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[www.uky.edu/~njdewa2/home.html](http://www.uky.edu/~njdewa2/home.html)

## **What does your research focus on?**

My research emphasizes the pervasively social nature of human beings, a nature that includes a powerful motivation to form and maintain social connections, a propensity to behave aggressively, and a sophisticated capacity to self-regulate. My research program focuses on these three related processes: (1) the consequences of social rejection and acceptance, (2) understanding risk and resiliency factors for aggression, and (3) why humans and non-human animals succeed and fail at self-regulation.

## **What drew you to this line of research? Why is it exciting to you?**

I've always been interested in interpersonal relationships and understanding why people fail to live up to personal and societal standards. To understand the strength of the human motivation for positive and lasting relationships, I wanted to investigate how thwarting this motivation affects people. People experience feelings of exclusion and rejection quite frequently, which poses a tremendous threat to well-being. I am continually surprised by how people respond to deficits in their feelings of social connection and the dramatic measures most people take to regain a sense of belonging. My research on aggression and self-regulation followed closely from my interest in interpersonal relationships. Because the need to belong touches so many aspects of life, I felt that the desire to be accepted and included may inhibit aggressive and other undesirable impulses. This program of research excites me for two main reasons. First, these topics apply to everyone. As a result, this research can be of use to many people. Second, I feel that I've only scratched the surface about what I know about relationships, aggression, and self-regulation. Hence, I always arrive at work knowing that I have so much more that I can learn.

### **Who were/are your mentors or psychological influences?**

I've had spectacular mentors. At St. Olaf College, Chuck Huff and Bill Altermatt got me hooked on research. At the University of Chicago, Penny Visser showed me the ins and outs of getting a program of research going. At Florida State University, I met the person who would change my life as a researcher forever: Roy Baumeister. Roy showed me not only the basics of doing research, but also the stuff that most graduate students have to learn on their own. He taught me about the importance of writing, remaining curious and open-minded to research ideas, and how to collaborate effectively with others. Fortuitously, I arrived as a graduate student at Florida State the same year that Jon Maner arrived as an assistant professor. Jon also provided crucial mentorship, especially regarding the best ways to navigate the early years as an assistant professor. When it comes to mentorship, I feel a lot like Yankee slugger Lou Gehrig: "the luckiest man on the face of the earth."

### **To what do you attribute your success in the science?**

Three things. First and foremost, I treat writing like a class. I write uninterrupted every day at the same time. I write 20 hours a week. When I travel, I always schedule my time so that I can get my weekly writing hours. I try not to write at home or on the weekends. That's family time. I read books about writing. By being disciplined about writing, I don't have to worry about things that depend on being a productive scientist (e.g., tenure and promotion). I also don't have to worry about being an absentee spouse. Second, I have hard-working, conscientious collaborators. I believe strongly in the principle of "team science." Trying to master everything is a fool's errand. People have their individual strengths they bring with them to projects. By putting together an effective team for a project, the process flows smoothly and is extremely rewarding. Third, I remain curious and open-minded. I try not to get tied down to any perspective, any method, or any past experience I've had that will limit my ability to be open to new research ideas.

### **What's your future research agenda?**

I'm still enchanted with research on interpersonal relationships, aggression, and self-control. I will continue to do research on these related processes for several years. With my interpersonal relationships research, I plan to devote a good deal of attention to ongoing relationships, to focus on the steps that people take to restore feelings of connection, to understand the implications of social connection on substance use, and to apply these findings to clinical samples. With my aggression research, I will continue to explore the importance of psychological and biological self-control processes on aggressive behavior. I'm also beginning to explore genetic risk and resiliency factors for aggression. With my self-control research, I will continue to explore how situational and personal factors help to predict impulsive behavior and the mechanisms that help explain why such behavior occurs.

### **Any advice for even younger psychological scientists? What would you tell someone just now entering graduate school or getting their PhD?**

First, develop a consistent writing routine. Writing is like eating. If you do it in on a regular basis, you'll have a healthy career. Don't binge write. Second, have clear-cut career goals and develop a specific plan for how to accomplish them. Run your plan by people you admire. It's easy to confuse activity with accomplishment, especially in graduate school. Third, learn to appreciate constructive criticism, even

when it hurts. Advisors, reviewers, and editors have the goal of trying to help you. It is difficult to see that sometimes, but it's always been true for me. Academics show other academics they care by offering feedback. When your advisor criticizes your idea, when a reviewer points out a flaw in your paper, or when an editor rejects your paper, don't panic. If you remember that they're trying to help you, it will be easier for you to use their feedback to strengthen your idea. Fourth, remember that no idea is off-limits. Push yourself outside of your comfort zone. Finally, remember that being a psychological scientist is only one part of who you are. Develop hobbies, read books and papers outside of psychology (I love history and business/economics books), buy a dog (or, in my case, two dogs), and remember that psychology isn't the only fun thing you get to do.

**What publication you are most proud of or feel has been most important to your career?**

DeWall, C. N., MacDonald, G., Webster, G. D., Masten, C., Baumeister, R. F., Powell, C., et al. (2010). Acetaminophen reduces social pain: Behavioral and neural evidence. *Psychological Science*, 21, 931-937.

Using daily diary and fMRI methods, we provided the first evidence that an over-the-counter analgesic (i.e., acetaminophen) reduces the pain of social rejection.