



Understanding the need for novelty from the perspective of self-determination theory



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ABSTRACT

A fundamental tenet of self-determination theory is that the satisfaction of three basic, innate psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness is necessary for optimal functioning. The aim of this research was to propose novelty as a basic psychological need in self-determination theory and develop a new measure to assess novelty need satisfaction, the Novelty Need Satisfaction Scale (NNSS). Two studies were performed, one at the global lifestyle level (Study 1: general adults, $N = 399$, $M_{\text{age}} = 31.30$ years) and the other at a contextual level in physical education (Study 2: first-year post-compulsory secondary school students, $N = 1035$, $M_{\text{age}} = 16.20$ years). Participants completed the NNSS alongside measures of psychological needs and regulation styles from self-determination theory and psychological well-being. The six-item NNSS showed adequate psychometric properties and discriminant validity with other psychological needs in both studies. Novelty need satisfaction predicted life satisfaction (Study 1) and intrinsic motivation in physical education (Study 2) independent of the other three psychological needs. Results provide preliminary evidence that need for novelty is a unique candidate need alongside existing needs from self-determination theory, but further confirmatory and experimental research is required.

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1. Introduction

Self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1991, 2000) is currently one of the most important motivational theories in social psychology given considerable evidence of its capacity to predict human behavior in multiple behavioral contexts. Although the theory postulates have been widely tested and applied, it is a ‘living’ theory that has been modified and advanced as new applications and processes are discovered (e.g., Vansteenkiste, Niemiec, & Soens, 2010). A key driver of motivation set out in self-determination theory is satisfaction of three basic, psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Since its formulation, these three needs are considered ‘basic’ and fundamental to the development of effective motivational orientations and optimal functioning, despite other proposals (Ryan & Deci, 2000a; Sheldon, Elliot, Kim, & Kasser, 2001). The aim of this article is to suggest the need for novelty, defined as the need to experience something not

previously experienced or deviates from everyday routine, as an additional basic need alongside the needs proposed in self-determination theory. The focus is to provide the conceptual basis of the need for novelty and its role in the theory, why its satisfaction is important for optimal functioning, develop a measure of satisfaction of the need, and provide an empirical test of its construct, discriminant, convergent, and predictive validity alongside existing needs in the theory. Consistent with measures based on the conceptualization of the existing candidate needs within self-determination theory, our proposed new measure focuses on the satisfaction of the need for novelty rather than its intensity. While previous studies have developed instruments to measure people’s tendency to seek novelty, our study is the first that conceptualizes novelty as a need within self-determination theory and analyzes the relations of novelty need satisfaction with different positive outcomes.

1.1. Basic psychological needs in self-determination theory

The conceptualization of needs in self-determination theory is based on two classic traditions in the study of motivation, the Hull (1943) and

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Murray (1938) traditions. On the one hand, Hull specified a set of innate physiological needs (e.g., food, water, sex) whose deficit activates drive states, and that must be met for the organism to remain physically healthy. On the other hand, Murray referred to psychological instead of physiological needs and he considered needs as acquired instead of innate. Murray defined needs as anything that moves an individual to action, and, therefore, most needs established in his list (e.g., abasement, acquisitiveness, dominance) are not necessary to achieve a healthy development and optimal functioning (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Self-determination theory proposes a set of innate needs consistent with the Hullian tradition, but it focuses at the psychological level according to Murray's approach. However, the function of the needs is quite different based on their organismic-dialectical approach.

According to self-determination theory, basic psychological needs are defined as innate psychological nutrients, the satisfaction of which is essential for the process of continuous psychological growth, integrity, well-being, and optimal functioning (Deci & Ryan, 2000). These needs are organismic and present in all individuals, therefore, they do not represent acquired or learned orientations. The needs are qualitatively different from deficits or defensive motives. The needs are conceptualized as essential for optimal functioning—the means to promote human potential—whereas defensive motives are derived from threats and the thwarting of needs (Ryan & Deci, 2000a).

In addition, the needs are considered universal and present in all cultures and settings (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Sheldon et al., 2001). Need satisfaction is essential for healthy development and well-being and can be achieved by means of a great variety of behaviors that can differ among individuals and cultures. This means that individuals cannot prosper unless they satisfy their needs. Needs persist over the entire lifespan, although their relative importance, their forms of expression, and the pathways to achieve their satisfaction vary throughout lifetime and across cultures (Ryan & Deci, 2000b).

Deci and Ryan (1991, 2000) and Ryan and Deci (2000b) in their basic postulates of self-determination theory, establish three basic psychological needs that meet the above-mentioned criteria: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. The need for autonomy refers to the desire for choice and volition over one's activities and goals, without externally-referenced pressures and threats, actively engaging in the process of decision-making and attaining a sense of agency in one's environment. The need for competence reflects the desire to experience efficacy, to feel that one is doing things well, and achieving one's goals. The need for relatedness reflects the desire to experience a sense of connectedness with significant others and to maintain good social relations and feel accepted. It is the satisfaction of these three needs that is hypothesized to be related to adaptive motivational orientations toward behaviors, that is, autonomous motivation, and to maintain a sense of optimal functioning. Furthermore, it is the satisfaction of all three needs that is required for optimal functioning and measures of the satisfaction of the needs have indicated a higher-order need satisfaction construct consistent with this complementarity hypothesis (Hagger, Chatzisarantis, & Harris, 2006).

1.2. Internalization, intrinsic motivation, and novelty

The concept of basic psychological needs specifies the content of motivation and provides a basis for energizing and directing action. Needs are considered essential to understand what (content) and why (process) one seeks goals, and they are a key concept to interpret the processes of internalization and intrinsic motivation in self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000). According to the theory, satisfaction of basic psychological needs is related to more autonomous forms of motivation with respect to activities and behaviors. Autonomous actions are those that are experienced as self-endorsed and reflect of an individual's genuine sense of self. If psychological needs are satisfied, people value the importance of the activity they are performing, integrate it into their lifestyle, feel that they are the origin of their actions,

and experience adaptive outcomes including behavioral persistence, enjoyment, and psychological well-being. However, for the interpretation of this process to be effective, it is necessary to establish a fundamental set of needs that explain a large number of phenomena. As the number of needs increases, the utility of this approach decreases. In fact, one of the reasons why the classic theories of needs were not accepted was that their list of needs was too long and weighty (Ryan & Deci, 2000a). It is extremely important for each candidate need to reflect a basic, fundamental need that extends to the explanation of a large number of behavioral phenomena (Ryan & Deci, 2000a).

Taking this into account, we propose novelty as a candidate basic psychological need within self-determination theory. Drawing from the tenets of the theory, we aim to identify the conceptual basis for the need for novelty, explaining its relation with the process of internalization, intrinsic motivation, and well-being. In fact, in the classic studies of Deci and Ryan, novelty is frequently mentioned as an important element of human motivation. Deci and Ryan (2000) define intrinsic motivation as "active engagement with tasks that people find interesting and that, in turn, promote growth. Such activities are characterized by novelty, or what Berlyne (1971) called 'collative stimulus properties', and by optimal challenge" (p. 233). Ryan and Deci (2000b) consider that intrinsic motivation is "the inherent tendency to seek out novelty and challenges, to extend and exercise one's capacities, to explore, and to learn" (p. 70), and Deci and Ryan (1991) state that intrinsic motivation "leads people to encounter new challenges that are optimal for their self-development and that can be integrated as development proceeds naturally" (p. 244). Novelty and perceived competence, therefore, represent two essential aspects of intrinsic motivation derived from original conceptualizations of the construct in self-determination theory. It is therefore surprising that competence has been conceived as a basic psychological need, the object of study of many studies, while novelty has not received comparable attention.

The conceptual case for novelty seeking as an innate and universal need is based on the original operationalization of self-determination theory. Deci and Ryan (1985) contend that children are active, inquisitive, and curious from birth and are constantly in need of stimulation. The key motivational state of intrinsic motivation characterizes the natural inclination toward spontaneous interest and exploration, assimilation, and mastery as an essential experience necessary for cognitive and social development and optimal functioning (Ryan, 1995; Ryan & Deci, 2000b). Moreover, self-determination theory suggests that humans have innate propensities to commit to interesting activities (novelty), practice capacities (competence), pursue relations with others in social groups (relatedness), and integrate personal and intrapsychic experiences in relative unity (autonomy) (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Individuals are therefore compelled to seek out new experiences, a need that complements the desire to experience effectance and choice, mastery, and connectedness with others (Deci & Ryan, 1991).

The integration of new experiences is related to a tendency toward negentropy, a term that represents a more elaborated organization of the system which is central to the development of a sense of self (Deci & Ryan, 1991). Systems that are not renewed tend to deplete, disappear and become extinct, and, therefore, for humans to survive they need continuous innovation and evolution in their developmental process. Since prehistory, humans have developed new objects, inventions, activities, ideas, and projects as a part of their natural evolution. Life without the pursuit of novelty would mean individuals would not engage in exploratory pursuits to understand the self and their environment, to search for meaning, and for personal growth (Kashdan & Silvia, 2009). Although this need to innovate is related to the needs for competence and autonomy, it seems a source of motivation in its own. In this line, novelty would have an adaptive function being important for the development of phylogenetic and ontogenetic adaptive strategies. Children seek new experiences to stimulate their developing brains; adolescents seek novelty to extend their horizons and to develop their social identities; and in adults novelty is related to the development of the self-

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