

WHAT JAVANESE PEOPLE DO WHEN THEY ARE IN EGO DEPLETION STATE?

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Abstract

The results before (American research), conducted by Baumeister and Heatherton (1996) showed that when individuals depleted then more destructive. More specific, the behaviors are less normative. The purpose of this study was to determine how adult people, with background Javanese culture (which is different from the norms of Western culture) in expressing themselves when they are depleted. The study involved six informants experienced fatigue caused by the emergence of externally problems in long term. Data retrieved by using in-depth interviews. Before analyzed, researcher did data triangulation by checking the consistency of the answers, discussion with colleagues and informants. Furthermore, data is proceed in a phenomenological analysis, in order to obtain specific themes. The findings showed that the conditions of impulsive verbal appear on informants, while the impulsive behavior also appear but not shown in front of people who stimulate and did not lead to be a destructive action. In these conditions "self-restraint" in principle "mungguh-mudhunke rasa" is used all of informants to control themselves.

Keywords: ego depletion, Javanese people

Presenting Author's Biography



Nuke Martiarini. I am a lecturer in psychology department. My major is cross cultural psychology. I am interested to explore about ego depletion accross culture, like what causes, how people express themselves in ego depletion state, and how to overcome ego depletion. I did my research in ego depletion, especially ego depletion in Javanese context, since 2010 until now.

Introduction

Ego depletion occurred because the psychological energy of the individual decrease. In this condition, people difficult to think effectively. Ego depletion also affects the fluid intelligence, which relates to analytical ability (Garlick, 2002). Ego depletion may also be expressed in ignorance toward tasks (Schmeichel; Demaree; Robinsun; & Pu, 2006).

The psychological energy is necessary to control their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. The ability to restraint and resist the temptation from inside or outside of themselves is called self-control (Baumeister & Vohs, 2004). Baumeister (in Higgins & Kruglanski, 2007) said that discussion of human's psychological-energy is not novel because it has been mentioned in Freud's self-defense mechanism theory. However, Baumeister emphasized that self-regulation process in the mechanism of self-defense is non-conscious self-regulation; it is automatic, therefore it doesn't require intense energy. On the other side, conscious self-regulation is the effort to manage behaviors and affections toward the desired standards; And self-control is the effort to hold particular actions and impulsive response toward stimulus.

Related to control of stimulus from, people as social individual try to behave normatively, like control their behavior toward the achievement of social expectations (Ng, 2005). Research conducted by Contrada, et al (2000) showed that social stratification affect the physical and psychological well-being, particularly people from minority groups. People from minority groups are more likely to internalize prejudice and negative stereotypes.

Indonesia is one of the collective cultures with many social groups amongst the society. One of the major culture in Indonesia is Javanese culture, which is well known for its kinship and social system. The systems value the importance of harmony living through tolerance, despite the individual differences (Beatty, 2002). The changing of cultural values, according to Boucher and Maslach (2009) occurred in some countries with collective culture (being more individualistic like American and European culture). However, it does not eliminate the role of the group, the group remains an important reference for people.

The aforementioned studies in ego depletion tend to discuss the effects of ego depletion to degradation of several executive functions, such as self-control and self-regulation, and their effect to the impulsive behaviors. All of the aforementioned studies were also conducted amongst people in western culture, which might not be the same to people from Eastern culture. A research by Hardjoprakosa (1956) about "Indonesia's *candra jiwa*-based therapy" explained that ego performance or "The I" is controlled by four desires that are manifested from four natural elements (*anasir*). They are physiological need (*lauwamah*), anger, pretension (*sufiah*), and *nmutmmainah* (supra-social, sincerity). "The war of desires" will always take place, and *mutmainah* comes as its control that requires ego's role to withstand it whenever the three desires are conflicting at each other. It shows that the ego is obligated to be able to control (especially) negative conditions that may harm the life of the individual. The same condition appears in the analysis of Javanese self-regulation in the concept of *Kawruh Jiwa Suryomentaram* (Jatman, 2011). This concept states that the source of every problem is in human's 'desires' or 'urges', which has the character of '*mulur*'. *Mulur* is occurrence of another higher desire after the fulfillment of one desire. When a desire isn't fulfilled, disappointment come, and therefore, lowering the achievement standard of the individual's desire (*mungkret*). Based on the aforementioned discussions, it is concluded that further research for the more detailed explanation about how the image while Javanese people in a state of limited energy, is a same formula that shown by Baumeister and colleagues research before?.

Ego Depletion

Ego is the connector to reality and important to the development of personality. Ego's inability to be assertive in action will be considered as weak, which may be caused by insufficient energy for the ego to operate its role. Furthermore, Hartmann (1958) said that mental disorder is caused by ego's failure in performing its reality-bridge function. Baumeister (2002) said that the condition of ego depletion is indicated by the degradation of executive function, like self-control and self-regulation due to the weak state of the self. Successfulness of self-regulation is needed to be able to perform the appropriate attitudes and actions, performing planned activities, attending appointments, and other standardized activities or actions (Baumeister, et. al, 2007). High self-control is needed is to endeavored for well-performed mood-regulation. The mood regulation will help in the process of acceptance and self-regulation that is important to overcome the event of failure or below standard achievements.

Ego depletion is caused by internal and external factors. In general, during ego depletion, a person would be more passive, regardless the amount of expectations they have. Internally, ego depletion is related to the lower level of blood's glucose, which has the function as “the fuel” for the individual to perform actions. Personality factor also plays a role in affecting ego depletion, in which individuals with fewer expectations may still perform relatively stable interactions compared to individuals with more expectations. Externally, non-conducive environments may also give effect of ego depletion.

Self in The Perspective of Javanese Culture

The individual personality in Javanese culture is based in two concepts: the person's social status and the amount of power (Keeler, 1987). The Javanese culture has the value that each person should initially understand themselves and their position in their extended family. The concept of *ngalah* (in English : concede) and *ngajeni* (in English : to comply) are always emphasized in sibling's relationship in Javanese culture. Older brother or sister is expected to concede (*ngalah*) to their younger brother or sister. At the other side, the younger brother or sister is expected to always comply with his or her elders.

The spiritual aspects in Javanese people may be understood through Hardjoprakosa's writings. Hardjoprakosa (1956) explained that the concept of self in Indonesia's Candra Jiwa consists of three areas. They are the raw physical (*badan jasmani kasar*), the soft physical (*badan jasmani halus*), and the true nature (*alamsejati*). The raw physical consists of biological “practical tools”, such as the feet, hands, and the five senses. The soft physical has the function to process the information received by the raw physical body in the *angen-angen* (in English: the mind) in order to reach awareness (*eling*), controlled desires (*mituhu*), and the sense is leaded to faith (*pracaya*) in Tripurusa (*Suksma Kawekas, Suksma Sejati, Roh Suci*) that exists in the third area (*alam sejati*, The True Nature). Hardjoprakosa compared the concept of western personal balance with the eastern concept (*Candra Jiwa*). Freud tends to emphasized the unconscious area, in which it is dominated by Id (sexual desires, animal instincts, primitive drives) that will be confronted by the outside world and therefore creates “The I” or ego. Ego regulates the uncontrolled desires in Id and expressed it based on the outside world's needs. Another part that influences ego is super ego. To Freud, the outside world (environment) is an in important part that always in conflict with Id. Freud also has the strong emphasize in sexual desires and destructive desires of death, and never discuss the social desires or the supra social. Freud put the emphasize of the unconscious desires as negative desires, while the unconscious desires in

Candra Jiwa concept is not always negative. In Candra Jiwa concept, there exists the positive desire named as *mutmainah* desire. *Mutmainah* desire is the desire that drives human to the better social relationship and supra social.

The self-development in Javanese culture is explained by Suryomentaram (1959) in the concept of "*pengawikan pribadi*" (the knowledge of our own self). The self in this concept refers to the psychological conditions. The psyche may not be sensed by the five senses, but it can be felt, and therefore, the learning of self is considered as the learning of "*rasa*" (the feelings) in the self. Human consists of various *rasa*, therefore it is needed by humans to understand those various *rasa* in themselves, from the shallow level that can be sensed by the five-senses to the deeper *rasa* (ideas and thoughts, the mind). It is assumed that through understanding the deeper *rasa*, we will be able to understand ourselves better. Through the ability to differentiate problems occurs from the shallow and deep *rasa*, we will be able to differentiate problems caused by concrete senses of by the mind and therefore able to solve life problems. Thus, it can be concluded that a person will not be easily overwhelmed by the many feelings in himself or herself if they're able to understand the *rasa* in their own self.

Research Method

This qualitative research is designed to utilize phenomenological methods in its data analysis. Phenomenology is one of the methods in qualitative research that has the purpose to seek in-depth comprehension (*verstehen*) or to reveal meanings in a phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). Specifically, the tradition of phenomenology utilized in this research is the classical phenomenology or the transcendental phenomenology. Transcendental phenomenology emphasizes the subjectivity and it is to reveal the core-experience through conscious data from informants. There are four steps in the process of the method: orientation, exploration, rechecking research result, and the final report.

The primary source of data in the research is the actor informant who directly experienced the ego depletion. In order to complement the primary data, additional information were gathered through the significant others who have close relationship with the actors and have witnessed them in various moments of ego depletion. The informants were gathered through snowball method. The data was gathered through interviews and nonparticipant observation.

The analysis process of data consists of four steps; they are *epoche*, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and synthesis (Moustakas, 1994). The analysis and interpretation procedures were started by creating interview transcripts and then coding, which is the process of bracketing the statements and giving codes to the labeled or themed statements. The next step is to group the small labels or themes into four categories: informant's internal condition, the causes of ego depletion, characteristics of ego depletion's experience, and the efforts to overcome ego depletion. From the four categories, the groups of small themes are then to be comprehended, given meanings, and made into main theme. The processes were held for each informant. Similarities and differences of each informant were then sought after individual analysis. The similarities found would then be used as the main themes of the research.

In order to reach research credibility, this research used several techniques required by Moustakas (1994). They are (1) continuous topic exploration through researcher and informants' involvements during interview and observation, (2) data triangulation (including approval at each data analysis process), (3) referential adequacy checks, and member checking. The in-depth interviews of the six informants were held for approximately four months. Four of the informants are males and two of them are females. Researcher and informants have known each other for about 1-4 years, which was the advantage or the rapport building. The interviews were held in

informants’ residences and workplace. The average time of the interviews is three times (excluding approachment process) and 1-1.5 hours of interview duration. The data gathering was initiated by asking informants’ unpleasant experiences.

Result and Discussion

When experiencing ego depletion, in general the mood is changing, leading to negative emotions. Here are the things perceived, thought, and done (psychomotor) informants when experiencing ego depletion :

1. Impulsive verbal & behavior. Informant claimed that verbally expressing disappointment that originally wanted to keep, but not in front of people that stimulates anger. Furthermore, men are also more motivated to express their anger in impulsive behavior either self-harm (suicide) or attack those perceived not appreciate.
2. Avoidance. In a state of ego depletion, people feel compelled to move away from a state that they did not like. The informant choose not interact much.
3. Helpless. When ego are exhausted, informants also said the emergence of the confusion. They felt so difficult to determine what to do. They could not focus on the problems encountered thus causing some duty neglected or delayed.
4. Losing hope. Informants seemed like no hope to solve its problems.
5. Prejudice easily emerge. When in a state of ego depletion, informants under 50 years are easier to blame others, and prejudiced against people who are not supportive and did not appreciate them.
6. Physical stamina decreases. Ego depletion constantly unnoticed by some informants affect his physical stamina, it’s not a serious illness. Beginning with loss of appetite, and the sleep quality is not good that feels to be less deep sleep.

The result of data analysis shows that none of the informants expressed their disappointment with explicit anger, like beating or frontal verbal (anger out). The informants tend to choose to lowering the urges and rely themselves in God’s will during the moments of disappointment and increased sadness. Koentjaraningrat (1990) in his writings give explanation to this behavior. He said that Javanese culture is strong in spiritual aspects, which is indicated by the fundamental value of *narimo* (in English: to accept, to give in). All informants express that the faith to God gives way to being *narimo* and it provides them the sufficient and effective source of energy. The dogmatic faith makes an individual easier to stand during complex situations. In line with Hardhoprakosa (1956), it was also explained that the supra social *mutmainah* desire will remind the individuals to take positive actions because of the existence of divine characters in them.

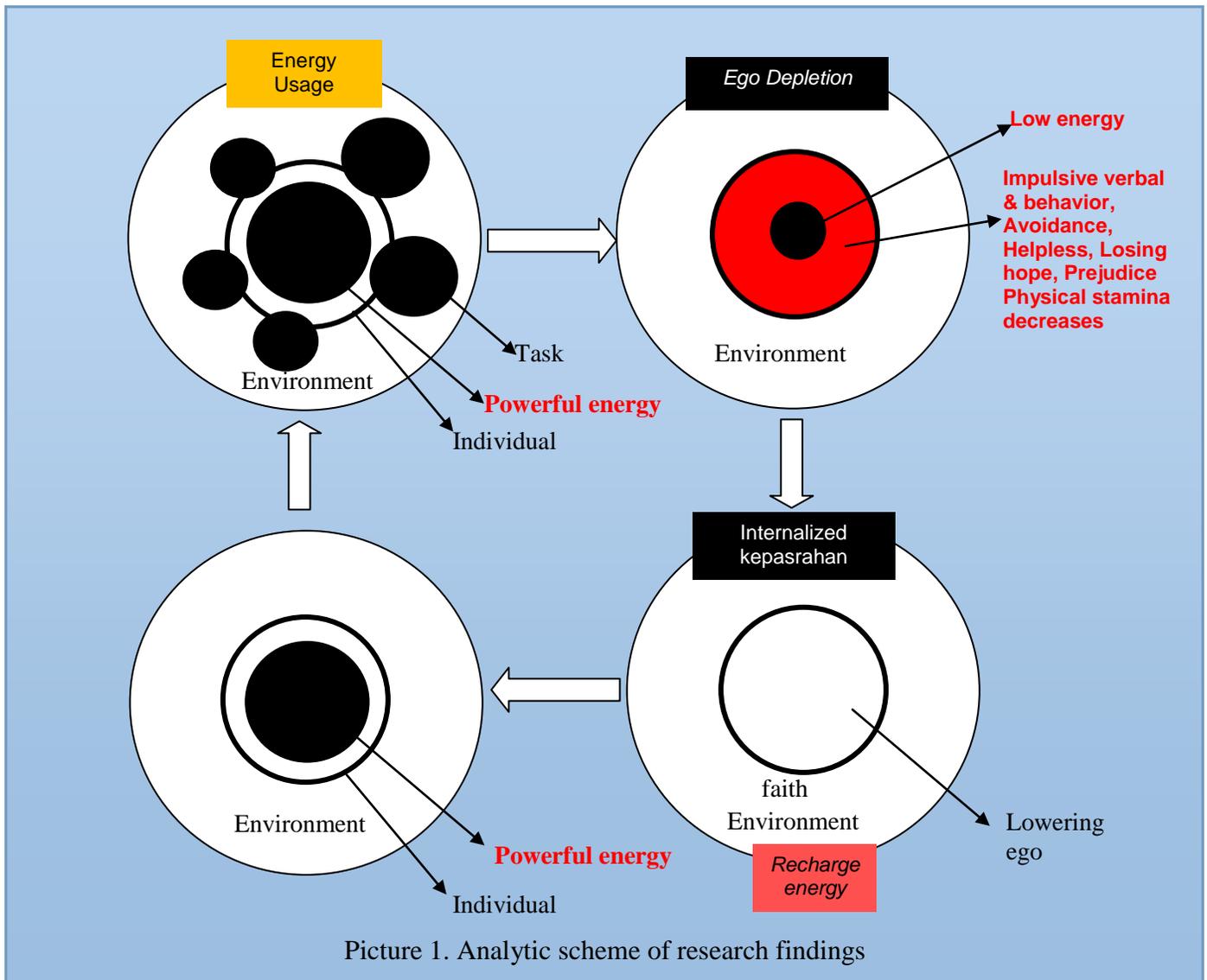
Informants’ behavior during ego depletion did not lead to destructive actions. The faith that God have prepared them the better result on their positive actions becomes their handle in controlling themselves. It is different to the research of Baumeister, Heatherton, and Tice (1993), where it was shown that American people tend to lead their behaviors to addictions, unwanted pregnancy, AIDS, STD, corruption, improvidence, violence, and criminal actions during ego depletion.

Self-control is also the characteristic shown by informants during ego depletion. None of the informants said that physical resting (sleeping) would help the depleting condition they had. This is different to Baumeister’s statement that sleeping and resting may help to overcome ego depletion; and that positive emotion may help to overcome ego depletion (Ren; Hu; Zhang; & Huang, 2010). All informants in this research showed that they feel better after performing

self-control, rather than expressing their depleted state into negative actions and pleasure or self-oriented needs fulfillment.

It can be concluded that informants tend to restrain themselves, though they want to express it, but consciously they control it well. They called it “*mungguh mudhunke rasa*”. The informants said that to recharge their energy, they through “keep walking” even though they feel powerless. The informants try to keep on their awareness to stay optimistic by decreasing a bit of their desires. Suryomentaram (1931) explained this with the concept of *bungah* (happiness) and *susah* (sadness) that are caused by human’s desires. When a desire is achieved, happiness will come. However, the achievement of one desire will widen (*mulur*) another desire which also demands to be fulfilled. When this desire isn’t fulfilled, the sadness (*susah*) will come and therefore shrinking (*mungkret*) the desire by lowering its standard for easier achievement. This effort will also help in achieving happiness, instead of terminating the desire. This is what the informants do in coping with (very) difficult life problems. In order to maintain optimism, they decrease a bit the desire to be able to fulfill it and recharging their energy at the same time.

Below is the diagram to the research finding :



Conclusion

The concept of ego depletion amongst the western people found in previous researches have several similarities and differences to the eastern (Javanese) people in this research. In previous researches, the causes of ego depletion are dominated by internal factors, whereas this research shows that the internalized external conditions absorbed informants' significant amount energy. In previous researches, the task that requires high self-control was given in hours, whereas the informants of this research have had longer period of depleting experience (about 4 months – 11 years) and therefore more overt. Furthermore, the characteristics of ego depletion from this research show that the ego depletion isn't expressed impulsively into harmful actions to others, even though it is manifested in negative attitudes and emotions. It is caused by their strong internalized faith that facilitates them to recharge their energy. This condition is different to Baumeister's research (2002), where the energy recharging methods are through personal pleasure activities, consuming nutritious food, and resting.

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