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IMPLICATIONS OF GENDER DYSPHORIA ON GENDER SCHEMA AND SOCIAL  
COGNITIVE THEORIES OF GENDER DEVELOPMENT

A Thesis presented in partial fulfillment of requirements  
for the degree of Master of Arts.

Department of Philosophy and Religion  
University of Mississippi

Beau Bourgeois  
May 2022

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## ABSTRACT

This project considers the implications of gender dysphoria under two prominent theories of gender development, gender schema theory (GST) and social cognitive theory (SCT). Gender dysphoria is considered a significant motivator for transgender behavior and is presented in the DSM-5 as the experience of a strong desire, or as primarily affective in nature. GST and SCT differ in a number of ways, most notably in the role affect plays for gender development and behavior motivations. The former places primary emphasis on environmental influences, leaving the role of affect in question, while the latter posits gender behavior and motivation as an interaction of three sources: behavior, environment and cognitive/personal factors, which among them include affective elements. However, the importance GST places on self-concept and its assimilation with gender schemas offers a potential source of affect common in later self-concept literature. As well, studies looking comparatively at academic performance applications of self-concept and self-efficacy, both crucial to gender and agency in GST and SCT respectively, found self-concept researchers treated affect and cognition as co-contributors to perceptions of self and motivation, while self-efficacy researchers viewed affect as a consequence of cognitive inputs, and kept cognitive/affective components distinct. Despite these and other differences, the constructs also share some similarities. We conclude in line with the findings of Bong et al. that self-efficacy may be incorporated as part of the cognitive/affective structure of self-concept, but further add doing so may offer the opportunity to apply similar research methodologies used in academic performance research, to the research of gender performance. To that end, we consider a possible approach utilizing gender structure theory to identify the interactional aspects of cis

and transgender performance that may be useful in clarifying the role of affect in motivating gender performance more broadly.

## DEDICATION

For my Mother and Father,  
Memere and Pepere,  
Claire and Emmanuel Bourgeois,  
Louis Bourgeois,  
and my wife Robin.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to express my deepest appreciation to my committee members Dr. Deborah Mower, Dr. Donovan Wishon, and Dr. Bryan Smyth, for their help and input on this thesis. Also I would extend that appreciation to those I have gotten to know over the years in the Philosophy department and have helped make it a great experience.

A special thanks the University of Mississippi for their commitment to education which encourages staff employees, such as myself, to improve themselves and in effect the character of the university.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

As awareness of the transgender community has continued to grow it has revealed many challenges that being trans and living among dominant cisgender traditions entails. The scope of these challenges are perhaps reflected in how the moniker “transgender” has expanded to accommodate not only those whose gender identity lies counter to their sex, but also those who consider themselves among other labels, gender nonbinary or genderqueer (“Understanding Gender Identities”). Along with these many challenges, the unique circumstances of transgender also presents a valuable opportunity to reexamine theories on offer that purport to explain how gender differences are developed, maintained and expressed. When considering that the greater emphasis on transgender activism and lifestyle is a phenomenon primarily situated within the 21<sup>st</sup> century, there is a good chance such theories were formed during periods when transgender expression was more marginalized (Morris). And so it is reasonable to suppose that with greater awareness and increased inclusion has also come a deeper understanding into transgender motivations which any theory of gender development would seemingly need to account for.

The aim of this paper is to consider a couple of commonly referenced theories of gender development, mainly gender schema theory (GST) as proposed by Sandra Bem and social cognitive theory (SCT) conceived by Albert Bandura, in light of the strong affective, or emotional, motivation that gender dysphoria is thought to have on transgender behavior (Cuncic; “What Is Gender Dysphoria?”). We have chosen GST and SCT since, in addition to being well-cited, these views of gender development have, in some cases, served a generative role in theories that are beyond the topic of gender alone (Cuncic; Starr & Zurbriggen 566, 568). We

will look closely at the analogous constructs of *self-concept* and *self-efficacy* and how their usage within gender schema and social cognitive theory, respectively, are considered paramount in explaining distinctions of gender behavior (Bong & Skaalvik 140; Markus & Oyserman 100; “Social Cognitive Theory” 47, 50, 58-60). Work by Hazel Markus and colleagues will help to elucidate the cognitive/affective makeup of self-concept and the process of how it becomes imbued by gender, while the observations of Owen Flanagan regarding gender difference studies appear to underscore the importance of self-concept to gender expression. Finally, papers by Mimi Bong and colleagues will aid our analysis by showing the similarities and differences between self-concept and self-efficacy and give insight into the differential role affect plays in each case.

Ultimately, we find that because GST places environmental influences at the center of gender development, it is SCT that appears better suited to account for the largely physiological influences of gender dysphoria. Caveats, however, must be granted in each case. First, Bem specifies in GST that schematic organization of gender is integrated with the construction of self-concept (Bem 604). We find in the subsequent works of Markus and colleagues and Bong et al. a consistent view of self-concept as having both cognitive and affective components that work together in perceptions of self and motivation (Bong & Clark 139; Bong & Skaalvik 10; Markus & Oyserman 101, Markus & Wurf 315). By adopting such a cognitive/affective framework, the integration of self-concept within GST may mean it fares better, after all, in explaining gender dysphoric motivation. Second, as Bong et al. present, the practical application of each self-construct in academic performance studies show how affective states were treated by self-efficacy researchers as a discrete result of the cognitive factors, not as a constituent part of self-perceptions, or performance motivation, that typified research using self-concept (Bong and

Clark 145-146, 149; Bong and Skaalvik 13-14). We conclude in line with findings of Bong et al., that self-efficacy could be incorporated as contributor to the cognitive element within the structure of self-concept and that doing so may offer an opportunity to apply similar research methodologies used in, for instance, academic performance research, to studies of gender performance. To that end, we close by roughly considering one possible approach utilizing gender structure theory to identify the practical aspects of gender from the cultural milieu with the aim of clarifying the role affect has in motivating gender-linked performance more broadly.

## 2. TRANSGENDER AND GENDER DYSPHORIA

Considerations of transgender experience often highlight how gender identity, gender expression and biological sex align or diverge within the individual (“What Is Gender Expression?”). Although intersex conditions are thought to make up anywhere from .018% to 1.7% of live births, for the majority of people biological sex is categorized as either a male or female phenotype (“Intersex,” Priedt; Sax). Gender, on the other hand, is largely considered a malleable social construction where gender identity, biological sex, and gender expression may align or diverge in any number of ways. As such, these elements may precipitate situations where individuals are phenotypically one sex, identify as the opposite gender, and express or behave in ways that are atypical of both male or female. Since transgender has the potential to apply to such a wide spectrum of possible sex, gender, and transgender identities and expressions, our analysis here will be purposely limited to only those instances where transgender identity/expression is assumed to be primarily motivated by the experience of gender dysphoria. Such an approach obviously serves to maintain the scope of this paper, but may also focus attention on the segment of the transgender community where the options for treatment could have the greatest impact on happiness and well-being. Limiting in this way, however, is not meant to suggest transgender identity and gender dysphoria are synonymous, or to deny that transgender identity could not, or should not, be expressed or considered legitimate in the absence of gender dysphoria.

Common to the descriptions found in literature attempting to relate the experience of gender dysphoria is a profound, undeniable feeling of being born in the wrong body, or in the

wrong skin, or alternatively, as a strong distress or anxiety that is associated with their socially ascribed gender and its prescriptions (Cirbus; Engdahl; “Cherry: What Is Gender Dysphoria?”). In an effort to remove the stigma associated with transgender identity, in its most recent version of the DSM the American Psychiatric Association (APA) chose to replace the term “gender identity disorder” with “gender dysphoria”.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, the DSM-5 also modified the criteria for diagnosing gender dysphoria by centering it more around the distress and discomfort that individuals commonly report, and less around issues of identity (Cherry, “GLAAD,” “FAQ about Transgender”). As it stands, the DSM-5 lists 14 total criteria for diagnosing gender dysphoria across adults, adolescents, and children. Of these 14 criteria, 10 of them primarily depend on the existence of a long-lasting “strong desire” or “strong preference” to be rid of one’s primary and/or secondary sex characteristics, and identify or be treated as the opposite gender (“APA: What is Gender Dysphoria?”). The APA further stipulates that adults and adolescents ought to have experienced any two out of their six total indicators for a minimum of six months, while children should meet six out of their respective eight, one of which must include a, “strong desire to be of the other gender,” also for a period of at least six months (Ibid.).<sup>2</sup> Since these new criteria appear largely aligned with the commonly reported subjective, or experiential “wrong body” accounts of how gender dysphoria presents, and are clearly affective in nature, it seems reasonable to believe they can aid in our analysis of its implications for either gender schema or social cognitive theories (Engdahl, 267)

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<sup>1</sup> Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders most recent version was released in 2013.

<sup>2</sup> We assume a fairly strict 3-way correspondence between the terms “strong desire” and “strong preference” as given by the DSM-5, the derivations of the term “affect” as given by GST, SCT, and self-concept theory, and the actualized physiological/interoceptive presentation of gender dysphoria. Of the remaining 4 APA gender dysphoria criteria left out, 3 still arguably correspond to affective motivations (“strong dislike,” “strong rejection,” “strong conviction”) and only one appears to be a cognitive contribution (“marked incongruence between one’s experienced/expressed gender and primary and/or secondary sex characteristics”) (“APA: What is Gender Dysphoria?”).

### 3. GENDER DEVELOPMENT BY WAY OF GENDER SCHEMA THEORY

Cognitive schemas as originally presented by Piaget can be thought of as the basic building blocks for our knowledge of the world. Schemas organize and give cohesiveness to the things we know about our environments and the meaningful behavior it elicits (“Piaget’s Stages”). Kohlberg, being influenced by Piaget, built on the latter’s work of moral stages by creating the influential work of cognitive development theory and was followed by Bem who, citing weaknesses in Kohlberg’s theory with respect to gender, developed gender schema theory in 1981 (Bem 601-602; “Kohlberg’s Theory;” Kavathatzopoulos).

Gender schema theory (GST) follows the general Piagetian definition of schemas as cognitive features that anticipate, organize and structure our incoming perceptual information into “schema-relevant terms” (Bem 603). Our disposition for schematic processing is taken to be inherent to processing networks of our brain and is used in the development of our gender identity and expression, and similarly in the construction of our conception of self (Bem 604). The disposition, however, is not attuned toward processing of only certain categories, but instead gender and self-concept are merely the most salient aspects of experience that are available for schematic encoding (Bem 603-604). Though Bem does not detail what terms outside of gender that the schematic organization of the self may involve, she stipulates that gender schema processing is, “itself derived from the sex-differentiated practices of the social community...a learned phenomenon and, hence ...neither inevitable nor unmodifiable” (603). That is, not only do the cultural expectations of gender act as the most salient variables we can use to satisfy our

predilection for schematic processing, but they also influence the ways in which schematic processing itself is done with regard to one's gender.

Our disposition for generic schematic processing allows, in principle, an equal hearing to any salient categories of organization, which permits Bem to turn her attention to the potential social explanations for why elements of gender become widely favored schematic terms. To determine what makes a particular category salient she gives us the following criteria:

[A] category will become a schema if: (a) the social context makes it the nucleus of a large associative network, that is, if the ideology and/or the practices of the culture construct an association between that category and a wide range of other attributes, behaviors, concepts, and categories; and (b) the social context assigns the category broad functional significance, that is, if a broad array of social institutions, norms, and taboos distinguishes between persons, behaviors, and attributes on the basis of this category (Bem 608).

The associative network refers to the cultural objects, symbols and behaviors that revolve around gender and come to make up the contents of the gender schema. From early on we are inundated with environmental cues and dictates of sex-appropriate behavior from sources such as our parents and peers, our speech (e.g. pronoun usage) and clothing choices, within our institutions and occupations, and within household divisions of labor (Bem 608-609). Each of these contribute to an associative network that instills fundamental behavioral differences between the sexes. Bem, however, places a greater importance on the functional significance, or the practical dimensions a category may garner as it sits within the cultural stipulations of the associative network. She tells us, "functional importance assigned by society to particular categories and distinctions animates their associated networks and gives these schemata priority and availability over others" (Bem 608). So, the extent to which gender dominates and shapes the cognitive, interactive, institutional, and cultural dimensions we are born into and must operate within, gives explanation to why it is the most salient category for schema formation.

Although we may now see how the differentiating mechanisms behind GST are the result of primarily social and environmental influences, the significance Bem places on the assimilation of gender and self-concept suggests the analysis may not be complete. The dearth of explanation regarding the integration of self-concept and gender, leaves us open to speculate on whether there may be other terms beside the environmental prescriptions of gender which could become part of our schematic organization of self. One approach that may help comes from a 2016 paper by Starr and Zurbriggen which discusses the multi-decade reach and impact of GST. Among other insights, their paper revealed that GST has appeared especially conducive to “theory bridging,” or the practice of integrating GST into aspects of different theories in order to extend their explanatory power (Starr & Zurbriggen 578).<sup>3</sup> In the same manner, theory bridging could be particularly useful to GST by offering a route for a more substantive view of the function, structure, and organization of the self construct. Accordingly, the upcoming section will look closer at research which appears to show how important self-concept is to gender expression and seems to offer a better explanation of its role in gender development than is found within GST alone.

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<sup>3</sup> Starr and Zurbriggen also found that while empirical support for GST is mixed, it remains frequently cited and its impact extends well outside the field of psychology (Starr & Zurbriggen 566, 568).

#### 4. THE ROLE OF SELF-CONCEPT IN GENDER DEVELOPMENT AND EXPRESSION

A particularly illustrative, as well as empirical, example of the importance of self-concept to gender expression comes from a meta-analysis done in 2000 by Jaffee and Hyde which looked at 113 studies testing the theory of gender moral orientations put forward by psychologist and ethicist Carol Gilligan.<sup>4</sup> Jaffee and Hyde's analysis found that although gender differences were unremarkable by most metrics related to moral reasoning, they remained significant when men and women were left to choose the types of dilemmas they wanted to talk about. (709, 719-720). Additional studies by Walker et al. and Wark et al. confirmed the findings of Jaffee and Hyde, but outside of self-reported dilemmas the results remained largely unresponsive of Gilligan's moral orientations.<sup>5</sup> Commenting on these mixed results, philosopher Owen Flanagan surmised that the research results which were largely unresponsive of gender differences were because the design did not allow for the expression of participant's self-concept. The reason, he concluded, was the use of impersonal, hypothetical dilemmas which elicit generic responses and effectively shut off avenues that participants might otherwise use to respond in gender specific ways (Flanagan 233). Self-concept, Flanagan tells us, is the necessary component in guiding the way

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<sup>4</sup> According to Gilligan, the male, or justice, orientation is cognitive, values duties, principles, universality, fairness, and places little authority on emotions. Care is the female orientation which values close relationships, beneficence, the needs of others, and emotional motivation (Flanagan 197-199)

<sup>5</sup> Lawrence J. Walker, Brian de Vries, and Shelly D Trevethan's 1987 study found that when talking about "real-life dilemmas," females were more apt to report personal-relationship conflicts eliciting a "response [care] orientation" and men reported more impersonal-relationship conflicts eliciting a "rights orientation" (856). Gillian R. Wark and Dennis L. Krebs 1996 study found females also more apt to report prosocial dilemmas, males more antisocial dilemmas, and that females chose to discuss more care-oriented dilemmas than males (Wark "Gender" 228).

men and women think about themselves, how they choose to live their lives, and ultimately influences the moral problems they consider worthy of remark.<sup>6</sup>

Self-concept is a perception of oneself constructed out of the experiences and interactions with environmental factors, and is thought responsible for mediating and regulating our thoughts, actions, emotions, and our general sense of reality. (Bong & Skaalvik 140; Markus & Oyserman 100). Environmental factors may also, in turn, be shaped by an individual's perceptions of themselves as they encounter relationships and social structures that may or may not reinforce the types of behavior they deem to be important (Bong & Clark 3, Markus & Oyserman 100) As given by Markus and Oyserman, men and women are fostered from infancy by a variety of divergent types of social interactions and experiences that continue throughout their lives and which inevitably become part of their conception of self (100-101, 108-110). Parents, even before the birth of a child, begin to structure its environment and anticipate interactions for their children in ways that, in most cases, follow cultural convention, and in doing so they provide ample terms for schematic organization and construction of the child's self-concept around the many facets of gender. (Bem 603; Markus & Oyserman 101) Such reliance on primarily environmental and socially based factors of influence are certainly consistent with Bem's inclusion of self-concept in GST. For instance, she tells us, "specifically, the theory [GST] proposes that sex typing results, in part, from the assimilation of the self-concept itself to the gender schema" and that the sources of differential gender behavior, "have cognitive primacy over many other social categories because the culture has made it so" (Bem 604, 608). As a

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<sup>6</sup> Researchers involved in these studies appeared to support Flanagan's view by interpreting gender differences in self-reported moral dilemmas as a function of situational differences in the types of problems each sex encounter (Jaffee 720; Walker 856; Wark "Gender" 229; Wark "Sources" 164).

result, gender becomes invariably a part of the construction of self, and Bem along with Markus and Oyserman, largely believe this is due to our immersion in the traditions of gender.

More of interest to this project is that although Markus and Oyserman, like Bem, cite cognitive schemas as foundational for gender and self-concept, unlike Bem, they specify that self-schemas are both a cognitive *and affective* (my emphasis) structure (Markus & Oyserman 101). Their view similarly relies on environmental influences for motivating gender difference, but as we see in the earlier work of Markus and Wurf, self-concept can function as a regulator of affective states when they are perceived as related to, or a challenge to prevailing conceptions of self (317-319). For instance, negative affective states connected to the self may prompt individuals to seek experiences that reaffirm and maintain those conceptions of self that have been generally associated with positive affective states (Ibid.). So, the inclusion of affect as a part of self-concept appears to provide not only some type of framework that would be needed for alternative sources of motivation (e.g. gender dysphoria), but also serves as a theoretical bridge between GST and self-concept theory, providing necessary details related to self-concept which are absent in GST.

Similarly, Bong, in her respective works with both Clark and Skaalvik looking at self-concept and self-efficacy, also emphasizes both affective and cognitive elements being present in self-concept metrics. The framework and methodology of self-concept research considers both the cognitive and affective factors of behavior in conjunction, each working to construct and continually evaluate the self against social sources of comparison (Bong & Clark 139, 140, 142-143; Bong & Skaalvik 10). As we will see in upcoming sections, the evaluative function of self-concept shares a similar functional role to elements within SCT, but key to our effort here is that self-concept theory appears to allow for affective elements to play a fundamental role in

motivating schematic organization and evaluations of self which may be cis or, potentially, transgender (Bong and Clark, 149).

## 5. TRANSGENDER SCHEMA AND TRANSGENDER SELF-CONCEPT

Gender dysphoria based transgender appears to present somewhat of a problem for Bem and GST. Even if she is correct that gender and self-schemas are primarily socially inculcated, and that their formation is due to their pervasiveness and functional usefulness and not, for instance, a biological propensity toward a particular category, then ostensibly she has only managed to explain *cisgender* motivations. Transgender people and their motivations, however, clearly exist despite having been subjected to the same (a) gendered associative networks, rituals, and (b) presumed functional significance of gender that successfully takes root in the much larger *cisgender* population.<sup>7</sup> Given such a fact, we may reasonably think that if gender and self-concept are dominant schematic terms merely due to their cultural ubiquity, as Bem stipulates, then likewise the affective nature of gender dysphoria must have as much capacity to become the dominant schematic terms for those who experience it. Consequently, there would be little doubt gender dysphoria would possess at least as much influence over the construction of self-concept and transgender behavior as environmental influences do for *cisgender*; forming self-concept that is essentially transgender in nature, and compelling schematic processing in ways that are largely in line with the attributes valuable to that community.

Put another way, transgender, or any behavior incongruent with prevailing *cisgender* stereotypes or preconceptions of male and female, stand as potential refutations to GST and the environmental influences it claims are sufficient for gender development. Otherwise, we should

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<sup>7</sup> Recall Bem's two criteria for a category to become the terms for schematic processing: (a) it must have a large associative network, and (b) it must garner some functional significance.

find clear evidence of the link between transgender behaviors and a broader transgender culture that extends its power from infancy through adulthood, in order to provide the same pervasive qualities of association and functional significance Bem/GST insists are necessary for certain categories to become schematic terms. But there is little evidence to support trans culture having that kind of ubiquity or sway. Most trans people instead develop alongside cis people, immersed in cis culture, and naturally we are left to assume there is more than just environmental influences shaping these gender incongruent outcomes.

Perhaps an amelioration for Bem, and GST generally, is to employ the cognitive/affective structure reflected in works like Markus et al. and Bong and colleagues, as a bridge over her socially unilateral view of gender and self-concept. In the latter case, we find research efforts utilizing self-concept as a structure where both cognitive and affective elements work together to motivate schematic organization and evaluations of self (Bong & Clark 139, 140, 142-143; Bong & Skaalvik 10). And in the former we find a view of self-concept that is in accordance with the environmental sources Bem takes as paramount, and which associates positive or negative affective states with views of self that are either align with, or challenge those prevailing views (Markus & Oyserman 100-101, 108-110; Markus & Wurf 317-319). Of course, it remains to be determined how exactly strong affective states like gender dysphoria will influence behavior in relation to the prescriptions of the largely cisgender culture, but it appears the cognitive/affective nature of a theoretically-bridged gender schema/self-concept framework could adapt to account for those greater affective influences.

## 6. GENDER DEVELOPMENT BY WAY OF SOCIAL COGNITIVE THEORY

In 1986 Albert Bandura published his landmark contribution to psychology, *Social Foundations of Thought and Action: A Social Cognitive Theory*, which served to extend his earlier theory of social learning and more squarely include those influences of human behavior that originate from within the individual (“Bandura's Social Learning Theory”). Social cognitive theory (SCT) seeks to explain the lifespan of human development, motivation and comportment by the interaction, or “triadic reciprocal determinism,” of behavior, cognitive/personal factors, and environment influences (“Social Cognitive Theory” 2-3). Each of these elements has the ability to both influence, and be influenced by any of the other elements, and each element may vary in the strength of their contribution to motivate behavior, or sometimes act independently and at other times in unison. Important for concerns related to affective motivations like gender dysphoria, Bandura includes biological conditions under the personal side of the cognitive/personal element, and he stipulates that the interactions of the triadic factors afford us a number of basic capabilities: a symbolizing ability, used to abstract models and confer meaning onto our experiences; a vicarious ability, for learning by merely observing behavior; and a forethought capability, to motivate ourselves through planning. But it is our vicarious capability, our self-regulatory, and our self-reflective capabilities that contain the kinds of processes that appear to best comport with the current views regarding the nature of gender dysphoria (“Social Cognitive Theory” 9, 23-24, 40). Within these particular capabilities we find our propensity for

observational learning, modeling, and the motivation that comes from affective self-evaluation against both internal and aspirational standards (“Social Cognitive Theory” 47-48). Also, and most importantly for the social cognitive approach to gender, it is within these capabilities we find the so-called “self-efficacy mechanism” which plays a vital role in gender-linked conduct and in human agency more generally (“Social Cognitive Theory” 47, 50, 58-60) Though the complexity of social cognitive theory dissuades a holistic analysis within the space of this project, the affective qualities that are primary to gender dysphoria given by the DSM-5 will help pick out the aspects of SCT that seem most relevant to our concerns.

The social cognitive approach to gender difference is the integration of psychological and environmental determinants that operate within a set of “biological potentialities,” and thus allow for a broad range of culturally shaped expressions (Bussey & Bandura 12-14). According to the theory, the main influences on gender development comes from the effects of modeling, enactive experience, and direct tuition which collectively work to affect our gender-linked knowledge and competence, our outcome expectations, our standards for self-evaluation, and any beliefs we have about our ability to successfully enact gender-linked behaviors in the future, i.e. our self-efficacy beliefs (Bussey & Bandura 15-16) Of the three influences on gender development, Bussey and Bandura place the most emphasis on modeling through observation which they say is the most effective and quickest means of learning gender (15-16).

Within the larger SCT framework modeling falls under our vicarious capabilities and includes a number of processes that govern our observational learning and influence the kinds of behaviors we deem worthy of being modeled. Among these, our attentional and cognitive representational processes have the greatest relevance to our concerns since they involve qualities such as cognitive ability, value preferences, biases or preconceptions and, most

importantly, the relative attractiveness of modeled behaviors (Bussey & Bandura 16-17). Cognitive representational processes, in particular, govern the kinds of experiences we ultimately retain and are biased not only by any preconceptions we have about a modeled behavior, but also by any occurrent affective states (Ibid.). Attentional processes determine which behaviors we notice, the particular aspects of those behaviors we find most salient, and partially overlap with processes of cognitive representation by involving the preconceptions and cognitive skill of the observer (Bussey & Bandura 16). If gender dysphoria is primarily an affective motivator, then under SCT it ought to have influence over our preconceptions and the relative attractiveness of the behaviors which are modeled and retained through the workings of our cognitive representational and attentional processes.

The last and perhaps most crucial piece for explaining development of gender differences under SCT is our self-efficacy beliefs, sometimes referred to as the self-efficacy mechanism (“Self-Efficacy Mechanism” 122; “SCT” 59-60). Self-efficacy is a functional concept that appears to emerge from our natural regulatory and reflective capabilities. Bussey and Bandura explain:

[P]eople are self-organizing, proactive, self-reflective, and self-regulating not just reactive organisms shaped and shepherded by external events. The capacity to exercise control over one's thought processes, motivation, affect and action operates through mechanisms of personal agency. Among the mechanisms of agency, none is more central or pervasive than people's beliefs in their capabilities to produce given levels of attainments. Unless people believe they can produce desired effects by their actions they have little incentive to act or to persevere in the face of difficulties. Perceived efficacy is, therefore, the foundation of human agency (23).

Self-efficacy beliefs are developed quickest through mastery experiences, that is, successful representations of behavior that instill confidence in the ability to successfully enact similar behavior in the future (Ibid.). Social modeling (observing mastered behavior) and social persuasion (feedback which can influence perceived ability and environment) also contribute to

self-efficacy, but more relevant to our concerns is how self-efficacy is inferred through the presence of physical and emotional states (Ibid.). Feelings related to stress, depression or anxiety can factor into how capable or comfortable one feels in particular situations or enacting certain behaviors (“Self-Efficacy Mechanism” 136-137, 141). Thus, we may reasonably think that given a stronger set of affective inputs, like gender dysphoria, physical/emotional states would play a greater role in self-efficacy and perhaps in agency more generally.

Although this section falls short of considering all pieces of Bandura’s theory, we have picked out the parts that appear to have the most relevance to the concerns of gender dysphoria. Among those are our attentional and cognitive representational processes that together accommodate our preconceived notions of gendered behavior and the relative attractiveness of potential types of behavior models. Likewise, the self-efficacy mechanism also has the kind of affective constituent parts necessary for considerations of uniquely transgender behavior motivations. In the next section we will look closer at how gender dysphoria fits among these concepts and generally how well SCT can explain its influences.

## 7. IMPLICATIONS OF GENDER DYSPHORIA FOR SOCIAL COGNITIVE THEORY

As mentioned, modeling through observation is the fastest means of learning gender conceptions. Observational learning is aided by cognitive representational processes responsible for coding and storing information, and according to Bandura such processes are subject to background physiological states as well by any related preconceptions (Bussey & Bandura 16-17). As a matter of experience, we might speculate that cognitive representational processes involve forming implicit associations between behaviors that bring on positive or neutral affective states, and those that provoke negative affective states, and by some means factoring those associations into practical information that is used to determine future behavior. For cisgender individuals this may mean daily life immersed in the structures of cis/hetero culture goes mostly unnoticed or is associated with neutral or positive affect, which is over time reinforced, remembered, and catalyzes expectations for the next day. For transgender individuals, especially with unaddressed gender dysphoria, it plausibly means quite the opposite; daily activities may be only at best, neutrally coded or, worse, a persistent agitator of the underlying dysphoric feelings already associated with gender congruent behavior. In any case, if gender dysphoria plays a significant part of one's affective state, as is presumed, it is plausible it will influence the processes responsible for the kinds of experiences we retain and the formation and usage of our preconceptions.

As well, SCT tells us the attentional processes responsible for the kinds of behaviors one might deem attractive and potentially worthy of modeling, should also be influenced by occurrent affective states by way of our behavioral preconceptions (Bussey & Bandura 16). As

mentioned, since preconceptions are also a constituent to cognitive representational processes and potentially have a physiological valence, attentional processes may likewise be shaped by preconceptions and any associated affective disposition, even if only transitively. At the risk of oversimplifying, it seems that as a matter of experience gender dysphoria could potentially code preconceptions of gender congruent behaviors with negative emotional states, and that daily activity within the largely cis/hetero milieu requires enduring the barrage of social cues and pressures to perform gender congruent behaviors which are found to be deeply unattractive. Nevertheless, with either cognitive representational or attentional processes, the obvious relevant factor for our purposes is that each of these elements may be influenced by affective states and the effects those states entail may be necessarily related to the presence or absence of gender dysphoria.

The implications of attentional and cognitive representational processes that modeled activities presume will also feed into ideas individuals form regarding the kinds of behaviors they have successfully enacted, or might successfully enact in the future (Bussey & Bandura 15). Thus, the self-efficacy mechanism will also have the kind of affective constituent parts necessary for motivating uniquely transgender behavior. As mentioned, feelings of fear, depression or anxiety will factor into how proficient a particular situation or behavioral performance feels, and may enhance or erode one's confidence for future performances ("Self-Efficacy Mechanism" 136-137, 141). Although, out of the four ways self-efficacy can be developed, Bandura and colleagues seem to place greatest emphasis on mastery experiences, social modeling, and social persuasion, the value self-efficacy belief has for human agency generally could mean strong affective influences like gender dysphoria are able to garner a larger share of the collective motivational effect than is commonly found in the cisgender population. Perhaps to underscore

the point, in a 2004 published response to Martin, Ruble, and Szkrybalo and their charge that SCT lacked the “motivational underpinnings” that incentivize gender conduct, Bandura acknowledges a vital role for affect in SCT stating plainly, “in self-directedness through personal standards, the motivation [for gender development and behavior] resides in the self-approving and self-disapproving reactions, not in the standard. The anticipatory affective self-reactions are the motivating incentives" (Bandura & Bussey 698).

So, SCT appears to provide a framework which should allow for potentially stronger affective inputs, like gender dysphoria, to play a greater role in self-efficacy and in agency more generally, and it is the spirit behind triadic reciprocity which makes this possible. Any of the three modes of behavioral influence are allowed to vary in strength or relative influence, and so a larger affective influence means only that one particular mode shares a greater than equal part in behavioral motivations, and not necessarily that the others are absent. How triadic reciprocal determinism influences each particular experience is a relative contribution dependent on the, “activities, situations, and socio-structural constraints and opportunities ...[whose] relative impact may fluctuate over time, situational circumstances, and activity domains” (Bussey & Bandura 14). As a matter of course, the potential interaction effects of triadic reciprocity also raises questions as to how this 3-way relationship would differ between cisgender and transgender individuals.<sup>8</sup> To provide an answer, we need some idea of how SCT presumes the affective elements of our cognitive/personal factors become motivating factors by affixing to the types behaviors we are attracted to and want to model.

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<sup>8</sup> “Interaction effect” is used here as it might be in statistics or psychology, and it may be useful for considering whether triadic factors have a multiplicative effect on gender-linked behavior. Nevertheless, it is not a term that is used in the SCT literature considered here. For more on interaction effects see: <https://dictionary.apa.org/interaction-effect>.

One answer Bandura gives is our capability for vicarious arousal. He tells us, “people are endowed with the receptive and expressive capacity for vicarious arousal [where] social experience largely determines the level and pattern of emotional activation. Expressive displays acquire arousing capacity mainly through correlated social experiences (Bandura, 1986)” (Bandura 30-31). So, our affective self-reactions are largely a learned or conditioned response shaped by the social and environmental influences, and are not themselves inherently instructive. In large part, affective associations with social cues tend to follow the kinds of emotional experiences an individual has seen socially modeled and deems worthy of being modeled (“Self-Efficacy Mechanism” 127; Bussey & Bandura 18-19). But gender dysphoria presumably inhibits culturally congruent gender conduct with feelings of unease, anxiety and a strong desire to express gender in ways considered incongruent with prevailing norms and cues. Absent any alternative environmental explanations for the partiality towards gender non-conforming behavior, it would appear that environmental influences normally considered by SCT as primary in establishing the affective associations for cisgender development, are being largely overpowered by the influence of gender dysphoria. Instead of anticipating a negative emotional state for failing to enact proper gender behavior, we might reasonably imagine those negative states are anticipated when proper gender behavior is seen as inevitable, necessary, or achieved.

Nevertheless, Bandura’s apparent overreliance on environmental conditioning of affective self-reaction may not, by itself, be much of a problem for SCT in relation to gender dysphoria. The framework and principle behind triadic reciprocal determinism still allows for a dynamic interaction between environment, behavior, and cognitive/personal factors, which will differ in ways that are individually unique. However, as we will see in the upcoming section, the comparative analyses of self-efficacy and self-concept conducted by Mimi Bong and colleagues

appears to show a fundamental difference with how each of these self constructs treats the role of affect in the motivation for behavior.

## 8. THE DIFFERING ROLE OF AFFECT IN SELF-EFFICACY AND SELF-CONCEPT

In this section we consider two papers authored in part by educational psychologist Mimi Bong, that look closer at the highly analogous relationship between self-efficacy and self-concept. As is likely evident by now, the constructs of self-efficacy and self-concept are both thought to play a large part in human agency and gender development, and each make some allowance for the influence of affective qualities to factor into behavioral motivations. However, the findings of Bong et al. indicate there may be fundamental differences between the two in the way they treat the role of affect. Over the two papers considered here, Mimi Bong and colleagues looked closely at similarities and differences in how self-concept and self-efficacy measures were used to predict and improve academic performance. Though their research is not directly related to the performance of gender, much like this project, they rely on the works of both Markus and Bandura who are frequently cited in reference to self-concept and self-efficacy, respectively, and the implications of each construct are clearly presented in light of their distinguishing conceptual, methodological, or definitional features (Bong & Clark 140-142; Bong & Skaalvik 2-6).

Interestingly, the findings of Bong et al. indicate that individual perceptions of ability to enact desired outcomes, as seen in measures of self-efficacy, rely more exclusively on cognitive factors and tend to view affective states as a consequence of those factors rather than a constituent to motivation, perceptions of self, or efficacy (Bong & Clark 145-146, 149; Bong & Skaalvik 13-14). Generally speaking, one reason for this distinction appears to be that keeping affective and cognitive components separate has an enhancing effect on the predictive

power of self-efficacy research (Bong & Skaalvik 13-14, 29-30). Clearly useful in academic performance settings, self-efficacy is found to be better representative of individual self perceptions with regard to specific tasks, or in particular situations where there are obvious standards for success and failure. Thus, efforts are made treat affective and cognitive inputs as discrete components in series, and self-efficacy is widely regarded as a more predictive and well-defined construct for deciphering performance motivations (Bong & Clark 144, 145-146, 149).

Measures of self-concept, however, were found to treat both cognitive and affective factors of behavior more equally, and were concerned with formed perceptions of the self that are more related to a general domain, or the subject-level of functioning (Bong & Clark 144-146, 149; Bong & Skaalvik 5, 13-14). For instance, as noted by Bong and Skaalvik, children tend to avoid academic tasks they have historically performed poorly on in order to maintain the positive affective state connected to their prevailing view of self, a finding that is largely in line with the views of Markus and Wurf (Bong & Skaalvik 12; Markus & Wurf 317-319) As a result, measures of self-concept are in some ways less predictive in specific tasks, but more indicative of general perceptions of competence and self-worth (Bong & Clark 150-151). Bong et al. cite studies backing up the ability for self-concept to better account for feelings of anxiety, apprehension, or intrinsic motivations, while at other times pointing out how the motivational effects predicted by self-efficacy are apt to be more clearly established than those from self-concept (Bong & Skaalvik 28).

Thus it appears, on the one hand, that SCT includes affective inputs to motivate behavior, as given in theory, but as some research practices may have it, actively seeks to separate out affective motivations in order to, in effect, sharpen its predictability. On the other hand, GST, which makes no explicit account of affective motivators in theory, may garner the framework

necessary to account for the potentially physiological signatures of gender dysphoria by its reliance on self-concept, and the bridging of the cognitive/affective structures given therein. It should be noted, however, that while the composition of academic self-efficacy given by Bong and Skaalvik is entirely cognitive in nature, to conclude that affect plays no role in self-efficacy performance motivations would appear to be incorrect (Bong & Skaalvik 10). Bandura clearly finds anticipatory affective self-reactions and the affective elements within the self-regulatory processes of vital importance, but because they are anticipatory they seem to have the ability to motivate future behavior while remaining completely cognitive in nature (Bong & Clark 151; Bong & Skaalvik 10, 33-34). The differential treatment of affect between the two self constructs highlights their apparent separate levels of analysis, each attempting to measure the same thing by different and overlapping routes, which perhaps contributes to the perception they are analogous while also being functionally complementary. (Bong & Clark 146; Bong & Skaalvik 5, 9). In any case, the work of Bong et al. raises the question of whether the role of affect in self-efficacy perceptions may relate to gender performances in the same way it does for academic or general task/goal performance research, and what use those findings might have in clarifying gender motivations as a whole (Bandura & Bussey 698-699).

## 9. CONCLUDING REMARKS

If we recall the concerns of Owen Flanagan regarding the studies testing gender moral orientations, we may be left wondering whether his observations on the importance of self-concept for gender expression might also find a more substantive explanation from Markus et al. and Bong et al. His concern that hypothetical dilemmas left out the possibility for respondents to express self-concept, and therefore gender, appeared to be supported in terms of the significant gender differences found when men and women were left to talk about the kinds of dilemmas they may personally encounter.<sup>9</sup> Evidently, if we were to follow a cognitive/affective framework of self-concept adopted by Markus et al. and Bong et al., then the filtering out of self-concept from such hypothetical dilemmas would also include any affective elements that are presumed to make up part of its cognitive/affective structure. So, likewise, we may speculate whether measures of self-efficacy, particularly in performance settings seen in studies like Bong et al., might similarly lack expressions of gender perhaps due not so much to their filtering of self-concept as a whole, but more specifically because they have the ability to filter out affective motivations which make gender-linked conduct (at minimum) more probable.<sup>10</sup> These sets of concerns, taken alongside the contemporary view that some transgender expression is the result of a strong affective motivator (i.e. gender dysphoria), elicits at least one further question; how strongly are affective states tied to gender behavior more broadly?

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<sup>9</sup> See section 4.

<sup>10</sup> In support of this notion, the one relevant reference to gender difference in the Bong (academic performance) papers is related to an observation of math self-efficacy, and that it, “mediated the effects of gender and prior math experiences on self-concept and achievement (Bong & Clark 145).

Although it may be tenuous to draw conclusions based on results in one research domain (academic performance) and apply them to another (gender performance), the insights from Bong et al. related to the conceptual and methodological approaches of self-efficacy/self-concept raises questions on whether gender performance might also be studied at a task/situation level, like academic performance, and the role of affect possibly made clearer. As Bong and Skaalvik suggest, self-efficacy and self-concept both have means of measuring relative anxiety or depression, and self-efficacy beliefs can conceivably make-up at least part of the cognitive basis for self-concept (Bong & Skaalvik 10-11, 13-14, 30-31). The challenge would be designing studies that could effectively atomize the sociocultural elements of gender into task level scenarios, where there are fairly clear indicators of progress towards a particular outcome or goal. Considering gender performance in terms of tasks and goals maybe somewhat unusual, but we can see this kind of multi-level analysis of gender in the gender structures work of Risman and Davis, where the goal is to empirically identify causal mechanisms of how gender is incorporated at the individual, interactional, and institutional levels (744, 746-747) If a through line of such a mechanism could be found connecting the culturally maintained standards of gender, to its reflections within organizations and institutions, down to the level of gender performance in individual social interactions, it is at least plausible that task/goal scenarios may reveal themselves in a manner useful to such a project.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> See section 5 for more on transgender schemas/self-concept. A further thought on the empirical studies on gender moral orientations: granted that the gender differences found in self-reported moral dilemmas may not necessarily reveal gender dependent moral orientations a la Gilligan, perhaps they reveal some mechanisms of gender schematic organization around resources whose value is connected to characteristics unique to particular genders and/or sexes. As Sewell, Risman and Davis have it, these valued resources will embed into social and institutional organizational structures in such things as anti-discriminatory or equal opportunity policies, access to gender appropriate health care, maternity leave or flexible work schedules, etc. (Sewell 10-12, Risman and Davis 746-747). Likewise, with greater cultural awareness and acceptance of the trans community should also come tangible evidence of their schemas, uniquely transgender schemas, organizing around resources important to that community and thus embedding into social and institutional structures. Kristin Schilt provides many examples of transgender social

As alluded to in the opening section, if the hope is to have theories of gender development and behavioral motivation that apply to everyone, then clarifying the role affect plays in these capacities ought to be important to theories like GST or SCT. Doing so would seemingly extend their explanatory reach into forms of gender-linked motivations that earlier theoretical presumptions strictly related to cisgender behavior may have missed. What is more, when further considering how each of these theories tightly integrates the role of gender to the sense of self, self-efficacy, and to human agency more generally, these questions regarding the role of affective states in gender behavior may likewise extend to those of non-gender-linked behavior. Such an outlook would not be far from the positions found in the works of Haidt, Kahneman, or Damasio, who among others, are all roughly concerned with the fundamental role of emotional states to feed intuitions, influence the seemingly logical reasoning behind our moral beliefs, undergird our decisions and behaviors, or flesh out the phenomenological nature of our conscious experiences.<sup>12</sup>

Our purpose here has been to consider gender development as it is given by GST and SCT to determine how each fare in dealing with the affective disposition of gender dysphoria. These two theories were picked because they are widely cited and thought to play a significant role in generating other theory beyond their respective fields. We found that the emphasis Bandura places on affective self-reactions, and the affective aspects of processes that underlie modeling and self-efficacy, make SCT more favorable to account for the qualities of gender

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structure and institutional organization around their concerns that can now be found in issues such as bathroom access, pronoun usage, support organizations like GLAAD and the ADL, in hiring practices and general coworker support of trans issues in the workplace (Schilt 19-20, 110-111, 116, 133-134, 163). Thus, both cis and transgender structure may provide artifacts to gender behavior and practices that may prove useful in clarifying the connection between gender expression and affective motivation.

<sup>12</sup> The works I am thinking of here are, *The Righteous Mind* (2012) by Jonathon Haidt, *Thinking Fast and Slow* (2011) by Daniel Kahneman, and many works by Antonio Damasio such as *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain* (1994), *The Feeling of What Happens: Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness* (1999) or more recently *Feeling and Knowing: Making Minds Conscious* (2021).

dysphoria. But when considering how Bem integrates schematic organization of gender into the construction of self-concept, this conclusion may be too hasty. Since it appears suitable to adopt, or theory bridge, the cognitive/affective structure of self-concept evident in later works like Markus et al. and Bong et al., GST may retain avenues for affective gender motivations despite Bem having never mentioned them. Granted as much, both GST and SCT could safely offer viable routes to explain both cisgender and transgender motivations, were it not for the work of Bong and colleagues who put the picture slightly different. Their comparative analyses of self-concept and self-efficacy, both essential to gender development within each theory, found that self-efficacy research treated affective motivators as a by-product of cognitive factors, while self-concept research treated both cognitive and affective contributors more equally. At last, we are left to conclude that the question of which theory might better account for the development of both cis and transgender appears to be an empirical one, conceivably approached by utilizing the methodologies found in performance studies like those analyzed by Bong and colleagues, perhaps integrating self-efficacy beliefs into the cognitive elements of self-concept, but reimagining them for the performance of gender.

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## VITA

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As a graduate student Beau was primarily interested in moral psychology, philosophy of mind, philosophy of science, epistemology, feminism, and critical studies related to gender and race.