

Excerpt from Ngoc Luzardo's Master's Project titled "Application of Self-Determination Theory to Medication-Assisted Treatment and Ibogaine"

Self-Determination Theory

Deci and Ryan (1985) introduced a theory of motivation known as Self-Determination Theory (SDT) which helped create a paradigm shift from the mechanistic theory of motivation in which motivation is driven by biological needs (survival instincts such as desire for sex, food, water, physical protection) to an organismic theory of motivation in which motivation is driven by three psychological needs: self-determination (autonomy), competence, and interpersonal relatedness. Mechanistic theories view humans in a very physical and mechanical way, as passive entities that are pushed around by the interaction of biological drives and environmental stimuli. For this reason, the mechanistic theory of motivation has led many to focus on extrinsic motivators to manipulate human behavior whether that be at the workplace, schools, homes, or any other human setting, activity, or endeavor (Deci, 1971; Deci, 1972). Organismic theories view humans as active, higher-level organisms who possess volition (human agency) and therefore can initiate behaviors to act on their environment instead of just reacting to the environment and are able to manage aspects of their biological drives and emotions. Deci and Ryan (1985) hoped that this shift to an organismic theory of motivation will ultimately result in greater internal psychological freedom which will reflect outwardly as social, political, and economic structures that support and encourage human agency and therefore human freedom.

Intrinsic or Self-Motivation

The exercise of human agency requires motivation to be intrinsic or self-motivated by its very definition of using volition or will to initiate behaviors (not reacting to outside forces).

Extrinsic motivation negates human agency (and therefore intrinsic motivation) because it replaces or subverts human agency (Deci, 1971; Deci, 1972). This is the reason why any economic system that is based on extrinsic motivation (e.g., money, barter and trade, conditional giving system) ultimately corrupts human beings because it goes against their need for human agency (Luzardo, 2015). Intrinsic motivation is not only required to satisfy all three basic psychological needs, but it also plays a key role in psychotherapy, healthy behavioral change, and all healthy human interactions and endeavors (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2017).

Basic Psychological Needs

In order to be considered a basic psychological need, it must: 1) be universal to all human beings regardless of culture, race, ethnicity, sex, gender, socio-economic status, age, or any other classification of human beings; 2) be a consistent and ongoing need from birth to death across all human developmental periods; 3) the degree of satisfaction of the need must positively correlate to the degree in thriving (beyond just surviving) as indicated by the individual's mental and emotional well-being, realization and maximization of the individual's potential, and the well-being of the family, social networks, communities, and ecosystem in which these individuals live; and 4) the degree of thwarting or denial of the need must positively correlate to the degree of developmental and social dysfunction, mental and emotional stress or illness, defensiveness, compensatory behaviors (i.e., need substitution such as need for materialism, money, dominance, power, or control over others to compensate for lack of primary need satisfaction), decrease in or inability to feel empathy, feeling inferior or superior to others in terms of self-worth or value as a human being, being stuck in survival mode, inaccurate perceptions of self and others, and breakdown of family, social networks, communities, and ecosystem in which these individuals

live. The empirical evidence using the above definition of a basic psychological need have identified three basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and interpersonal relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2017).

Autonomy

Ryan and Deci (2017) realized that even after 32 years since their Deci and Ryan (1985) publication on SDT that their 2017 book on SDT “remains unfinished” (pg. vii) due to the ongoing, expanding, and accelerating research, discussion, and application of SDT all over the world and in a variety of contexts, levels, and endeavors. What they did not realize was that moving from a mechanistic theory of motivation to a more accurate organismic theory of motivation simply allowed those who are interested in changing or controlling human behavior to more accurately “facilitate, divert, or undermine that natural energy and direction” (pg. vii). A prime example of the potential to manipulate others using their own inner psychological need is the definition of autonomy as defined by SDT. The word *autonomy* literally means “self-governing” which implies regulation by the self, as opposed to *heteronomy*, which refers to regulation by an “other” (*heteron*). However, the SDT definition of autonomy adds a subjective dimension to this definition which makes the experience of autonomy manipulatable. SDT uses the words *autonomy*, *self-determination*, and *will* interchangeably and defines them as pertaining to acts that are experienced as freely done and endorsed by the self even if those acts were initiated by others such as willfully consenting to the demands of others, or perceiving the will of others as an obligation, as legitimate, or as a moral responsibility. Because the SDT definition of autonomy can depend on one’s perception of autonomy, the accuracy of the perception is highly dependent on the accuracy of the information or knowledge that has been transmitted to us since birth through parents, siblings, relatives, friends, coworkers; all forms of media (Internet, cable, television, radio, newspapers, magazines, books, music, movies, videos, podcasts, art, etc.);

government, education, business, nonprofit, religious institutions, non-governmental organizations (NGOs); and those with enough monetary wealth to control the type and flow of information disseminated to the masses through all these various means. The adage “knowledge is power” alludes to this fundamental truth so those who control the knowledge are the ones who really have all the power, and in a monetary-based system, it is those who have the most money who are able to practically and feasibly control or manipulate the knowledge of the population (Luzardo, 2015). Doyal and Gough (1991) recognized the key role of accurate and complete information in enabling true autonomy when they stated: “To be autonomous in this minimal sense is to have the ability to make informed choices about what should be done and how to go about doing it” (p. 53). Ryan and Deci (2017) acknowledge on the last page of their Human Autonomy chapter “that people often do not know what prompts or gives rise to a desire, impulse, or action tendency” and “that people do not know how their inner machinery works” (pg. 79), which underscores the critical importance of ensuring accurate information is not distorted, discredited (defamed or flagged as “misinformation” or “disinformation”), or censored from the public (and that critical thinking, doing one’s own research, and open debates are encouraged), hence the reason why freedom of speech is intended to be protected by the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution.

In addition to manipulation of knowledge (which affects our perception and psychology), our physical environment and our biology can also be manipulated chemically, microbially, and genetically (which can affect our perception and psychology in addition to our physiology) further robbing us of true autonomy. Lastly, any monetary or extrinsically-based economic system is highly susceptible to manipulation by those who acquire the most money or extrinsic power (i.e., the ultra-rich) and are able to impoverish the masses in order to keep them in fight-

or-flight survival or fear-based mode for the purpose of control, dominance, and ultimate self-aggrandizement (i.e., attainment of god-like status and power in which one controls or owns all the world's assets and resources in order to implement only their will at the cost of all others), thereby preventing the masses from ever satisfying their basic psychological need for autonomy (Luzardo, 2015). Out of the three basic psychological needs, the need for autonomy is the primary or foundational need that must be met in order for the other two needs to be completely satisfied (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2017). This will be explained in detail in the sections on Competence and Interpersonal Relatedness below.

Competence

Competence refers to the basic psychological need to be effective in one's interactions with one's environment, with others, and with the care of one's own body and mind. Satisfying the need for competence not only requires accurate knowledge, understanding, skills acquisition and mastery, and expression of one's gifts and talents, but also the expression of one's autonomously originated or intrinsically motivated values and interests. Gaining competence as a tennis player because one's parents have pushed their own dreams upon their child, does not fulfill the child's basic psychological need for competence because the tennis playing is not autonomously chosen (the child complied with or adopted the demands of the parents in exchange for the parents' conditional love, attention, and material rewards, and to avoid the parents' conditional wrath or punishment). Out of the three basic psychological needs, competence is the growth-oriented need in that its satisfaction allows one to grow or improve as a human being thereby expanding one's human potential, whose limit is currently unknown (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2017). As the Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany from 1974 to 1982 Helmut Schmidt once said, "the largest room in the world is the room for improvement" (Helmut Schmidt Quotes, n.d.).

Interpersonal Relatedness

Interpersonal relatedness refers to the basic psychological need to be unconditionally loved and to unconditionally love others which can be expressed as being cared about and caring about others (e.g., mutual expression of significance, appreciation, respect, unconditional regard), and others to be sensitive and responsive to one's basic psychological needs and for one to be sensitive and responsive to the basic psychological needs of others, all of which result in the forming of lifelong relationship bonds or a deep sense of belonging and connection with others that is mutual. Interpersonal relatedness must be bidirectional, which means it is satisfied when two human beings autonomously exercise their own human agency or volition to love, care, and connect with each other of their own free will (not forced, manipulated, or contrived). Therefore, nonautonomous connections can never satisfy this basic psychological need of interpersonal relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2017).

Application of Self-Determination Theory

SDT provides a useful framework for evaluating all kinds of systems (e.g., economic, business, political, government, education, media, environmental, social, family, community, entertainment, sports), policies, organizations, medical treatments, therapies, cultural traditions or practices, parenting styles and practices, work environments, or any other human environment, condition, or context in which there is a need to understand and explain current impact or outcomes and predict future impact and outcomes, especially if one wants to determine its effectiveness (or lack thereof) in order to make improvements or completely eliminate what is not working. The premise of SDT is that in order to have any human endeavor have enduring positive impact and outcomes, the environment or context in which humans function must satisfy the three basic psychological needs by fostering intrinsic or self-motivation which is also known as human agency, volition, or free-will. Humans can only be free agents if they are free from

outside manipulation or interference such as the censorship or discrediting of accurate information; inaccurate information used as propaganda to control or mislead; pollution, contamination, or genetic or molecular alteration of food, air, water, medicine, and environment which make humans physically and mentally weak; and an economic system based on extrinsic motivators (e.g., money) instead of intrinsic (e.g., a trust-based economy) (Luzardo, 2015).

Most schools of therapy do not explicitly discuss autonomy or self-determination (or similar terms or concepts) within their theoretical framework; and even if they do, not all therapists or practitioners actually behave in ways that engage the volition of their clients, regardless of their treatment modality. Ryan and Deci (2017) recommend the following techniques for psychosocial support and health providers to use to help clients foster autonomy, competence, and relatedness (pp. 442-450). Regardless of the provider’s theoretical approach, to the extent to which the provider uses the techniques below, SDT predicts the degree of treatment effectiveness to increase.

Autonomy-Supportive Techniques	
Taking the Internal Frame of Reference	Listening empathetically is a way for the provider to take the client’s internal frame of reference (IFOR). Empathetic listening requires the ability to be open, accepting, interested, nonjudgmental, and compassionate to enter the perspective of the client to accurately understand the client’s perceptions, feelings, values, conflicts, unresolved issues, ambivalence, or barriers to change. IFOR should help the client feel validated, lower the client’s defensiveness, and encourage honest sharing, especially in regard to painful emotions, which if not reflected upon and processed, will continue to interfere with need satisfaction.
Providing a Meaningful Rationale for Therapeutic Strategies and Activities	The principle of informed consent requires providers to be as transparent as possible in their activities and treatment because it is impossible for clients to be autonomously motivated unless they have a clear and legitimate reason or understanding to act. In addition to the provider doing their best to explain in terms the client can understand without intent to manipulate or bias, encouraging the client to ask questions for clarification or out of

	curiosity, express doubts, or to offer any other ideas, conveys respect and acknowledges the client's right to autonomy.
Acknowledging Feelings of Resistance	Actively listening for or being sensitive to any resistance from the client requires the provider to be mindful and self-regulated to keep their ego from violating client boundaries such as when the provider pushes their viewpoints or goals onto the client for which the client does not agree to, does not understand, or is not ready to internalize. By honoring the client's perspective on the resistance or interpersonal, emotional, or practical barrier, the provider can best understand its significance and engage in a collaborative effort to resolve or overcome it.
Providing Choice and Inviting Meaningful Inputs	Similar to the principle of informed consent, providers (to the best of their knowledge) are to provide clients an unbiased and transparent explanation of options available to the client (whether they are from the provider or not), and encourage the client to discuss, review, research, and think about the options including any other options the client may have heard of or thought of, as well as possibilities for experimentation or a trial period, if client makes that decision. Provider should also ensure the client understands that the decision not to change or to delay change are also options the client has.
Avoiding the Use of Controlling Pressures or Incentives, Including Provider Conditional Approval	Avoid using extrinsic motivators to encourage (e.g., rewards, incentives, conditional approval or recognition) or to control or discourage (e.g., punishment, sanctions, revoking privileges). Positive feedback or acknowledging progress should be spontaneous and sincere and not for the purpose of manipulation.
Need-Supportive Limit Setting	Being clear about the limit and what it entails, providing a meaningful rationale for the limit or limitation, being empathetic about conflicts with or resistance to the limit, and providing or suggesting options or alternatives are autonomy-supporting ways to communicate limits.
Relatedness-Supportive Techniques	
Unconditional Positive Regard (UCPR)	UCPR is the cornerstone of Carl Roger's person-centered approach to counseling in which clients are accepted and valued unconditionally as human beings regardless of their past or current behaviors, mistakes, transgressions, performance, background, beliefs, personality, experience, abilities, or physical characteristics. UCPR facilitates both autonomy (because it is noncontrolling or has no strings attached) and relatedness satisfaction (due to the compassionate and permanent acceptance

	and value of the person). UCPR avoids any communication that can be perceived as judgmental, blaming, or disapproving or approving to avoid the creation of contingencies.
Taking Interest in the Person	Have a sincere interest and curiosity in learning about the client as a human being with unique thoughts, perceptions, emotions, and experiences.
Acknowledging/Accepting Conflict	Be sensitive and responsive to any ambivalence, distress, or dissatisfaction with the provider or service. Encourage their communication and expression so clients will feel they are being heard, taken seriously, and that they matter. Responding with compassion and without judgment fosters a deeper sense of connection since the client has most likely felt rejected or ignored in past conflicts with others, and the current acceptance can also heal some of the impact of past rejections.
Authenticity and Transparency	Authenticity is about being honest or open in empathetically expressing relevant thoughts, feelings, or concerns with the client. Transparency is about thoughtfully and reflectively sharing important and meaningful experiences or perceptions with the client in a way that conveys ownership of the experience rather than imposing it on the client.
Competence-Supportive Techniques	
Identifying Barriers and Obstacles	Encourage and help clients identify known and potential likely barriers to engagement and change. Explain to the client that it is often the hidden or unacknowledged barriers that impede or can even sabotage efforts. Working to understand and accept them makes it easier to find ways to avoid or overcome them, thereby increasing self-efficacy.
Focusing on Optimal Challenges	When the client feels they have enough autonomous motivation to start setting goals and action plans to achieve them, encourage and support client's deliberation about goals and autonomous decision on implementation of the goals. If the challenge involves making nonconscious material conscious to be examined, processed, and integrated, help the client understand the potential implications of defensiveness or feeling overwhelmed, and that the client is free to stop or slow down the process at any time.
Promoting an Internal Rather Than External Perceived Locus of Evaluation	When the client engages in change-oriented activities, encourage the client to monitor and reflect on their own progress, performance, or skill level to avoid the experience of being

	externally judged or evaluated, unless the client explicitly asks for information from an outside perspective, if appropriate.
Offering Rich, Clear, and Effectance-Relevant Feedback	If specific behavior changes are the goal of the client, offer (not impose) informative (not evaluative) feedback and invite reactions and questions about the feedback. Listen with the understanding that any difficulty experienced is helping to reveal unanticipated obstacles or barriers which can then be avoided or overcome to increase client's chances of success in achieving their goals.
Encouraging Reflective Consideration of Consequences	When examining the costs and benefits of current behaviors or potential new ones, respectfully encourage the client to reflect on the ramifications of these choices without judging their responses but with interest in understanding their perspective, values, intentions, thought processes, and history.

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