

Jonathan S. Gore
Research Statement

My research examines the self, specifically how it can guide human thought and behavior. Although my focus has been in this particular area, the implications of this research reach into several other subdisciplines such as motivation, social cognition, relationships, and culture. By investigating the interplay of the self with these other facets of social psychological research, I can reach a broad audience as well as collaborate with others across fields. To enhance my skills as a researcher, I obtained a Statistics minor from Iowa State University (one of the top ranked Statistics Departments in the country), and took several other courses on multivariate statistics and structural equation modeling, which I have used extensively in my work. My research laboratory currently consists of myself, three graduate students, and seven undergraduate students, all of which help with data collection and analysis as well as the development and implementation of my three main research programs: the self and social cognition, close relationships and goal motivation, and self-concept change.

The Self and Social Cognition

A substantial amount of my research on the self has explored the consequences of having a highly *relational self-construal*, which is a self-definition based on one's close relationships. This work has been part of a collaborative effort with Dr. Susan Cross at Iowa State University since 1999. Having its roots in Markus and Kitayama's (1991) cross-cultural research on the independent and interdependent self-construals, this concept was developed as a way to explain the differences in the thought and behavior of men and women in Western societies (see Cross & Madson, 1997). Since then, research on the relational self-construal has expanded to become an invaluable contribution to the self literature, resulting in several top-tier publications. For example, this research shows that people who integrate close others into their self-definition have well-organized cognitive networks for relationship information, and encode and organize information about others in terms of their close relationships (Cross, Morris, & Gore, 2002).

This research also challenges some established theories that assumed most members of Western cultures defined themselves independently. Time and again, our research shows that the relational self-construal moderates several associations between cognitive structures and well-being that have long been considered fundamental to optimal human functioning. For example, we found that people with a highly relational self-construal show less concern than low relationals for acting consistently across situations (Cross, Gore, & Morris, 2003), and for having goals that are integrated with other goals (Gore & Cross, under review). In contrast, we found that people with a highly relational self-construal show more concern than low relationals in acting consistently within each of their relationships (Cross & Gore, manuscript in preparation), and exhibit more win-win perceptions than low relationals between themselves and a close other when interests conflict (Gore & Cross, manuscript in preparation). In addition, we found that people with a highly relational self-construal are able to foster and maintain intimacy between themselves and a new roommate through deeply personal disclosures (Gore, Cross, & Morris, 2006). They also have a more positive outlook on a task depending on the label given to it; high relationals have more positive outlooks on the task when they believe that the activity corresponds to relationship-enhancement as opposed to when they believe the activity enhances skills for a career (Gore & Cross, manuscript in preparation).

I plan to follow-up several of these studies in future collaborations with Susan Cross, particularly studies that involve the interactions of the relational self-construal with goal integration and task labeling. Future tests of the goal integration interaction effect will include longitudinal data to determine the long-term effects on well-being. Future tests of the task labeling work will include the manipulation of labels across several different tasks. I also hope to test this hypothesis using cross-cultural data. I expect that several of the findings found among high relationals may also be evident in non-Western samples.

Close Relationships and Goal Motivation

Building upon the relational self-construal findings mentioned above, much of my own research explores the degree to which close others are involved in the pursuit of goals. Several theorists suggest that the best reasons for pursuing goals are those that enhance a person's autonomy (i.e., "because I want to"). I argue that people can also pursue goals for reasons that are integrated with close others' interests, and therefore are in the interest of one's close relationships. While some may suggest that integrating close others goals into one's own cannot be intrinsically rewarding to the self, my research has shown that pursuing goals in the interest of one's relationships can predict enhanced effort, goal attainment and satisfaction just as well as pursuing goals for oneself.

I define *relationally-autonomous reasons* (or *RARs*) as reasons for pursuing goals that reflect the interests of both oneself and a close other (i.e., "we're in this together"). In a series of structural equation models, my research shows that a) people with a highly relational self-construal tend to pursue their goals for relationally-autonomous reasons, and that b) RARs have a direct effect on the amount of effort exerted toward the goal. RARs also have indirect effects on purpose in life, goal progress, and expectations of sustained effort in the future. These associations were significant controlling for *personally-autonomous reasons* (or *PARs*, which reflect the degree to which the goal promotes one's own autonomy) and the amount of support from others. The ability of RARs to predict positive goal outcomes has been replicated using cross-cultural samples (Gore, Cross, & Kanagawa, revise/resubmit) and using longitudinal designs (Gore & Cross, 2006).

Currently, my research assistants and I are examining the influence of RARs in the pursuit of self-improvement goals, using a variety of research designs. In January, 2007, I submitted an application to the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) to aid in data collection for this project. This application is currently under review and a decision will be made in October, 2007. We are also exploring the effects of RARs on academic goals, and for particular types of people (based on gender and attachment style). We have also begun to examine the influence of RARs in advertisements to investigate how incorporating the interests of close relationships can persuade people to donate to charities. The results of these studies will be presented at both regional (Kentucky Psychological Association) and national conferences (Society of Personality and Social Psychology) over the next two years. Over the course of my career, I plan to investigate the extent to which RARs can work in a variety of clinical and health programs.

Future tests of these hypotheses will include longitudinal data from both Western and Eastern samples (in collaboration with Dr. David Dalsky in Kyoto, Japan). In addition, I plan to obtain assessments of RARs from both the participants and close others to investigate the degree to which relational reasons are shared by relationship partners. Through these assessments, I can determine the degree to which pursuing goals for relationally-autonomous reasons can encourage pursuit for the same reasons by a close other (i.e., one person's RARs predict another's RARs, and vice versa). I believe that identifying the extent to which RARs are effective across situations and people is an imperative contribution to the self and motivation literature.

Self-Concept Change

The primary purpose of this research is to provide a meaningful addition to the self-concept change literature, particularly that which focuses on relocation. I define the self-concept as a hierarchical, multi-faceted cognitive structure that is composed of four self-domains: the individual self, the relational self, the group self, and the ecological self. As the self-concept is composed of various elements that reflect one's social and physical environment, changes in the environment may lead to changes in the self-concept. The first step in this process is to determine the best indicator of overall change. I have found that a single indicator of change can be obtained with an intraclass correlation coefficient (*ICC*), which summarizes the degree of change that has occurred in a person's overall profile. This new method for calculating change will be proposed in a paper with two collaborators (Gore, Cross, & Russell, manuscript in preparation).

A second purpose of this research is to better understand how changes in one's environment can change the self-concept, and which of these environmental factors contribute the most to change. Preliminary analyses has found that the process through which most change occurs is through changes in one's close relationships, and through changes in one's group memberships (Gore, 2005). This research has also provided some evidence that individual difference variables, such as expectations of change, are involved in the process, and that these individual differences are important components of a model of self-concept change. These results suggest that self-concept change during the transition to college can mostly be understood through the change in one's social environment and that most of the change results from adding aspects from that environment onto the self rather than from the environment discouraging expression of old self-aspects.

Future examination of these effects will first investigate the change process using a computer-based assessment of the self-concept, which will allow me to obtain both their ratings (self-descriptiveness) and their response latencies (certainty) to each item. Over time, I will obtain assessments over the internet so that I can broaden my research beyond college students. Throughout the course of my career, I plan to expand this research into other instances of relocation such as moving to another country for work or school. I would also like to investigate instances of dynamic change in one's environment, whether they are positive changes such as marriage or the birth of a child, or negative changes such as imprisonment or divorce.

Currently, I have started to design programs of research with other researchers to examine the outcomes of change. For example, Dr. Jerry Palmer of Eastern Kentucky University and I will examine the influence of personality change on occupational citizenship behaviors (*OCBs*), which is defined as any helpful behavior that extends beyond one's job description. Dr. Virgil Zeigler-Hill of the University of Southern Mississippi and I will examine longitudinal change in self-esteem as indicative of a narcissistic personality, and therefore a potential cause of aggressive behavior. By expanding this research to include various contexts of change, I plan to generalize my model of self-concept change across people and situations.

Other Future Directions

Cross-cultural psychology typically examines differences between Western (e.g., United States) and Eastern cultures (e.g., Japan). Recently, researchers have begun to examine differences within cultures, particularly regions that emphasize individualistic values (i.e., choice, personal achievement, self-expression) versus regions that emphasize collectivistic values (i.e., group harmony, enhancement of one's family, self-sacrifice). These differences typically result from geographic and economic barriers within a culture, and I believe that the differences between Western and Eastern cultures will correspond to differences between Western and Eastern regions in Kentucky. Thus, I am developing a program of researchers in collaboration with faculty, graduate students, and undergraduate students at Eastern Kentucky University to examine these differences. I believe that a cross-cultural perspective on these regional differences is necessary to understand differences among our students, among Kentuckians, and among members of American culture. It is also in line with the current trend in cross-cultural psychology, and has the potential to make a significant impact on psychological literature.