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CAPACITY TO MENTALIZE AND ACHIEVEMENT MOTIVATION

Summary: *The aim of this study was to check the potential relation between the capacity to mentalize and achievement motivation. The sample consisted of two subsamples. Sample from Serbia consisted of 142 respondents, of both sexes (Female=100; Male=42). The age range in this sample was from 18 to 43 (M=20.24). Sample from North Macedonia consisted of 100 respondents, students from Faculty of Philosophy in Skopje, both sexes (Female=65; Male=35). The age range in this sample was from 18 to 45 (M=22.2). Mentalization was operationalized using Questionnaire for assessing Mentalization (Dimitrijević, Hanak, Altaras-Dimitrijević & Jolić-Marjanović, 2017), while Achievement Motivation was measured using Achievement Motivation Scale (Franeško, Mihić, Bala, 2002). The data were analyzed by the usage of linear correlation between capacity for mentalization and achievement motivation. On the Serbian sample, statistically significant correlations were found between mentalization of self and persistence in achieving goals ($r=-.354$) and achieving goals as a source of satisfaction ($r=-.210$), between mentalization of others and persistence in achieving goals ($r=.253$), tendency towards competing ($r=.170$) and achieving goals as a source of satisfaction ($r=.209$), and between motivation for mentalization and and persistence in achieving goals ($r=.275$), tendency towards competing ($r=.242$) and achieving goals as a source of satisfaction ($r=.282$). On the sample from North Macedonia statistically significant correlations were found between mentalization of self and persistence in achieving goals ($r=-.218$), between mentalization of others and persistence in achieving goals ($r=.423$), tendency towards planning ($r=.217$) and achieving goals as a source of satisfaction ($r=.356$), and between motivation for mentalization and all components of achievement motivation ($p<.001$). In conclusion, we can say that these two constructs, both developed at an early age are connected to each other, and that patter of this connection is nearly completely the same for two examined cultures.*

Keywords: *Mentalization, Achievement motivation, North Macedonian sample, Serbian sample.*

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INTRODUCTION

Mentalization is a construct that is an object of interest of a large number of psychologists today, including developmental, social and clinical psychologists, but also, from very recently, this construct has found its application in the field of work psychology (Di Stefano, Piacentino, & Riuvoilo, 2017). Because of the possibility of applying this construct in different areas of psychology, and therefore in different areas of life, we consider it important to study this construct more closely.

Mentalization has a long history and several definitions. Traditionally, this concept was centered around the notion of transformation of drives and affects into mental representations (Marty, 1990, 1996, as cited by Dauphin al all., 2013). Mentalization can be defined as "the mental process by which a person implicitly or explicitly interprets his own behavior and behavior of others as significant on the basis of deliberate mental states such as personal desires, needs, feelings, beliefs and reasons" (Bateman & Fonagy, 2004, p. 302). This definition of mentalization is also the most widespread definition of this construct since it is its first definition, introduced in science by Fonagy and his associates (Bateman & Fonagy, 2004). Fonagy, as the author of this term, uses the term reflective function when speaking of the capacity for mentalization. The term reflective function in fact refers to the operationalization of the process at the root of the mentalization capacity, a concept that is described in the psychoanalytic (Fonagy, Edgumbe, Moran, Kennedy, & Target 1993) as well as in the literature of cognitive psychology (Morton & Frith 1995, as cited by Fonagy, Gergeley, Jurist, & Target, 2002). When we have clarified that authors sometimes use the term reflective function whilst thinking of the abilities associated with the construct of mentalization, we can continue with further clarification of the central construct of this paper. Namely, mentalization or reflective function is the ability to explain other people's behavior to their mental states (attitudes, intentions, plans, feelings, etc.) and this ability is one of the two most important aspects of mental health capacity. This aspect allows us to see the behavior of other people as meaningful and predictable, because invoking the inner mental states of other people, for the purpose of explaining their behavior, enables us to understand others better. Another aspect of mentalization refers to the ability to call our psychic experiences and give them meaning (Stefanović-Stanojević, Mihić, & Hanak, 2012). The second aspect of mentalization is, therefore, directed towards ourselves

and towards the level of understanding of ourselves. As this aspect of mentalization is more developed, a person will have a better insight into his own mental state and will better understand why he acts (or at least has the need to behave) in a certain way in certain situations.

The concept of Mentalization is strongly related to Attachment theory. Attachment is considered to be a system through which key tasks in the psychological development of an individual are being achieved – development of self and mechanisms of its regulation and, above all, the capacity for mentalization (Fonagy et al., 2002; Mikulincer, Shaver, & Pereg, 2003; Schore, 2003). The concept of mentalization, just as attachment, depends mostly upon a caregiver. More precisely, a child's capacity for mentalization depends upon caregivers ability to treat the child as a mental agent, someone with the developing capacity to mentalize (Grienenberger, Kelly, & Slade, 2005). Also, the capacity for mentalization is strongly and positively related to a secure attachment (Bateman & Fonagy, 2004). Besides that, both insecure attachment and lower capacity for mentalization correlate with psychological disorders. Mental illness is reported to be associated with disorganized attachment representations (Allen, Hauser, & Borman-Spurell, 1996; Dozier et al., 2008, according to Fizke, Buchheim & Juen, 2013) and with reduced mentalizing abilities (Fonagy et al., 1996, 2002; Fonagy & Luyten, 2009) especially in patients with Borderline Personality Disorder. For depression, Fischer-Kern et al. (2008) report less capacity for mentalization in patients with moderate to severe depression. It should be also stated that one of the instruments measuring Attachment as one of its measuring subjects has Mentalization (Hanak, 2004). From all reported above it can be seen that there indeed is a connection between attachment and capacity for mentalization, and importance of this relation for this research will in part of the paper regarding the problem and the aim of the study.

The second construct in this research was Achievement Motivation. Achievement motivation theorists have long been attempting to explain people's choice of achievement tasks, persistence on those tasks, vigor in carrying them out, and performance the tasks in question (Eccles, Wigfield, & Schiefele, 1998; Pintrich & Schunk, 1996).

Murray (1938) was among the first authors to point out the existence of achievement motivation. Among the twenty basic human needs, he also includes a need for achievement. Murray defines this need as a very complex need, which is reflected in the desire to achieve something that is difficult to achieve in order to manipulate people, ideas and things, as a desire to stand out in front of others and to

compete with them (Murray, 1938). McClelland was also among the most important authors regarding the topic of achievement motivation. He defines this motive as „tendency to invest the effort to achieve and accomplish something that is considered valuable and because of which individual will stand out in front of other people" (McClelland, as cited by Rot, 1972). McClelland singled out two components of this motive: setting goals and competing with other people. Later studies singled out some additional components of achievement motivation besides two components about which McClelland wrote. Those additional components are orientation towards planning and persistence in achieving goals. The other two components about which authors write (orientation towards planning and persistence in achieving goals) are instrumental components or forms of behavior that person develops in order to be successful in achieving goals and competing with other people (Franceško, Kodžopeljić, & Mihić, 2002). In one paper, which researched achievement behavior, the same is determined as behavior in which the goal is to develop or demonstrate - to self or to others - high ability or to avoid demonstrating the low ability (Nicholls, 1984). This implies that in achievement situations individuals desire success to the extent which shows high ability and they seek to avoid failure to the extent that it indicates low ability (Kukla, 1978; McFarland & Ross, 1982). According to some authors, what distinguishes achievement behavior from other behaviors is its goal: competence (Crandall, Katkovsky & Preston, 1960; Heckhausen, 1967; Kukla, 1972, 1978; Maehr & Nicholls, 1980). Different individuals can satisfy their achievement motivation through different means, but in all cases, achievement motivation refers to achieving goals and life aspirations of those individuals. It is considered that achievement motivation can influence the way people perform certain tasks (Adika, Adesina, & Rabi, 2013). The distinction which singles out four components of achievement motivation: competition with others, orientation towards planning, persistence in achieving goals and the tendency toward setting goals, was taken into account in this research. This distinction was given by Franceško, Mihić, and Bala (2002).

Although both the capacity for mentalization and the achievement motivation are constructs developed early in childhood, although both are connected to attachment and parent-child relations, no previous studies regarding the relation between these two constructs have been found. Because of the lack of previous papers regarding this topic, we will try to find out if there is a potential relationship between them in this paper. We supposed a potential relationship between these two

constructs primarily because both of them are closely related and dependent upon the early parent-child relations, and because understanding others and self is important for planning, setting goals and others aspects of the achievement motivation.

METHOD

Problem and aim of the research

Previous studies regarding the relation between Mentalization and Achievement motivation were not found, but there were studies regarding the relation between Achievement motivation and Attachment, the construct which is theoretically very close to Mentalization so that even one of the instrument measuring Attachment as one of its measuring subjects has Mentalization (Hanak, 2004). We supposed a potential relationship between these two constructs primarily because both of them are closely related and dependent upon the early parent-child relations, and because understanding others and self is important for planning, setting goals and others aspects of the achievement motivation. Further, because of the presumed physiological basis of the capacity to mentalize, we supposed that this concept is hierarchically higher and older from the concept of the achievement motivation, because of which not only correlation was used in this research. So, the aim of this study was to check the potential relation between the capacity to mentalize and achievement motivation.

Instruments

Mentalization was operationalized using Questionnaire for assessing Mentalization (Dimitrijevic, Hanak, Altaras-Dimitrijevic & Jolic-Marjanovic, 2017) with three measuring subjects: Mentalization of self, Mentalization of others and Motivation for Mentalization.

In this research Achievement Motivation was measured using Achievement Motivation Scale (MOP2002: Franseško, Mihić, Bala, 2002) with four measuring subjects: Persistence in achieving goals, Tendency towards competing, Tendency towards planning and Achieving goals as a source of satisfaction.

Sample

The sample consisted of two subsamples, each one for one of the two studies.

Sample from Serbia was collected in the City of Niš, at the premises of the Faculty of Philosophy, and it consists of 142 respondents.

Respondents were students from the Faculty of Philosophy in Niš. The sample consisted of respondents from both sexes (Female=100; Male=42). The age range in this sample was from 18 to 43 (M=20.24).

Sample from Macedonia was collected in Skopje at the premises of Faculty of Philosophy. This sample consisted of 100 respondents, students from the Faculty of Philosophy in Skopje, both sexes (Female=65; Male=35). The age range in this sample was from 18 to 45 (M=22.2).

Procedure

For purposes of this study, both questionnaires were translated and adapted from Serbian to the Macedonian language. The back-translation procedure was used. Adaptation for Macedonian sample, in one direction (translation to Macedonian), was done by Gjoko Zdraveski, former professor of Macedonian language at Faculty of Philosophy in Nis. Translation in the other direction (back translation) was done by Danijela Sinadinović, French teacher with Macedonian origin.

We have conducted this research on two samples, from two cultures, in order to see if the relationship between the capacity to mentalize and achievement motivation is, potentially, a cross-cultural phenomenon.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data was analyzed by the usage of linear correlation because both the capacity for mentalization and the achievement motivation develop early in childhood and because none previous studies were found on this topic, so this study is somewhat an exploratory study.

Before analyzing the correlation between the capacity to mentalize and achievement motivation, the difference between a sample from Serbia and North Macedonia was examined through independent samples t-test.

Statistically significant differences between samples from North Macedonia and Serbia were not found. But it should be mentioned that marginally significant differences between the respondents from Serbia and North Macedonia were found in their tendency towards planning ($t=-.2.748$, $p=.006$), so maybe these differences are small, and because of that they are only marginally significant, and they would be more significant on a larger sample. This is only a presumption and should be checked in further studies.

Table 1 – Correlation between the capacity to mentalize and achievement motivation on the sample from Serbia

Pearson's correlation coefficient	Mentalization of self	Mentalization of others	Motivation for Mentalization
Persistence in achieving goals	-.354**	.253**	.275**
Tendency towards competing	.011	.170*	.242**
Tendency towards planning	-.005	-.107	.081
Achieving goals as a source of satisfaction	-.210*	.209*	.282**

Note: ** - Statistically significant on level of <.001

* - Statistically significant on level of <.05

From Table 1 we can see that there are significant correlations between the capacity to mentalize and components of achievement motivation. More precisely, results show that good mentalization of self correlates negatively with persistence in achieving goals and with achieving goals as a source of satisfaction. These results suggest that those individuals who have a good insight into themselves, do not have as high achievement motivations, as do those who have lower insight into themselves.

In order to account for the results such as these, we should remind ourselves of definitions of achievement motivation given by previous authors. For example, Murray defines this need as a very complex need, which is reflected in the desire to achieve something that is difficult to achieve in order to manipulate people, ideas and things, as a desire to stand out in front of others and to compete with them (Murray, 1938). While McClelland defines this motive as „tendency to invest the effort to achieve and accomplish something that is considered valuable and because of which individual will stand out in front of other people" (McClelland, as cited by Rot, 1972). By connection these definitions with results from the previous table we can suppose that individuals who have a good insight into themselves do not have a need to stand out in front of others. Or, more precisely and closely related to the components of achievement motivation which were related to the capacity to mentalize in our research, those individuals who have a good insight into themselves probably, and who by a consequence have a better understanding of their own need, desired and feelings, also probably do

not give too much meaning to outside goals, as they have their own intrinsic motivation and developed inner world, which could be more important to them from those extrinsic goals.

From Table 1, we can also see that both mentalization of others and motivation for mentalization are positively correlated with persistence in achieving goals, a tendency towards competing and with achieving goals as a source of satisfaction. These results suggest that both those who understand others, and those who are motivated towards understanding human behavior, have a tendency towards being persistence when achieving goals, are competitive and feel satisfaction when achieving goals. These results might, on the first look, be opposite to those regarding individuals with high mentalization of self, but if we remember that achieving motivation is an outside oriented variable, these results can be understood. So, those individuals who understand others, and who are highly motivated towards understanding human behavior are also those who have high achievement motivation. Understanding others and being motivated towards it, might be necessary for achieving goals and competing, because achieving goals and competing with others are quite a social aspect of life, meaning that they always include other people. On the other hand, those who have a good insight into themselves do not have a need to compete and compare themselves with others.

Table 2 – Correlation between the capacity to mentalize and achievement motivation on the sample from North Macedonia

Pearson's correlation coefficient	Mentalization of self	Mentalization of others	Motivation for Mentalization
Persistence in achieving goals	-.218**	.423**	.399**
Tendency towards competing	.041	.119	.279**
Tendency towards planning	.036	.217*	.345**
Achieving goals as a source of satisfaction	.023	.356*	.381**

Note: ** - Statistically significant on level of <.001
 * - Statistically significant on level of <.05

From Table 2 we can see somewhat different results from those obtained on the Serbian sample, but that they do not vary too much.

Firstly, on a sample from North Macedonia, also a negative correlation was found between mentalization of self and persistence in achieving goals, but no correlation was found between mentalization of self and achieving goals as a source of satisfaction. Correlation between mentalization of self and persistence in achieving goals can be explained in the same way as it was done for the sample from Serbia. Those individuals who have a good insight into themselves probably, and who by a consequence have a better understanding of their own need, desired and feelings, also probably do not give too much meaning to outside goals, as they have their own intrinsic motivation and developed inner world, which could be more important to them from those extrinsic goals. But achieving goals as a source of satisfaction is not in relation to mentalization of self.

Also, mentalization of others also correlates positively with persistence in achieving goals and with achieving goals as a source of satisfaction, but, as opposed to the results for the Serbian sample, on the sample from North Macedonia, mentalization of other does not correlate with a tendency towards competing, but it correlates with a tendency towards planning. Also, motivation for mentalization correlates on the sample from North Macedonia correlates with all variable it correlates on the Serbian sample, in addition to its correlation with a tendency towards planning. When it comes to the tendency towards planning, these differences can be accounted for if we take into account that there are marginally significant differences between samples from Serbia and North Macedonia on this variable.

On the basis of these results, we can conclude that in both cultures good insight into oneself is negatively connected with persistence in achieving goals, which suggest that, indeed those who have a better insight into themselves are less involved into the achievement of the outside goals. Also, we can conclude that those who understand others well, as well as those who are motivated towards understanding human psychology, have higher levels of achievement motivation, maybe because understanding people is essential in achieving because other are always involved in one's own achievements. Differences between the two cultures can be explained by differences in their development. More precisely, although Serbia and North Macedonia are very similar by all criteria, North Macedonia is maybe in a slightly better economic position, and by that more close to the western cultures, in which achievement is something of great value.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this study was to check the potential relation between the capacity to mentalize and achievement motivation.

The results of this study suggest that there is indeed a connection between these two constructs and that this relation is fairly similar in two cultures (Serbia and North Macedonia). Results suggest that those who have better mentalizing capacity, oriented towards themselves do not have as high achievement motivation as do those who have good mentalizing capacity oriented towards others and those who are motivated towards better mentalizing. These results are almost completely the same in both cultures, with some small differences. The differences are related mostly to a tendency towards planning as one of the components of achievement motivation. More precisely, this component is higher in the sample from North Macedonia and is correlated with achievement motivation only on this sample. Differences between the two cultures can be explained by differences in their development. More precisely, although Serbia and North Macedonia are very similar by all criteria, North Macedonia is maybe in a slightly better economic position, and by that more close to the western cultures, in which achievement is something of great value.

The theoretical contribution of this paper refers to a better understanding of the capacity for mentalization, achievement motivation, and their relation. While practical contributions could be found in the basis this paper can give to the potential workshops, most of all in schools and at an early age, for individuals achievement motivation. Maybe different approach should be made for those children who have a better insight into themselves from the approach for those who do not have such a good insight into their psychological states. In that way, achievement could be spurred in both those group of young people, because the tendency towards achieving is very important for life in this modern worlds and for its advancements.

Disadvantages of this research are, first of all, the sample. The sample was small and it consisted only of students. So for further studies, we suggest a larger and broader sample. Also, only two cultures and very similar cultures were included. So for the further studies, we suggest the inclusion of more cultures.

In conclusion, we can say that these two constructs, both developed at an early age are connected to each other, and that patter of this connection is nearly completely the same for two examined cultures.

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KAPACITET ZA MENTALIZACIJU I MOTIV ZA POSTIGNUĆEM

Sažetak: Cilj ove studije bio je da provjeri potencijalnu vezu između kapaciteta za mentalizaciju i motivacije za postignućem. Uzorak se sastojao od dva poduzorka. Uzorak iz Srbije činilo je 142 ispitanika oba pola ($\bar{X}=100$; $M=42$). Starost u uzorku išla je od 18 do 43 godina ($M=20,24$). Uzorak iz Severne Makedonije činilo je 100 ispitanika, studenata Filozofskog fakulteta u Skoplju, oba pola ($\bar{X}=65$; $M=35$). Starost u uzorku išla je od 18 do 45 godina ($M = 22,2$). Mentalizacija je operacionalizovana pomoću Upitnika za procenu mentalizacije (Dimitrijević, Hanak, Altaras-Dimitrijević, & Jolić-Marjanović, 2017), dok je motivacija za postignućem merena pomoću skale motivacije postignuća (Franeško, Mihić, Bala, 2002). Podaci su analizirani korišćenjem linearne korelacije između sposobnosti za mentalizaciju i motivacije postignuća. Na srpskom uzorku, pronađene su statistički značajne korelacije između mentalizacije selfa i upornosti u postizanju ciljeva ($r=-.354$) i postizanja ciljeva kao izvora zadovoljstva ($r=-.210$), između mentalizacije drugih i upornosti u postizanju ciljeva ciljeva ($r=.253$), tendencije ka takmičenju ($r=.170$) i postizanja ciljeva kao izvora zadovoljstva ($r=.209$), i između motivacije za mentalizacijom i upornosti u postizanju ciljeva ($r=.275$), tendencije ka takmičenju ($r=.242$) i postizanja ciljeva kao izvora zadovoljstva ($r=.282$). Na uzorku iz Severne Makedonije utvrđene su statistički značajne korelacije između mentalizacije selfa i upornosti u postizanju ciljeva ($r=-.218$), između mentalizacije drugih i upornosti u postizanju ciljeva ($r=.423$), tendencije ka planiranju ($r=.217$) i postizanja ciljeva kao izvora zadovoljstva ($r=.356$), kao i između motivacije za mentalizacijom i svih komponenti motivacije postignuća ($p<.001$). U zaključku, možemo reći da su ova dva konstrukta, oba razvijena u ranom uzrastu, međusobno povezana i da je ova povezanost gotovo potpuno istovetna za dve ispitivane kulture.

Ključne reči: Mentalizacija, Motivacija za postignućem, Severno Makedonski uzorak, Srpski uzorak.