

# The need for affiliation



Previous research findings have concluded that human beings have a need to affiliate themselves with their peers, especially in stressful situations. An experiment conducted by Schachter (1959) assumed that when faced with a particularly difficult stressor we seek the company of those individuals that are in the same predicament as ourselves. This paper seeks to analyze the theory behind the need for affiliation and to thwart the old standing belief that we only seek the collection of people in our same situation. Yacov Rofe oversaw a study of 212 Israeli children and their parents that states otherwise. The background to Henry Murray's theory and the complete study of the Israelis are further discussed.

### Introduction to Henry Murray's Theory

Henry Murray's educational training was anything but typical for that of a psychology professor; he attained a bachelor's degree in History, a master's degree in biology from Columbia University, and a doctorate in Biochemistry. It was after reading several of Carl Jung's published work and establishing a meeting with the legendary Swiss psychiatrist that he was persuaded into studying psychoanalysis. He completed his training in Harvard University and later taught and conducted his research there until his retirement in 1962.

While Murray was director of the Psychological Clinic in Harvard he developed a term for studying personality that he called "personology." His theory was that personality was implanted in the brain. A person's cerebral composure dictates every characteristic of one's personality; everything that the personality depends on such as feelings, memories, beliefs etc., exists in the brain therefore so does the personality. Murray also noted in his theory

that although people do act to reduce psychological and physiological tension we do not act to totally eliminate that tension and that a tension-free environment is an affliction itself.

Along with Christiana Morgan, Henry Murray developed the Thematic Apperception Test. In this projective test a subject is presented with a number of black and white pictures and the subject is asked to tell a story about each picture. The test is considered to be a projective test because it is hypothesized that the subject will project their feelings, fears, hopes etc., into the story that he or she tells (Kaplan & Saccuzzo, 2005). The analysis of the stories is based upon Murray's concept of need and press. (1938)

Murray believed that psychology's primary concerns should be of individual lives and not of people as a whole. His strategy was to break down a person's complex behavior into smaller and more manageable units. The basic unit is called a proceeding and the continuation of proceedings is a serial. A proceeding is " a time period in which an important behavior pattern occurs from beginning to end" (Schultz & Schultz, 2009). Proceedings are usually associated with interactions whether they are real or fantastical. A serial is a " succession of proceedings related to the same function or purpose" (Schultz & Schultz, 2009). Serials are related to time and function. The researches conducted on these needs were the stepping stones for the development of Murray's theory of the need for affiliation.

What is the need for affiliation? By definition, an affiliation is the inclination to seek the company of others. Animals tend to separate into groups, flocks, and schools for food, migratory purposes or protection. In humans, affiliation

has a lot less to do with instincts and a lot more with motives. For example, when people are afraid they tend to seek comfort by being with a group of people for support. The company in which they seek may aid them in calming down and reducing the anxiety. It is also suggested that people tend to seek others who are in their same situation for reassurance (Piotrowski, 2004).

### Studies Conducted on the Need for Affiliation

Over the years there have been several research efforts to both prove and dismiss Henry Murray's theory of the Need for Affiliation. A study that was conducted by Craig A. Hill suggested that a person with strong affiliation needs may be more likely to express that need if the interaction was warm and compassionate yet, a person with low affiliation needs conveyed little inclination to care whether the interaction was compassionate or not (Hill, 1991). Another survey explored whether or not there was a difference in the needs for affiliation in people of different ages, sexes and education level (Ray & Hall, 1995). The study that we will be focusing on was overseen by Yascov Rofe of Bar-Ilan University in Israel using 212 Israeli children and their parents. The subjects were examined from January to March of 2003, when it was believed that there was a high risk for an Iraqi attack against Israel. His hypothesis was that the Israeli families would prefer the company of less anxious citizens rather than the company of families that were equally distressed.

### Method

#### Participants

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The participants of the study consisted of 212 Israeli children with the age range from 9-12 years of age (80 boys, 128 girls and 4 that did not report gender specifications) and 212 parents (38 fathers, 172 mothers, and 2 did not report a gender).

### Measures

The level of the partaker's concern was determined by asking the following question: "To what extent are you worried that a war will break out in Iraq and that Saddam Hussein will fire missiles toward Israel?" The responses were in a scale format that ranged from 1 (no anxiety) to 4 (high levels of anxiety). The contributor's affiliation inclinations were evaluated by their answer to the following questions: "With whom would you prefer to be in case of war?" which was rated on a scale from 1 (someone with a high level of fear) and 3 (someone without fear) and "Would you prefer to talk about war-related issues or other issues?" also judged on a 3-point scale with 1(war-related problems), 2 (not to speak) and 3 (speak of irrelative issues).

### Procedure

For this analysis questionnaires were administered between January and March 2003. During this timeframe terrorist movement was well-known and there was a severe probability of a surge of war with Iraq. The children completed their portion of the questionnaire in school or youth groups and their parents at home. All of the participants completed the questionnaire in front of the interviewer, who was blind, in order to keep the confidentiality of the participants.

## Results

### Affiliation

The data confirmed that the lowest percentage of the adult participants (2.2%) wanted to affiliate themselves with a person with more anxiety than they had, and 10.8% of the contributors wanted to be around people with the same level of anxiety and that the majority of the participants (87.1%) would rather be affiliated with people who have no anxiety. The results in the children were relatively the same. A number of tables were put together to examine the relationship between generation, anxiety and affiliation. The results concluded that the interaction of those factors were important. In order to further explore the source of the interactions a chi-square test (a test used to determine whether or not there was a noteworthy difference between the hypothesized data and the acquired data) was administered. The results are found in Table 1 and 2.

### Discussion Tendencies

The chi-square data table shows that the majority of the participants both in adults and children preferred discussing topics that were unrelated to the war (54.2%) or would rather stay silent (13.5%). Only a relatively small amount of the partakers (32.3%) were interested in speaking about the war and receiving some sort of clarity on the matter. The same holds true for children. Another table was produced to identify the relationship between discussion of the war, generation and anxiety levels. They were each done separately for children and adults. The results are shown in Tables 3 and 4.

## Discussion

The purpose of this study was to prove that when people are faced with dangerous and stressful situations people would prefer to affiliate themselves with less anxious peers. In adults (who were more aware of the crisis that the situations presented) this phenomenon was present regardless of the applicants own anxiety levels whereas in children that tendency was directly related to the child's own anxiety level. These findings contradict one of the first experiments in the phenomenon of need for affiliation that was conducted by Schachter (1959) regarding electric shock and that the people who were expecting a shock sought out the comfort of others who were waiting for the same thing. In the study of the Israeli citizens it seems as though adults would prefer to seek the comfort of non-anxious peers because they are trying to escape and relax rather than speak about the war and end up with more fear. In children it seems as though the children seek the comfort of less apprehensive peers because they are unable to take any precautionary measures and for distraction.

## Conclusion

In summation, Henry Murray's theory of the need for affiliation derived from his experimentation in Harvard University regarding the theories of personality. He believes that the human personality is located in the brain because that is where our belief, memories etc., lie. He later developed the TAT test with his colleague Christiana Morgan. Murray also was a firm believer that psychology should focus more on an individual's experiences rather than people as a whole and general subject. He produced a manner in

which to break down a subject's more complex behaviors into more manageable units. He called these units proceedings and serials. It was because of this break down that he came across the need for affiliation. An affiliation is the need to establish a connection with other people especially during troubled times.

The case study that we focused on was proof that people do seek comfort during extreme stressful situations but it also thwarted Schachter's old notion that those people who are in the same situation tend to seek out comfort in peers that are going through the same situation. This study suggested that those people who are troubled would rather pursue an affiliation with someone who is either not as anxious or stressful and if they are anxious, they would prefer not to speak about it. It is believed that this is because as an adult you are looking for an escape from the stressor. In children, they tend to seek peers with no anxieties because they cannot prevent the stressor and are looking for reassurance or a distraction.