

Towards Self-Satisfaction: Theories and Concepts

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Abstract: Life poses many questions such as the reason for one's birth, the purpose of life, the goals one wants to pursue, etc. Such questions, if left unanswered, leading to a state of unknown displeasure and unhappiness. These questions keep on confronting the individual no matter how rich or successful the person becomes. Self-satisfaction, the sense of absolute fulfillment with oneself and one's accomplishments, is a way to find answers to such questions. It is the quest for self-satisfaction that helps the individual in finding answers to such troubling questions. Over the years there have been a number of psychological theories and concepts that inherently suggest ways of seeking self-satisfaction. This paper identifies such theories and concepts and elucidates how they can enable individuals towards the path of seeking self-satisfaction. The paper explores the theories of Victor Frankl, Carl Rogers, and Abraham Maslow, with an emphasis on their concepts of will to meaning, becoming oneself, and self-actualization respectively. Along with these theories, the paper also explores the concepts of intrinsic motivation, self-awareness, and delay of gratification with respect to self-satisfaction. The seeking of self-satisfaction guides in coping with the unpredictable and unstable nature of life and helps in bringing about a certain calmness and composure within an individual. The quest for self-satisfaction should, thus, be the major element of life.

Keywords: Self-satisfaction, Will to Meaning, Becoming Oneself, Self-actualization, Intrinsic Motivation, Self-awareness, Delay of Gratification

1. Introduction

Almost everyone, at some point or the other in their life, might have asked themselves about the reason of their birth, the purpose of their life, and the goals that they would like to pursue. These questions, if left unanswered continuously keep posing troubles to the individual and lead to an unknown displeasure and unhappiness.

No matter how much success a person gets, no matter how rich a person becomes, and no matter how many goals are achieved, somehow these questions keep on confronting the person. This will continue until and unless such accomplishments do not lead to self-satisfaction.

The only answer to these questions is to seek self-satisfaction. It is self-satisfaction that can keep an individual away from these troubling questions. Self-satisfaction should thus be the sole quest for human beings. Self-satisfaction should therefore be the ultimate goal of life.

Self-satisfaction

Self-satisfaction is a sense of absolute fulfillment with oneself and one's accomplishments. As simple as may it sound, achieving self-satisfaction is not at all an easy task. But, there are ways in which one can constantly look out for self-satisfaction and in the process find answers to the many unanswered questions that life imposes upon us.

Will to Meaning

Victor Frankl talked about *meaning of life* and *will to meaning*, which means that if an individual has certain meaningfulness in life, then that becomes a driving force for the individual to move forward in life (Frankl, 1962). Frankl (1962) says that people tend to go through a blandness or emptiness in life, which refers to *existential vacuum* and not being able to come out of it is known as *existential crisis*. The will to meaning helps an individual to overcome this existential crisis. According to Frankl (1962), if a person has a meaning of life, then he/she can survive the toughest

conditions of life and come out of it in a positive manner. This will to meaning enables the individual a personal choice to grow and develop, which leads to triumph and self-fulfillment.

According to Frankl (1962), when people go through existential crisis, they try to fill the void by guiding themselves by conformity, conventionality, and traditionality, which do not provide any kind of help. People do not use the freedom to make their own choices in life in order to find their own meaning.

Frankl (1962) suggests three ways of finding meaning in life. The first is by experiencing something or someone valued by the individual. This mainly includes experiencing the value of another person such as parents, siblings, friends, lover, etc. In order to develop meaning in the life of the valued person, the individual can develop meaning in his/her own life. The second is by involving oneself in creative deeds such as art, music, writing, invention, etc. The third is by developing virtues such as compassion, bravery, good sense of humour, etc. Once a person finds meaning in life, he/she sets off to a journey of achieving self-satisfaction.

Becoming Oneself

Carl Rogers talks about *congruence* and *incongruence* (Rogers, 1959). According to him, people have a *real self* and an *ideal self*. The real self is what the person actually is or can be. It is the true potential of the person. The ideal self is what the person feels that he/she should be, which may not be the real potential of the person. People, at times, tend to move towards their ideal self rather than their real self, due to expectations or external pressure. This creates a gap between real self and ideal self. Rogers calls this gap as incongruence. If there is no gap between a person's real self and ideal self then it is referred to as congruence. In a state of congruence, the individual is well-adjusted and mentally healthy and is maladjusted in the state of incongruence. The more the gap between the real self and the ideal self, the more there is inner conflict and displeasure. The individual

feels threatened and anxious. They become defensive, and their thinking becomes rigid and constricted.

For instance, a youngster has his/her own interests and is perhaps very good at it, but chooses not to take it up as a career because it is quite risky and decides to go for something that is more secure. Going for a career that is more secure is more acceptable in the eyes of others and also somewhat guarantees quick success. Here, the real self of the person is that he/she is good in some other activity. But, due to external demands he/she prefers to go away from his/her real potential and prefers to go for something that is more secure. This might prove to be worthwhile initially, but in the long run it only gives dissatisfaction. There is no harm in going for something that is more secure, but it should not be at the expense of one's true potential and definitely not at the expense of satisfaction.

According to Rogers (1959), we should try not to conform to the expectations of others. We should rather come to terms with our own nature, trust one's own experience, and accept the fact that other people are different. In this way, the gap between the real self and the ideal self will become lesser and a state of congruence will come into place. Once this happens, in terms of Rogers, the person is said to have *become oneself*. The becoming of one's self makes the person what Rogers calls a *fully functioning person* (Rogers, 1961). The fully functioning person, according to Rogers, acknowledges and expresses all his/her feelings, has no rigidity and preconceptions about what he/she should be, make and rely on their own decisions, acknowledges the feeling of freedom and takes responsibility of his/her decisions, and contributes to life. Becoming oneself and being a fully functioning person brings the person closer and closer to self-satisfaction.

Self-actualization

Abraham Maslow talked about *self-actualization*. Self-actualization is the desire to become more and more what one idiosyncratically is and it is to become everything that one is capable of becoming (Maslow, 1970). It involves the continuous desire to fulfill potentials and become the most complete, the fullest.

According to Maslow (1970), people who have achieved self-actualization have some distinguished features. Self-actualized people are realistically oriented; they accept themselves, others, and the natural world for what they are; they have a lot of spontaneity; they are problem-centered instead of giving up to life difficulties; they have a need for privacy; they are autonomous and independent; they do not buy into stereotypes; they have few intimate relationships that are deeply emotional rather than having shallow relationships with many people; they do not confuse means with ends; they have a philosophical sense of humour, preferably directed towards themselves rather than being directed to others; they have a great ability to be creative; they are non-conformists; and they are open to individual variety.

Apart from this, self-actualization involves what Maslow calls *peak experiences*. This is a feeling of being more integrated, more at one with the world, more their own boss,

more spontaneous, less aware of space and time, and being more perceptive (Maslow, 1968). Self-satisfaction is more or less being self-actualized as well as the peak experiences that Maslow talks about.

Intrinsic Motivation

People should be *intrinsically motivated* (Deci, 1975; Deci & Ryan, 1985; Deci & Ryan, 2000) in the things that they do. Intrinsic motivation is the motivation that comes from within the individual rather than from external factors such as money or high status. It is the motivation that comes from the pleasure that one gets from the task itself or from the sense of satisfaction that one gets in completing or even working on a task. Being intrinsically motivated is to be motivated by self-generated factors such as responsibility, freedom to act, development and use of skills and abilities, interesting and challenging work, and opportunities for advancement. These factors have a deeper and longer-term effect.

Usually, in order to earn their bread and butter, people choose a particular career as their work and they have their hobbies for leisure time. They keep their work and hobbies as two distinct things. It will be a lot better if people make their hobby as their work and career. A hobby is something that people enjoy to do and use it as a stress buster when they get tired of their work. Instead, if their hobby becomes their work then they will enjoy their work and be happy with the kind of work they will be doing. This will make them intrinsically motivated towards their work. Not only it will make them enjoy their work, but it will also drive them to excel in it.

The work-life of a person plays a very major role in one's life. Work should not be seen as something that is burdensome; it should be something that is fun. If a person's hobby becomes his/her work then he/she will have more and more interest in it, which will give a sense of satisfaction. When a person gets up in the morning, he/she should not say, "oh no, I have to work." He/she should rather be excited and say, "oh yes, I am going to work." This excitement and joy can only be there if the person is intrinsically motivated towards work, which can only happen if the person's hobby becomes his/her work. In the long run, this will become an immense source of satisfaction.

Self-awareness

A *high level of self-awareness* is required for self-satisfaction. An individual should have a realization of his/her strengths and weaknesses. This will make the person know about how good or bad he/she is at various things. This will also make the person more focused and will enable him/her to know exactly what he/she wants from life. When a person knows exactly what he/she wants to do, it generates an immense amount of positive feeling within that person and leads to a lot of self-worth.

This high level of self-awareness is very much similar to what Howard Gardner calls *intrapersonal intelligence* (Gardner, 1983; Gardner, 1993). People who are high on intrapersonal intelligence have a good capacity of being introspective and self-reflective. They are intuitive and

skillful in recognizing their own feelings and motivations. It includes having a deep level of understanding, knowing ones strengths and weaknesses, realization of what makes one unique, and having the ability to predict one's own reactions and emotions.

A high level of self-awareness or being high on intrapersonal intelligence also enables the individual to understand the meaning of success in its true sense. Success has different meanings for different people. There are individual differences in what people may desire and their meaning of success differentiates accordingly. Knowing one's strengths and weaknesses gives a clear picture of these individual differences. This realization helps in coping with failure to a great extent and leads to a lot of emotional stability, which in the long run helps in getting close to self-satisfaction.

The realization of the true meaning of success also leads the person not to make inappropriate social comparisons. Comparing oneself with others is a very common phenomenon and it can turn out to be quite useful in assessing oneself. However, this may also be misleading. If one person is strong in a particular ability then it does not mean that the other person also is strong in that ability. Someone else, due to various reasons, might get success easily. Comparing oneself with that person might be disheartening and may make the person become impatient and lose focus. Rather than following his/her own interests, the person might try to do something else in which he/she may not be that good in. While comparing himself/herself with the other person, the individual might have a sense failure, which is wrong. That person is successful in his/her own way and making comparisons with him/her is inappropriate, which should not be done.

Delay of Gratification

Delay of gratification (Friedman & Schustack, 2004; Hoerger, Quirk, & Weed, 2011) is something that becomes very important in achieving self-satisfaction. People, at times, forget about their larger goals and become satisfied by smaller and relatively insignificant goals. They also, at times, ignore their larger goals in order to achieve the smaller ones. It is true that achieving small things is important, but it should not be at the expense of the larger goals that are in fact the main goals of the individual. An individual might achieve something that gives immediate pleasure and in the bargain may not be able to look at the larger picture. This can be harmful and cause dissatisfaction in the long run. The person should rather be sensible enough and be able to assess things properly. This may require ignoring the small, little pleasures in order to achieve the larger and much more satisfying goals in life.

2. Conclusion

Life can be highly unpredictable. Various ups and downs may occur throughout one's life. There are moments of happiness as well as sadness. All this may create a lot of instability within oneself. The only way to maintain proper composure in life is to seek and eventually achieve self-satisfaction. It is the seeking of self-satisfaction that guides the person through all the turbulence of life. Achieving self-

satisfaction should be the main criterion for whatever the person wants to do.

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