

## Transference and the Relational Self

Serena Chen, Helen C. Boucher, Susan M. Andersen, and S. Adil Saribay

**Abstract**

In this chapter, we describe our theory of the relational self grounded in the social-cognitive phenomenon of transference. Relational selves embody the cognitive, emotional, motivational, and behavioral tendencies exhibited in relation to significant others. We argue that relational selves are stored in memory and are linked to significant-other representations. Accordingly, when a significant-other representation is activated and used in an encounter with a new person, the perceiver not only comes to interpret and evaluate the new person as if he or she were the significant other but also views and experiences the self as he or she usually does in relation to the particular significant other. Having laid out our theory, along with wide-ranging evidence to support it, we then address several questions and issues raised about our work. We conclude with a discussion of several broad directions for future research on transference and the relational self.

**Key Words:** relational self, transference, significant others, close relationships, self-concept

**Introduction**

The psychological notion that significant others—whether a parent, best friend, sibling, or romantic partner—influence the self is more than a century old (James, 1890). It is captured in a wide array of psychological theories, such as theories about social comparison, attachment bonds, cultural differences in self-construal, self-regulation, and so forth. In this chapter, we present our theoretical perspective on the influence of significant others on the self. We argue that repeated interactions with significant others lead to the formation of *relational selves*, which embody the cognitive, emotional, motivational, and behavioral tendencies people exhibit in relation to their significant others. Our theory is distinct because it is grounded in transference, the phenomenon whereby aspects of past and present significant-other relationships, including associated relational selves, resurface in

encounters with new people. As such, our work speaks not only to the relational nature of the self in interactions with significant others but also to the reemergence of relational selves in day-to-day encounters with new people.

As a roadmap, in the first third of the chapter, we describe the social-cognitive model of transference in which our theory of the relational self is based, followed by the key postulates of this theory. We then turn to evidence that relational selves are activated in the context of transference, thereby eliciting a host of intrapersonal and interpersonal consequences. In the second third of the chapter, we address several important issues and questions that readers are likely to raise about our work—such as the nature of the link between relational selves and personality. The final third of the chapter outlines several broad directions for future research.

## A Transference-Based Approach to the Relational Self

In this section, we first present the social-cognitive model of transference, along with an overview of the basic paradigm that has been used to examine transference empirically. We then present our transference-based approach to the relational self. Specifically, we define what we mean by relational selves and how these selves emerge in the context of transference. In the latter half of this section, we review evidence for our relational-self theory, providing illustrative examples of a wide range of intrapersonal and interpersonal processes and phenomena that reflect the activation of relational selves in transference encounters.

### *Theoretical Assumptions and Principles*

In our research, we focus on transference, the phenomenon whereby elements of one's past or present relationships with significant others resurface in present-day social interactions with new others (Freud, 1912/1958; see also Sullivan, 1940, 1953). *Significant others* refer to any person who is or has been deeply influential in one's life and in whom one is or once was emotionally invested. They can include family members (e.g., mother, sister) as well as nonfamily individuals who are encountered early or later in life (e.g., best childhood friend, romantic partner). Whereas clinicians focus on transference as the phenomenon whereby a client redirects the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that he or she experiences with significant others onto the therapist, a process the therapist uses to help the client confront and alter maladaptive relational patterns, we take a social-cognitive approach to transference, one that specifies the mental structures and processes that underlie the occurrence of transference in daily interpersonal life (see Miranda & Andersen, 2007, for a discussion of our theory in relation to therapeutic settings).

### THE SOCIAL-COGNITIVE MODEL OF TRANSFERENCE

Our social-cognitive model of transference maintains that mental representations of significant others are rich warehouses of information that include beliefs about significant others' physical and personality characteristics, as well as their internal states, such as their thoughts, feelings, and desires (Andersen & Glassman, 1996; Andersen, Glassman, & Gold, 1998; Chen, 2003). Because people's emotional and motivational outcomes often hinge largely on significant others, significant-other

representations are infused with affect and motivation. Unlike representations that designate a social category, such as "Asians," "Democrats," or "jocks," significant-other representations are exemplars (e.g., Smith & Zárate, 1992), each designating a specific individual rather than a collection of individuals. These exemplar representations may contain generic forms of information—for example, generalizations about the person or links to other generic constructs (e.g., social categories)—but it is the significant person that accounts for the associations among this information rather than a generic category label. Exemplar- and category-based processing differ in some ways (e.g., Smith & Zárate, 1992), but the activation and use of exemplars in social perception follow basic principles of construct accessibility (e.g., Higgins, 1996a).

### *Nomothetic and Idiographic Components*

In our model, we conceptualize transference in terms of the activation and use of a perceiver's representation of a significant other in an encounter with a new person. Such activation and use may occur, for example, by virtue of the similarity between the new person's personality characteristics and those of the relevant significant other. When a perceiver's significant-other representation is activated, the perceiver comes to interpret the new person in ways derived from the representation—in essence, viewing the person as if he or she *were* the significant other.

Although we define transference in terms of nomothetic, social-cognitive processes, we view the phenomenon in idiographic terms as well. In particular, we assume that the content and meaning of any given significant-other representation are, at least in some respects, unique to the perceiver in question. Thus, for example, although transference based on a parental representation reflects the activation and use of the relevant representation regardless of who the perceiver is, the consequences of such nomothetic activation and use will differ between any two perceivers owing to the unique relationship they each share with the relevant parent.

### *Sources of Construct Accessibility*

Drawing on prevailing social-cognitive theories of construct accessibility (e.g., Higgins, 1989, 1996a), our model specifies both chronic and temporary sources of activating significant-other representations—or, in other words, of triggering the transference phenomenon. A construct that has been used frequently is thought to be chronically

accessible—that is, in a chronic state of readiness to be activated and used, even in the absence of other sources of activation (e.g., Higgins & King, 1981). Significant others are, by definition, individuals with whom perceivers are highly familiar, about whom perceivers think about frequently, and who have pronounced relevance to the self (Andersen & Glassman, 1996; Andersen et al., 1998)—all factors that imply that significant-other representations are chronically accessible. Research has in fact shown that significant-other representations are chronically accessible in that they are activated and used to make sense of new others, even with minimal or no contribution from temporary sources of construct accessibility (Andersen, Glassman, Chen, & Cole, 1995; Chen, Andersen, & Hinkley, 1999). On the other hand, this same research has shown that, consistent with the broader social-cognitive literature on construct accessibility, temporary sources of accessibility can combine with the chronic accessibility of significant-other representations to make transference even more likely.

One such temporary source is priming, which refers to a momentary increase in a construct's accessibility due to a recent event in the environment (e.g., Higgins, Rholes, & Jones, 1977). A large literature has shown that when perceivers are primed with a construct just before encountering a stimulus person, their interpretations and judgments are colored in ways derived from the primed construct. We similarly propose that the priming of a significant-other representation just before encountering a new person should increase the likelihood that the representation is activated and used to make sense of the person, a proposition that is supported by research (e.g., Andersen et al., 1995, Study 1).

Another temporary source of accessibility is applicability, which refers to accessibility arising from the match or overlap between the attended-to cues in a stimulus person and stored knowledge about the construct in question (Higgins, 1989, 1996a). Most research on transference has relied on such applicability sources to temporarily activate a significant-other representation. More specifically, we have characterized a stimulus person using attributes of a perceiver's significant other to increase the accessibility of the corresponding significant-other representation. In other words, the attribute-based resemblance of the stimulus person to the perceiver's significant other triggers transference. We view such applicability-based triggering as especially relevant to the activation of significant-other

representations in daily life because transference typically occurs in face-to-face encounters with new others (Chen & Andersen, 1999). Thus, we propose that both chronic and applicability sources of activation are typical contributors to the triggering of transference, and considerable research supports this (e.g., Andersen et al., 1995, Study 2).

On a related note, research indicates that the activation and use of significant-other representations often occurs automatically, outside of perceivers' consciousness (Andersen, Reznik, & Glassman, 2005; Glassman & Andersen, 1999). Indeed, evidence for the chronic accessibility of these representations suggests this is the case because the activation and use of a chronically accessible construct occur efficiently and uncontrollably, without the perceiver intending or registering that they have occurred (Chen, Fitzsimons, & Andersen, 2007). Evidence for the automatic activation and use of significant-other representations also comes from research in which participants were subliminally presented with descriptors about a new person that were derived from descriptors they had previously used to describe a significant other (Glassman & Andersen, 1999). These descriptors served as applicability-based cues for the activation of the corresponding significant-other representation. Unaware of the subliminal triggering cues, participants did not intend, were not aware of, invested no effort in, and could not control the resulting activation and use of their significant-other representation.

#### *Research Paradigm and Standard Indices of Transference*

The paradigm used to test our model involves a two-session procedure that captures both the nomothetic and idiographic elements of transference. The specifics of this procedure vary across studies, but its basic elements are as follows. In the pretest session, participants name a significant other from their lives (e.g., parent, best friend, girlfriend), and then generate a list of descriptors to characterize this person. Several weeks later, participants take part in the second session, an ostensibly unrelated study in which they are led to anticipate an interaction with another participant (who may or may not actually exist).

This second session involves both a learning and a test phase. In the learning phase, participants are presented with descriptors allegedly about their upcoming partner. For participants in what is

known as the Own Significant-Other (Own S-O) condition, some of these descriptors are derived from ones that they had previously generated about their *own* significant other in the pretest session. Put differently, the partner is made to resemble his or her own significant other, thereby serving as a trigger for transference. In contrast, participants in the Yoked Significant-Other (Yoked S-O) condition are presented with descriptors about a *different* participant's significant other, which are unlikely to map onto a specific representation in Yoked S-O participants' memory, and thus transference should not be elicited. Own S-O and Yoked S-O participants are paired on a one-to-one basis so that the descriptors used across the two conditions are the same, but they differ in their significance to Own S-O versus Yoked S-O participants. This allows for examining the effects of activating a perceiver's significant-other representation beyond the mere effect of exposure to the descriptors of anyone's significant other.

In the test phase, transference is measured using one or both of two standard indices. The first index is a recognition-memory test that assesses representation-derived inferences about the upcoming interaction partner. Such inferences are indexed by participants' confidence that they learned descriptors about the partner that are true of their significant other, but were not actually presented. In other words, this measure taps participants' inferences that the partner is more like their significant other than is actually the case. The second index, which asks participants to evaluate their partner, reflects the assumption that the affect associated with significant-other representations is elicited upon the activation of these representations (Fiske & Pavelchek, 1986). On this index, evidence for transference takes the form of Own S-O participants evaluating their anticipated partner more positively when the partner was made to resemble their own positively (vs. negatively) regarded significant other, with no such pattern seen in Yoked S-O participants. Thus, this measure taps whether participants evaluate their partner as they evaluate their significant other.

This basic paradigm has been used to study transference for over two decades. Countless studies have shown that when a significant-other representation is activated in an encounter with a new person, the perceiver makes inferences about and evaluates the new person, at least to some degree, as if he or she *were* the significant other.

## LOCATING THE RELATIONAL SELF IN TRANSFERENCE

Extending our social-cognitive model of transference, Andersen and Chen (2002) articulated a theory of the relational self focused on the consequences of transference for the self. This theory assumes that every individual possesses a repertoire of relational selves, with each relational self embodying aspects of the self in relation to a particular significant other. Thus, a person might possess a relational self with her mom, a relational self with her brother, a relational self with her best friend, and so forth. Below, we elaborate on several key assumptions underlying our theory of the relational self (for further details, see Andersen & Chen, 2002).

### *Profound Emotional-Motivational Importance of Significant Others*

As we noted at the outset of this chapter, the emotions people experience and the motivational orientations they adopt often depend on significant others—the expectations and standards they hold for us, as well as their reactions toward us (e.g., Higgins, 1987). We also noted that the notion that significant others exert a deep influence on the self is recognized by numerous theories that span social, personality, clinical, and developmental psychology (for a review, see Chen et al., 2006). In our theory, we suggest that precisely because of the emotional-motivational relevance of significant others to the self, stored knowledge about each of an individual's significant others is likely to be linked to the self-concept, thus forming a set of self–other linkages or relational selves. Each self–other linkage embodies who the individual is in relation to the particular significant other—that is, it captures the typical patterns of self–other relating. Although people vary in the number and quality of significant-other relationships that they have, we assume that most people have multiple significant others and, thus, multiple relational selves.

### *Activation of Relational Selves in Transference*

Like many theories of the self grounded in social-cognitive principles, our relational-self theory assumes that, given the extensive array of knowledge one has about the self (e.g., Linville & Carlston, 1994), one's entire body of self-knowledge cannot be accessible in working memory all at once. Instead, only a portion of self-knowledge is in working memory at any given moment. In short, our theory adheres to the notion of the working self-concept (Markus & Wurf, 1987), which refers to the subset

of self-knowledge that occupies working memory in the current situation, and thus guides people's cognitions, affect, motivation, and behavior in that situation.

Our theory focuses on the particular relational self that is accessible in working memory in the context of a transference encounter. That is, because linkages are stored in memory between significant-other representations and relational selves, when a perceiver's significant-other representation is activated, activation should spread across these stored linkages to the associated relational self. As a result, the perceiver comes to view and experience the self in part as he or she does when relating with the relevant significant other. In self-concept terms, transference produces a shift in the content of the working self-concept toward relational-self knowledge. In short, our theory focuses on the activation of relational selves in transference. Accordingly, whether or not a relational self is activated in a given context depends on the chronic and/or temporary activation of its corresponding significant-other representation.

#### *Idiographic and Normative Aspects of Relational Selves*

A relational self might include attribute-based (e.g., supportive) and role-based (e.g., caregiver) aspects of the self with the relevant significant other. It may also include positive and negative self-evaluations, the affect experienced when with the significant other, the goals and motives pursued in the significant-other relationship, the self-regulatory strategies used in the relationship, and the behaviors enacted in interactions with the other. Consistent with our conceptualization of significant-other representations as "n-of-one" exemplar representations, we emphasize the uniqueness of each significant other in a person's life and propose that knowledge about each significant other is linked to relatively unique relational self-aspects and relational patterns (cf. Chen et al., 2006).

At the same time, we recognize that significant-other representations and their associated relational selves may also contain some generic, normative elements. For example, as noted above, we assume that relational selves include knowledge about the role relationship shared with the significant other, which may be a normative one (e.g., parent-child relationship) that includes normative role-based expectations and prescriptions (e.g., A. P. Fiske, 1992). Another potential normative component of significant-other representations and their associated relational selves are beliefs about the standards

that a significant other holds for the self (e.g., Higgins, 1987). In short, when a significant-other representation is activated, the associated relational self is also activated, putting into play a variety of idiographic and normative components of the person one typically is when interacting with the particular significant other.

#### *Empirical Evidence*

We now turn to evidence for the activation of relational selves in transference. Specifically, we provide illustrative examples of studies showing that the activation of a perceiver's significant-other representation in an encounter with a new person has consequences for a broad range of self-relevant processes and phenomena, both intrapersonal and interpersonal. We note that in studies using some version of the research paradigm we described earlier, basic evidence for transference has been documented with one or both of our standard indices—namely, representation-derived inferences and evaluation. That is, Own-SO participants are more likely to infer their partner possesses characteristics of their significant other and to evaluate their partner as they evaluate their significant other, relative to Yoked S-O participants.

#### **SELF-DEFINITION AND SELF-EVALUATION**

A key prediction of our theory of the relational self is that the activation of a perceiver's significant-other representation should result in a shift in his or her working self-concept toward the associated relational self. In the seminal study testing this prediction, participants were asked to complete five feature-listing tasks in the pretest session of the basic transference paradigm (Hinkley & Andersen, 1996). For the first task, participants listed features that described themselves, providing a baseline measure of their self-concept. For the second and third feature-listing tasks, participants described both a positively and a negatively regarded significant other. For the final two tasks, participants described themselves as they are when with each of the two significant others they had just described, providing a baseline measure of each of the associated relational selves.

In the second session, participants were presented with descriptors about a new person who either did (Own S-O condition) or did not (Yoked S-O condition) resemble their positively or negatively regarded significant other. Afterward, participants were asked to list descriptors that characterized themselves at that moment as a measure of their working



self-concept. To measure their self-evaluation, participants were then asked to classify each of their listed working self-concept descriptors as positive or negative.

To assess whether participants' working self-concept shifted toward the relevant relational self, the researchers first calculated the overlap between the descriptors of participants' baseline self-concept and each relational self during the pretest session. Controlling for this pretest overlap, participants in the Own S-O condition showed a greater shift in their working self-concept toward the relevant relational self, relative to Yoked S-O participants. This finding emerged for both positively and negatively regarded significant others. In terms of self-evaluation, the researchers summed the positive and negative classifications that participants gave to those self-descriptors in the second session that overlapped with their pretest relational self. Participants in the Own S-O but not the Yoked S-O condition evaluated these overlapping descriptors more positively when the new person resembled their positively, rather than their negatively, regarded significant other. Thus, when transference occurs, both self-definition and self-evaluation shift to reflect the relevant relational self.

Similar evidence was found in research examining significant others who are positively evaluated, but around whom one experiences a dreaded self (Reznik & Andersen, 2004). When the representation of such a significant other is activated, the dreaded self comes into play, eliciting negative shifts in self-definition and self-evaluation. To test this, participants were asked to name a significant other whom they love but around whom they behave badly (i.e., have a dreaded self), as well as a loved significant other around whom they are at their best (i.e., have a desired self). Later, participants learned about a new person who resembled a positively regarded significant other (Own S-O condition) associated with either a dreaded or a desired self, or learned about a person who resembled someone else's significant other (Yoked S-O condition).

Once again, the working self-concept of participants in the Own S-O condition shifted toward the relevant relational self—in this case, the dreaded self when the new person resembled the significant other around whom these participants are at their worst, and the desired self when the person resembled the significant other around whom these participants are at their best. In addition, participants evaluated the self-descriptors that were involved in the working self-concept more negatively in the dreaded-self

condition, and more positively in the desired-self one, in the Own S-O relative to Yoked S-O condition. Thus, this study demonstrated that when the dreaded or desired self is activated in transference, people evaluate themselves in a manner reflecting the relevant relational self, even though the valence of the significant-other representation was held constant.

Other researchers have documented self-evaluative processes associated with relational selves simply by priming a significant-other representation. For example, research has shown that subliminally priming a significant-other representation leads people to stake their self-worth in domains they believe are valued by the particular significant other (Horberg & Chen, 2010). As a result, successes and failures in these domains lead to rises and drops, respectively, in state self-esteem. These self-esteem effects only occur among people who desire being close to the relevant significant other, presumably because linking one's self-esteem to one's performance in domains valued by the significant other helps to maintain the relationship with that person. Overall, the studies described in this section support the key prediction of our relational-self theory that the working self-concept exhibits a shift toward the relevant relational self upon activation of a significant-other representation, in terms of both content and evaluation.

#### EXPECTATIONS OF ACCEPTANCE OR REJECTION

Among the most fundamentally relational of perceivers' beliefs about their significant others are expectations about these individuals' acceptance or rejection of the self. In our relational-self theory, we assume that such expectations are stored in memory as part of the linkages that bind significant-other representations to relational selves. Thus, when a significant-other representation is activated in an encounter with a new person, this should lead the perceiver to assume that the person will accept or reject him or her, just as the relevant significant other does. Supporting this prediction, several studies have shown that participants in the Own S-O condition expect more acceptance from their partner when the partner is made to resemble one of their own positively versus negatively regarded significant others (Andersen, Reznik, & Manzella, 1996; Reznik & Andersen, 2004). This pattern was not seen among Yoked S-O participants.

In another study that focused on physically or psychologically abusive family members (Berenson &

Andersen, 2006), female participants who had an abusive or nonabusive parent were led to expect an interaction with a partner who resembled this parent (Own S-O condition) or did not (Yoked S-O condition). Own S-O but not Yoked S-O participants with an abusive parent expected more rejection from their upcoming interaction partner relative to their counterparts who had a nonabusive parent. Moreover, these participants reported greater dislike, mistrust, and indifference toward their partner. In short, the studies described in this section reveal that expectations of a significant other's acceptance or rejection are stored as part of the relational self and get elicited when transference is triggered.

### GOALS AND MOTIVES

Our theory of the relational self maintains that the goals people pursue in relation to their significant others are part of the relational dynamics between the self and other, and are stored in the linkages binding significant-other representations to the relevant relational selves. As such, when a significant-other representation is activated during an encounter with a new person, the goals associated with the relevant significant other are set into motion, leading the perceiver to pursue the goals typically sought with the significant other, but now with the new person.

To test this hypothesis, researchers have examined the fundamental goal of connection and belonging in relation to significant others (Andersen, Reznik, & Chen, 1997; Baumeister & Leary, 1995), based on the assumption that people pursue this goal in relation to positively regarded significant others more so than negatively evaluated ones. Indeed, activating a representation of participants' own positively evaluated significant other leads participants to report a greater desire to get closer to (and not to be distant from) an anticipated interaction partner more so than activating the representation of participants' own negatively evaluated significant other—a finding not seen in Yoked S-O participants (Andersen et al., 1996; Berk & Andersen, 2000).

Research has also explored the self-evaluative motives—in particular, self-verification motives—that people pursue in relation to their significant others. Self-verification refers to the desire to have others view the self in a manner consistent with one's existing self-views (Swann, 1990). Most research on self-verification has focused on people's desire to verify their global self-views. However, some studies have examined self-verification strivings directed at people's relational self-views (e.g.,

Swann, Bosson, & Pelham, 2002). Building on evidence that people are especially likely to seek self-verifying appraisals from significant others (e.g., Swann, De La Ronde, & Hixon, 1994), one study tested the hypothesis that self-verification motives are activated as part of the relational self when a significant-other representation is activated in a transference encounter (Kraus & Chen, 2009). Indeed, relative to Yoked S-O participants, Own S-O participants expressed a greater desire for their anticipated partner to evaluate them in a manner that verified their core relational self-views (i.e., self-views that they rated as highly defining of the relevant relational self). Another study showed that priming a significant-other representation (vs. a representation of an acquaintance) led participants to provide more favorable ratings of feedback that verified their relevant relational self, compared with other forms of feedback (e.g., self-enhancing). In short, this research demonstrates that self-evaluative goals typically pursued with significant others are elicited in transference encounters.

Other work has examined how chronically unsatisfied goals with significant others play out in transference (Berk & Andersen, 2008). This research found that participants' self-reported hostility increases when an anticipated partner activates a representation of a positively evaluated significant other with whom they chronically experience unsatisfied (vs. satisfied) goals for affection, an effect not seen in Yoked S-O participants. In addition, when the new person resembled a family member—a significant other who was not chosen and is thus “irrevocable”—the increases in hostility seen in Own S-O participants were linked to behaviors in a subsequent task that were designed to solicit acceptance from the partner. Hence, when it comes to a family member, the hostility that arises from the activation of chronically unsatisfied affection goals in transference is tied to increased efforts to pursue affection.

Evidence for the activation of goals associated with relational selves can also be found in studies in which a significant-other representation is simply primed. Specifically, studies show that subliminally exposing people to the name of a significant other leads them to behave in line with goals that they previously reported associating with the significant other (Fitzsimons & Bargh, 2003). For example, participants who have the goal to please their mother and were primed with their mother subsequently performed better on a verbal achievement task. A different set of studies showed that participants who

were subliminally primed with the name of a significant other reported being more committed to goals associated with that significant other, and exhibited more persistence in pursuit of these goals, particularly when participants were close to the other and believed he or she valued the goal (Shah, 2003a). A related set of studies showed that participants' appraisals of the difficulty of attaining a goal were colored by their beliefs about a primed significant other's expectations about their goal attainment (Shah, 2003b).

As a final example of the activation of goals associated with relational selves upon the activation of a significant-other representation, research grounded in attachment theory (e.g., Bowlby, 1973) has demonstrated that subliminally priming the name of an attachment figure increases pursuit of the attachment goal of increasing proximity (Gillath, Mikulincer, Fitzsimons, Shaver, Schachner, & Bargh, 2006). For example, participants primed with the name of an attachment figure self-disclose more, and do so more quickly, to a new person.

Overall, the studies described in this section support our assumption that goals associated with significant others are stored as part of linkages representing the interpersonal dynamics between significant others and the self. When a significant-other representation is activated, associated goal dynamics are set into motion.

#### ELICITATION AND DISRUPTION OF AFFECT

The social-cognitive model of transference assumes that significant-other representations are infused with affect, as noted earlier. This suggests that the emotional meaning of significant-other relationships should be elicited in transference, leading to affective experiences reflecting those that one experiences in the relevant relationship. In other words, affective elements of relational selves are activated in transference encounters. As one test of this broad hypothesis, the facial movements of participants who were reading each descriptor about an anticipated interaction partner during the learning phase of the transference paradigm were covertly videotaped (Andersen et al., 1996). Naïve judges then rated the pleasantness of participants' facial expressions of emotion. The results showed that Own S-O but not Yoked S-O participants exhibited more pleasant facial affect when the representation of a positively rather than a negatively evaluated significant other was activated.

Further evidence for the elicitation of affect in transference comes from the study described earlier

on abusive significant others (Berenson & Andersen, 2006). More pleasant facial affect arose when the new person resembled versus did not resemble the abusive (but nonetheless positively evaluated) parent. This facial-affect effect is thus fairly general, occurring on the basis of significant-other relationships of varying quality. At the same time, additional findings show that affect in transference can be complex at times. Specifically, in addition to learning about an upcoming partner who either did or did not resemble a parent who was or was not abusive, participants were either given or not given interpersonally threatening information about their upcoming interaction partner—namely, information that the partner was becoming tense and irritable while waiting. Participants in the Own S-O condition who had an abusive parent reported less dysphoric mood in response to the interpersonal threat, exhibiting relatively “flat affect” relative to nonabused participants in this condition or other participants in general. Thus, the threat of the anticipated partner's irritability in transference did not increase the dysphoric mood of abused participants. Hence, despite reports of rejection expectations, dislike, mistrust, and indifference by abused women in the Own S-O condition noted earlier, these women also show a kind of “emotional numbing” response in transference, reflecting the emotional shutdown needed to cope with abusive relationships.

The above studies suggest that the affect associated with significant-other relationships tends to be re-experienced in transference. However, circumstances external to the perceiver may also disrupt affect. In a study showing this, participants were exposed to descriptors of an upcoming interaction partner who resembled either their own or a yoked participant's positively evaluated significant other (Baum & Andersen, 1999). In addition, the partner's role (expert or novice) in relation to participants in an upcoming task was either congruent or incongruent with the role typically adopted by participants' significant other (who was an authority figure). Role incongruence should be unpleasant because it signals that goals usually pursued with the significant other are unlikely to be satisfied. Indeed, Own S-O participants who anticipated a role-incongruent interaction with their partner reported higher dysphoric mood compared with those expecting role congruence. No such difference emerged in Yoked S-O participants. Thus, even though the significant others in this study were positively evaluated, and thus linked with positive affect, this affect was disrupted due to external role circumstances.



Disrupted positive affect may also occur when the representation of a positively regarded significant other associated with a dreaded self is activated. In the research on dreaded selves (Reznik & Andersen, 2004), Own S-O participants expecting to meet a new person who resembled a significant other associated with a dreaded self reported less positive and more negative mood compared with Yoked S-O participants. By contrast, when the representation of a positively regarded significant other associated with a desired self was activated, Own S-O participants reported greater positive affect compared with Yoked S-O participants.

As a final example, another study examined the emotional states that are evoked upon the activation of a representation of a parent with whom one has secure, preoccupied, dismissive, or fearful attachment (Andersen, Bartz, Berenson, & Keczkemethy, 2006). Eliciting transference involving a parent to whom one is securely attached produced increases in positive affect relative to the corresponding Yoked S-O condition, an effect not seen in the preoccupied, dismissive, or fearful conditions. Greater positive affect was also seen in securely compared with insecurely attached participants in the Own S-O but not the Yoked S-O condition. At a more specific level, eliciting transference involving a parent with whom participants had a preoccupied attachment led to increases in anxiety relative to the Yoked S-O condition, an effect not seen in the other groups. Finally, evoking transference in the dismissive attachment condition resulted in large decreases in hostility compared with the Yoked S-O condition, in which hostility was greatly elevated. This suggests the kind of suppressed emotion—suppressed hostility—that is characteristic of avoidant relationships in the context of transference.

Overall, the studies described in this section indicate that affect experienced in relation to significant others can be elicited by activation of a significant-other representation. However, some studies also reveal that the affective consequences of transference are complex, depending on circumstances such as whether the new person's relational role *vis-à-vis* the self is congruent with the role of the relevant significant other in relation to the self.

#### SELF-REGULATION

Over the past decade, growing attention has been given to interpersonal influences on self-regulatory processes (e.g., Fitzsimons & Finkel, 2010). Our relational-self theory assumes that the activation of a significant-other representation in transference

should elicit the self-regulatory processes that typically unfold in relation to the relevant significant other. Thus far, we have examined two main forms of self-regulation. The first focuses on people's efforts to meet significant-other standards, whereas the second focuses on strategic responses aimed at defending the self and one's relationship in the face of threat.

In terms of efforts to meet standards associated with significant others, research has drawn primarily from self-discrepancy theory (Higgins, 1987). This theory argues that people are aware of the standpoints or perspectives of significant others on their actual, ideal, and ought selves. Accordingly, significant-other standpoints are likely to be stored as part of relational selves, and the activation of a relational self should activate the ideal and ought self-guides held by the relevant significant other. To the extent that actual-ideal discrepancies exist, dejection-related affect should ensue, whereas actual-ought discrepancies should elicit agitation-related affect.

In a study testing these predictions, participants who had an ideal or ought self-discrepancy from the standpoint of a parent learned descriptors of a new person who either did (Own S-O condition) or did not (Yoked S-O condition) resemble this parent (Reznik & Andersen, 2007). Activating the parent representation should activate the associated relational self, including the ideal or ought self-discrepancies from the parent's standpoint. Indeed, in the Own S-O but not the Yoked S-O condition, ideal-discrepant participants reported more dejection-related affect, whereas ought-discrepant participants reported more agitation-related affect.

When people regulate themselves with respect to ideal standards, this reflects a promotion regulatory focus (a focus on attaining positive outcomes; Higgins, 1996b). By contrast, regulating the self guided by ought standards reflects a prevention focus (a focus on preventing negative outcomes). In the study just described, it was hypothesized that if activating a parent representation activates the self-discrepancy from this parent's standpoint, the self-regulatory focus with respect to this other should also emerge. Thus, when transference is elicited, ideal-discrepant participants in the study should show greater approach tendencies toward their partner, whereas ought-discrepant participants should show more avoidance. Indeed, ideal-discrepant participants in the Own S-O but not the Yoked S-O condition reported less motivation to avoid their partner in anticipation of meeting

him or her, relative to after learning the meeting would not occur (at which point promotion was no longer relevant). Ought-discrepant participants in the Own S-O but not the Yoked S-O condition, by contrast, reported more avoidance motivation before than after learning the meeting would not occur (at which point prevention was no longer relevant).

Research on the second form of self-regulation has examined both self- and relationship-protective responses to threat. For example, in research on shifts in self-definition and self-evaluation toward the relational self, recall that participants learned about a new person who either did or did not resemble a positively or negatively evaluated significant other (Hinkley & Andersen, 1996). Afterward, Own S-O participants described themselves with self-descriptors that overlapped with ones they listed earlier to describe the relational self with this significant other, and they evaluated these relational-self attributes in line with their evaluation of the significant other. Interestingly, Own S-O participants in the negative significant-other condition evaluated the *non*-relational-self attributes of their working self-concept more favorably than participants in all other conditions—a finding that presumably reflects a defensive response to the threat delivered by the influx of negative, relational-self attributes into the working self-concept.

Supporting this interpretation are similar findings reported in research on dreaded selves (Reznick & Andersen, 2004). Recall that when the representation of a positively evaluated significant other associated with a dreaded self was activated, Own S-O but not Yoked S-O participants' self-descriptors shifted in content and evaluation toward the relevant relational self. In addition, however, Own S-O participants in the dreaded-self condition listed the most positive self-attributes in their overall working self-concept. Hence, although the self-evaluations of these participants shifted to reflect the negative valence of the relevant relational self (a dreaded self), these participants exhibited a countervailing, self-protective response as well.

In terms of relationship-protective self-regulation, recall the facial affect research showing that Own S-O but not Yoked S-O participants' facial expressions when exposed to descriptors of their upcoming partner were more pleasant when the partner resembled a positively rather than a negatively evaluated significant other (Andersen et al., 1996). In this research, regardless of whether the partner resembled a positive or a negative significant other,

participants were presented with both positively and negatively valenced descriptors of him or her. Being confronted with negative descriptors about a new person that also characterize a positively evaluated significant other should pose a threat to participants' positive view of this other, and thus may elicit a self-regulatory response aimed at alleviating the threat. Consistent with this, Own S-O participants responded to negative descriptors about their partner that reflected disliked qualities of their positively evaluated significant other with more pleasant facial affect than did participants in any other condition. Moreover, these participants exhibited more pleasant affect in response to negative qualities of their positively regarded significant other even when compared with their response to positive qualities of this same significant other. Thus, Own S-O participants' prior evaluation of the negative descriptors was reversed in their facial affect, presumably as a relationship-protective response.

Converging evidence has been found in research on abusive significant others (Berenson & Andersen, 2006). Specifically, as described earlier, even when previously abused by a loved parent, Own S-O relative to Yoked S-O participants expressed more positive facial affect virtually immediately when presented with descriptors of an upcoming partner who resembled this loved parent. Thus, even though they later reported higher rejection expectations, dislike, mistrust, and indifference, as noted earlier, their relatively immediate facial affect was just as positive as that of nonabused participants. Independent judges made these positive-negative affect ratings reliably in the approximately 1-second "rating window" during which the participant read each descriptor about their upcoming partner, providing some basis for confidence in this evidence, although we acknowledge that the Facial Action Coding System was not used, and hence the possibility that these expressions were not genuine cannot be ruled out. Nonetheless, it remains worth noting that both abused and nonabused Own S-O participants showed more positive facial affect in response to learning that their upcoming partner was becoming tense and irritable (compared with Yoked S-O participants). In essence, both groups appeared to transform the interpersonally threatening information into positive affect. Thus, even when maladaptive, abusive relationships are involved, activating the associated significant-other representation and relational self may elicit self-regulatory responses that protect these relationships.

Overall, the studies in this section show that the self-regulatory processes that typically unfold in relation to significant others may also play out in interactions with new others following activation of a significant-other representation and associated relational self. These self-regulatory processes range from reactions to and efforts to meet significant-other-related standards, to responses aimed at protecting the self and one's relationships.

#### INTERPERSONAL BEHAVIOR

Finally, our theory of the relational self maintains that typical patterns of interpersonal behavior are stored as part of linkages that bind significant-other representations to relational self-knowledge. Thus, when transference occurs, this should elicit behaviors consistent with those typically enacted in relation to the relevant significant other. In one study testing this hypothesis, it was predicted that when the relational self is activated, the expectations regarding the significant other's acceptance or rejection should also be activated (e.g., Andersen et al., 1996), and this should have implications for how perceivers behave in transference (Berk & Andersen, 2000). Specifically, research on the self-fulfilling prophecy has shown that perceivers' expectations about a target person are often fulfilled by virtue of perceivers' tendency to act in line with these expectations and the target's tendency to respond in kind (e.g., Snyder, Tanke, & Berscheid, 1977). Thus, the activation of acceptance–rejection expectations that occurs in transference should set into motion a self-fulfilling cycle.

In a study by Berk and Andersen (2000), participants (perceivers) were presented with descriptors of another participant (target) with whom they subsequently had an audiotaped conversation. The descriptors did not bear an actual relation to the target, but instead were derived from descriptors that the participant (Own S-O condition) or a yoked participant (Yoked S-O condition) had generated in the pretest session of the transference paradigm to characterize a positively or negatively evaluated significant other.

The pleasantness of the affect that targets expressed in their conversational behavior with participants was coded from the audiotapes by naïve judges. The key prediction was that the relational self associated with the positively or negatively evaluated significant other should be activated in the Own S-O conditions, leading Own S-O participants to behave in a manner consistent with their positive or negative assumptions, respectively,

eliciting confirmatory behavior in the target. Supporting this, judges rated the target as expressing more pleasant affect when he or she resembled the perceiver's own positively rather than negatively evaluated significant other, whereas no such effect was seen in Yoked S-O participants. Hence, this study demonstrates that assumptions derived from perceivers' relational selves are activated in transference encounters and, in turn, give rise to confirmatory behavior in targets.

In a different behavioral study, the focus was on affiliative behavior (Kraus, Chen, Lee, & Straus, 2010). Participants in this research were presented with descriptors of an anticipated partner who resembled either their own or a yoked participant's positively evaluated significant other. In addition, across Own S-O and Yoked S-O conditions, the partner was described as a member of the same group (ingroup) or a different group (outgroup) as the participant (e.g., liberal or conservative). Participants' affiliative behavior toward their partner was measured in terms of how close they moved their chair to the one that they thought would be occupied by their partner, with smaller distance between chairs signaling greater affiliative behavior.

Regardless of the group status of the partner, Own S-O participants pulled their chair closer to the chair of their partner than Yoked S-O participants, presumably reflecting the kind of affiliative behavior these participants typically exhibit in relation to their positively evaluated significant other. That Own S-O participants showed this kind of affiliative behavior even when their partner was described as an outgroup member suggests that the activation of the representation of a positively evaluated significant other may be one route by which intergroup bias can be reduced—a topic we will return to later.

In sum, the studies described in this section show that transference elicits behaviors that one normally enacts in relation to significant others, only in relation to *new* others. Such transference-elicited behaviors may have important downstream interpersonal consequences, such as eliciting responses from new others similar to those one expects from significant others.

#### Issues and Questions

In this section, we address several important issues and questions that readers are likely to have about our work on transference and the relational self. Specifically, we first address the issue of the implications of our relational-self theory for personality.

Second, we tackle the question of how our theory relates to several other contemporary perspectives on the self and its relation to others. To do so, we compare and contrast our theory with work on relational schemas, attachment, and the inclusion of other in the self. Finally, we address implications of existing work on cultural and gender differences in the self-concept for our relational-self theory.

### ***Relational Selves as a Basis for an Interactionist Theory of Personality***

What role do relational selves play in a given individual's personality? Building on Mischel and Shoda's (1995) "if-then" approach to personality, Andersen and Chen (2002) argued that relational selves serve as a basis for an interactionist theory of personality (see also Andersen, Saribay, & Kooij, 2008; Chen et al., 2006), which we elaborate upon below.

#### **IF-THEN RELATIONS AS BASIC UNITS OF PERSONALITY**

Challenging long-held assumptions about cross-situational consistency in personality responding, Mischel and Shoda's (1995) if-then approach defines personality in terms of the different responses (i.e., thens) that individuals exhibit in different classes of situations (i.e., ifs). This approach posits that each individual has an idiosyncratic set of if-then relations, and an individual's overall pattern of if-thens reflects his or her unique "personality signature." This view of personality captures variability in personality responding across different situations, while at the same time allowing for stability in personality at the level of an individual's signature. In other words, continuity in personality stems from the *predictability* of the cross-situational variability in an individual's responses. From this perspective, variability in an individual's responses across different contexts does not reflect error and should not be averaged over or dismissed. Instead, varying responses across contexts are precisely what constitutes the individual's personality.

A key element of Mischel and Shoda's if-then model is the idea that situations, or ifs, are subjectively rather than objectively defined. Thus, objective situations may carry unique meaning for any given individual. The model argues further that situations activate specific cognitive-affective units—including encodings, expectancies, feelings, and goals—which then give rise to the particular responses an individual exhibits in these situations. The cognitive-affective units that are activated in

a given objective situation reflect the unique psychological situation experienced by that individual (Mischel & Shoda, 1995; see also Chen, 2001). This unique psychological situation is what mediates a given if-then relation—that is, the relation between the objective situation and the response an individual exhibits in it. Put another way, the model recognizes idiographic differences in how people make sense of different situations and, hence, in how people respond to them.

Early evidence for the if-then approach to personality came from in situ research in which behavior was observed in a wide range of naturalistic situations and assessed over time (e.g., Shoda, Mischel, & Wright, 1989; Wright & Mischel, 1987). More recent work has applied the if-then approach to understand an array of specific processes and phenomena, including self-control (e.g., Kross & Mischel, 2010), person perception (e.g., Kammrath, Mendoza-Denton, & Mischel, 2005), and race relations (e.g., Mischel, Mendoza-Denton, & Hong, 2009).

#### **CONCEPTUALIZING RELATIONAL SELVES IN IF-THEN TERMS**

Our theory of the relational self—in particular, the central notion that relational selves are activated in transference—is readily conceptualized in terms of Mischel and Shoda's (1995) if-then model. Using the language of their model, we view objective situations as interpersonal encounters with new people who resemble a significant other. Significant-other representations and relational selves contain the cognitive-affective units that, when activated in an interpersonal encounter with a new person who resembles a significant other, yield the idiographic psychological situations that form the basis for the particular responses that the individual exhibits in the encounter. Analogous to Mischel and Shoda's (1995) if-then model, we see personality variability and stability as both arising from the activation of relational selves in transference encounters. There is variability in that a person is likely to possess relational selves that differ from each other, and the activation of different relational selves gives rise to differences in the responses that he or she exhibits. Continuity, on the other hand, arises from stable, if-then interpersonal patterns. That is, whenever a new person who resembles a particular significant other is encountered, the relevant significant-other representation and associated relational self are activated, eliciting the particular interpersonal responses that one typically exhibits in relation to the particular significant other.

In short, our relational-self theory can be seen as a member of the family of perspectives that view personality in if–then terms. It parallels Mischel and Shoda's (1995) overarching if–then model in the most fundamental respects, while being unique in its focus on interpersonal situations and the activation and use of significant-other representations as the social-cognitive processes that predict variability and stability in personality. Put differently, our focus is on the interpersonal elements of personality, and our assumption is that significant-other representations, coupled with associated self-other knowledge, constitute the interpersonal substrate of personality.

### *Comparing and Contrasting with Other Perspectives on the Self and Significant Others*

The basic notion that significant others influence the self-concept is widespread, raising the question of how our theory relates to others grounded in this notion. In this section, we compare and contrast our theory with three prominent and contemporary lines of work that also examine connections between the self and significant others—namely, work on relational schemas, attachment, and the inclusion of others in the self. In doing so, we suggest ways in which our theory and the others may inform or extend one another (see also Chen et al., 2006; Chen, Boucher, & Kraus, 2011).

#### RELATIONAL SCHEMAS

A relational schema is composed of schemas of the self and the significant other in the self–other relationship, which are linked with interpersonal scripts (Baldwin, 1992). These scripts are defined by if–then contingencies of interaction (e.g., “If I assert myself, then my mother will treat me with respect”) that reflect expectations about how a significant other will respond to the self in a given situation, based on past interactions with the other. It is argued that people derive rules of self-inference from repeated exposure to if–then contingencies. For example, the contingency “If I make a mistake, then others will criticize me” may develop over time into the self-inference rule “If I make a mistake, then I am unworthy” (Baldwin, 1997, p. 329).

Our theory converges with the relational schema perspective in several ways. First, the self-schema component of relational schemas is akin to our relational-self construct in that both refer to the self in the context of the relevant relationship, and both are viewed as distinct from knowledge about

significant others. Second, the interpersonal scripts of relational schemas fit our view that linkages exist between relational-self and significant-other knowledge reflecting the relational patterns between the self and other. Finally, our perspectives converge in assumptions about chronic and temporary sources of activating relational self-knowledge. In relational-schema terms, when contextual cues activate a significant-other schema, this in turn activates associated if–then rules that shift views of the self toward self-views in the relevant relationship (Baldwin, 1997). Research has also shown that relational schemas may be chronically accessible (e.g., Baldwin, Keelan, Fehr, Enns, & Koh-Rangarajoo, 1996). Thus, similar to relational selves, which are elicited upon the chronic or temporary activation of significant-other representations, relational schemas can be chronically or temporarily activated as well.

On the other hand, research on relational schemas differs in emphasis and methodology from our work on transference and the relational self. For instance, although both perspectives assume that relational self-knowledge is formed on the basis of repeated activation of particular self-aspects in interactions with significant others, research on relational schemas provides more precision regarding the mechanisms underlying this formation. Specifically, relational schema researchers argue that self-inferences are derived through the repeated use of if–then rules, which are procedural knowledge structures that dictate the self-inferences that follow in light of particular responses from significant others (Baldwin, 1997). One can, however, easily incorporate these if–then rules into our theory. Namely, when a significant-other representation is activated, if–then self-inference rules (derived from repeated interactions with the relevant significant other) may be activated, leading to shifts in the working self-concept toward relevant relational self-aspects that occur in transference.

As another example, given that transference refers to the resurfacing of prior relationships in interactions with *new* others, our research has typically relied on attribute-based cues in a *new* person that match the attributes of a perceiver's significant other in order to activate a significant-other representation and its associated relational self. Thus, the activation cues we typically use emanate directly from new people themselves. Because the new person's attribute-based resemblance to the significant other is fairly minimal, the activation of transference occurs relatively implicitly. In contrast, although subliminal priming of the faces of significant others



has been used to activate relational schemas (e.g., Baldwin, Carrell, & Lopez, 1990), most relational schema research has had participants consciously visualize that they are interacting with an actual significant other (e.g., Baldwin & Sinclair, 1996). Thus, relational schemas have often been activated by procedures that refer directly to significant others, rather than by cues in a new person. Thus, it might be worthwhile to examine how activated relational schemas play out in interactions with new people.

Research has also shown that novel cues (e.g., auditory tones) that are repeatedly paired with elements of relational schemas can activate these schemas (e.g., Baldwin & Main, 2001). If-then contingencies can also serve as activation cues, such that harboring expectations about an interaction partner's responses (Pierce & Lydon, 1998) or being exposed to an interaction pattern that resembles if-then dynamics with a significant other (Baldwin, Fehr, Keedian, Seidel, & Thompson, 1993) can activate relational schemas. Such studies suggest that in daily encounters with new others, transference may be elicited not only by new people who resemble a significant other but also by cues incidentally associated with a significant other or by cues reflecting the dynamics of the relationship. We will return to the latter possibility later in the chapter.

#### ATTACHMENT THEORY

In broad strokes, attachment theory proposes that internal working models of the self and others develop during the course of interactions with attachment figures (Bowlby, 1969/1982). When attachment figures are consistently caring and responsive, people develop a model of the self as competent and worthy of love, and of others as caring and available. When attachment figures are inconsistently responsive or are neglectful, in contrast, people develop insecure models of attachment, such as a model of the self as unworthy of love and of others as uncaring.

Several parallels can be found between the attachment-theoretical view of the self and our relational-self construct. Among them, although early attachment research focused on attachment figures, defined as individuals who serve a specific set of attachment functions (proximity, safe haven, and secure base), more recent work has demonstrated the utility of applying attachment theory to a broader range of significant others (e.g., Baldwin et al., 1996), whether or not they meet all the criteria for attachment figures per se. Hence, working

models of the self can reflect the influence of attachment figures or significant others more generally, which fits the focus in our research on the impact of significant others or attachment figures on the self.

On the other hand, most adult attachment research has treated attachment as an individual difference variable (e.g., Hazan & Shaver, 1987). Because of this, working models of the self are often treated as if they represent the self-concept as a whole, and their relational underpinnings recede into the background. To illustrate, some research has used global self-esteem as a measure of working models of the self (e.g., Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994). Although some attachment experiences may be so internalized that it is appropriate to treat attachment as a general trait-like characteristic, self models that derive specifically from interactions with significant others and represent how the self relates to specific others are what we call relational selves. In line with our view of relational selves as linked to specific significant others, growing evidence shows that people possess both general and relationship-specific attachment models (e.g., Klohnen, Weller, Luo, & Choe, 2005; Overall, Fletcher, & Friesen, 2003). There may be overlap across these levels of specificity, but research has shown that general and relationship-specific working models can have differential predictive power.

In another vein, attachment theory posits that working models of the self and others are complementary and intertwined (e.g., Bowlby, 1973), suggesting that they exert their effects in tandem. This assumption is compatible with our view that linkages exist between relational-self and significant-other knowledge, although 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 differences in the nature of the if-then contingencies stored in relational schemas (Baldwin et al., 1993). Owing to the relational schema perspective, such studies are very explicit about linkages between self and other schemas.

Similar to both transference and relational schema findings, working models of attachment have been shown to be activated by chronic and temporary sources of accessibility (e.g., Mikulincer & Arad, 1999). Attachment theory, however, is unique in proposing that psychological or physical threats in the environment activate the attachment system, and therefore working models (Bowlby, 1969/1982). Particularly relevant to the activation of working models of the self, threat in the form of failure feedback has been

shown to polarize the chronic self-evaluations of insecurely attached individuals (e.g., anxious-ambivalent individuals' negative self-evaluations are exacerbated) (Mikulincer, 1998).

How might attachment and transference research inform one another? Although attachment styles can and do change as a result of specific relationship-relevant experiences (e.g., Fraley, Vicary, Brumbaugh, & Roisman, 2011; Simpson, Rholes, Campbell, & Wilson, 2003), attachment working models have nonetheless often been treated as an individual difference variable, implying some degree of stability across relationships. In contrast, we focus on specific significant-other relationships and associated relational selves. But the notion that people have more generalized conceptions of significant others and relational selves paves the way for broadening the scope of transference. That is, a new person may activate a more generalized significant-other representation (e.g., family members), thus shifting the working self-concept toward self-aspects experienced with more than one family member (see also Chen et al., 2006).

Our work on transference may also inform adult attachment work. For example, research suggests that transference may be a mechanism by which attachment working models persist over time (e.g., Brumbaugh & Fraley, 2006). That is, attachment working models may persist not only because they are activated in interactions with attachment figures themselves but also because they are activated in encounters with new people who resemble these figures.

#### INCLUDING OTHERS IN THE SELF

The inclusion-of-other-in-the-self (IOS) approach (Aron, Aron, Tudor, & Nelson, 1991) posits that close relationships involve the incorporation of close others (e.g., their resources, perspectives, and personality characteristics) into the self-concept. This conception of the self diverges from our relational-self construct. In particular, although the IOS approach distinguishes self-knowledge from significant-other knowledge, a key assumption of this approach is that closeness leads to greater self-other overlap. By contrast, we view relational-self and significant-other knowledge as linked but separate, in that the relational self embodies how the self relates to, rather than internalizes, significant others. Some research on relational schemas illustrates this distinction nicely by showing that people's ratings of themselves assimilate to their relationship partners on the affiliation

dimension (agreeableness vs. quarrelsomeness) but complement their partners on the control dimension (dominance vs. submissiveness) (Tiedens & Jimenez, 2003). Hence, self-conceptions may be similar to or different from conceptions of significant others, and what matters is self-other linkages—that is, how the self relates in interactions with significant others. The IOS approach, by contrast, focuses on overlapping aspects of the self and significant others to the exclusion of complementary ones, which may be just as or even more defining of the relational self.

Other differences between our theory and the IOS approach become apparent when one considers the measure used to assess inclusion of other in the self. This measure consists of seven pairs of circles, with one circle in each pair designating the self and the other circle designating a significant other (Aron, Aron, & Smollan, 1992). The degree of overlap between the circles varies, with more overlap indicating greater inclusion of the other in the self. Although this measure is usually administered in reference to a specific significant other, there is ambiguity as to which “self” is being assessed by the measure. To illustrate, research shows that entering a new relationship yields self-concept expansion, due partly to the inclusion of the new relationship partner (Aron, Paris, & Aron, 1995). In this research, participants were asked to describe themselves without reference to the relationship. Hence, it is not clear whether the “self” here refers to self-conceptions in the relationship or to the global self-concept. Indeed, IOS theorizing is silent on whether contextual variations, stemming from relationships or otherwise, have implications for how much others are included, whereas variations in the relational context are a key feature of our transference-based theory of the relational self.

Overall, then, IOS researchers focus on the notion that significant others influence the self by being incorporated into the general self-concept, whereas we focus on the idea that significant others lead to the formation of self-aspects reflecting the self when relating to those others. Accordingly, the IOS perspective may or may not afford predictions about how an individual will respond to significant or new others, whereas our relational-self perspective provides a direct basis for such predictions. Still, it is interesting to consider how the two approaches might be integrated. For instance, it is 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 entirely by them. As another example, relational-self and significant-other knowledge may be especially tightly linked in relationships involving a high degree of inclusion.

### *Relational Selves, Culture, and Gender*

Considerable theory and research suggest that there are cultural and gender differences in the degree to which people define the self-concept in terms of their social bonds and relationships. In this section, we consider our theory in connection with such evidence.

#### **RELATIONAL SELVES AND CULTURE**

Two highly influential constructs invoked to explain cross-national differences in behavior are independent and interdependent self-construals on the one hand, and dialectical and linear belief systems on the other. Regarding the former, Markus and Kitayama (1991) proposed that North American cultural practices foster the formation of an independent self-construal, defined as a view of the self as a separate, autonomous, and bounded entity. In contrast, East Asian cultural practices promote an interdependent self-construal, defined as the “self-in-relation to specific others in specific contexts” (Markus & Kitayama, 1991, p. 227). Regarding the latter, Peng and Nisbett (1999) contrast linear beliefs, which characterize Western thought and in which the behavior of an object can be understood by referencing the object’s properties, with dialectical beliefs, which characterize East Asian traditions and in which the behavior of an object can be understood by examining the context in which the object is embedded. Associated with dialectical beliefs are expectations of change (i.e., if an object is understood with reference to context, as the context changes, so, too, must the object) and contradiction (the object in one context may be quite different from the object in another context; Peng & Nisbett, 1999; Nisbett, Peng, Choi, & Norenzayan, 2001).

How do the interdependent self-construal and dialectical belief systems relate to our relational-self construct? Both are concerned with the self in relation to others; whereas the interdependent self-construal does this explicitly, dialectical beliefs can easily be adapted to include this idea (for research on the “dialectical self,” see Spencer-Rodgers, Boucher, Mori, Wang, & Peng, 2009). However, despite the similarity in the language used to define the interdependent/dialectical self and the relational self,

there are several significant differences between these sets of constructs. First, although both sets of constructs refer to the self in relation to others, they differ in terms of who constitutes “others.” According to Markus and Kitayama (1991), interdependence includes an awareness of one’s part within a larger social unit, which can include both significant-other relationships and various group memberships (Brewer & Chen, 2007). Similarly, although dialectical beliefs can be reflected in beliefs about the self in an immediate context (e.g., me with my department chair), it can also entail a much broader focus, encompassing one’s place vis-à-vis the whole universe (Boucher, 2011a). Minimally, then, the interdependent/dialectical self is a broader construct than our relational-self construct, which focuses particularly on the role of significant others (cf. Saribay & Andersen, 2007).

The second major difference lies in the fact that since the independent/interdependent self-construal and linear/dialectical beliefs were introduced to explain cross-national differences in behavior, the theories stipulate broad emotional, motivational, and cognitive processes that differentiate between cultures that emphasize one self-construal set of beliefs or the other. For example, Heine and his colleagues suggest that the need for positive self-regard is not universal and, instead, argue that self-criticism and self-improvement are the primary self-evaluative motives in Japan, which is an interdependent culture (Heine, Lehman, Markus, & Kitayama, 1999; see also Boucher, 2010). According to this view, Japanese signal their commitment to their relationship partners and groups by being vigilant to their own flaws, striving for self-improvement, and persevering in response to obstacles. Being aware of shortcomings informs one where efforts to improve the self need to be directed so as to secure the approval of others and, by implication, to maintain relationship and group harmony.

By the same token, linear versus dialectical beliefs have been linked to broad cultural differences in perception, memory, categorization, prediction, and reasoning (Nisbett et al., 2001; Spencer-Rodgers, Williams, & Peng, 2010). For example, cultures that privilege dialectical beliefs are more likely to prefer a compromise approach to reasoning about contradiction, such that both sides of an apparent contradiction can hold some truth; on the other hand, cultures in which linear beliefs are emphasized adopt a polarization strategy in the face of contradiction by placing faith in one side and discounting the other (Peng & Nisbett, 1999).

In contrast, although we argue that thoughts, feelings, and motives associated with significant others are stored as part of relational selves, we do not assume any singular, overarching kind of thinking or motive associated with relational selves beyond a basic motivation to connect to others (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

The above differences notwithstanding, research connecting relational selves and culture exists. For example, English and Chen (2007) examined differences in the consistency of relational selves across different contexts, as well as within the same context over time, among East Asian Americans compared with European Americans. Consistent with work suggesting that individuals of East Asian descent exhibit lower self-concept consistency (e.g., Cousins, 1989; Spencer-Rodgers, Boucher, Peng, & Wang, 2009) and are especially likely to tailor the self to different relationships, East Asian Americans showed less consistency in their self ratings across different relationship contexts than did European Americans. In other words, East Asian Americans are especially likely to form distinct relational selves. However, when consistency in the self was defined in if-then terms—that is, in terms of consistency within the same context across time, rather than consistency across different contexts—East Asian Americans and European Americans showed similarly high levels of consistency. Boucher (2011b) found a similar pattern of results in high scorers on a measure of differences in the emphasis on holism, change, and contradiction in one's self-beliefs (the Dialectical Self Scale [DSS]; Spencer-Rodgers et al., 2011).

In a follow-up set of studies, English and Chen (2011) showed that inconsistency in the self-concept across different relationship contexts was linked to lower subjective authenticity and relationship quality for European Americans, but not East Asian Americans. However, inconsistency within the same relationship context over time showed similar negative associations with these outcomes in both groups. Similarly, for low-DSS scorers, inconsistency across relationships was associated with less subjective well-being, less self-concept certainty, and less felt authenticity. Among high-DSS individuals, these negative relations were significantly attenuated (Boucher, 2011a). Overall, these studies suggest that work on relational selves and culture can be integrated in interesting ways.

#### RELATIONAL SELVES AND GENDER

Considerable research, based mainly on North American samples, has shown that women define

themselves in terms of their close relationships more than men do (e.g., Cross & Madson, 1997; Gabriel & Gardner, 1999). Consistent with this research, studies have shown that women also score higher on the Relational-Interdependent Self-Construal (RISC) Scale (Cross, Bacon, & Morris, 2000), which indexes individual differences in the extent to which people view their self as defined by their relationships. Scoring high on the RISC Scale implies that one's thoughts, feelings, goals, and behaviors are especially influenced by one's relationships. For example, relative to low scorers on the RISC Scale, high scorers are more likely to consider the needs and opinions of significant others when making decisions, and they are judged as more open and responsive by their interaction partners (Cross et al., 2000).

How does the RISC construct, along with evidence for gender differences in the degree to which the self is defined in relational terms, relate to our theory? The RISC approach and our theory are fundamentally different in that the former was specifically developed to capture individual differences in defining the self in relational terms, whereas our theory assumes that, although people vary in both the number of relational selves they have and the content of their relational selves, all people—men and women alike—possess relational selves, and these relational selves influence their thoughts, feelings, goals, and behaviors.

In addition, unlike our theory of the relational self, knowing a person's score on the RISC Scale does not provide any information on the precise content (e.g., goals, evaluations) of the person's selves in relation to his or her significant others, nor does it allow one to predict which of the person's relational self-aspects are likely to be elicited when a particular significant-other representation is activated. Finally, according to Cross et al. (2000), for high RISC people, "representations of important relationships and roles share the self-space with abstract traits, abilities, and preferences" (p. 791). In other words, the RISC construct connotes the incorporation of significant others into the self-concept, whereas our relational-self construct focuses on the self *in relation to* significant others, regardless of whether or to what degree aspects of others have been incorporated into one's self-concept.

Despite these differences, the RISC construct and our theory can be integrated. For example, research has shown that the effect of activating a significant-other representation, and presumably the associated relational self, on perceivers'

self-confidence, defined as perceivers' confidence in and comfort with who they are, varies as a function of perceivers' RISC scores (Gabriel, Renaud, & Tippin, 2007). Specifically, people who score high on the RISC Scale, or who were manipulated to hold a relational-interdependent self-construal, report greater self-confidence after the priming of a significant other. Because high RISC people (or those manipulated to hold such a self-construal) define themselves in relational terms, bringing to mind relational selves by activating a significant-other representation should increase their self-confidence. Overall, then, theory and research on the RISC construct, along with gender differences in the relational interdependent self-construal, are distinct from our work on relational selves, but the two bodies of work can nevertheless be integrated in interesting ways.

### Future Directions

Research on the relational self has grown tremendously over the past two decades, but many important avenues for future inquiry remain to be explored. In this section, we consider three broad directions for future research. The first involves obtaining a better understanding when transference and associated relational self-effects are most likely to occur by examining moderating variables and new kinds of triggering cues for transference. The second direction involves considering the role of social identities in transference and relational-self effects. A final direction involves the role of relational selves in well-being.

### *Eliciting Transference: Moderating Variables and Triggering Cues*

Although considerable research reveals that the elicitation of transference via the activation of a significant-other representation shapes a broad range of interpersonal and intrapersonal processes, recent findings suggest that transference and related phenomena may be moderated by a number of variables. We review these findings and then suggest new directions for research on moderators of transference. From there, we turn to a discussion of triggering cues for transference, reviewing extant research and suggesting new avenues of research on this topic.

#### MODERATING VARIABLES

Building on the notion that people are more likely to rely on existing schemas when cognitive resources are low, researchers have shown that transference

effects, as assessed by representation-derived inferences, are more likely to occur during times of circadian mismatch—that is, when people who prefer daytime activity are tested in the evening, and when people who prefer nighttime activity are tested in the morning, relative to times of circadian match (Kruglanski & Pierro, 2008). This finding most likely reflects reduced cognitive resources during times of circadian mismatch, and the accompanying increase in reliance on existing schemas, such as schemas of significant others. In a related vein, Pierro and Kruglanski (2008) found that people who have a high need for cognitive closure, which refers to the desire for “a firm answer to a question, any firm answer as compared to confusion and/or ambiguity” (Kruglanski, 2004, p. 6), are more likely to make inferences based on an activated significant-other representation. This finding presumably reflects the tendency of people with a high need for cognitive closure to “seize and freeze” on judgments derived from highly accessible schemas—again, such as significant-other representations.

Other work has examined moderators of the effects of activating a significant-other representation on goal pursuit. As described earlier, activating a significant-other representation elicits the pursuit of goals associated with the other (e.g., Kraus & Chen, 2009; Shah, 2003a). Morrison, Wheeler, and Smeesters (2007) examined whether such effects vary depending on whether the goal reflects perceivers' own personal goals or goals that significant others hold for them. When perceivers shared a goal that a significant other held for them, activating the representation of this significant other led them to pursue this goal. But when perceivers did not share their significant other's goal for them, activating the representation of this significant other led to pursuit of the goal in question only if perceivers were high in self-monitoring or the need to belong—in other words, only in people who were strongly motivated to respond to social cues.

Overall, this research on moderators of transference and related effects represents useful first steps toward a better understanding of when transference and relational-self effects are and are not likely to emerge. However, there remain many possible directions for future work. For instance, the research on circadian mismatch implies that any variable that is linked to reduced cognitive resources can make transference and relational-self effects more probable, including situational factors such as time pressure (e.g., Kruglanski & Webster, 1996). At the same time, people cannot necessarily make



transference *less likely* to occur simply by consciously trying. In fact, the effect can be prevented using a regulatory strategy, adopted in advance, that operates automatically when relevant cues are encountered (Przybylinski, & Andersen, in press). Using implementation intention—*if* significant-other resemblance is encountered, *then* the individual will ignore the resemblance—can prevent the representation-derived inference effect of transference, whereas this effect persists when one simply adopts a goal intention to ignore the resemblance (without *if-then* framing). Hence, the most effective strategies for preventing transference may be those that capitalize on its automatic nature.

Dispositional and situational factors linked to attachment theory may also moderate the transference effect. For example, some research shows that attachment security is associated with less preference for cognitive closure (Mikulincer, 1997), suggesting less reliance on existing cognitive structures such as significant-other representations in social perception. Perhaps, then, attachment security moderates the likelihood of transference and associated effects. In a newer vein, research has shown that exposure to a subliminal threat (e.g., exposure to the word “failure”) increases the accessibility of perceivers’ representations of their attachment figures (Mikulincer, Gillath, & Shaver, 2002). The implications of this research are potentially broad because they include that threat contexts set into motion the attachment system, consistent with a core tenet of attachment theory. However, just focusing on the notion that attachment-figure representations become more accessible in threatening contexts suggests that threat may be a moderator of transference and relational-self effects, at least when it comes to the activation of representations of significant others who serve as attachment figures.

Finally, diverse lines of research have shown that threats to typical sources of meaning (e.g., certainty, belonging) lead people to find ways to regain a sense of meaning (Heine, Proulx, & Vohs, 2006). For example, when people are induced to think about their death, feel uncertain, or think about isolation from friends and family members, they restore meaning by increasing self-concept clarity—specifically, by demonstrating more polarized self-knowledge and responding more quickly and consistently to self-descriptive attributes (Boucher, 2011a). Other work suggests that people reduce self-uncertainty by expressing minority opinions, particularly about issues that express their values (Morrison & Wheeler, 2010). Finally, female (but

not male) participants who think about their death are more likely to include relational self-aspects in their spontaneous self-concept, relative to females in a control condition (Boucher, 2011b). To the degree that a given relational self serves as a source of self-certainty, affording people a clear, consistent, and coherent sense of self, the above findings suggest that self-uncertainty should increase the likelihood of the activation of this relational self and its associated significant-other representation.

Along related lines, research has shown that activating the representation of a loved significant other in a transference encounter indirectly activates the belief system *shared with* this other (vs. one’s own or the other’s distinct beliefs), leading the perceiver to turn toward these shared beliefs with the anticipated partner and react against threats to these beliefs with attempts to restore meaning (Przybylinski & Andersen, 2012).

#### TRIGGERING CUES

As described above, although significant-other representations can be activated in the absence of any triggering cues—by virtue of their chronic accessibility—the presence of triggering cues increases the likelihood that a significant-other representation is activated and used (e.g., Andersen et al., 1995). The majority of research on transference has relied on applicability-based cues in a new target person to trigger transference—that is, participants are presented with descriptors derived from ones that they generated earlier to describe a significant other. Although perceivers in daily life are rarely exposed to written descriptors denoting features of their significant others, they may be exposed to cues in a new person that connote such features (e.g., the assertive behavior of a new person may remind a perceiver of the assertiveness of a particular significant other, thereby increasing the likelihood of activating the corresponding representation of this person).

What other kinds of cues might trigger transference? Recent research has examined facial cues in a new person as potential triggers (Kraus & Chen, 2010). Drawing on theory and research on face perception, Kraus and Chen hypothesized that transference may be elicited on the basis of the resemblance of a new person’s facial features to those of a perceiver’s significant other. Supporting this, they found that manipulating an upcoming interaction partner’s facial features to resemble those of participants’ significant other led participants to make inferences about and evaluations of the partner that reflected those associated with the significant other.

Participants undergoing transference also exhibited shifts in their own self-concept, describing themselves more like the relevant relational self.

This research raises questions about other kinds of physical-appearance-based triggering cues for transference. For example, do cues in a new person's body—such as the person's physique, height, or gait—enhance the likelihood of transference? More broadly, it may be worthwhile to examine cues involving modalities other than vision, such as auditory or olfactory cues. For example, could the sound or tone of a new person's voice, or the whiff of a new person's perfume, activate the representation of a significant other who has a similar voice or odor?

Earlier, we mentioned that interaction dynamics in the form of interpersonal expectations can serve as activation cues for relational schemas (e.g., Pierce & Lydon, 1998). It would be useful to apply such findings to the transference realm by examining whether cues associated with the relational patterns typically experienced with a significant other can trigger transference. The research examining interpersonal roles in transference (Baum & Andersen, 1999), described earlier, is a step in this direction insofar as occupying interpersonal roles, such as authority-novice roles, entails engaging in a particular interaction dynamic. However, this research did not examine whether an interpersonal role associated with a significant-other relationship in-and-of-itself can trigger transference, nor did it examine interaction dynamics as triggers. For example, if a new person responds to a perceiver's opinions in a manner similar to how a significant other typically responds—for example, the new person belittles the perceiver's opinions—can this interaction dynamic increase the likelihood that the corresponding significant-other representation is activated?

### *Social Identities and Transference*

Social identities refer to people's membership in and sense of belonging to different social groups (e.g., ethnicity, religion). In initial work on this topic, it was hypothesized that information about social identities may be stored as part of relational selves. For instance, the fact that one shares the same social identity as a significant other may be stored as part of the relational self with this particular other. As such, this social-identity information should be activated along with the relevant significant-other representation in a transference encounter (Saribay & Andersen, 2007).

Supporting this hypothesis, participants in the Own S-O condition assume that their upcoming partner was a member of the same ethnic group as the relevant significant other, even though there were no ethnicity-relevant cues in the features describing this partner. In other words, the ethnic category descriptive of the significant other was activated and applied to the anticipated partner in transference, but not in the Yoked S-O condition. In addition, immediately after learning about the partner, Own S-O participants showed greater bias against other ethnic groups if the relevant significant other lacked an ethnically diverse social network, compared with both participants in the Yoked S-O condition and to Own S-O participants whose significant others had more diverse social networks. This latter finding reflects intergroup bias and indicates that perceivers' social identities, as well as some knowledge pertaining to who the significant other affiliates with (i.e., his or her social network), appear to be activated in transference involving a significant other who shares their group membership.

In a different but related vein, research has shown that the positive expectations, attitudes, and behaviors that characterize relational selves associated with positively evaluated significant others can be harnessed in intergroup interactions to improve intergroup relations. Specifically, Mikulincer and Shaver (2001) found that participants exposed to positive significant-other relationship primes evaluated outgroup members more favorably than control participants, presumably because the former group was reminded of positive relational experiences and thus felt safe and secure enough to be warm toward members of outgroups.

In a related set of studies using the transference paradigm described earlier, recall that participants in the Own S-O condition who engaged in a transference encounter involving a positively regarded significant other evaluated their anticipated partner positively—in line with the positive tone of the relevant significant-other representation—even when the partner was described as belonging to a different social group than the significant other and the participant (Kraus et al., 2010; cf. Saribay & Andersen, 2007). Similar to Mikulincer and Shaver's (2001) findings, this research suggests that positively toned aspects of relational selves can be used in social identity contexts as tools for reducing negative biases toward outgroup members. Additional research needs to explore and better understand this important possibility. For example, perhaps the likelihood of transference occurring across group boundaries

is lessened among individuals who perceive the relevant group membership to be a highly central feature of their relationship with their significant other. Another important question is whether transference can minimize negative evaluations of outgroups in general, or whether the transference effect impacts only responses to the one resembling target, as shown in the research described above. Perhaps over time, by shaping inferences and evaluations of individual outgroup members, transference can lead to changes in evaluations of group categories as a whole.

### *Relational Selves and Well-Being*

Finally, we consider how relational selves may influence well-being. In initial work on this important question, we tested the potential use of relational selves as a self-affirmational resource (Chen & Boucher, 2008). According to self-affirmation theory (Steele, 1988), people can defend themselves from threats to their self-worth by affirming an important aspect of themselves that is unrelated to the domain of threat. We proposed that relational selves can serve as a self-affirmational resource in the same way by deflecting a threat delivered in an unrelated domain, especially for individuals who view relational selves as central to their self-concept. In line with this prediction, we found that both women and people who score high on the RISC Scale—for whom relational aspects of the self are especially self-defining—were more likely to emphasize relational self-aspects after receiving failure feedback on an academic competence test relative to men and low scorers on the RISC Scale; that is, they were more likely to spontaneously use their relational selves to affirm themselves in the face of threat.

This set of studies also showed that relational self-affirmation repairs the blow to self-esteem that often occurs after a threat. Specifically, in one study, high- and low-scoring RISC participants received threatening feedback (or not) and were induced to affirm a relational self-aspect (or not). Threatened high-scoring RISC participants had higher implicit self-esteem (i.e., nonconscious or automatic evaluation of the self) if they were induced to affirm a relational self-aspect, relative to their low-scoring RISC counterparts. Indeed, their implicit self-esteem was higher than that of high-scoring RISC participants who were not threatened at all. Even threatened low-scoring RISC participants who were induced to affirm a relational self-aspect scored relatively high on the implicit self-esteem measure (especially compared with threatened low-scoring RISC

participants who did not affirm), although the boost they received did not match their high-scoring RISC counterparts. This research suggests, then, that although low-scoring RISC individuals may not spontaneously affirm relational selves following threatening feedback in the same way as high-scoring RISC individuals do, exhorting even low-scoring RISC individuals to do so could serve a self-esteem repair function.

On a more basic level, one fairly straightforward way to foster well-being via relational selves may be to encourage the activation and use of representations of positively regarded significant others. As described above, when such significant-other representations are activated, not only are self-evaluations more positive (e.g., Hinkley & Andersen, 1996), but also perceivers' expectations about, and responses toward, others are similarly positively toned (e.g., Andersen et al., 1996). Future research might focus on identifying interventions that increase the everyday accessibility of such representations.

### **Summary and Closing Remarks**

In this chapter, we described a social-cognitive model of transference that serves as the basis for our theory of the relational self. From there, we laid out the key ideas of our relational-self theory, followed by a description of a wide range of illustrative empirical tests of our theory. We argue that relational selves embody the cognitive, emotional, motivational, and behavioral tendencies exhibited in relation to significant others. Because relational selves are stored in memory and linked to significant-other representations, when a significant-other representation is activated in a transference encounter with a new person, the perceiver not only comes to perceive and evaluate the new person through the lens of the relevant significant-other representation but also becomes in part the self he or she typically is when relating to the significant other, only now with the new person.

Having presented our theory and evidence supporting it, we addressed several questions and issues likely to be raised about our work, including the role of relational selves in an individual's personality and the similarities and differences between our relational-self theory and other theoretical perspectives concerned with the self and significant others. Finally, we outlined several broad directions for future research, such as research focused on better understanding when transference is and is not likely to be triggered. To conclude, judging from the rapidly growing body of theory and evidence on

relational selves, it seems clear that relational selves are a highly influential component of an individual's self-concept, one that is likely to be a topic of great interest for self researchers for decades to come.

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