

The antecedents and consequences of autonomous self-regulation for college: A self-determination theory perspective on socialization

Christopher P. Niemiec^{a,*}, Martin F. Lynch^b, Maarten Vansteenkiste^c,
Jessey Bernstein^{a,1}, Edward L. Deci^a, Richard M. Ryan^a

^a*Department of Clinical and Social Sciences in Psychology, University of Rochester, Box 270266, Rochester, NY 14627, USA*

^b*Department of Psychology, University of South Florida, Sarasota, USA*

^c*Department of Psychological and Educational Sciences, University of Leuven, Belgium*

Abstract

Using self-determination theory, two studies investigated the relations among perceived need support from parents, their adolescents' autonomous self-regulation for academics, and the adolescents' well-being. Study 1 indicated that perceived need support from parents independently predicted adolescents' well-being, although when mothers' and fathers' data were examined separately, the relation was stronger for mothers than for fathers. In Study 2, autonomous self-regulation for planning to attend college was a significant partial mediator of the relation of adolescents' perceived need support to well-being. Thus, perceived need support from parents does seem important for the development of adolescents' autonomous self-regulation and well-being.

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*Corresponding author. Tel.: +1 585 506 2512; fax: +1 585 273 1100.

E-mail address: niemiec@psych.rochester.edu (C.P. Niemiec).

¹Present address: Department of Psychology, Concordia University.

Introduction

Socialization is the process through which individuals learn and internalize the social percepts and mores that allow for effective functioning in society (Maccoby, 1984). Processes in the persons and in social contexts have been found to affect individuals' phenomenological experiences and to promote the internalization of attitudes, values, and regulatory processes. Self-determination theory's (SDT) view of socialization (Deci & Ryan, 1985) emphasizes an inherent orientation towards growth and development, energized and sustained, in part, by the fulfillment of the psychological needs for autonomy (deCharms, 1968), competence (White, 1959), and relatedness (Harlow, 1958). This natural, active propensity towards engagement with, and internalization of, social values is considered an important basis of healthy development, marked by the tendencies towards differentiation of personal and social structures and their integration into a coherent, unified, healthy sense of self (Ryan & Deci, 2000b). We thus consider the SDT view of need support and internalization in more detail.

Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation

SDT suggests that humans are intrinsically motivated to approach activities that are interesting, optimally challenging, and spontaneously satisfying (Ryan & Deci, 2000a), and that this process promotes development. Intrinsically motivated behaviours (e.g., exploration) are undertaken in the absence of external contingencies or controls, so engagement with these behaviours does not require prompts by socializers. However, not all behaviours that are important for socialization are intrinsically motivating. Hence, initiation of socially prescribed but unenjoyable behaviours may require the use extrinsic motivators (Ryan, Deci, & Grolnick, 1995).

Extrinsically motivated behaviours that are consistent with societal values and norms, once prompted by external contingencies, are often carried out compliantly. However, compliance tends not to persist when the extrinsic contingencies are not present, and mere compliance has been associated with psychological discord and ill-being (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Therefore, the critical issue is whether socializing agents can facilitate adolescents' internalization of the extrinsic motivation in a way that will allow for self-regulation of the behaviours.

The process of internalization is necessary for the regulation of extrinsically motivated behaviours that are consistent with social norms to be transformed into personal values (Deci & Ryan, 1985). One of the primary concerns in the lives of many adolescents is getting into college, although academic achievement is often not considered to be intrinsically motivated. Some look forward to college because they feel external or internal pressures to attend, while others approach college with more volition, viewing it as personally important to their own life goals. Although pursuing college may not be endorsed by all parents, it is an important societal value in the extant environments of most adolescents. Thus, the two studies herein reported concern internalization of the value and regulation of high school students for pursuing college.

SDT proposes that initially external regulations and their implicit values can be internalized to differing degrees through the processes of introjection, identification, and integration. Introjection involves taking in a contingency or regulation without accepting it as one's own, such that the introjected regulation essentially controls the person (e.g., planning to attend college to avoid feelings of guilt). Identification involves identifying with the personal value of an activity so that

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