

## Self-exploration, self-control, and support of fundamental psychological needs

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(469 words in the body of the abstract)

### Introduction

Self-exploration involves exploring new aspects of the self or new activities, whereas self-control involves exerting control over the self. Research suggests that self-exploration and self-control in life narratives are aspects of personality differences in promotion and prevention focus (Manczak, Zapata-Geitl, & McAdams, 2014). However, promotion and prevention focus are not just personality traits, because they also function as motivational states within specific situations. Anyone can experience promotion or prevention focus in the right situations. The need-support model proposes that promotion-focused experiences tend to have more support for autonomy, competence, and relatedness than prevention-focused experiences (Vaughn, 2017). According to self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), autonomy is about really wanting to do what one is doing, competence is about feeling capable to take on and master hard challenges, and relatedness is about feeling close and connected to others. Our hypothesis was that participants would recall having more support for autonomy, competence, and relatedness in key life scenes of self-exploration than in key life scenes of self-control.

### Method

Participants were 90 Ithaca College students who did this study in exchange for extra credit in their psychology courses. The study asked them to describe two key scenes in randomized order: self-exploration and self-control.

After describing each key scene, participants completed a measure of need support about the scene they described: the Balanced Measure of Psychological Needs (BMPN; Sheldon & Hilpert, 2012). This 18-item questionnaire contains three six-item measures of support for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. In the current study, Cronbach's alphas were lower for ratings of self-exploration than for ratings of self-control. Self-exploration Cronbach's alphas = .59, .67, and .71, whereas self-control alphas = .75, .76, and .78, for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, respectively.

### Results

We conducted paired-samples *t*-tests on autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Recalled experiences of self-exploration were higher in support of all three needs than recalled experiences of self-control. The difference on relatedness was largest,  $t(89) = 8.29$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = .873$ ; followed by the difference on autonomy,  $t(89) = 4.81$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = .441$ ; and the difference on competence,  $t(89) = 2.47$ ,  $p = .016$ ,  $d = .260$ .

### Discussion

We found that experiences of self-exploration were higher in all three types of psychological need support. This finding is consistent with other research on how promotion and prevention focus relate to psychological need support (Vaughn, 2017). Limitations of the current study

include the small sample and the fact that we used a within-subjects design, which could increase the sizes of differences between conditions because participants get to contrast the conditions. Future research could examine how much the current findings reproduce with a larger, more diverse sample in a between-subjects design. Additionally, future research could assess whether need support influences the priority people give to goals that are about self-exploration versus goals that are about self-control.

**References:**

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