

THINKING OF ADMIRERED ONES: EFFECTS ON INTERPERSONAL BEHAVIORS AND PERSONAL WELL-BEING

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Abstract

Admiration, experiencing and expressing admiration towards another, may be considered a basis for building harmonious relationships, but its impact on a more profound, personal level and the relationships with people other than admired ones has been less studied. Is admiration toward another opposed to self-acceptance or a loss of personal power, or is it associated with benefits for personal well-being as well? The objective of the present study was to explore the answer to this question by means of an experiment, integrating psychometric and statistical methods as well, in a more detailed manner. After an experiential exercise of thinking of the persons they admire and expressing their admiration in front of others, the participants assessed their interpersonal behavior, tendency to obsess, and to perform compulsions, and personal well-being on several dimensions. Compared to the control group, those involved in the admiration exercise reported more relational and autonomy thwarting towards others, less relational support offered and a lower sense of purpose in life, while there were no significant differences for the received support or thwarting from others.

Keywords: autonomy thwarting, competence support, purpose in life, compulsions, relational support.

1. INTRODUCTION

According to Maslow's theory of self-actualization, a person needs a supportive social environment to grow and to reach to the self-actualization needs from his hierarchical model with seven steps (Maslow, 2013). A self-actualizing person is also capable of establishing and nourishing empathic relationships with others, contributing to their autonomous development, in harmonious relationships, according to others' real needs. This means offering unconditional positive regard to others (Rogers, 1951). As a characteristic of early stages of life, people tend to assume that another sees the world the same way they see it, but some tend to keep this perspective in older ages. Such high egocentrism for friends, objectively established, may be best explained by the failure to override an egocentric default. Although familiarity and similarity independently amplify self-projection, the effects are larger for similarity. The egocentric effect is also amplified by: affinity, group membership, self-accessibility (activation of self-information), individualism, high power, social class and status, right-wing orientation, congruent emotions, anxiety and happiness. An attenuating effect has collectivism,

bilingualism, incidental and internal anger, differentiation, imitation-inhibition training, avoidance motives and multiculturalism (Todd & Tamir, 2024). Admiration predicted more prosocial behaviors and higher satisfaction of basic psychological needs, while rivalry had the opposite effects in research involving Chinese adolescents (Lin, Wong, Guo, & Fung, 2024). Also, prosocial behavior supported a higher satisfaction of basic psychological needs and admiration. Autonomy supportive parenting had higher positive effects on prosocial behaviors of adolescents, the effect being magnified by their narcissism (Lan & Ma, 2024). Controlling parenting is positively associated with extrinsic values, the relationship being moderated by chaotic parenting, meaning also a disengagement from the pursuit of internal goals, expressing intrinsic values and personal needs (Tessier, Joussemet, Kurdi et al., 2023). According to Vanhove-Meriaux and colleagues (2017), the satisfaction of needs for personal relationships and competence development in older adults are positively associated with positive affectivity, vitality and purpose in life, while competence and autonomy thwarting result in negative affective states. Moreover, according to James and colleagues (2017) positive online socialization decreases the risk for obsessive compulsive disorder, the link being the need to belong.

The objective of this research was to explore the effects of remembering admired persons and expressing admiration have on self-assessed interpersonal behavior, personal well-being, and compulsions, but also to explore the associations between the dimensions of well-being with the interpersonal behavior or different type of compulsions.

The hypothesis was that expressing admiration towards others would influence the scores on self-assessed offered autonomy thwarting (H1), offered relational support (H2), offered relational thwarting (H3), and purpose in life (H5).

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

To accomplish the objectives, we conducted a quasi-experimental study, integrating psychometric and statistical methods.

The participants were divided into two groups. The experimental group consisted of 21 persons with a mean age of 39 years ($SD=9.284$), and the control group consisted of 20 persons with mean age of 32.7 years ($SD=11.720$), students in the first year at *Clinical Psychology: Assessment and Intervention*. The assignment in the experimental group was based on their presence at the same time at the practical lesson (when they were informed about the research and the activity), while the others voluntarily completed the questionnaires online.

Materials and methods:

The Well-being Questionnaire (6 scale) (Ryff & Keyes 1995) assesses six dimensions (autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance) considered to be representative for personal well-being in a short format of 18 items, with three items for each dimension. All dimensions are interconnected, characterizing a person who accepts her needs and resources, engages in meaningful actions into the environment while cultivating positive relationships, thus being able to autonomously engage in personal growth. The items are in the form of self-describing phrases, the respondent expressing his agreement on a scale with five possibilities, from *Strongly Disagree* to *Strongly Agree*. The instrument has good validity and reliability. It was chosen for its comprehensive model, well fitted with the theory of the research, in a short, yet reliable form.

The Interpersonal Behavior Questionnaire (Rocchi, Pelletier, & Desmarais, 2017) is dedicated to interpersonal behavior, both received from and directed towards others, in terms of opposites (either

support or thwarting), focused on personal autonomy, competence, and interpersonal relationships. It contains four items for all the three dimensions, for the two outcomes, in both directions. It has good psychometric properties, and was chosen for the analytical, clear perspective over interpersonal behavior, strongly related to admiration.

The Revised Obsessive- Compulsive Inventory (Foa et al., 2002) contains 18 items, three for each of the five compulsions (washing, hoarding, ordering, checking, neutralizing) and another three for obsessivity. The inventory has good psychometric properties, despite being short, and was chosen for its correspondence to the latest theoretical perspective on the topic.

Procedure: The experimental task was a group exercise during which the participants expressed by painting the way four persons they admire made them feel and think, and the way they have inspired them, and the same about a fifth person in the room. Afterwards, they presented and spoke about them in front of the whole group, without naming the persons. The persons in the control group only completed the same questionnaires in Google Forms.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The first hypothesis was that there would be significant differences in the offered autonomy thwarting after expressing admiration for some persons in their life. After expressing admiration in painting and speaking about the admired ones, the participants in the experimental group expressed higher tendencies to thwart the autonomy of important people in their lives. $t=-2.225$, $p=.032$, confirming the hypothesis as shown in Figure 1.

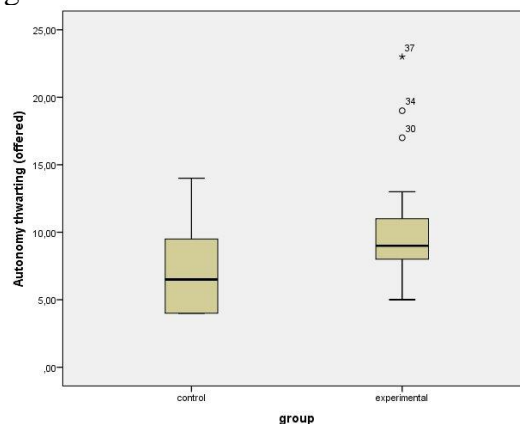


Figure 1: The differences between the experimental and the control group on the Autonomy thwarting (offered) dimension of PCI

The second hypothesis was that there would be significant differences in self-reported relational support after participating in the admiration exercise. There were significant differences, with lower scores for the experimental group, in the relational support the participants offer ($t=2.603$, $p=.013$, Figure 2)

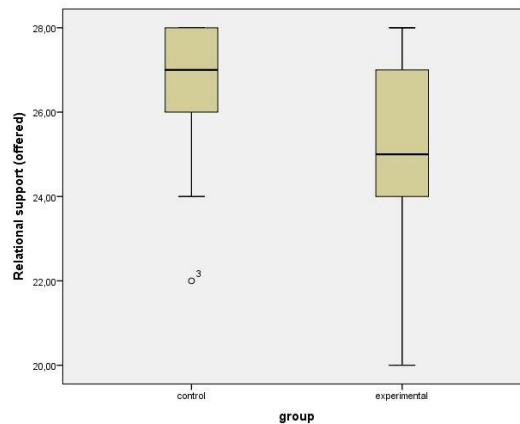


Figure 2: The differences between the experimental and the control group on the Relational support (offered) dimension of PCI

The third hypothesis was that expressing admiration would influence the self-assessed relational thwarting offered to others. The participants in the painting exercise showed higher scores for relational thwarting they offer ($t=-2.460$, $p=.018$), confirming the hypothesis (Figure 3).

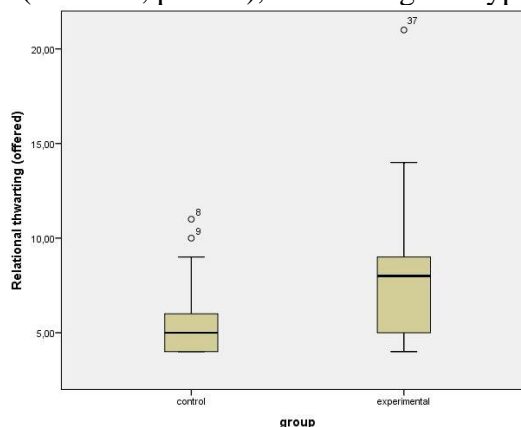


Figure 3: The differences between the experimental and the control group on the Relational thwarting (offered) dimension of PCI

The fourth hypothesis was that there would be differences in the self-assessed purpose in life between the two research groups. The participants in the painting exercise showed lower scores on the purpose in life dimension of well-being ($t=2.536$, $p=.015$, Figure 4).

Afterwards, we examined the correlations of the six dimensions of well-being with the interpersonal behavior and with the obsessivity and different type of compulsions. Autonomy had a significant negative correlation with the offered autonomy thwarting ($r=-.509$, $p=.001$, Figure 4), with washing ($r=-.369$, $p=.018$), obsessivity ($r=-.329$, $p=.036$), competence thwarting offered ($r=-.579$, $p=.000$, Figure 5) and received ($r=-.308$, $p=.050$), offered relational thwarting ($r=-.361$, $p=.021$), received autonomy thwarting ($r=-.314$, $p=.049$). It also had significant positive correlations with autonomy support, offered ($r=.399$, $p=.010$) and received ($r=.339$, $p=.030$), and the received competence support ($r=.364$, $p=.019$).

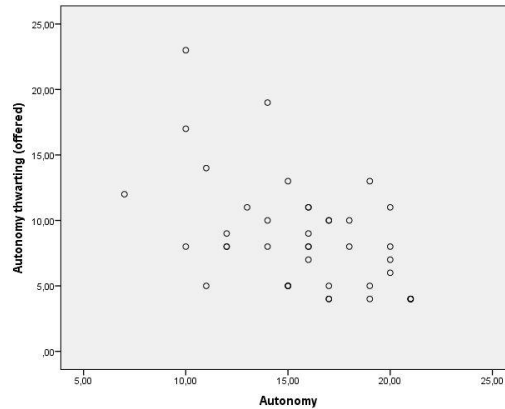


Figure 4: The association between the Autonomy dimension of well-being and the offered Autonomy thwarting

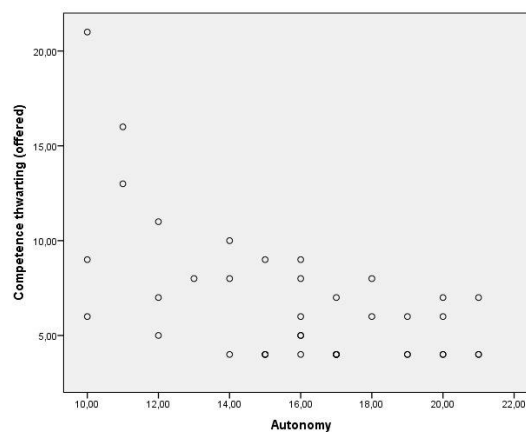


Figure 5: The association between the Autonomy dimension of well-being and the offered Competence thwarting

Environmental mastery had a significant negative correlation with the offered competence thwarting ($r=-.440$, $p=.005$, Figure 6) and with obsessivity ($r=-.356$, $p=.022$).

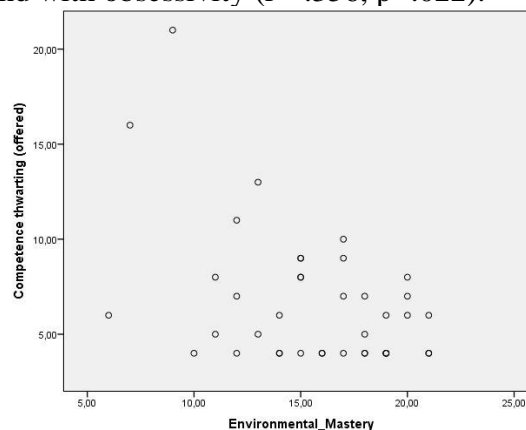


Figure 6: The association between the Environmental mastery dimension of well-being and the offered Competence thwarting

Personal growth had significant negative correlations with the offered relational thwarting ($r=-.428$, $p=.005$, Figure 7), offered autonomy thwarting ($r=-.348$, $p=.028$), offered competence thwarting ($r=-.322$, $p=.046$), and positive associations with the offered relational support ($r=.378$, $p=.015$), and offered autonomy support ($r=.359$, $p=.021$).

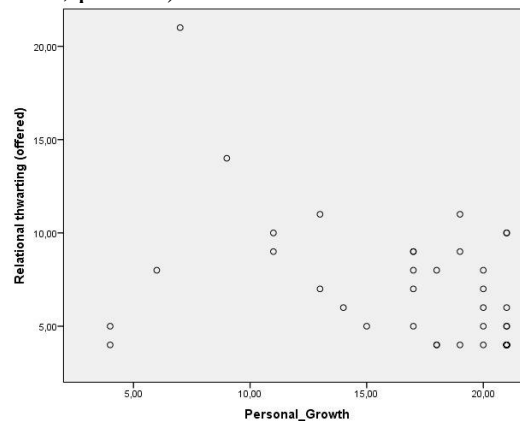


Figure 7: The association between the Personal growth dimension of well-being and the offered Relational thwarting

Positive relations with others had a significant positive correlation with the received autonomy support ($r=.668$, $p=.000$, Figure 8), with relational support offered ($r=.407$, $p=.008$) and received ($r=.552$, $p=.000$), with received competence support ($r=.510$, $p=.001$), and negative associations with competence thwarting offered ($r=-.328$, $p=.042$) and received ($r=-.488$, $p=.001$), received autonomy thwarting ($r=-.318$, $p=.046$), received relational thwarting ($r=-.523$, $p=.000$), washing ($r=-.543$, $p=.000$), and obsessivity ($r=-.524$, $p=.000$).

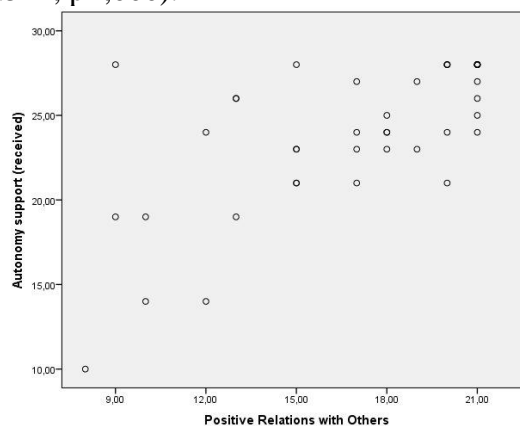


Figure 8: The association between the Positive relations with others dimension of well-being and the received Autonomy support

Purpose in life had significant negative association with the autonomy thwarting received ($r=-.517$, $p=.001$, Figure 9) and offered ($r=-.508$, $p=.001$), and also with washing ($r=-.383$, $p=.013$), ordering ($r=-.319$, $p=.042$), and obsessivity ($r=-.313$, $p=.046$), and had positive associations with the received support for autonomy ($r=.401$, $p=.009$), competence ($r=.460$, $p=.000$), and relationships ($r=.371$, $p=.018$).

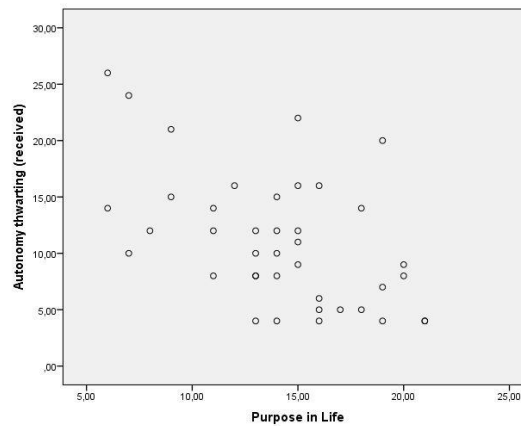


Figure 9: The association between the Purpose in life dimension of well-being and the received Autonomy thwarting

Self-acceptance had significant negative correlation with obsessions ($r=-.490$, $p=.001$), washing ($r=-.450$, $p=.003$), hoarding ($r=-.362$, $p=.020$), and ordering ($r=-.350$, $p=.026$) and also with the received autonomy ($r=-.324$, $p=.041$) and competence ($r=-.415$, $p=.007$) thwarting, and positive associations with received autonomy ($r=.432$, $p=.005$) and competence ($r=.308$, $p=.050$) support.

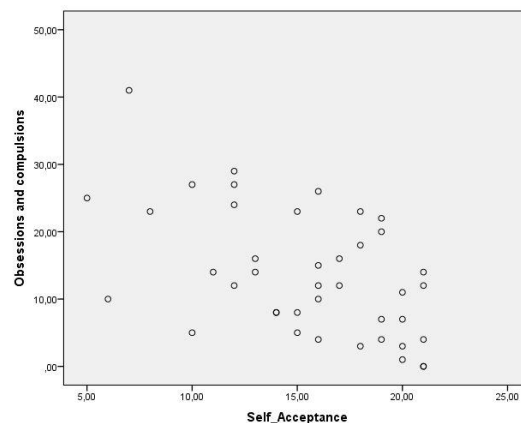


Figure 10: The association between the Self-Acceptance dimension of well-being and the total Obsessions and compulsions score

The participants tend to express a higher tendency to thwart the autonomy of important people in their life. In line with the egocentring tendencies of thinking about other, they may think of the people they admire in terms of personal internal objects but also may consider that they might do more to support their autonomy.

After thinking of persons they admire, expressing the way they made them feel, think and inspired them by painting and speaking in front of the group, the participants presented scores that showed a lower tendency to offer relational support to other persons in their life. They may think that the others do not need as they seem to be able to be admirable persons by themselves or they are less appropriate to be in the offering position or tend to be focused more on the internal objects of their admiration, neglecting the relational needs of the others.

Moreover, after expressing admiration, both in painting and in words, the participants tend to think that they undermine the relational support for others. This finding is somehow contradicting to that

of admiration as wanting to have relationship with the admired one. It may be explained by some sort of extreme possessiveness (wanting them to have no other friends and isolating them) or envy, or the need to control the others, but also as viewing them as the carriers of some qualities, neglecting their more vulnerable parts or may see the closeness with others as a possibility to interfere with the admired ways of being.

By focusing on the people they admire the most, the participants in the art-therapy technique had significantly lower scores for purpose in life, suggesting that this type of focus reduces the one on personal needs and wants, of the higher purpose in life in general. Also, by comparison, they may assess themselves as less self-actualizing. Admiration, especially for people acting morally or simply attractive, but also possessing acquired talents, may typically have an emulating effect, but not necessarily. Zagzebski (2017) mentions deviant cases of admiration, characterized by an envious desire to deprive the admired person of her admired features. On the other hand, emulation involves admiring others in a manner that fosters the motive to emulate the admired person, in a dependent manner, to be the way she is admired for: if I admire a kind person, I will try to become kind.

Furthermore, for all the participants, autonomy seems to have more to do with the support received in developing personal competencies and using them, and negatively be associated with the dimensions regarding relational life, obsessions and especially the washing compulsion. Environmental mastery seems to be associated with thwarting others' competence and personal obsessivity, as the higher the feeling of environmental mastery, the less intense the intrusive, anxiogenic, repetitive thoughts, but also invalidating the efforts of others. Positive relations with others had the higher correlations with obsessivity and compulsions and with most dimensions of interpersonal behavior, both in terms of support and thwarting, highlighting the important role the social environment has in developing competencies which allow autonomous functioning, not only for emotional support. It also highlights the importance of reciprocity for positive relationships. Interesting enough, personal growth seems to be more associated with the support offered to other people, and only with autonomy and social support from others, as if supporting others' growth also reflects in personal growth. Purpose in life has more to do with autonomy, as expected, higher sense of purpose in life being associated with less obsessivity and compulsions, and with the personal support received in all its forms.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Thinking of admired persons in a meditative, expressive manner and talking about them in front of others, seems to make people to be more sensitive in support they offer to others and think that they thwart their autonomy and relational support, and that they offer less support. Thinking of the person in an isolated manner may explain the difference, but also a possessive perspective, wanting to possess who they admire. Also, focusing on others, in an admiring manner, decreases the subjective feeling of purpose in life, as the persons may focus on the positive feeling facilitated by the admired one, losing sight of the emotions connected with the satisfaction of personal needs and goals. There are very nuanced interrelations among the dimensions of interpersonal behavior, dimensions and behaviors of well-being, and repetitive thoughts and actions.

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