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An Investigation of Basic Psychological Need Satisfaction in Small Groups

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An Investigation of Basic Psychological Need Satisfaction in Small Groups

Summary

Overview

I am a fourth-year graduate student in good standing in the experimental psychology program at the University of Mississippi and am working under the direction of Dr. Carrie Veronica Smith. I plan to use the Graduate Student Council research grant program to conduct a study for my doctoral dissertation, which I plan to propose in Spring 2020. For this project, I will investigate self-determination theory. Specifically, I want to study how individual's satisfaction of autonomy, competence, and relatedness relates to these same needs in other group members while they engage in a cooperative task, as well as how satisfaction of these needs influences group satisfaction and success.

Intellectual Merit

My dissertation will contribute to the theory of self-determination theory by helping us to determine how individuals' psychological need satisfaction of autonomy, competence, and relatedness influences others' need satisfaction in small groups. Much research has been conducted demonstrating that individuals who feel competent (have a sense of effectiveness in their environment), autonomous (feel a sense of volition for their own behavior) and related (feel cared for by others) have stronger subjective well-being and other better outcomes (see Deci & Ryan, 2000 for a review). These effects have been reliably demonstrated in numerous contexts such as health (Gómez-Baya, Lucia-Casademunt, & Salinas-Pérez, 2018), relationships (Leung & Law, 2019), academics (Yu & Levesque-Bristol, 2018), and the workplace (Van den Broeck, Ferris, Chang, & Rosen, 2016). However, studies have yet to investigate satisfaction of autonomy, competence, and relatedness at the group level. Four participants will play a cooperative board game (*Forbidden Island*TM) in which they must work together to capture treasure on a sinking island. The purpose of this game is to mimic real-life work groups in which individuals must work on a task towards a common goal, while also having separate and unique responsibilities. This will contribute to the theory of self-determination theory by helping us to examine whether those who feel greater need satisfaction are more likely to be supportive of other people's needs. In addition, it is also important to investigate whether individuals' perception of their group's autonomy, competence, and relatedness influences actual group performance and success. Implications of this research could be applied to both workplace and academic contexts.

External Opportunity

The external opportunity I plan to apply for is the \$15,000 Geis Memorial award, which is a dissertation grant funded by the American Psychological Association's Society for the Psychology of Women (due April 15th, 2020). This grant money will be used to conduct a study on self-determination theory in women who work in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) fields. This external opportunity will benefit my academic career by allowing me to contribute to a program of research and, in accordance with the study that is being proposed for this Graduate Student Council research program grant, will lead to a package of studies that will be presented at national conferences and submitted to high-impact journals.