



Understanding the Structure of Autonomy among Filipino Adolescents

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Abstract

This study examined the structure of autonomy among Filipino adolescents through the framework proposed by Markus and Kitayama (1991b). Screening through median split was used to identify participants with high level of interdependence. The first set of participants ($n=21$) responded in the qualitative phase while the second set of participants ($n=201$) participated in the quantitative phase. After performing exploratory factor analysis (EFA), two dimensions of autonomy emerged—inward autonomy *and outward autonomy*. The results provide evidence about the unique definition of autonomy in an interdependent culture like the Philippines. Implications to assessment and student motivation are discussed.

Keywords: Self-Determination Theory, Interdependence, Autonomy, Filipino Adolescents

Introduction

Self Determination Theory or SDT (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2000) described autonomy (deCharms, 1968; Deci, 1975) as a motivational state that produces behaviors that are self-endorsed and willingly enacted. People are described to be most autonomous when an action is based on their own decisions, genuine interests, values, and desires. Furthermore, it had been studied in many perspectives and had been linked primarily with well-being (e. g., Chirkov, Ryan, Kim, & Kaplan, 2003; Reis, Sheldon, Gable, Roscoe, & Ryan, 2000). In addition, Ryan and Deci (2000) proposed autonomy as one of the

three basic psychological needs that, when satisfied, is assumed to contribute to overall well-being.

Autonomy has been challenged by many theories. For example, Wegner (2002) views that behavior can be displayed non-consciously, and therefore emphasized that human will is an illusion. Other theorists forwarded another perspective when they criticized the idea that autonomy is gender and culture bound and insisted that autonomy is a cultural element rather than a process of behavioral regulation (e.g., Iyengar & DeVoe, 2003; Jordan, 1991). Despite these divergences in theoretical perspectives, autonomy remained to be a fundamental human need and was claimed to be universal and a cross-developmental need (Ryan & Deci, 2006). In SDT perspective, autonomy is characterized as a state that can vary in degree. Ryan and Deci (2000) emphasized that it is a regulatory style continuum that ranges from controlled regulation (heteronomy) to true self-regulation (autonomy). SDT classifies people's motivation into different forms such as being externally regulated, introjected, identified, and integrated. Individuals with externally regulated form of motivation are considered the most heteronomous. People with introjected kind of motivation, on the other hand, displays partial assimilation of external influences. Moreover, individuals who internalize a personal valuing of actions are described as having an identified form of motivation. Those with well-synthesized values and beliefs are characterized to have an integrated form of motivation. (Ryan & Deci, 2000). The last form of regulation, intrinsic motivation, is considered highly autonomous, as it is independent and is fueled by interest in the behavior (Ryan & Deci, 2006). Although autonomy has been formulated as a universal need, one cannot assume that it operates the same way when observed among people who live in an interdependent social system. Interdependent cultures like the Philippines value interpersonal relationships as a primary cultural goal. Therefore, the motivation and decision to display any behavior while navigating in this kind of culture would give elevated consideration on interpersonal perception and consequences. Enriquez (1977) explained that Filipinos have higher sensitivity to other people and makes decision in consideration of others.

Markus and Kitayama (1991a, 1991b) argued that people with independent (individualistic) and interdependent self-construal (collectivistic) perceive the self in different ways. People with

independent self-construal view the self as unique individual with unique set of characteristics and was described as having lower attention to context. On the other hand, people with interdependent self-construal view the self as interconnected with others. They are described to be more sensitive with the context and tend to give more value to harmony. For this reason, cultural psychologists suggested a review of psychological processes and constructs that had been studied in the past because most of these constructs and processes are believed to behave differently when observed in a cultural perspective (e.g., Na & Kitayama, 2011; Kitayama, Duffy, Kawamura, & Larsen, 2003). Although autonomy had been studied already in a cultural perspective (e.g., Chirkov, et al., 2003), many of these studies investigated it using western formulations and instruments. Thus, studying the structure of autonomy in an interdependent culture such as the Philippines is an important research direction. The present study assumes that autonomy is shaped differently in an interdependent culture. That is, people do not only endorse behaviors that are self-oriented but also behaviors that are other-oriented or those that concern the benefit of other people.

Method

Participants

Twenty one participants (Mean Age = 17.86 years; Male = 11, Female = 10) in the qualitative phase were chosen after performing median split (Median = 5.68). The 21 participants were deduced from 45 individuals. They were chosen on the basis of their scores that are higher than the median, suggesting high level of interdependence. Moreover, 201 participants (Mean Age = 17.74; Male = 52, Female = 149) in the quantitative phase were selected as participants in the study. They were chosen from the original 405 individuals after performing median split (Median = 5.36). The participants were tertiary students from two private and one public university in Manila, Philippines. They came from different year levels and were selected through convenience sampling.

Instruments

The 11-item Relational-Interdependence Self-Construction (RISC) scale by Cross, Bacon and Morris (2000) was used to screen the participants with high level of interdependence. The researcher evaluated the 7-point scale RISC in order to ascertain that the Filipino sample can understand the items (e.g., *My close relationships are an important reflection of who I am.*). The participants answered the instrument by rating each item from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree. The obtained Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.83 suggests that the RISC items have relatively high internal consistency.

Situational sampling was used to gather qualitative data that would describe autonomy among the participants. It is a method typically used in cultural studies. This instrument was used in the present study by instructing the participants to read the definition of autonomy provided in the questionnaire then they were asked to list down at least five situations where autonomy is being displayed. After the coding analysis of the qualitative data, two major categories of behaviors were generated: *inward and outward autonomy*.

In the quantitative phase, the researcher developed a 19-item, 5-point scale instrument to measure autonomy of the participants in the quantitative phase. The 19 items were based on the two major categories that were generated from the qualitative responses in the situational sampling. 10 items were developed under ego-oriented autonomy (e.g., *I make all my decisions for my own welfare.*) and 9 items were developed under other-oriented autonomy (e.g., *I do things willingly for other people.*). The participants answered each item by rating from 1 = not true to me to 5 = very true to me.

Procedure

The study involved three phases—qualitative, item development, and the quantitative phase, all involving a participant screening process. In the qualitative phase, 45 participants were asked to answer the RISC and the situational sampling questionnaire. The RISC was used to determine the participants with higher level of interdependence through performing median split. 21 out of the 45 participants in this phase were selected for the analysis of situational sampling (qualitative) data. The qualitative method was used to gather

data about autonomy. During the administration of the two instruments, the participants were reminded that there are no right or wrong answers and that it is essential to respond with utmost honesty.

After analyzing the qualitative data, two major categories such as *inward* and *outward autonomy* were identified. Next, the researcher developed items based on the two major categories derived from the qualitative phase. The researcher checked the items to determine if they truly represent the two identified dimensions of autonomy. A new set of participants was selected to participate in the quantitative phase. Pretesting of online and face-to-face administration was done and the participants responded that both methods were almost equally effective in getting genuine responses. Two to five minutes was spent by the participants in answering the RISC and the autonomy questionnaire combined. Data on autonomy were gathered both through online and face to face administration. The same with the first face, RISC was also administered first to screen the individuals with high level of interdependence by performing median split. During the administration, an informed consent was provided to the participants. They were oriented about their voluntary participation and the nature of the study. Participants' data were analyzed using exploratory factor analysis through SPSS Version 20.

Results

Qualitative Results

The results show the experience of autonomy of the participants based on their listings of situations and behaviors where they fully endorse a behavior. Results from 21 participants indicate that the experience of autonomy or fully endorsing one's behavior revolves around two distinct dimensions: *inward* and *outward autonomy*. Table 1 shows the two dimensions represented by the categories that emerged after the analysis. It also shows definitions and sample behaviors per dimension. The first dimension is termed as *inward autonomy*. It is characterized by decisively endorsing behaviors with a motivation to gain personal benefit. It was found out that participants tend to display behaviors that are driven to have a sense of personal fulfillment and expression. However, the participants also reported fully endorsed behaviors that are interpersonal in nature or *outward autonomy*. It is

defined as a form of autonomy that prioritizes others or gives higher consideration to the welfare of other people. It must be noted that while the participants experience self-oriented autonomy, most of the listings of behaviors that they provided were other-oriented in nature. This suggests that since the participants came from an interdependent culture, which prioritizes interpersonal relationships as a cultural norm, it should not be surprising to observe behaviors that gear towards the benefit of other and yet be fully endorsed.

Table 1
Generated Categories, Definitions, and Sample Behaviors

<i>Generated Categories</i>	<i>Category Definition</i>	<i>Sample Behavior Listings</i>
Self-Oriented Autonomy	<p><i>Self-oriented autonomy</i> is characterized</p> <p>by decisively endorsing behaviors with the motivation to gain personal benefit.</p>	<p>When I joined the glee club in high school to have a sense of personal achievement and expression</p> <p>I want to do good so that I can live up to my ideals</p> <p>I learned more about football to be knowledgeable and to feel fulfilled about my lack of ability</p> <p>I study harder to be a great game developer so I can prove to my self that I can do it</p> <p>I independently choose the degree program I am taking now</p> <p>I enrolled myself in a violin class because I want to learn</p>
Other-Oriented Autonomy	<p>Other-oriented autonomy is described as endorsing behaviors with the motivation and high consideration of other people.</p>	<p>I took computer science for my family</p> <p>I spent my vacation at home to take care of my mom</p> <p>I intentionally graduated late to spend more time</p>

with someone I loved
 I volunteered for competitions
 to see my
 grandmother smile
 I talk to and include the shy kid
 in class
 I spoke in a presentation for my
 scared groupmates
 despite being scared too
 I spend extra effort to animate
 a project for my group
 and my own grade
 Working over the summer to
 fulfill my working dreams
 and to help out family
 Choosing priorities over games
 to help out groupmates
 and support them in their study
 I choose my course because I
 wanted to give my
 time to people with special
 needs

Preliminary analysis

Descriptive statistics was used to test the normality of the data. All the indicators of normality appeared to be good except for the distribution of scores on the other-oriented dimension tends to be slightly leptokurtic. This would mean that the scores in the said dimension reached a higher peak compared to a normally distributed set of data.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics of Autonomy Dimensions

Variable	M	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis	SE
Self-oriented	3.97	0.433	-0.459	0.174	0.341
Other-oriented	3.8	0.436	-0.567	1.387	0.341

Prior to the main analysis, the reliability of the self-oriented and other-oriented dimensions was tested and the obtained Cronbach's

alpha coefficients were 0.70 and 0.66, respectively. The computed Bartlett's Test of Sphericity value of 777.692 ($p < .001$) and the Kaiser-Meyer-Okin (KMO) value of 0.644 suggest that the data are acceptable to undergo factor analysis.

Main Analysis

A two-stage exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was performed. The first stage aimed to extract the factors and identify the items that loaded in each factor, while the second stage involved analyzing the retained items after ruling out the those that did not load in any of the factor and those that cross-loaded. EFA through Principal Axis Factoring (PAF) was performed with Oblimin rotation. The researcher decided to use PAF method because the multivariate normality of data distribution in the study cannot be assumed. In addition, Oblimin Rotation method was used because there is a reason to believe that the dimensions in the present study are correlated. Using the minimum Eigenvalue of 1 and screen plot as criteria, two factors which accounted for 58.36% of the variance were extracted.

The obtained pattern matrix in the first EFA obtained shows factor loadings ranging from 0.10 to 0.63 in Factor 1 and factor loadings ranging from 0.12 to 0.72. Four items from self-oriented dimension (e.g., *"I make all my decisions for my own welfare."*; *"I do not allow others to influence my decisions in life."*; *"I enroll in college to work on the skills and abilities that I lack."*; and *"Only a few of my decisions in life are self-motivated."*) and four items in other-oriented dimension (e.g., *"I rarely consider other people in making personal decisions."*; *"I do not do an action when I know that other people would be compromised."*; *"I do things willingly for other people."*; and *"I rarely let others affect my decisions."*) with factor loadings that are $<.40$ were omitted and were excluded in the second EFA. No items were excluded due to cross-loading.

Excluding the items with loadings $<.40$ in the initial EFA, the obtained pattern matrix in Table 2 shows the second EFA where six items loaded in Factor 1 with factor loadings ranging from .46 to .61, while five items loaded in Factor 2 with factor loadings ranging from .41 to .71. The second EFA was performed to check if similar results would appear after excluding the items with low factor loading values. The two factors accounted for 60.48% of the variance and the same items that loaded in both factors in the initial EFA also loaded in the

second one. Factor 1 loadings (Eigenvalue = 4.85; % of variance = 40.46) showed six items that came from one of the hypothesized dimensions which describe behaviors that are self-oriented in nature. A sample is *“I do things to prove to myself that I can do it.”* The six items in this factor represent the inward autonomy dimension. The cronbach alpha of .70 for the said dimension remained even after the second EFA, suggesting that the first autonomy dimension has acceptable level of internal consistency.

Table 3
Factor Loadings for Exploratory Factor Analysis with Rotation of Autonomy Dimensions

Items	Factor 1	Factor 2
	Inward	Outward
I am pursuing my studies to have a sense of personal achievement.	0.47	0.24
If I am to join an organization, I will do it for my own improvement.	0.58	0.035
Whenever I make big decisions, I make sure that it is good for my own future.	0.46	0.09
I want to succeed in life to fulfill my own dreams.	0.61	0.018
I do things to prove to myself that I can do it.	0.51	0.13
I accomplish things to have a sense of self-worth.	0.56	0.21
*Only a few of my decisions in life are self-motivated.	0.04	0.54
I consider other people whenever I do important decisions.	0.12	0.55
I will not leave my group because I know that they need me.	0.04	0.41
I work harder to see my family happy.	0.2	0.71
It is important for me to not cause problem to others whenever I make actions.	0.19	0.5

Note. Factor loadings >.40 are in boldface. Items with asterisk (*) are reversed coded.

Moreover, five items that load in Factor 2 (Eigenvalue = 1.16; % of variance = 20.02) came from the hypothesized dimension that characterized behaviors that are concerned with the welfare of other people. Hence, this factor is labeled as *outward autonomy*. A sample item is *“It is important for me to not cause problem to others whenever I make actions.”* This dimension refers to self-endorsed behaviors that are guided by an individual’s concern to others’ welfare or situation. The cronbach alpha coefficient of 0.66 for this dimension suggests a moderate level of

internal consistency during the first EFA and increased to .69 in the second EFA. The overall reliability of the two dimensions combined is 0.69 in the first EFA and .72 in the second, which also suggests an acceptable level of internal consistency.

Discussion

The present study aimed to define autonomy by testing its structure using data from individuals from an interdependent culture. This paper argued that the definition of autonomy should be explored in a nation living in an interdependent culture like the Philippines (Markus & Kitayama, 1991b) since many of the motivations behind the behaviors displayed in such cultural orientation were theorized to have much more concern about the context and welfare of the people around. By conducting an initial qualitative study, item development derived from the qualitative data, and performing EFA twice with the data from the quantitative phase, two major dimensions of autonomy was found to operate among the participants—*inward* (ego-oriented) and *outward* (other-oriented) *autonomy*. Thus, autonomy is defined in this study as a motivational state that promotes behaviors that are fully endorsed based one's own interest and/or the welfare of other people, and situational context—with inward and outward autonomy as its dimensions. Inward autonomy is a motivational state that produces self-endorsed behaviors that concern one's own interests, values, and desires, whereas outward autonomy is another motivational state that fully promotes based on context and other people's welfare and situation.

The findings suggest that Filipinos' behaviors may not only be endorsed for one's interest but it may also be influenced by how other people would be affected by our decisions and actions. The findings reflect the Filipino notion of "*kapwa*" (Enriquez, 1977) which explains Filipino's sensitivity to other people. The findings were consistent with the theoretical formulation of Markus and Kitayama (1991a, 1991b) that people from interdependent culture have high context. This means that individuals with interdependent self-construal tend to be highly sensitive to the overall situation before endorsing an action or behavior. They are more likely to screen the behaviors that they would display in order to maintain harmony and good social relations. These findings pose a challenge to the conceptualization of autonomy in the

context of SDT which is formulated using mostly Western samples. Since most studies on autonomy using SDT framework are conducted using Western samples, it may be possible that its formulation is biased towards autonomy as a self-oriented construct. The findings of the present study suggest a more culturally sensitive framework in understanding autonomy.

Understanding the interdependent nature of autonomy among Filipino adolescents can help teachers, educators, and allied professionals in dealing with the lack motivation of students. Lack of motivation causes serious long-term problems (e.g., high drop out rate, diversion to drugs and violence, poverty, etc.) among students in any level and poses a challenge to parents, educators, and the society. Student motivation can be increased not only by promoting internal sources of motivation but also by promoting external sources such as the will to help one's family and others. External sources of motivation can also be provided by setting up an environment that teaches students to be more sensitive with the situation of other people and with the context. Being sensitive with the context can motivate students to independently endorse behaviors for the benefit of others and inhibit those that do not promote harmony. This study does not suggest to set aside the internal causes of motivation because it is equally important with its external counterpart.

The present study also has implications to testing. Researchers, educators, and psychometricians should be careful in using standardized measures. Fully relying on standardized tests without further validation using local norms may lead to misleading information. Most standardized tests made used Western samples with an independent view of the self. There is a need to use more culturally sensitive frameworks that give attention to the unique understanding of the self from an interdependent cultural perspective. Since people from interdependent countries like the Philippines view the self not as a unique entity but as a self that is defined by interpersonal relationships (Markus & Kitayama, 1991), using tests that were developed using Western samples may bring errors in our understanding of different constructs and phenomena as they operate in this culture. The present study suggests developing locally-made assessment tools that can best capture the indigenous characteristics of Filipino samples. The researcher also suggests that future research should verify the results of this study by revisiting the items used, and

selecting other types of populations since this study only focused on adolescents. Furthermore, confirmatory factor analysis using a new set of sample should be done to verify the results. While the results of this study are preliminary and have limitations, we now have a new measure of autonomy that is more culturally relevant to the experiences of Filipinos. It is the hope of the researcher that this new measure becomes a useful tool in the assessment of autonomy among Filipinos.

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