

4-1-2012

Redefining Relational Needs

Laura Romaine
College of DuPage

Follow this and additional works at: <http://dc.cod.edu/essai>

Recommended Citation

Romaine, Laura (2013) "Redefining Relational Needs," *ESSAI*: Vol. 10, Article 29.
Available at: <http://dc.cod.edu/essai/vol10/iss1/29>

This Selection is brought to you for free and open access by the College Publications at DigitalCommons@C.O.D.. It has been accepted for inclusion in *ESSAI* by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@C.O.D.. For more information, please contact koteles@cod.edu.

Redefining Relational Needs

by Laura Romaine

(Philosophy 1125)

The social nature of human beings is often viewed from various specialized perspectives—physiological, sociological, psychological, philosophical, etc—which can leave gaps in the observations of the minutia of our human condition. In an attempt to respond to a lack of attention given to individual needs that are satisfied between individuals, I will be constructing a model exploring this relational need, as I call it, and how it is satisfied. I am using this new model to describe what sorts of interactions a person needs from others, just for the interaction's own sake rather than any additional benefits the interaction may provide. This model is referred to throughout the paper as the “relational needs model.” It is distinct from social dynamics of small group, community, or state in its focus on the individual’s personal need, but as it explores relational interactions, the study is also not strictly contained to the individual. The model uses three types of relational need to describe how relational inputs and outputs are received by the individual and, as an appurtenance, the dynamics between individuals. These service, self, and nurture types each have an input/output attribution and a broad description of what manner of relational input/output is provided. Some additional benefits to having relational needs satisfied are also mentioned, and while they might still be accurately described as needs, they are not the specific type of need I am attempting to encapsulate. Before detailing this model, I will be exploring various theories that have elements of the model, and how they contribute to its perspective. These theories include psychological models geared towards describing the disposition of individuals, as well as interpersonal models attempting to describe the effects of relationships between two or more persons.

Writing from a nation that idealizes independence, it is relatively common to encounter the view or implication that all society offers is an unwanted taint on the individual, somehow robbing him of autonomy or identity. There seems to be a constant war between the balance of personal freedom and societal structure, yet even a cursory view of our interactions and development show that not only do we congregate in social groups, but it is necessary for our optimal development as human beings to interact with others. There are certain functions of humanity that cannot be performed without another, certain types of input that are impossible to impose upon oneself. Isolation is no more part of our nature than is parthenogenesis. In fact, one psychologist, Lisa Goldstein, suggests that “the process of cognitive growth is inherently relational.”¹ Certainly, interactions with others have an immeasurable effect on our cognition, attitudes, physical and emotional development, and identity. I would go so far as to suggest that relations with others is a need in and of itself. Just as we have a need for nutrition, and when that need is satisfied it can impact and fulfill other categories of need (such as positive self image, for example, from looking healthy and strong), so too do we have a need for interactions with people, which when fulfilled can provide satisfaction in other areas of need.

¹ Lisa S. Goldstein, *The Relational Zone: The Role of Caring Relationships in the Co-Construction of Mind*. American Educational Research Journal, Vol. 36, No. 3 (Autumn, 1999), pp. 647-673

Psychological and medical studies often explain some of the mental and physical effects-- as opposed to underlying causes--of social deprivation and satiation, without necessarily forming theories for what constitutes the fulfillment of relational, or even interpersonal, need. That is, they are inclined to focus on manifestations rather than the relational conditions that cause them. For instance, child development theorists posit that, especially in early development, it is necessary for a child to secure an attachment with a parent or parent figure in order to evoke feelings of security, being cared for, and belonging (by association with another human being). These feelings are usually the focus of study, though their origin lies in the parental type interaction. Without such an attachment, resultant phobias or other physiological difficulties tend to cause delinquency, underachievement, and difficulties in interactions. Children need guidance to develop complex skills and explore safely, but the need is not limited youth.² Lonely adults, who categorize themselves either as being lonely or who are in isolated environments, suffer tangible health difficulties such as increased blood pressure, depression, insomnia, and heart disease. A longitudinal health study done in Framingham, Massachusetts only observed physical factors contributing to death, and scientists grossly overestimated the number of deaths that would occur in 20 years. It has been hypothesized that this is due to the communal spirit and relational health of the town.³

The negative results explored above are indicative of unfulfilled need, and the positive results evidence of fulfilled need. Attachment and guidance are perhaps needs for a child, without which a certain state of dissatisfaction would exist. This brings us to a conception of a need which I will be using to construct my model, defined by Henry Murray as “a force...[either psychological-chemical, psychological, emotional, etc]...which organizes perception, apperception, intellection, connotation, and action in such a way as to transform in a certain direction an existing, unsatisfying situation.”⁴ Therefore, unsatisfying conditions such as those mentioned in the previous paragraph help identify the needs of individuals.

However, the treatment of needs in the child and health studies mentioned was either not related to strictly interpersonal need, or the interpersonal need was not described accurately. When the needs are defined in various models, they are often expressed in imprecise terms. For example, one common need relied on in various models is “love.” Though it is used in a variety of well respected interpersonal and psychological theories, the term “love” is used to classify a broad variety of actions in a social dynamic, and sensations and perceptions of the individual. In various contexts it can imply touch, support, attention, care of a child, charitable works, or sex. A broad definition, where most remotely social unsatisfying conditions could be blamed on a lack of love, is an unacceptable criterion for the model. Yet the actual *interactions* classified as providing love do serve a purpose in fulfilling relational needs; the model seeks to include these interactions while avoiding the nebulous term.

Coming closer to defining the role of interpersonal interactions as needs, Abraham Maslow’s theory of human motivation identifies the third level of need hierarchy as “love and affection and belongingness needs.” He acknowledged the imprecision of terms, but also identified an important fact—“the love needs involve both giving *and* receiving love.”⁵ This latter concept is central to the relational needs model, in which the receipt of love is expressed as a positive relational input.

² Ainsworth, Mary S. "Attachments beyond Infancy." *American Psychologist* 44.4 (1989): 709-16

³ Lynch, James J. *A Cry Unheard: New Insights into the Medical Consequences of Loneliness*. Baltimore, MD: Bancroft, 2000.

⁴ Murray, Henry A. *Explorations in Personality; a Clinical and Experimental Study of Fifty Men of College Age*, New York: Oxford UP, 1938.

⁵ Maslow, A. H. "A Theory of Human Motivation." *Psychological Review* 50.4 (1943): 370-96. Print.

Something is received or understood as being received by an individual. Encompassing Maslow's ideas of belongingness and giving of love necessitates some action on the part of the individual to encourage worth and usefulness, which is described in the model by the positive relational outputs.

From a less emotional perspective, corporations use interpersonal need and motivation to gear products and advertising, and often offer beneficial insights into what people commonly expect from interpersonal relations, though not always with a formal model. One corporate theory identified six aspects of social need: expressing personal identity, status and self-esteem, giving and receiving help, affiliation and belonging, sense of community, and reassurance of value and self worth.⁶ These categories are excellent for identifying results that are commonly expected from interpersonal relationships, but only a few are actual relational needs. Self esteem, a sense of belonging and community, etc, would be positive effects of having relational needs met. However, giving and getting help, and expressing personal identity are very different categories. By engaging in these two actions, a person would be able to alleviate the unsatisfying conditions. For example, giving help could have the effect of making one feel useful, a productive member of a community, thereby fostering self-esteem and a sense of belonging. Therefore, some of these elements are present in the relational model as subdivisions of a major relational need, such as expression of personal identity as a subdivision of exchange of selves; other elements are merely manifestations of having relational needs satisfied.

A three dimensional theory of interpersonal behavior developed by William Schutz is sometimes used to analyze corporate dynamics, though it is basically a psychological model identifying the interpersonal needs as inclusion, control, and affection.⁷ In this model, the individual would have different interpersonal needs depending on whether and to what extent he experienced want or needed to express each dimension. For example, a passive individual might have very little need to express control, but harbor substantial want to be controlled by others. A major advantage of this model is that it comes very close to describing the relational needs of an individual by expressing both the direction of the relationship (want or expression) and the manner or nature of relationship that is being exchanged. Used as an analyzing factor in corporate settings, its theories have accurately described workplace dynamics. However, because of the intended uses of the model, it is designed to take into account less than ideal types, such as the undersocial and overpersonal, which either want or express more in their interpersonal behaviors than is beneficial for optimal development, both personal and social. It allows for an individual to have interpersonal needs which are only wants or only expressions. As Maslow posited, both giving and receiving are needs. While there might be individuals who are extremes in the dynamic of expression and want, it does not seem in the interest of the individual to be so unbalanced, and that some point on the continuum such an extreme should no longer be considered a need, but a disordered desire or as Schutz describes it, psychosis. Also, I think this model is lacking in its treatment of the expression of personal identity mentioned in the previous corporate description, which is different enough from the expression of control to merit distinction in the relational model. Just as it is a biological motivation to pass on genetic identity, an individual seeking to reach his highest potential is often motivated by the need to share his identity, to pass on the product of his thought and what he considers uniquely his own. I will discuss this in further detail in my model, but it is important to keep in mind that, though there may be additional feeling effects from having oneself understood and understanding another, the actual need hinges upon this expression of personal identity, or as I will call it later, the "exchange of self."

⁶ Schlack, Julie W., Michael Jennings, and Manila Austin. "Meeting Business Needs by Meeting Social Needs in Small Communities: Why Size Matters." Communispace Corporation, 2007.

<http://www.comunispace.com/uploadedFiles/ResearchInsights/Best_Practices/BestPractices_WhySizeMatters.pdf>.

⁷ Schutz, William C. *The Interpersonal Underworld*. Palo Alto: Science & Behavioral, 1966.

I have constructed a model that seeks to incorporate various elements of these various models to describe the relational needs of the individual. The model uses the continuum aspect of the Schutz model, but instead of want and expression, I have chosen the terms “input” and “output.” Input refers to an interaction that exerts a positive influence as perceived by the individual, while output is the positive influence that an individual perceives himself to exert. The implementation of an input/output center for the model provides a measure of fluidity. It helps describe how the needs could be intensified or muted through different life stages, or vary in degrees of intensity because of an aspect of personality that prefers a different level of social interaction.

Previous models have taken into account the fact that input/output interactions may fulfill some type of need, or have positive outcomes, but what makes the relational need model unique is that it considers the interaction itself to be the relational need, rather than what the interaction produces. Whether or not an actual exchange of some type has occurred is inconsequential, as long as the individual has received an interaction as a fulfillment of his interpersonal needs. The reason for this emphasis is that it combines the perceptions of the individual with actual observable interactions. Needs are only satisfied if the individual perceives them as satisfactory, and what satisfies the needs are the relational exchanges. It is not necessary that the individual be aware of this need in any quantifiable terms, or be able to define it, but he must be aware of the change from a state of dissatisfaction to a state of satisfaction. Defining it in this manner allows the model to describe both how the individual receives some type of input, such control or inclusion, but also in what manner other people fulfill these relational needs.

The model divides input/output interactions fulfilling relational needs into three types, based on what manner of interaction is been received or given by the individual: service, self, and nurture. Each of these types does not refer to the nature of relationship between two or more individuals. Rather, it refers to the way a relationship is received by the individual. That is, I would not say “this person fills the capacity of input of nurture and support for me.” Rather, I would say that “my need for an input of nurture and support is fulfilled by this interaction with this person.” A relationship with a specific person need not be confined to one type of relational need, nor does it necessarily need to be a specific type of relationship (mother, spouse, child, employer, etc) to fill any of the three areas.

The exchange of services is characterized by a relationship centered around a goal. The goal may be implicit or explicit, but regardless the individual would have something to gain and something to offer in the achievement of this goal. The goal cannot be one sided, but it can have different motivations. For example, a goal could be “to clean this house for A, and to obtain money from A.” The goal relates to both A and self, and both A and self have the same goal in mind (though of course A's goal would be “to give money to B, to get house cleaned by B”). A goal could also be something in the nature of “to climb Mount Everest,” if both parties have the intention of pooling services towards the achievement of this goal. Not insignificantly, the acquisition of the goal is a crucial element in this particular need, not in the sense that the fulfillment of the need depends upon the goal but that, more so than any of the other four types, the exchange of service relationship is defined by an external factor. All exchange of service interactions must be simultaneously input and output, in order to achieve certain results, such as feelings of belonging, purpose, and mutuality. This is intimately connected with the “control” and “inclusion” needs mentioned in the Schutz model. If the interaction is not simultaneously creating perceptions of input and output of relational good, then it is either an exchange of nurture or is not fulfilling exchange of service needs.

The exchange of selves is characterized by a relationship centered around a person or persons rather than a goal. Instead of the mutual giving and receiving of services, it is the mutual giving and receiving of some aspects one considers one's own. This is a less utilitarian need than the services. It is a need of pleasure, enjoyment, and probably the most purely social type in the model. A less precise term might be “friendship” and when a positive interaction is perceived as being mutually

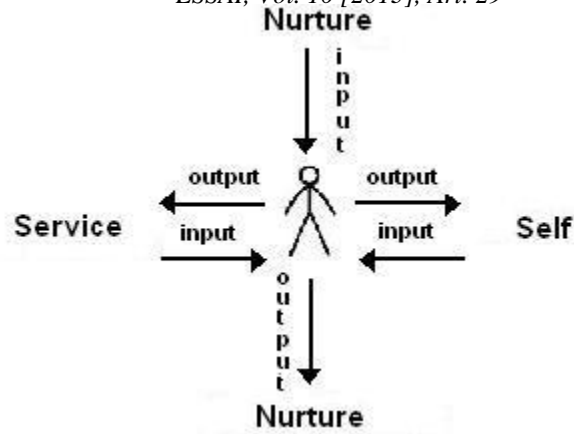
beneficial but without a goal (as many “love” relationships are perceived) it would fall into this category. The sharing of selves contributes to a sense of belonging, because through it commonalities are discovered and explored. Schutz's inclusion and affection dynamics would be met in this interaction, but it also plays a great role in the establishment and expression of personal identity. Victor Gallese, in his work on the manifold nature of interpersonal relations, classifies “three fundamental aspects of interpersonal relations: imitation, empathy and the ascription of intention.”⁸ While this is a significantly different context, those three words seem to sum up what the nature of self exchange entails. The phrase “ascription of intention” also provides an added dimension to the common understanding of personal interactions. It is a different qualification than empathy, which is the identification with or experience of the feelings and perceptions of another. To ascribe intention is to foretell, to predict, and to understand the feelings, perceptions, and motivations of another—Gallese associates it with mind reading.

Unlike the exchange of selves and the exchange of service, the exchange of a nurturing interaction at any one time must *only be* an input or output. That is to say that an interaction might at one time be input of nurture and at another point output of nurture, but in no single interaction can it be both simultaneously. For example, a child being held by his mother is receiving a nurture input, without exerting any care towards his mother at that time. This does not mean that the mother does not benefit caring for her child, but from the perspective of the child nothing is being outputted. The mother, on the other hand, is exerting a nurture/care output, regardless of whether the child is receiving it as a positive interaction or not. The fulfillment of the need depends on the perspective of the mother, the individual in this new example, and whether or not she perceives the interaction as outputting positively upon the child.

The distinguishing quality with nurture/care interactions is that either the individual has something he can provide which is lacking in another (output) or the individual lacks something which is being provided by another (input). Receiving nurturing provides a sense of security, at least some measure or aspect of care (varying by degrees, of course, related to state in life and personality). It is common to think of needs as input only, but the output nurture relationship often provides the desire for control and contributes to self-actualization and self-worth mentioned in the corporate model.

When examining a relationship between some individuals whose relationship is more balanced, such as a spousal one, the nurture interaction is often considered mutual. In fact, nurturing family or intimate acquaintance can easily be considered a mutual exchange, since the individual providing the output will not only receive positive feelings from the interaction, but may even expect something in return, e.g, an expression of gratitude, evidence of the other person's satisfaction. However, this does not make the nurturing interaction a mutual one, because even though *something* is being received, it is not a nurturing input. In the case of an intimate relationship, it is very probable that the perception of mutuality is due to the exchange of selves aspect of the interaction. This would account for a parents being more satisfied by caring for their own child than any other child. The interaction simultaneously satisfies the output of nurture need and the exchange of selves need because of their identity in terms of their child and their child's identity in terms of themselves. However, according to this model, the input and output aspects of the nurturing interactions cannot occur simultaneously in a single interaction.

In summary, a visual construction of the model would look like this:



Notice, there is no specification as to who is on the other end of these interactions, or how these interactions would impact that person or person. The model only describes the nature of the interaction and how it is perceived and received by the central individual. These relational needs are not the most basic, and would fit well as a substitute to “love and belongingness” in Maslow's hierarchy.