work has shown that the self-evaluative motives that are typically pursued with a significant other are activated in transference, leading people to seek from new others the kind of self-evaluative feedback they seek from their significant others (Chen & Kraus, 2004).

In research outside of the transference domain, subliminal exposure to the name of a significant other led participants to behave in line with goals that they previously reported associating with the other (Fitzsimons & Bargh, 2003). To illustrate, participants who had the goal to please their mother and who were then primed with their mother performed better on a verbal achievement task relative to those without such a goal and those in a control priming condition. Shah (2003a) found that activation of a significant-other representation increased the accessibility of the goals associated with the other, as well as goal commitment and persistence, particularly among participants close to their significant other and who believed that the other valued the goal. Activation of significant-other representations also influences goal appraisals (Shah, 2003b). For instance, significant others' expectations about participants' goal attainment colored participants' own appraisals of the difficulty of attaining the goal. In relational-self terms, these studies suggest that activated significant-other representations lead people to construe and pursue goals as the relevant relational self typically does.

In the attachment realm, goals are viewed as a core component of working models. Indeed, attachment theory assumes that attachment bonds are formed in the service of basic needs for security and protection (Bowlby, 1969/1982, 1988). Beyond these needs, different attachment experiences are thought to give rise to differences in the more specific goals that are stored as part of working models (Collins & Read, 1994). For example, working models associated with a secure relationship are generally more likely to contain intimacy goals than are avoidant working models. In relational-self terms, when activated, the self in the context of secure relationships is more likely to pursue intimacy goals than the self in relation to significant others with whom one shares an avoidant relationship.

Consistent with this, Mikulincer (1998c) posited that the working models of secure, anxious–ambivalent, and avoidant individuals contain distinct, trust-related goals. Secure individuals' positive sense of trust should be reflected in intimacy goals, whereas anxious–ambivalent and avoidant individuals' negative sense of trust should foster, respectively, security-seeking and personal control goals. Indeed, a lexical-decision task study found that secure individuals were quicker to respond to intimacy target words preceded by a trust-related prime than to security and personal control targets. Anxious–ambivalent individuals responded to security targets preceded by a trust-related prime quicker than secure and avoidant participants, whereas avoidant individuals were fastest at responding to personal control targets preceded by a trust-related prime. Overall, this research suggests that the chronic or temporary activation of working models of the self should lead individuals to pursue trust-related goals in relation to the relevant significant other, although the exact goals that are pursued hinge on the nature of the relationship with the other.

Finally, optimal distinctiveness theory (Brewer, 1991) argues that optimal social identities are those that meet people's opposing needs for assimilation and differentiation. These needs are thought to operate at not only the collective level of self-definition but also the individual and relational levels (Brewer & Pickett, 2002; Brewer & Roccas, 2001). Most relevant, at the relational level, assimilation needs may take the form of a desire for intimacy/interdependence, whereas differentiation needs manifest as a desire for autonomy. From our vantage point, activation of a relational self should accordingly activate opposing intimacy/interdependence and autonomy needs.

Self-regulation and defense. The line between motivational and self-regulatory influences of relational selves is blurry in that the goals people associate with significant others may function as self-regulatory standards. Thus, one self-regulatory influence of relational selves has to do with people's efforts to attain significant-other-related goals. A second involves the self-regulatory strategies people use to defend themselves in the face of threat.

Much of the evidence for the first kind of self-regulatory influence builds on self-discrepancy theory (Higgins, 1987), which posits that people hold actual self-beliefs (actual self) as well as beliefs about possible selves—namely, what they would ideally like to be (ideal self) and what they think they ought to be (ought self). Ideal and ought beliefs serve as self-guides or standards, motivating people to achieve matches between their actual self and these self-guides. The theory predicts that activation of discrepancies between the actual self and these guides has affective consequences; actual–ideal discrepancies produce dejection-related affect, whereas actual–ought ones elicit agitation-related affect.

Most relevant to the relational self, in addition to their own standpoints on actual, ideal, and ought selves, people are aware of the standpoint of significant others. Significant-other standpoints are a key basis for the self-regulatory influence of relational selves. As Higgins and May (2001) wrote, "The relational self involves a representation of the self in relationship to others and an underlying motivation to fulfill other people's hopes and expectations for oneself . . . this representation involves an 'other' standpoint on the self, and individuals regulate their behavior to meet significant others' desires and demands for them" (p. 61). We suggest that significant-other standpoints are stored as part of relational selves; thus, the activation of a relational self should increase the accessibility of the self-guides that the relevant other holds for oneself.

Most empirical work on self-discrepancy theory has focused on actual–ideal or actual–ought discrepancies from one's own standpoint, which pertain more to the individual self than the relational self. However, Moretti and Higgins (1999) examined discrepancies between one's actual self-views and the self-guides that one's parents hold. They also assessed the relation between own and parental self-guides, drawing distinctions among identified self-guides (parental guides that one shares), introjected self-guides (parental guides that one does not share), and independent self-

guides (own guides that are not shared by one's parents). They found that emotional distress and impaired interpersonal functioning was predicted by discrepancies involving identified self-guides for women and ones involving independent self-guides for men. Though it may be tempting to conclude that significant others exert a larger self-regulatory influence on women than men, as identified self-guides are shared with one's parents whereas independent self-guides are not, it is important to note that the latter were only independent vis-à-vis one's parents, leaving open the possibility that they were shared with other significant others. Overall, this research suggests that relational selves may have self-regulatory consequences insofar as ideal and ought self-guides that are shared with significant others are stored as part of the relational selves associated with these others.

Research on transference has also used self-discrepancy theory as a basis for testing the self-regulatory influence of relational selves (Reznik & Andersen, 2003). Participants who had an ideal or ought self-discrepancy from the standpoint of a parent were exposed to descriptors about a new person who either did or did not resemble this parent. In the resemblance condition, participants' parent representation was activated, thus eliciting transference. In addition, the relational self associated with the parent was activated, including the ideal or ought self-discrepancy from the parent's standpoint. That is, as predicted by self-discrepancy theory, ideal-discrepant participants reported more dejection-related affect, whereas ought-discrepant participants exhibited more agitation-related affect.

Adult attachment research provides evidence for the role of relational selves in self-regulatory attempts to defend the self. For instance, Mikulincer (1998a) argued that variations in working models of the self are due in part to the distinct regulatory strategies of secure, anxious–ambivalent, and avoidant individuals (see also Mikulincer, Orbach, & Iavnieli, 1998). For example, avoidant individuals responded to a threat by inflating the positivity of their self-views, presumably in an effort to enhance their sense of self-reliance. Anxious–ambivalent individuals, in contrast, responded to threat by increasing the negativity of their self-views, presumably as a means of securing others' love and support. Finally, secure individuals' self-views remained relatively stable in the face of the threat. In relational-self terms, threat activates relational self-knowledge and, with it, specific affect regulation strategies.

Research on transference provides another example of the role of relational selves in defensive self-regulation. In research noted earlier, participants were exposed to descriptors about a new person who either did or did not resemble a positively or negatively evaluated significant other and thus did or did not elicit transference, respectively (Hinkley & Andersen, 1996). After exposure to these descriptors, participants in the resemblance condition described themselves using attributes they had listed earlier to describe the relational self associated with the relevant significant other. This finding held for both positively and negatively evaluated significant others. Thus, in the context of transference, participants' working self-concepts shifted toward the relevant relational self.

Most relevant, this study also asked participants to evaluate the attributes they used to describe themselves. In the resemblance condition, they found that evaluations of relational-self attributes were more positive when the new person resembled a positively rather than a negatively evaluated significant other. Most relevant to the link between relational selves and self-regulatory defense, however, participants in the resemblance condition involving a negative significant other evaluated the nonrelational-self attributes in their working self-concepts more favorably than participants in all other conditions, presumably as a defensive response to the threat inherent to the shift in their self-concepts toward negative relational-self attributes. Put another way, they responded to the threat of their negative, relational-self attributes by bolstering the positivity of their nonrelational ones.

Interpersonal behavior. Finally, activated relational selves have behavioral consequences. For example, Berk and Andersen (2000) hypothesized that when a significant-other representation is activated in an interaction with a new person, this activation spreads to the associated relational self, thereby leading the individual to behave toward the new person in ways reflecting how the self behaves toward the relevant significant other. As this interpersonal behavior is guided by the beliefs and expectations held by the relational self, it leads the new person to behave in a manner that confirms these beliefs and expectations. In short, activation of the relational self in transference may set into motion a behavioral confirmation cycle.

In a test of this hypothesis, each participant (perceiver) was exposed to descriptors about another participant (target) with whom they then had an audiotaped conversation. The descriptors were designed so that the target resembled one of the perceiver's own positively or negatively evaluated significant others or a yoked participant's positive or negative significant other. The pleasantness of affect in participants' conversational behavior was coded. The results showed that the target expressed more pleasant affect when he or she resembled the perceiver's positive rather than negative significant other; no such effect was seen in the yoked conditions. These findings suggest that the positive and negative beliefs and expectations held by the relational selves linked to positively and negatively evaluated significant others, respectively, were activated in the resemblance conditions, thereby coloring perceivers' behavior in evaluatively consistent ways. Ultimately, this led targets to respond in kind, resulting in the confirmation of perceivers' initial beliefs and assumptions.

A core, attachment-theoretical assumption is that the attachment system includes a built-in repertoire of behavioral strategies designed to maintain proximity with caregivers (Bowlby, 1969/1982). Other attachment behaviors include exploration, caregiving, and support seeking. Although research directly examining the role that internal working models play in eliciting such attachment-relevant behaviors is lacking, it is generally assumed that activation of these models precedes such behavior. For example, Collins and Read (1994) theorized that activation of internal working models of attachment in a given situation influences the individual's interpretations of, and affective responses to, the situation, both of which in turn shape behavior.

On an empirical level, most of the attachment behaviors that have been assessed in the adult attachment literature (e.g., seeking support from a romantic partner) spring more directly from working models of others (e.g., beliefs about the partner's availability) than from self models (e.g., Simpson, Rholes, & Nelligan, 1992). However, many investigations have involved assessing attachment behavior in the context of a stressful situation, making the assumption that working models are likely to be activated under such

conditions. For example, Fraley and Shaver (1998) observed the behavior of members of couples in an airport while they were experiencing a separation (i.e., one member was boarding the flight) or not (i.e., both were boarding). The stress inherent to separation should activate working models of self and others. Consistent with this, separating couples exhibited more proximity-maintenance behaviors than nonseparating ones. Moreover, some behavioral differences were found as a function of individual differences in working models. For example, in the face of an impending separation, women with avoidant models tended to pull away from their partners, a behavior they did not exhibit in the absence of an upcoming separation. Although the role of working models of the self is not definitive in this research, this kind of work is at least consistent with the contextual activation feature of the proposed conceptualization of the relational self.

Evidence for the behavioral influences of relational selves can also be found in other literatures. In particular, as an interpersonal behavior, self-presentation may readily invoke notions of the relational self. However, most research has assessed self-presentation to strangers, not significant others; and in the cases in which significant others have been the audience of people's self-presentations, the findings have generally not been discussed in relation to the relational self. Our conceptualization predicts, though, that when in the context of a significant other, relevant relational self-knowledge should be activated, implying that any response exhibited in this context, self-presentational or not, reflects at least in part the relational self linked to this other.

Research comparing self-presentation to strangers versus friends has found that people use self-enhancing strategies with strangers but tend to be more modest in the strategies they use with friends (Tice, Butler, Muraven, & Stillwell, 1995). Other work has found that in same-sex interactions, people report less self-presentational concern (e.g., less desire for the audience to perceive them as competent) with highly familiar compared with less familiar audiences (familiar audiences were composed mainly of significant others), whereas in opposite-sex interactions, concern increased with increasing familiarity (Leary et al., 1994). Overall, such studies suggest that different relational selves (e.g., ones associated with same-sex vs. opposite-sex significant others) may elicit different forms and degrees of self-presentational behavior.

As another self-presentation example, self-verification theory (Swann, 1990) contends that people engage in cognitive and behavioral strategies to get others to verify their core self-views. Most self-verification research has focused on individual self-views. However, recent work found that relationship partners prefer self-enhancing feedback from each other on dimensions crucial to the survival of the relationship but self-verification on other dimensions (Swann, Bosson, & Pelham, 2002). To illustrate, dating partners preferred their partners to see them as more physically attractive than they typically saw themselves but sought self-verifying appraisals on less relationship-relevant dimensions. Another study found that dating partners actually presented themselves as more attractive than they saw themselves, resulting in their partners appraising them in an overly positive—yet deserved—manner on this dimension. In essence, people act in ways to merit the positive appraisals they seek from their relationship partners on relationship-valued dimensions, while eliciting self-verification on other dimensions. That self-verification tendencies varied across dimensions as a function of their relationship relevance suggests that this research was tapping relational self-views.

Finally, relevant evidence can be found in research on the Michelangelo phenomenon, which refers to the process by which a relationship partner perceives and behaves toward the self in a manner congruent with the self's ideal, thus eliciting behavior in the self that moves the self closer to the ideal (Drigotas, Rusbult, Wieselquist, & Whitton, 1999). Although the self in this phenomenon is the ideal rather than relational self, the perceptions and behaviors underlying the phenomenon are thought to occur over the course of many self–partner interactions. Viewed in this light, the ideal self takes on a decidedly relational-self flavor, embodying aspects of the self that one strives to realize and, over time, actually comes closer to experiencing, in the context of a relationship with a significant other.

To summarize, wide-ranging forms of evidence suggest that relational selves influence a broad array of psychological processes and outcomes. Namely, activated relational selves shape affective responses, goal pursuit, self-regulation, and interpersonal behavior.

Automatic Activation of Relational Selves

The proposition that relational selves play a far-reaching role in daily social life is compelling only to the extent that relational selves are readily and often activated. Our second proposition is that relational selves exert a broad impact in large part because they are often automatically activated. Their activation usually does not reflect conscious, deliberate evocation; rather, they are activated with little effort, intention, awareness, and control, rendering their downstream influences similarly automatic. As the social-psychological study of automaticity has emerged only within the past few decades (Bargh, 1997; Uleman & Bargh, 1989), this proposition clearly illustrates how conceptual and empirical advances since Markus and Cross (1990) have solidified the evidentiary basis for our thesis regarding the influence of relational selves. In this section, we return to many of the processes and outcomes discussed in prior sections but focus on evidence that speaks to their automatic nature.

Earlier, we noted that the repeated activation of any mental construct increases its baseline accessibility. Constructs with high baseline accessibility levels are considered to be chronically accessible, capable of activation even in the absence of contextual cues. Perceptions and interpretations derived from chronically accessible constructs tend to have phenomenal immediacy (Moskowitz, 2005)—that is, perceivers experience them simply as reflections of the reality before them, without consciously registering the role that their chronic constructs played in imparting meaning. In short, the influence of chronically accessible constructs is considered to be automatic (e.g., Bargh, 1994).

Evidence showing that relational selves are chronically accessible, then, constitutes evidence for their automatic activation. Research on transference offers clear evidence in this regard (for a review, see Andersen, Reznik, & Glassman, 2004). For example, even when a new person bore no resemblance to a significant other, participants were more likely to rely on a significant-other representation than on various control representations to make inferences about the person (Andersen et al., 1995). Coupled with evidence showing that the activation of significant-other represen-

tations spreads to associated relational self-knowledge (e.g., M. W. Baldwin, 1994; Hinkley & Andersen, 1996), such findings speak strongly to the chronic accessibility, or automatic activation, of relational selves.

In other transference work, participants were subliminally exposed to descriptors that they had generated earlier about a significant other (Glassman & Andersen, 1999). Unaware of the descriptors, participants were also unaware of the ensuing activation of their significant-other representation and, by association, relational self. Research outside of the transference realm has also relied on subliminal priming to activate significant-other representations. For example, research noted earlier on the goal-related consequences of activated significant-other representations used subliminal techniques to activate these representations (Fitzsimons & Bargh, 2003; Shah, 2003a, 2003b).

Although the above research shows that significant-other representations can be activated because of chronic accessibility or subliminal cues, most transference work has documented the activation of significant-other representations using supraliminal contextual cues. As noted, participants are typically supraliminally presented with descriptors about a new person, derived from ones they had generated in a pretest session to describe a significant other. Although participants consciously process these descriptors, they are not aware of the activation of the significant-other representation that they elicit nor of the spread of activation to associated relational self-knowledge. Thus, even research using supraliminal activation cues provides evidence for the automatic activation of relational selves.

Relational schema research also provides compelling evidence for the automatic activation of relational selves. For example, after subliminal exposure to the disapproving face of their graduate advisor, which presumably activated an if–then rule linking the advisor's disapproval to negative self-inferences and self-evaluations, graduate-student participants evaluated their ideas more negatively, unaware that their self-evaluations reflected an activated relational self (M. W. Baldwin et al., 1990). In other work, participants have consciously visualized a significant other, after which they indicated their self-evaluations (e.g., M. W. Baldwin & Holmes, 1987), as noted. Participants typically report no awareness that their inferences and evaluations reflect the self in relation to the significant other they had just visualized. A final example of the automatic activation of the relational selves embedded in relational schemas is research using conditioned cues to activate the latter (e.g., M. W. Baldwin & Main, 2001).

In the attachment domain, Bowlby (1980) essentially proposed that through repeated activation and use, working models may function automatically, outside of conscious awareness. Various forms of evidence support this early proposition. For example, in research noted earlier on self-in-relation-with-an-attachment-figure representations (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2004), these representations were activated by a threat induction (e.g., failure feedback). Participants were not aware of the activation of these representations, much less the ensuing shift in their working self-concept toward attributes that characterize the self in relation to the relevant attachment figure.

In sum, substantial evidence suggests that relational selves are often activated automatically. Thus, not only do they have the potential to influence a wide range of psychological processes and outcomes, but with little effort, intent, control, and awareness, they often do exert such influences.

Relational Selves Serve Fundamental Orientation and Meaning Functions

Our third proposition is that as readily activated sources of knowledge about the self, relational selves serve fundamental orienting and meaning functions. We describe two facets of these functions.

Self-regulatory direction. First, we propose that as highly accessible sources of goals and motives, activated relational selves provide self-regulatory direction; they orient the individual toward others in the world and guide the individual's behavior in goal-serving directions. This proposition fits the general notion that the self serves as an important guide for behavior (Scheier & Carver, 1988). It also adheres with mounting evidence indicating that activated goals elicit automatic self-regulation (Fitzsimons & Bargh, 2004). For example, research has shown that contextually activated goals elicit automatic positive evaluations of goal-promoting objects and negative evaluations of goal-interfering ones (Ferguson & Bargh, 2004). Such automatic evaluations facilitate goal pursuit by portraying goal-promoting objects as approach friendly and goal-interfering ones as objects to avoid.

Finally, our proposition fits with research suggesting that lacking a clear sense of the self is aversive because it interferes with people's ability to make decisions and to act (McGregor & Marigold, 2003), creating a kind of self-regulatory paralysis. In our view, relational selves serve as a source of clarity about, specifically, who the self is in relation to others and thus provide self-regulatory direction in interpersonal contexts.

Place in the social world. Second, relational selves serve orienting and meaning functions by informing the individual of his or her place in the social world and imparting meaning to this place. That is, given that they designate the self in relation to significant others, relational selves help people confirm their existence vis-à-vis others in the social environment and thereby impart order to their interpersonal encounters. This line of thinking is akin to Simon's (1999) theorizing on self-aspects as "places" that individuals occupy in their social worlds. Although Simon focused on collective self-aspects, his ideas can be applied to relational self-conceptions. Invoking the place metaphor, he argued that "self-categorization as a group member and construal of a collective self . . . mean settling and feeling at home . . . in a collectively shared space" (p. 63). To Simon, meaningful human existence requires locating one's place vis-à-vis others. Indeed, identity and meaning hinge so crucially on this that although "people may in general strive for good, well-respected places and try to avoid bad, less-respected places . . . just as the homeless are likely to prefer a bad house to no house at all, a less good place in the social world may still be better than no place at all" (p. 66). In our view, meaningful human existence depends on knowing not only one's place in the sphere of in-groups and out-groups but also one's place in relation to significant others.

The notion that relational selves designate important places also has some conceptual ties to terror management theory (TMT; Greenberg, Pyszczynski, & Solomon, 1986). TMT argues that awareness of the inevitability of death provokes anxiety and motivates people to find ways to reduce the terror of death. Recent

research suggests that close relationships serve as one defense against this terror because they "offer a symbolic promise of continuity, lastingness, and death transcendence" and can allay the "fear of loss of social identity after death" (Mikulincer, Florian, & Hirschberger, 2003, p. 24). For example, research has shown that thoughts of a romantic commitment obviated the need to summon another terror-management defense (e.g., validation of one's cultural worldviews) after a mortality reminder (Florian, Mikulincer, & Hirschberger, 2002). That close relationships can buffer death-related anxiety by providing a sense of continuity and identity clearly has self-related undertones. More to the point, this TMT work supports the view that relational self-aspects—aspects of the self associated with close relationships—help confirm or solidify one's existence in the world; they serve a placeholder function of sorts, a function that is weighty enough to allay mortality fears.

In sum, as rich and accessible sources of self-knowledge, relational selves provide self-regulatory direction; when activated, they prompt the individual to adopt an orientation toward others and ultimately to behave in goal-serving directions. In addition, relational selves inform and confirm the individual of his or her place in the social landscape, thus imparting existential meaning and order.

Relational Selves as a Basis for Coherence and Context-Specific Variability in Personality

Two classic dimensions of personality are coherence or continuity, on the one hand, and context-specific variability, on the other. The former refer to a sense of enduringness, order, and integration in personality and are the focus of, for example, trait approaches to personality (Allport, 1937; Costa & McCrae, 1995; McCrae & John, 1992) and longitudinal approaches (Caspi & Roberts, 1999). In contrast, context-specific variability refers to the situation-dependent nature of personality. This dimension is emphasized by, for example, social learning and social–cognitive approaches to personality (Bandura, 1986; Mischel, 1973, 1990). Our fourth proposition is that relational selves provide a basis for coherence and continuity in personality as well as context-specific responding.

Coherence and continuity. How are relational selves a source of coherence and continuity? First, most evidence for relational selves shows their assimilative effects. That is, activation of a relational self elicits the reenactment of aspects of the self in relation to significant others, thus reinforcing existing relational selves. Consistent with this, Bowlby (1969/1982) argued that attachment working models, developed in the course of early interactions with caregivers, continue to exert assimilative influences throughout the life span. Transference research assumes that aspects of past relationships resurface in interactions with new others by means of the assimilative influences of activated significant-other representations and relational selves. As a final example, research suggests that when activated, the if–then self-inference rules that compose relational schemas serve to perpetuate existing self-inferential and self-evaluative tendencies (M. W. Baldwin, 1997).

Second, the cognitive–affective system theory of personality treats if–then relations as the basic units of personality (Mischel & Shoda, 1995). *If*s are objective situations, and *then*s are the responses people exhibit in them. *If*s are thought to activate cognitive–affective units (e.g., goals, expectations), which compose the psychological situations that people experience in objective ones. Each person possesses a unique pattern of if–then relations, which reflects his or her "personality signature." By defining personality in these terms, the theory captures stability in that particular situations consistently activate particular cognitive–affective units, which give rise to particular responses. In other words, coherence and continuity exist at the level of an individual's personality signature. At the same time, there is cross-situational variability in that different objective situations elicit different cognitive–affective units. Thus, cross-situational variability exists at the if–then level.

Andersen and Chen (2002) have conceptualized the activation of relational selves in the context of transference in if–then terms. Objective situations are interpersonal encounters with new people who resemble a significant other. Significant-other representations and relational selves are the cognitive–affective units that are activated in such situations. Together, these units compose the psychological situation that then gives rise to responses reflecting the relevant representation and relational self. Paralleling Mischel and Shoda's (1995) if–then theory, coherence and continuity from the transference perspective lies in stable if–then patterns: Whenever a person who resembles a significant other is encountered, the relevant significant-other representation and relational self are activated. From the standpoint of the present, broader conceptualization of relational selves, significant-other representations and associated relational selves can be stably activated not only by new people who resemble a significant other but also by a large array of other possible cues that may or may not take the form of significant-other-resembling new people, as described in previous sections.

Finally, the chronic accessibility of relational selves also gives rise to coherence and continuity. In line with theorizing on personal constructs (Kelly, 1955) and category accessibility (Bruner, 1957), chronically accessible constructs can be seen as enduring elements of personality (Higgins, 1990). As noted in prior sections, research has shown that significant-other representations are chronically accessible. Thus, these representations and their associated relational selves are in a chronically high state of activation readiness, suggesting that both exert a chronic influence in daily interpersonal life.

Context-specific variability. How are relational selves a source of context-specific variability? First, a core feature of the proposed conceptualization of the relational self is the working self-concept notion that contextual cues activate different aspects of the self. Thus, context-specific variability is inherent to the relational-self construct. Second, the mere fact that people possess multiple relational selves implies context-specific variability. That is, if people have multiple relational selves, the nature of the self and personality depends on the particular relational self that is currently active.

To summarize, coherence and continuity in personality derive in part from the assimilative forces of relational selves, the consistency with which particular relational selves are activated in particular contexts, and the chronic accessibility of significant-other representations and their corresponding relational selves. Context-specificity, on the other hand, derives from the contextual activation of relational selves in daily social encounters and the multiplicity of these selves.

Implications of Relational Selves for Psychological Well-Being

Our fifth proposition is that relational selves carry implications for psychological well-being. Various indices of well-being exist, among them affect and life satisfaction. We focus on one aspect of psychological well-being—namely, authenticity. Researchers of authenticity and related constructs generally concur that it involves freely choosing one's actions and acting in accord with one's inner thoughts and feelings. Phrases such as "being true to myself" and "showing the real me" are often invoked to capture its essence. Relational selves carry implications for well-being because of their role in authenticity. To support this argument, we highlight the role that relational selves have played in recent conceptions of authenticity and review evidence for links between authenticity and well-being.

Self-concept consistency. One view of authenticity is consistency in the self-concept across contexts, referred to as self-concept differentiation (SCD), or the "tendency to see oneself as having different personality characteristics in different social roles" (Donahue, Robins, Roberts, & John, 1993, p. 834). Donahue et al. measured SCD by having participants make trait ratings of themselves in various social roles, the majority of which referred to a relationship (e.g., romantic partner). A key finding in this research was a positive association between SCD and maladjustment (e.g., depression).

Sheldon, Ryan, Rawsthorne, and Ilardi (1997) examined associations among SCD, well-being, and felt authenticity, the latter referring to the phenomenological experience of acting with a "full sense of choice and self-expression" (p. 1381). Participants rated themselves in several different roles—again, the majority of which referred to relationships—and then rated how authentic they felt in each. Sheldon et al. found that SCD was negatively related to felt authenticity and, replicating Donahue et al. (1993), positively related to maladjustment. In addition, felt authenticity independently predicted adjustment, with greater authenticity linked to higher well-being. More recently, Cross, Gore, and Morris (2003) hypothesized that variation in the RISC moderates the relationship between self-concept consistency and psychological well-being. Cross et al. argued that the link between consistency and well-being makes sense if one assumes a Western, independent self-construal for which expressing a core, stable set of traits, attitudes, and abilities is defining. However, such consistency is less critical for individuals who hold a higher order, relational construal of the self; for them, self-definition should hinge more on the maintenance of close relationships. Two studies showed that scores on the RISC scale moderated the relationship between consistency and well-being (e.g., depression). Consistency was assessed with a procedure adapted from Donahue et al. (1993). However, instead of rating themselves in different roles, Cross et al.'s participants explicitly rated themselves in the context of their relationships with five significant others. For low RISC individuals, the relationship between consistency and well-being was positive and significantly stronger than the same relationship seen among high RISC individuals.

In another study, consistency was assessed in SCD terms, and authenticity was measured with Sheldon et al.'s (1997) authenticity items, modified to refer to specific relationships. Cross et al. (2003) reasoned that authenticity should involve expressing one's core, stable set of attributes across relationships for low RISC individuals, implying a positive link between authenticity and consistency. In contrast, high RISC individuals should feel authentic, even if they behave differently across different relationships (see also Suh, 2002). Indeed, the results showed that the relationship between self-concept consistency and authenticity was stronger among low compared with high RISC individuals.

From our standpoint, it is no coincidence that all of the above research assessed self-concept consistency in part or entirely in terms of consistency in people's selves across different relationship contexts—which, in our view, are essentially relational selves. That such consistency was associated with psychological well-being implies that relational selves carry implications for well-being. Put another way, these findings suggest that it may be appropriate to define authenticity, at least in part, in terms of the consistent expression of relational self-aspects across different contexts (for further discussion, see *Multiple Relational Selves and Psychological Well-Being*).

Self-determination theory. Self-determination theory refers to a broad theoretical approach to human motivation and personality (Deci & Ryan, 1991, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000). It assumes that people have inherent tendencies to strive for psychological growth and for the integration of their experiences into a coherent, unified self. In fact, healthy functioning depends on the expression of these tendencies. Whether such functioning occurs depends on the satisfaction of three basic needs. First, competence is the need to experience effectance, the sense of having control over one's actions and outcomes and of having opportunities to express one's capabilities (Deci & Ryan, 1991). Second, relatedness is the need to experience connectedness with others. Third, autonomy is the need to experience self-determination, the sense that one's actions originate from within.

These basic needs play a role in each of several minitheories that together constitute self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2002). We limit our discussion to organismic integration theory, which views self-determined or authentic behavior as based on satisfaction of the basic need for autonomy and, more indirectly, relatedness and competence. Of greatest relevance, organismic integration theory assumes that others in the environment—such as significant others—may support or block need satisfaction. Consistent with this, research has shown that significant others influence need satisfaction and, in turn, authenticity (La Guardia, Ryan, Couchman, & Deci, 2000). Participants provided ratings to characterize their internal working models of self and other with regard to six significant others and then rated the degree to which their autonomy, relatedness, and competence needs were met with each of them. La Guardia et al. (2000) found that the level of need satisfaction experienced with a significant other was associated with level of attachment security. In other words, satisfaction of basic needs, a crucial basis for self-determined, authentic behavior, is tied in part to significant others and the selves people are in relation to them.

False-self behavior. Research on false-self or inauthentic behavior also suggests a role for relational selves in authenticity. For example, adolescent participants described themselves in different relational contexts (e.g., with friends) and then identified pairs of contradictory attributes across these contexts (Harter, Bresnick, Bouchey, & Whitesell, 1997). In describing these attributes, participants expressed authenticity concerns, wrestling with which

attribute reflected their true self. In other work, participants indicated their level of voice in different relational contexts, with lack of voice, or the inability to express one's thoughts and opinions, signaling false-self behavior (Harter, Waters, & Whitesell, 1997). The results showed that different contexts were associated with different levels of voice, and that perceiving that a significant other supports one's voice (i.e., respects what one has to say) was positively associated with the level of voice reported in the relevant relational context.

Overall, this work speaks to the role of relational selves in authenticity in that false-self behavior has been assessed within specific relational contexts. Also, the finding that a significant other's support for voice is positively related to the level of voice reported in one's relationship with this other speaks to the potentially important and unique impact that each significant other in one's life has in promoting or obstructing authenticity in the relational self associated with him or her.

Relational authenticity. Finally, Kernis (2003) has conceptualized authenticity in terms of four discriminable components. Awareness refers to "having awareness of, and trust in, one's motives, feelings, desires, and self-relevant cognitions" (Kernis, 2003, p. 13). Unbiased processing refers to the objective processing of self-relevant information. The behavioral component refers to acting in accord with one's inner values, opinions, and goals. Finally, relational authenticity refers to being open and truthful in one's close relationships—that is, acting authentically around significant others and, accordingly, being seen by others in that way. In our view, that this final component was included speaks volumes about the role that relational selves play in authenticity. Moreover, research has linked Kernis's conceptualization of authenticity to psychological well-being. Specifically, Goldman and Kernis (2002) developed a 44-item scale, with subscales for each authenticity component, and found that overall scores on this scale were correlated with several well-being indices (e.g., self-esteem, life satisfaction). Of greatest interest, relational authenticity subscale scores predicted higher life satisfaction and lower negative affect.

In sum, theory and evidence suggest that relational selves constitute at least one basis of authenticity, an important component of psychological well-being. Though recent views of authenticity form a diverse group, common among them is the implicit or explicit assumption that being authentic hinges at least in part, if not largely, on being authentic in relation to the significant others in one's life.

Summary of Conceptualization, Evidence, and Implications

Before turning to issues and questions likely to be raised by our conceptualization, it may be useful to summarize and highlight its main contributions. First, the relational self can be located in the broader literature on relationship cognition, a literature focused on delineating the cognitive structures and processes underlying close relationships. This literature includes topics as wide ranging as attribution patterns in marriages, interdependence and commitment processes, and lay theories about relationships. Although recent reviews and volumes on relationship cognition exist (e.g., M. W. Baldwin, 2005; Reis & Downey, 1999), many emphasize a particular theoretical perspective or reflect a collection of perspectives rather than an integrated whole. Most important, none have featured relational aspects of the self, thus failing to establish the relational self as an area of inquiry in its own right in the broader relationship cognition literature. The present effort does just this.

Second, existing definitions of the relational self lack precision or are grounded in a single theoretical perspective (e.g., Andersen & Chen, 2002). In contrast, the present conceptualization offers a comprehensive definition of the relational self that, by drawing upon several different theoretical approaches, unites them. The end result is a common framework and language to interpret findings from separate literatures. Third, careful distinctions were drawn between the relational self and other constructs involving the self and significant others (e.g., IOS, RISC). In addition to enhancing the precision of the present conceptualization, these distinctions offer a guide to current and future readers of the literature as to what findings do and do not reflect the same underlying structures and processes.

Fourth, by bringing together separate literatures under the single rubric of the relational self, our conceptualization provides a basis for making predictions in each literature that would not be apparent otherwise. Fifth, our conceptualization gives rise to the novel proposition that relational selves serve basic orienting and meaning functions, offers a bridge to personality approaches, and exposes the relational bases of authenticity. Last, but of no less significance, the present framework and synthesis should help demarcate and sustain a literature on the relational self that is as basic a part of the broader self literature as are the existing literatures on individual and collective selves.

Issues and Future Directions

In this last major section, we discuss outstanding issues and questions. In doing so, we also consider implications for future theory and research on the self.

Developmental Underpinnings of Relational Selves

Nearly all of the research included in our synthesis involved young adult, cross-sectional samples. This was largely due to our focus on recent social-psychological theory and research on the self and significant others. This recent upsurge of work was, of course, what compelled us to carry out the present synthesis. In addition, this most recent corpus of findings provides some of the most compelling evidence to date for the pervasive influence of relational selves. Finally, use of adult samples has facilitated measurement of the potential richness of the content and structure of relational selves as well as the wide array of psychological outcomes and processes that are influenced by activated relational selves. However, focusing on the recent adult literature leaves a number of pressing developmental questions unanswered, two of which we consider below.

First, what are the developmental origins of relational selves? A thorough review of self-development in infancy and childhood is beyond the present scope (for a recent review, see Harter, 1998; see also, e.g., Lewis & Brooks-Gunn, 1979; Mahler, 1968; Sroufe, 1990; Stern, 1985). Thus, instead, we highlight several ways in which prevailing beliefs regarding self-development cohere with our view of the relational self in adulthood.

As described at the outset, symbolic interactionists view self-development as inherently linked to the social environment. In the starkest of terms, the self only arises through interactions with others. Consistent with this, in his well-known research, Gallup (1977) showed that chimpanzees reared in social isolation performed worse on the rouge or red-dot test, a technique also used in human infant research to assess self-recognition, compared with chimpanzees raised in normal, social environments.

By around the age of 2, most children display self-recognition (Lewis & Brooks-Gunn, 1979), a rudimentary prerequisite for the development of the self-concept and, accordingly, relational selves. In this same period, young children begin to internalize experiences and build mental representations, including ones of themselves and caregivers (Bruner, 1964; Case, 1985; Piaget, 1951; Werner & Kaplan, 1963). In addition, language development during this time facilitates self-concept formation and enduringness in the self over time (e.g., Stern, 1985). Finally, and especially pertinent to the relational self, research suggests that the quality of infant–caregiver relationships influences the nature of self-concept development during the infant and toddler years. Most of the work examining this influence has focused on individual differences in the self-concept arising from variations in this relationship. The infant attachment literature is, of course, a prominent example (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Bowlby, 1969/1982; Bretherton, 1985; Crittenden, 1990; Main, Kaplan, & Cassidy, 1985). Whereas relationships with responsive and sensitive caregivers promote the development of positive working models of the self, inconsistently responsive or neglectful caregivers breed negative self-conceptions.

By age 3 or 4, children begin to show further hints of relational self-conceptions in that their self-descriptions include references to significant others (Harter, 1999). Social bases of the self continue to develop through the elementary school years, as children increasingly engage in social comparison, defining and evaluating the self relative to siblings, peers, and others (e.g., Ruble & Frey, 1991). During this time period, children also evaluate themselves against the standards held by parents and other important figures (e.g., Higgins, 1991; Stipek, Recchia, & McClintic, 1992).

In late childhood and early adolescence, peers constitute a major relational influence on the self, as peer relationships and social acceptance grow enormously in importance (Damon & Hart, 1988). Thus, attributes that characterize the self in relation to peers are common in young adolescents' self-descriptions. Especially pivotal to the development of relational selves, self-differentiation also begins in earnest during adolescence, as experiences with different roles, situations, and relationships accumulate, thus paving the way for the emergence of multiple selves, relational and otherwise (e.g., Erikson, 1968; Harter et al., 1997; Higgins, 1991; Montemayor & Eisen, 1977; Mullener & Laird, 1971; Rosenberg, 1986).

As an example of relational differentiation, research has shown that adolescents report different levels of self-worth with different significant others (Harter, Waters, & Whitesell, 1998). Also, their rating of how much a significant other provides validation support—the extent to which the other respects who one is—was more strongly related to the level of self-worth associated with the particular other than with levels linked to other significant others. Thus, by adolescence, self-conceptions and evaluations that are akin to the proposed conceptualization of relational selves have developed.

Taken as a whole, there appears to be ample evidence that relational influences on the self begin early in life, taking on various forms over the course of infancy, childhood, and adolescence. This leads naturally to a second set of interrelated questions. Namely, do earlier-formed relational selves influence later ones? Do relational selves evolve over time? Finally, do people continually form new relational selves over the life span? The current state of the evidence does not permit a full treatment of these questions, but several literatures offer, or at least hint at, some preliminary answers.

A core attachment-theoretical idea is that patterns of thought, emotion, and behavior that developed in the context of early interactions with caregivers show continuity throughout the life span, mediated by the assimilative influences of internal working models of the self and others (Bowlby, 1969/1982). Earlier, we too pointed to assimilative forces in discussing relational selves as a basis for continuity in personality. Consistent with this view, a recent meta-analysis of existing longitudinal data found a moderate degree of continuity in attachment from infancy through adulthood (Fraley, 2002). In addition, statistical modeling suggested that such continuity is derived in part by the relatively unchanging nature of early working models of attachment.

At the same time, Bowlby (1969/1982) and others (e.g., Collins & Read, 1994; Crittenden, 1990; Fraley, 2002; Ogilvie & Ashmore, 1991) have recognized that new relationships, changing conditions in existing relationships, and persistent challenges to existing working models can bring about change in individuals' beliefs and assumptions about the self and significant others. Consistent with this perspective, research has found that relationship-specific and global working models of the self and others influence one another over time (Pierce & Lydon, 2001). Of interest, this work also showed that the influence of relationship-specific models on global ones was stronger than the reverse influence. Although this research did not test the influence of new versus existing working models, if one assumes that global models have a longer history (e.g., Collins & Read, 1994), these findings suggest that later-developing, relationship-specific models can impact earlier-formed ones.

Overall, then, the extant literature seems to suggest that at present, it is fairly safe to conclude that existing relational selves exert some degree of top-down influence on new ones, but at the same time, they are not impervious to bottom-up influences stemming from new relationship conditions and experiences. To what extent, though, do people continually form new relational selves? On one level, the developmental literature would seem to suggest that at least through young adulthood, people are continually forming new relational selves, as their circle of significant others expands to include not only primary caregivers and immediate family members but also other family members, peers, romantic partners, and so forth. Although some of these relational selves may overlap with existing ones, others may include new conceptions of the self resulting from novel relationship experiences.

On the other hand, Baumeister and Leary (1995) suggested that the fundamental human need for relationships adheres to a satiation principle whereby motivation to form new relationships declines once relatedness needs have been met by existing ones. In other words, people do not continuously seek new relationships;

they derive minimal benefits from doing so and may even incur costs (e.g., time demands). An upper limit on the formation of new relationships implies a limit on the formation of new relational selves. In a somewhat related vein, socioemotional selectivity theory suggests that people begin to narrow their circle of significant others as early as early adulthood (Carstensen, 1991, 1992). At the same time, the frequency with which people interact with their select group of significant others increases, as does emotional closeness to these others. Perhaps, then, although the tendency to form new relational selves diminishes over time, frequent and emotionally meaningful contact with a core set of significant others deepens the complexity of existing relational selves. Future research is needed to explore this possibility as well as the other developmental questions discussed in this section.

Culture and the Interdependent Self-Construal

In their now classic formulation, Markus and Kitayama (1991) argued that the traditions, institutions, and practices of North American cultures promote an independent self-construal, a view of the self as a separate, autonomous, and bounded entity. In contrast, East Asian traditions, institutions, and practices foster an interdependent self-construal, a view of the self as interconnected with others. Seemingly reminiscent of our proposed relational-self construct, Markus and Kitayama (1991) defined this self-construal as the "self-in-relation to specific others in specific contexts" (p. 227). Moreover, they argued that this self-construal influences a wide array of psychological processes and outcomes. Is the relational self, then, tantamount to the interdependent self-construal?

We believe not. First, although both perspectives refer to the self in relation to others, they differ in who the others are. According to Markus and Kitayama (1991), interdependence includes an awareness of one's part in a larger social unit, which can include both significant-other relationships and group memberships. Thus, minimally, the interdependent self-construal is broader in scope than the relational self, which focuses on the role of significant others and is generally silent on groups.

Second, the interdependent self-construal derives from self-regulatory tasks mandated in particular in Japanese culture. In Japan, "one's behavior is determined, contingent on, and, to a large extent organized by what the actor perceives to be the thoughts, feelings, and actions of others in the relationship" (Markus & Kitayama, 1991, p. 227). It is this active process of attending and adjusting to others that defines the self in relation to others, and success at this culturally mandated task is what leads to feeling that one is a good cultural member (Markus & Kitayama, 1994). We are not arguing that only the Japanese adjust themselves according to who they are with; indeed, our conceptualization assumes that different self-aspects are activated with different significant others. However, adjustment may have qualitatively different bases across cultures. Whereas adjustment in Japan involves a consideration of others' thoughts, feelings, and needs, adjustment in North American culture, for example, may be more self-focused, whereby people adjust themselves with different significant others as part of self-oriented tasks such as defining, evaluating, or presenting the self.

Finally, although relational selves have motivational elements, as described in prior sections, the present conceptualization of the relational self does not assume any single, overarching motive. In contrast, challenging the idea that the need for positive regard, so robustly demonstrated among North Americans, is a human universal, Heine, Lehman, Markus, and Kitayama (1999) have suggested instead that self-criticism and self-improvement are chief self-evaluative motives among the Japanese. That is, the Japanese are hyper-vigilant to their flaws, continuously seek to improve themselves, and persevere at whatever tasks they undertake. It is through this ever-continuing process toward perfection that people with an interdependent self-construal promote unity within and commitment to their relationships. That is, being aware of one's shortcomings informs the individual where improvement efforts need to be directed so as to secure approval from others and, by implication, to maintain relationship harmony. Overall, then, despite surface similarities, the relational self is distinct from the interdependent self-construal in several fundamental respects.

Relations Among Individual, Relational, and Collective Selves

Earlier, we distinguished relational selves from individual and collective selves on both conceptual and empirical grounds. However, outside of the laboratory, are different levels of self-definition as distinct as theory and data suggest? We recognize the likelihood of some degree of overlap among a person's individual, relational, and collective selves. Indeed, various lines of work suggest that people may possess a core or superordinate set of attributes that characterizes the self across all contexts (e.g., Markus & Kunda, 1986; Ogilvie & Ashmore, 1991; Reid & Deaux, 1996). These self attributes might be construed as ever-present components of the working self-concept.

At first glance, it may seem that overlapping self attributes threaten the distinctions among different selves. However, overlap does not necessarily dictate similar affective, motivational, self-regulatory, and behavioral responses. For example, social identity research indicates that resource allocation behavior can go against the best interests of the individual self when a collective self has been rendered salient (e.g., Turner, Brown, & Tajfel, 1979). In other words, even if a person's individual and collective self-conceptions overlapped to some degree, his or her behavior may still differ depending on which self is currently active. In addition, the same attribute may carry quite different meanings when ascribed to different self levels. Consistent with this, different standards are used to judge the same characteristic when ascribed to different groups (e.g., Biernat & Manis, 1994). More relevant is research showing that qualitatively different standards of comparison are used to judge the self at different self levels (Brewer & Weber, 1994; Gardner et al., 2002). Overall, then, overlap between different selves may often be more apparent than real.

On a different note, one might inquire about cases in which different selves conflict with one another. For example, it is probably not uncommon for most people, at one point or another, to have behaved in relation to a significant other in a manner that is utterly uncharacteristic of their behavior outside of this relationship context. From a strict, working self-concept perspective, such contradiction poses no problem, as conflicting elements of the self are presumably activated in different contexts. For example, whereas relational self-aspects are activated in the context of most interactions between spouses of different races, in contexts where

race is somehow made salient (e.g., a discrimination incident), collective self-aspects are likely to be activated.

Although we embrace working self-concept assumptions on the whole, we speculate that conflicting elements of different selves may constrain one another. For example, the extent to which a person is emotionally expressive with a significant other may be limited by the inexpressiveness that characterizes his or her individual self. On the other hand, people are quite adept at forming theories to resolve the contradictory attributes of strangers (Asch & Zukier, 1984) as well as significant others (Murray & Holmes, 1993). Perhaps, then, conflict across different selves prompts the construction of self theories that lend a subjective sense of consistency and coherence (McAdams, 2001).

Finally, it is intriguing to consider contexts in which a self at one level may activate a self at another. For example, it is not uncommon to form a significant-other relationship in the context of a group membership (Hogg & Turner, 1985; Prentice et al., 1994), as when group members form personal friendships. In such cases, although most situations probably activate either relational or collective self-aspects, it is possible that some may activate both kinds of self-aspects. Of course, whether aspects from either or both self levels are activated should hinge on the importance and accessibility of the selves involved. These and other possible relations among individual, relational, and collective selves await future research.

Motivational Significance of Relational Selves

In comparing relational selves to other self levels, it would be natural to wonder which, if any, self level carries the greatest motivational weight. A recent meta-analysis tested three hypotheses: The individual self has motivational primacy, the collective self has motivational primacy, and motivational primacy depends on the self that is currently accessible (Gaertner, Sedikides, Vevea, & Iuzzuni, 2002). Supporting the primacy of the individual self, the results showed, for example, that people react more strongly to threats to the individual than the collective self. However, the relational self was not examined in this meta-analysis. This was likely due to the lack of a well-integrated, readily identifiable literature on the relational self—a fact that was, of course, a major impetus behind the present synthesis. In our view, the wide-ranging evidence for the influence of relational selves that has emerged over the past decade and a half suggests that the motivational force of relational selves may approach or perhaps even rival that of the individual self. Of course, taking a firm stand on the relative motivational power of individual and relational selves awaits future empirical test.

Multiple Relational Selves and Psychological Well-Being

What are the well-being implications of having multiple relational selves? Does well-being benefit or suffer from having a unique relational self for every relationship or from drawing on the same generalized or global relational self across relationships? These are complex questions that may appear to parallel ones discussed in the self-complexity literature. Self-complexity theory argues that defining the self in terms of multiple, distinct aspects prevents the negative effects of threat to one self-aspect from spilling over to another, thus buffering the adverse consequences of threat (Linville, 1985, 1987). However, as noted earlier, research has shown that SCD breeds poor psychological adjustment (e.g., Donahue et al., 1993). A detailed discussion of this debate is beyond the present scope (see Rafaeli-Mor & Steinberg, 2002). Moreover, this literature has not explicitly addressed different levels of self-definition, relational or otherwise.

Thus, we offer several alternative approaches to the issue of multiple relational selves and well-being. As pointed out earlier, authenticity has been defined at least partly in terms of consistency across relational selves. At one level, then, evidence that authenticity breeds well-being implies that there are well-being benefits to having generalized or global relational selves, which can be seen as capturing consistency in the self across multiple relationships or relationships in general, respectively. However, several complexities heed caution in accepting this kind of a simple conclusion. First, whether consistency in relational selves promotes well-being should depend at least in part on the nature of the relational selves involved. Extant research has not examined variations in the link between self-consistency and well-being as a function of the nature of the self-consistency. Yet it seems quite unlikely that an individual who is consistently insecure, anxious, or hostile in relation to the significant others in his or her life enjoys many well-being benefits from this state of affairs.

Second, as described earlier, Cross et al. (2003) found that individual differences in RISC moderated the link between self-consistency and well-being. This raises the possibility of other individual difference moderators. For example, women consistently score higher than men on the RISC scale (Cross et al., 2000; see also Cross & Madson, 1997), suggesting that there may be gender differences in the strength of the association between relational-self consistency and well-being.

Third, research has shown individual differences in interpersonal flexibility, which refers to the ability to adjust one's behavior to the situation, as well as in situationality, which refers to the tendency to view the self as dependent on the situation (Paulhus & Martin, 1988). Moreover, this work found that situational variations in behavior reflecting interpersonal flexibility are associated with greater adjustment (e.g., higher self-esteem), whereas variations reflecting situationality are linked to lower adjustment (e.g., lower self-esteem). Applied to the present discussion, there may not be a single answer to the question of how multiple relational selves are linked to well-being. For example, a person high in interpersonal flexibility with multiple, relationship-specific relational selves may fare just as well as a less flexible person who draws primarily from a global relational self. Alternatively, an individual high in situationality may not necessarily reap large benefits from having a high degree of consistency across relational selves. Such speculations clearly await future research.

Finally, whether consistency in relational selves promotes or hinders well-being should depend in part on the degree of similarity among the significant others and relationships to which they are linked. If a person's significant others and relationships happen to share many similarities, it may make adaptive sense for his or her responses to be guided primarily by generalized or global relational selves. Alternatively, having multiple relationship-specific relational selves may be to the advantage of a person whose significant-other relationships are quite distinct, as it should help him or her respond appropriately to different relationship realities.

Relational Selves: More a Rule Than an Exception?

Looking ahead, serious recognition of the influential role of relational selves in interpersonal life compels taking a close look at some of the field's most basic assumptions about the self. We hasten to underscore that we are not arguing that the self-concept is made up of entirely or even mostly relational elements. Instead, rather than treating individual self-aspects as the default, as is the case in most Western psychological theories of the self, it would be useful to take as a starting point the assumption that relational self-aspects exist alongside individual and collective self-aspects and are every bit as genuine and self-defining as these other constituents of the self-concept. Relationships with significant others are a major channel for satisfying the basic human need for close social bonds (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), and thus it seems obvious that conceptions of the self in the context of these relationships play a powerful role in shaping people's day-to-day social lives.

On a more specific level, theories that are explicitly or tacitly concerned with the individual self might benefit from a consideration of relational self-aspects. Indeed, research in this spirit has already begun to appear. We offer two illustrative examples, both in domains of inquiry that have not traditionally emphasized relational self-conceptions. First, Gill and Swann (2004) showed that achieving accuracy in person perception may lie not in knowing where people stand on a broad range of individual differences but rather in discerning people's relationship-specific identities. That is, perceivers achieve more accuracy on relationship-relevant attributes. Such work thrusts relational self-aspects into the spotlight in longstanding and continuing debates on accuracy in person perception.

Second, Mussweiler and Rüter (2003) argue that people often rely on routine standards when evaluating themselves through social comparisons. Using such standards is a cognitively inexpensive strategy. Who is used as a routine standard? Mussweiler and Rüter's research suggests that significant others often serve as standards. For example, participants' lexical decision times for the name of their best friend were facilitated after they had engaged in self-evaluation. Although these researchers argue that any person can become a routine standard with repeated use, we speculate that significant others may be among the most frequently used routine standards, as knowledge about these individuals is not only linked to the self, but also highly accessible. Most important, when people are evaluating themselves against a significant-other standard, the self in question may often reflect the self in relation to that particular significant other. In other words, the self that is being evaluated in social comparison research may be the relational self more often than has been recognized.

Concluding Remarks

To conclude, we have advocated a new, integrative conceptualization of the relational self, defined as the self that is experienced in relation to the significant others in one's life. In doing so, we synthesized the mass of theory and data on the self and significant others that has emerged in recent years. By specifying where the relational self can be found in recent approaches, and drawing distinctions between the relational self and other perspectives on the self and significant others, our conceptualization offers a more precise and fuller definition of the relational self than does any existing approach alone. Moreover, by providing a common language to interpret and organize the recent literature, it helps to remedy the obscuring of the relational self that has tended to result from different approaches using distinct sets of terminology. It is in this sense that we characterize the relational self as revealed by the present synthesis. Indeed, a major impetus behind the present effort was to establish a literature on the relational self that is as readily identifiable and salient in the minds of current and future researchers of the self as are those that exist for individual and collective selves.

Having laid out our conceptualization of the relational self, we then reviewed evidence for the thesis that relational selves have a pervasive impact on people's interpersonal lives, in that they shape a wide range of psychological processes and outcomes, are often evoked automatically, serve basic orienting and meaning functions, provide both continuity and context-specific variability in personality, and have implications for authenticity and thus psychological well-being. Finally, we tackled several questions and issues likely to be raised by the proposed conceptualization and thesis.

In closing, the influence of significant others on the self has been a topic of inquiry since the formative years of our discipline (James, 1890). Although attention to this influence has ebbed and flowed over the years, the past decade and a half has witnessed a renewed appreciation of the influence of significant others on the self. Among the various forms of this influence, we focused on relational selves—conceptions and aspects of the self that are experienced specifically in relation to significant others—as a particularly powerful one. Tice and Baumeister (2001) recently admonished researchers to recognize that "the interpersonal dimension of self is not confined to the fact that self-knowledge comes from the social world . . . relating to others is part of what the self is *for*" (p. 71). We wholeheartedly agree, and we hope that the proposed conceptual framework and synthesis will help maintain the momentum that has taken hold in recent years and will prompt theorizing and research on the self in which relational self-aspects are a given.

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