

Autonomy, Competence and Relatedness: Single Case Study

Natasha Vaidya^{1*}, Anupama Srivastava²

ABSTRACT

Self-determination Theory (SDT) is a theory of human motivation, personality development and wellness in social contexts. It proposes that all human beings have three basic psychological needs – the needs for competence, autonomy, and relatedness – the fulfilment of which is considered necessary and essential to vital, healthy human functioning. The present study assesses these three psychological needs of a 20 year old female using the Indian Adaptation of the Thematic Apperception Test (Choudhury, U., 1960). The results show the presence of the need for competence and relatedness, while the need for autonomy is only being partially fulfilled. There is presence of an environmental press of lack and loss and in spite of this there is hope and a striving to achieve her goals.

Keywords: *Autonomy, Competence, Relatedness, Self Determination Theory*

Investigation of factors that optimise development and functional integrity in living entities has long been an important topic of research within the biological and psychological sciences (Harlow, 1953; Raff et al., 1993). One such theory is the Self Determination Theory (SDT), developed by Edward L. Deci and Richard M. Ryan (2000), which studies psychological growth and development.

SDT is a theory of human motivation, personality development and wellness in social contexts. The theory focuses especially on volition or self-determined behaviour and the social and cultural conditions that promote it. SDT also postulates a set of basic and universal psychological needs, the fulfilment of which is considered necessary and essential to vital, healthy human functioning regardless of culture or stage of development. According to SDT, people will tend to pursue goals, domains and relationships that allow or support their need satisfaction (Deci & Ryan, 2000). These innate psychological needs are the needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness. The need for autonomy is described as the universal urge to be causal agents of one's own life and act in harmony with one's integrated self. The need for competence is the universal desire to seek to control the outcome and experience

¹ Scholar, Amity Institute of Behavioural and Allied Sciences, Amity University Haryana, India

² Assistant Professor, Amity Institute of Behavioural and Allied Sciences, Amity University Haryana, India

*Responding Author

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Autonomy, Competence and Relatedness: Single Case Study

mastery. The need for relatedness refers to the desire to interact, be connected to, and experience caring for others.

Most historical and contemporary motivation theories have treated motivation as a unitary concept that differs in amount but not type, but SDT has focussed on differentiating types of motivation to make predictions about performance and psychological health outcomes. The theory in particular distinguishes between autonomous and controlled motivation. To be autonomous involves acting with a full sense of volition, endorsement and choice whereas to be controlled involves feeling externally pressured or compelled to behave. Autonomous motivation encompasses intrinsic motivation and well-internalised extrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2014). Controlled motivation includes regulation by external factors such as externally administered rewards and punishments. When people are autonomously motivated, they act with a full sense of willingness because they find the activity that they are doing either interesting and enjoyable, or consistent with their deeply held, integrated values. Autonomous motivation is typically accompanied by the experience of positive affect, flexibility, and choice (Deci & Ryan, 2015).

Thus, according to the SDT, across the domains of people's lives, the people who are more optimally motivated, perform better, and feel healthier if their basic psychological needs are satisfied.

Objective

- To assess the basic psychological needs of a 20 year old female within the framework of the Self Determination Theory.

METHOD

Participants

Single subject case study – The subject was a 20 year old female, pursuing Bachelor of Arts Honours in English. She belongs to a middle class Muslim family. She is the second of five children.

Instruments

The Indian adaptation of the Thematic Apperception Test (Uma Choudhury, 1960) was used to assess the basic psychological needs of the subject. The Indian adaptation has 14 cards including two gender specific cards and one blank card.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

It was found that in most cards, the hero was a male. This shows that the female subject has identified with a person of the opposite gender. This indicates that she has a high masculine component.

In many stories there was a need for competence present. The heroes in these stories show a very high need for competence and are constantly striving against the environment. This need shows the subject's desire for accomplishment, mastering of skills or high standards. This can

Autonomy, Competence and Relatedness: Single Case Study

be seen in Card 1: *“he is poor so he cannot afford a teacher. So he starts playing it [sitar] himself, tries to do that and it takes him a lot of time. So he finally starts playing it very nicely and ends up being a great sitar player and famous and all”*. A need for relatedness is also present in some stories. A high need for relatedness shows that the subject wants to be connected to and experience caring for others, and requires warm interpersonal relationships. This is clearly seen in Card 4: *“he ends up deciding that she is an inseparable part of his life so he cannot leave her. He tells her that he wants to live with her for all the remaining life”*. In most stories, the hero is acting autonomously, with full volition. However, in some stories, the hero’s autonomy is being undermined by certain factors or characters in the environment. This can be seen in Card 7 additional: *“so this woman she’s somewhat addicted to this man, not in love but she cannot let go of him. She always needs him perhaps because he is satisfying her sexual needs as well as he gives her the money she needs for her life”*.

An important environmental force that comes through most clearly is lack and loss. It has been depicted by lack or loss of a parent figure, death, lacking affection, disability, and loss of home. This environmental press is seen very prominently in Card 3: *“the father left both the mother and the child and the mother had to take care of the [disabled] child herself”*. The presence of this environmental factor indicates that the subject is lacking something in her life or may have gone through the loss of a loved one, which she has not yet come to terms with.

In most stories, the environment is unfamiliar and hostile. The males in the environment are mostly absent. When present, they are aloof, uncaring or aggressive and dangerous. The female characters in the environment are all caring and nurturing. The females display traits that are opposite to the ones displayed by the males in the environment.

A recurring theme in the stories is that the hero has suffered a lack or loss and finds himself/herself in an unfamiliar or hostile environment. The hero strives very hard against the environmental forces to achieve his/her goals. This struggle often give rise to an outcome in which the hero achieves something but also loses something. Throughout, the hero is acting autonomously. Where he/she cannot, there is a struggle to become the causal agent of one’s own life. This can be seen in Card 7 additional: *“she tells the boss that she can no more do favours for him...and she leaves him and her job and calls her daughter and they both start a new life in a respectful way”*. There is a hope which is seen in the stories.

The findings suggest that, though the subject has suffered a deep loss, she is striving hard and achieving her goals to a certain extent.

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Autonomy, Competence and Relatedness: Single Case Study

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