Them, Us, and I: How Group Contexts Influence Basic Psychological Needs

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Abstract

We integrate two influential psychological theories: Social identity theory and self-determination theory. Whereas social identity theory considers how social identities impact the self, self-determination theory elucidates the psychological necessity of feeling related, competent, and autonomous. In the current paper, we outline and provide justification for a unified theoretical framework that considers how perceptions of personal relatedness, competence, and autonomy are influenced by perceptions that one's social group is related, competent, and autonomous.

Keywords: Social Identity, Intergroup Relations, Autonomy, Relatedness, Competence, Well-Being

"Your freedom and mine cannot be separated."

- Nelson Mandela - 10 February 1985. Message from prison, read by his daughter to a rally

 in Soweto

In the same way plants require water and minerals to grow and prosper, people have *personal* psychological needs they must satisfy to experience optimal psychological growth and well-being. According to self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2017), people have a need to be: 1) accepted by others (i.e*.,* personal relatedness needs; Baumeister & Leary, 1995), 2) able to achieve their goals and control their outcomes (i.e., personal competence needs; Bandura, 1982), and 3) free to act in ways that express their "true" self (i.e., personal autonomy needs*;* Ryan & Deci, 2000). Satisfying these needs yields psychological well-being across different cultures (Chirkov, Ryan, Kim, & Kaplan, 2003), life stages (Van Petegem, Soenens, Vansteenkiste, & Beyers, 2015), and contexts including educational (Reeve & Lee, 2014), health (Ng, et al., 2017), and organizational (Deci, Olafsen, & Ryan, 2017) domains.

Despite the utility of the self-determination perspective, the theory in its traditional form has not considered the needs people have on behalf of their social groups (i.e., *group* needs). Specifically, people have a need to feel that members of their social group are 1) accepted by other groups in society (i.e., group relatedness needs), 2) are capable of achieving desired outcomes (i.e., group competence needs), and 3) are free to determine and express their own sociocultural identity openly in society (i.e., group autonomy needs). Understanding the psychological implications of group need satisfaction is critical given that within (sometimes) conflictual intergroup contexts, group members may perceive that one or more of these group needs are deficient. For example, when group members experience systemic discrimination or oppression, they may feel that their social group has been ostracized within society, is incapable

of achieving success relative to other groups, or, is restricted from expressing its own authentic culture.

Herein, we offer a unified theoretical framework (Figure 1) that bridges self-determination theory with social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Social identity theory proposes that people define their sense of self partly by identifying with social groups (e.g., national, religious, or ethnic groups; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Social identity pertains to an individual's "knowledge of [their] membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership" (Tajfel, 1978, p.63). For instance, the beliefs, and customs that are rooted in people's sociocultural identity help people to orient their own individual beliefs and behavior (Hogg, 2000; Oyserman, 2007; Taylor, 2002). We explicate how experiencing a deficit in group needs can adversely impact personal need satisfaction.

We contend that because people derive their sense of self partly from their social identity, the extent to which people feel that their social *group* is related, competent, and autonomous relates to whether they *personally* feel related, competent, and autonomous as individuals. Speaking to the fundamental connection between personal needs and group needs, Nelson Mandela expressed how his personal autonomy was indivisible from the group autonomy of Black South Africans: "Your freedom and mine cannot be separated."
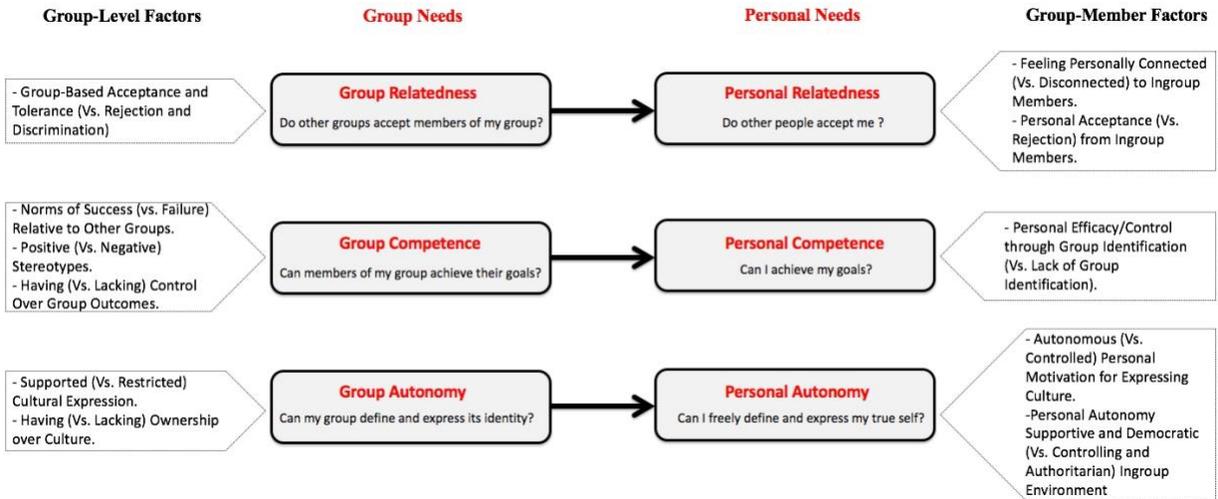
Figure 1: A unified theoretical framework of how group need satisfaction relates to personal need satisfaction.

Group-Level (Social Identity) Factors and Psychological Needs

Within our integrated framework (Figure 2) we synthesize research within the social identity theory literature to specify *group-level factors* that undermine group needs. This previous research supports our thesis that experiencing a deficit in group needs is detrimental to group members feeling personally related, competent, and autonomous.

Group relatedness needs are undermined when group members feel that they or other group members are socially rejected on the basis of their group membership (e.g., by experiencing discrimination; Schmitt, Branscombe, Postmes, & Garcia, 2014). Threats to group relatedness needs have negative implications for whether group members feel personally related (as a unique individuals). For example, Wirth and Williams (2009) found that group members who are ostracized on the basis of a cherished and immutable social identity (e.g., gender) find it difficult to restore a personal sense of relatedness. Likewise, Branscombe, Schmitt, and Harvey (1999) found people internalize discrimination (on the basis of their ethnic group) as personal rejection, and in turn, experience lower psychological well-being.

Group competence needs are undermined when group members perceive that failure is normative for members of their group (Oyserman, Bybee, & Terry, 2006), or are exposed to negative group stereotypes about the competency of their group (Schmader, et al., 2008). As well, experiencing disadvantage or victimization as a group can undermine group competence by causing group members to feel that their group lacks control over the outcomes it experiences (Shnabel & Nadler, 2015; Tiessen, Kirmayer, & Taylor, 2009). Threats to group competence can have negative implications for the personal competence of group members, given that group members evaluate their own personal abilities on the basis of the perceived abilities of members within their group (Jugert et al., 2016). For example, inner-city students who perceived that academic under achievement is normative within their community felt less personal efficacy at school (Oyserman, et al., 2006). Relatedly, feeling that one's group lacks control over its outcomes can also lead group members to feel a lack of personal control (Tiessen, Kirmayer, & Taylor, 2009). Group members may also experience impaired performance when they are concerned that their behavior may confirm that negative stereotypes of their group are true of themselves personally, and/or, are true of their group (Shapiro & Neuberg, 2007; Shapiro, Williams, Hambarchyan, 2013; but see Flore & Wicherts, 2015).

Group autonomy needs are undermined when group members feel that other groups seek to unduly restrict how their ingroup articulates and expresses its own culture (Kachanoff, Taylor, Caouette, Khullar, & Taylor, 2019). For example, experiencing slavery, forced colonization (e.g., the colonization of Indigenous peoples of North America and Africa), or societal restrictions (e.g., laws in France restricting Muslims from wearing facial coverings) may cause group members to perceive a lack of group autonomy. Group autonomy needs may also be threatened when group members feel they have lost influence over their group's way of life within

territories they perceive ownership over (e.g., one's nation state; Verkuyten, & Martinovic, 2017).

Perceiving deficits in group autonomy can have negative implications for whether individual group members feel personally autonomous. Our own research shows that people who experience restrictions to their collective autonomy also experience reduced personal autonomy, and as a result, reduced psychological well-being. These effects emerged within relatively collectivistic cultures (e.g., India) and relatively individualistic cultures (e.g., the United States), and when assessed cross-sectionally or longitudinally (Kachanoff et al., 2019). In one experiment, we simulated the experience of collective autonomy by placing people into groups and asking them to form a meaningful group identity. Participants could express their group identity by playing a videogame in which they controlled a game-avatar that directly reflected their group identity. Participants reported reduced personal autonomy when a higher-powered group prevented their group from expressing its culture within the videogame.

Group-Member (Social Identity) Factors and Psychological Needs

Within our integrated framework (Figure 2), we also synthesize research which indicates that personal psychological need satisfaction relates to individual differences in how group members identify with and relate to other ingroup members (Legault & Amiot, 2014). We refer to such factors as *group-member factors*. Group-member factors are distinct from group-level factors because they are specific to the needs and experience of the group member, and not the needs of the group as a whole. By incorporating group-member factors within our framework we provide a complete understanding of how social identity (at both the group-member-level and group-level) relate to psychological needs.

People satisfy personal relatedness needs when they feel personally accepted by their fellow ingroup members (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Oyserman, 2007). For example, university students satisfy relatedness needs by identifying with and feeling connected to members of their peer groups (Easterbrook & Vignoles, 2012). Relatedness needs are also fulfilled by identifying with large social groups (e.g., religious and ethnic groups) in which the majority of group members are not personally known (Ysseldyk, McQuaid, McInnis, Anisman, & Matheson, 2018).

People also satisfy their personal competence needs by identifying with social groups. Identifying with social groups such as national and political groups is positively associated with feeling efficacious to achieve personal goals (Greenaway et al., 2015). This relation holds because groups can accomplish feats that are impossible for a lone individual. As a result, group members will often channel the collective capacities of their group by aligning the self with their group (Greenaway et al., 2015).

The personal motivations that group members have for identifying with their social group have implications for personal autonomy needs. Group members feel more personally autonomous when they identify with their group and follow group customs because they personally value doing so, versus, feel pressured from within their group to conform (Amiot & Aubin, 2013; Amiot & Sansfacon, 2011; Amiot, Sansfacon, Louis, & Yelle, 2012). Group members are also attuned to whether other ingroup members feel volitional or controlled when expressing their group's identity. When group members perceive that their fellow group members follow group customs autonomously, they individually also experience greater personal autonomy (Thomas, Amiot, Louis, & Goddard, 2017). Ultimately, members of groups with a democratic structure tend to have an easier time internalizing their sociocultural identity than

members of groups with an authoritarian structure (Chirkov et al., 2003; Downie, Koestner, &

Chua, 2007; but see Tripathi, Cervone, & Savani, 2018).

	Relatedness Needs	Competence Needs	Autonomy Needs
Group-Member Factors	• Group identification associates positively with feelings of personal relatedness (Easterbrook & Vignoles, 2012; Vignoles et al., 2006; Ysseldyk et al., 2018) • Personal acceptance from ingroup members associates positively with personal relatedness (Baumeister & Leary, 1995 ; Oyserman, 2007)	• Group identification associates positively with personal efficacy and personal control (Easterbrook & Vignoles, 2012; Greenaway et al., 2015; Vignoles et al., 2006)	• Autonomous motivation for group identification and expressing culture associates positively with personal autonomy (Amiot & Sansfacon, 2011; Legault & Amiot, 2014) • Personal autonomy supportive ingroup environment associates positively with personal autonomy (Downey et al., 2007; Chirkov et al., 2003; Thomas et al., 2017)
Group-Level Factors	• Group-based rejection and discrimination associates negatively with personal relatedness (e.g., Branscombe et al., 1999; Schmitt et al., 2014; Wirth & Williams et al., 2009)	• Collective efficacy associates positively with personal efficacy (Jugert et al., 2016 ; Oyserman et al., 2006) • Negative stereotypes about group competence associates negatively with performance (Schmader et al., 2008; Shapiro & Neuberg, 2007) • Loss of collective control associates negatively with personal control (Tiessen, Kirmayer, & Taylor, 2009)	• Restrictions to cultural determination and cultural expression associates negatively with personal autonomy (Kachanoff et al., 2019)

Figure 2: An integration of social identity theory and self-determination theory literature

explicating how social identity factors impact individual and group needs.

Implications and Future Directions

By bringing attention to the psychological needs of groups, we expand self-determination

theory—a theory that has primarily considered only the psychological needs of individuals. By

highlighting the psychological importance of group-based *autonomy* needs (Kachanoff, et al.,

2019), we also broaden social identity theory—a theory that has primarily considered other

important group needs (e.g., the drive for collective esteem, distinctiveness and coherence;

Staub,1999; Vignoles, Regalia, Manzi, Golledge, & Scabini, 2006). Going forward, it will be

important for researchers focused on psychological need satisfaction to simultaneously assess

group needs for relatedness, competence, and autonomy; To this end, a measure to assess each of these three group needs has recently been validated (Parker, Ryan, Duineveld, & Bradshaw, 2019).

Central to our framework is the proposition that *group* need satisfaction is consequential because of its implications for *persona*l need satisfaction. Our perspective is consistent with social identity theory, which argues that people care about the positive distinctiveness of their social group because of its implications for their self-esteem (Hornsey, 2008). Our perspective is also consistent with research documenting the motivational primacy of the individual self, versus, the social self (Sedikides, Gaertner, Luke, O' Mara, & Gebauer, 2013). Importantly, however, within certain contexts satisfaction of group needs may be psychologically consequential for group members, independent of its consequences for personal need satisfaction. For example, Shapiro and colleagues (2013) found that among some group members, negative group stereotypes are threatening not because of their implications for the self, but because of their implications for the group.

From a self-categorization theory perspective (Turner et al., 1987; Hornsey, 2008), group-need satisfaction may be most consequential when group members construe their self-concept more on the basis of their social identity and less on the basis of their personal identity as a unique individual. Thus, future research is needed to examine whether group need satisfaction becomes consequential independent of personal need satisfaction in contexts in which one's social versus personal identity is the most salient aspect of the self. Relatedly, future research is needed to specify when group-level factors versus group-member factors have the greatest bearing on *personal* need satisfaction. Although both group-level and group-member factors are relevant to one's social identity, when people self-categorize on the basis of their

social versus personal identity, factors influencing the collective state of their group may become most consequential.

We call on researchers to examine how group members may adapt in response to feeling that the needs of their group are threatened. When group members feel that one of their group needs is not met, they may adjust how they identify and relate to their group (i.e., group-member factors) to personally satisfy the threatened need. For example, Branscombe and colleagues (1999) found that people who feel that their ingroup is socially rejected by outgroup members can still satisfy their personal need for relatedness by strengthening their bonds with ingroup members. Future work could examine whether group members who feel that their collective autonomy is restricted by other groups may try to mitigate the negative impact of this autonomy threat by personally identifying with their group for autonomous reasons. However, it may be difficult to fully contend with group-level threats: Although group members may be able to partially offset the rejection they experience from group-based discrimination by strengthening their bonds with members of their stigmatized group, a meta-analytic review by Schmitt and colleagues (2014) suggests that, *overall*, threats to relatedness needs of the group are detrimental to personal well-being.

People identify with a multitude of different groups, each of which will have differential levels of group need satisfaction. As such, group members may also adapt to group need threats by selectively deidentifying with the threatened group, and rather, identifying more strongly with groups which they perceive to be related, competent, and autonomous (Easterbrook & Vignoles, 2012). However, group members cannot always choose their group membership, or, how they are categorized by others (Kachanoff, Ysseldyk, Taylor, de la Sablonnière, & Crush, 2016). Despite these complexities, it is clear that considering *what* social identities are subjectively

active within a given context is critical to ascertain whether an individual's group needs, and in turn, personal psychological needs are satisfied (Turner et al., 1987).

Future research is also needed to examine which group needs have priority if they are in conflict with each other. For example, would group members tolerate restrictions to their group's autonomy to be accepted by other groups? According to self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2017), there is no hierarchy between the three needs, and jeopardizing any one need to satisfy the others is detrimental. Although it remains to be tested whether groups do prioritize certain group needs, it is likely that compromising one group need to satisfy another group need is maladaptive.

In sum, our framework integrates two significant psychological theories: self-determination theory and social-identity theory. While there remains much potential for further integration of these two perspectives, one point is clear: People's basic psychological need satisfaction is fundamentally linked to their social groups. Thus, new paths for understanding intra-and-intergroup relations are revealed. Specifically, to answer the question "am *I* related, competent, and autonomous as an individual?", we must ask "are *we* related, competent, and autonomous as a group?"

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Figure Captions

Figure 1: A unified theoretical framework of how group need satisfaction relates to personal need satisfaction.

Figure 2: An integration of social identity theory and self-determination theory literature explicating how social identity factors impact individual and group needs.

Recommended Reading

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