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MOTIVATION INTERNALIZED MOTIVATION IN THE CLASSROOM

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The motivation that students bring to a classroom setting is critical in determining how much, and how well, they learn. This activity allows students to assess and reflect on the quality of their own motivation for taking this particular class. In the process, important concepts from Deci and Ryan's self-determination theory are introduced.

CONCEPT Self-determination theory research has demonstrated the importance of having *internalized motivation*: doing X because it is interesting and enjoyable or at least an expression of one's values and identity rather than doing X because one feels controlled by internal or external forces. This activity allows students to assess their own motivation for doing well in this class and to consider why their motivation may be suboptimal.

MATERIALS NEEDED Each student will need a hard copy of a single-page motivation questionnaire (see Appendix 24.1).

INSTRUCTIONS This can be a good activity for the first day of class because it invites reflection on why the student is taking the class and what, therefore, he or she might expect to get out of it. Such reflection may help the student to get more out of the class. This activity also invites more general reflection on the nature of the student's motivation in the world, and it can serve to illuminate recurring motivational problems and potential solutions.

Hand out the questionnaire (see Appendix 24.1) and prompt students as follows:

Think about why you are trying to do well in this class. Then, rate each of the possible reasons, below. Of course, people can do things for more than one reason, so you might give high ratings to more than one of the questions.

Give them a couple of minutes to make the five ratings.

Afterward, provide a short introduction to Deci and Ryan's self-determination theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000, 2008). The theory is complex and multifaceted, and the five reasons provide a good entry point into it. In brief, SDT is a theory of optimal motivation, which begins with the concept of *intrinsic motivation*. This means doing something primarily because of the interest and enjoyment that activity provides (e.g., playing basketball, playing a video game, spending time with

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friends). When the concept of intrinsic motivation was proposed in the early 1970s, it was a somewhat radical idea because the then-dominant behaviorist and drive theory perspectives view behavior as motivated by expected rewards and reinforcements or by the need to assuage biological demands. However, the intrinsic motivation concept fits well with the “cognitive revolution” and the idea that cognitive development is in large part internally driven via exploratory behavior.

Early research by Deci demonstrated the *undermining effect*, in which intrinsic motivation could be spoiled by rewards, competitions, deadlines, and social pressures. For example, research participants who were paid to solve previously enjoyable puzzles did not want to play with them when left alone during a “free choice” period. This is the opposite of what the behaviorist reinforcement perspective predicts. Does undermining matter? Yes, because intrinsically motivated people try harder and longer, perform more flexibly and creatively, and learn more deeply than extrinsically motivated people (see Ryan & Deci, 2008, for a recent review).

Later, SDT evolved to incorporate other forms of motivation besides intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000, 2008). This was necessary because not all important behaviors (e.g., changing diapers, filling out tax forms) can be fun and enjoyable. In these cases, it is beneficial if one can at least internalize the behaviors, so that one does them willingly, even if they are not enjoyable. Currently, SDT specifies not just one but three forms of extrinsic motivation, which vary in their degree of internalization. *External motivation* is based on expected rewards or avoided punishments and fits the tenets of behaviorist (operant) theory. When external motivation is dominant, there is no internalization of the behavior; it does not feel as if it emanates from or is endorsed by one’s self. *Introjected motivation* is next on the internalization continuum. Here, there is partial internalization in that one part of the person is compelling another part of the person to act, usually to avoid guilt or bad feelings about oneself. Introjected motivation is a common target of psychodynamic therapy and fits the Freudian notion of the superego, which compels the person to do socially prescribed behavior. *Identified motivation* is next on the internalization continuum. Here, the nonintrinsically motivated behavior has been completely internalized; there is no internal resistance, and there is a willingness to do the behavior because it is important and valuable to the self, even when it is not enjoyable. Identified motivation fits the tenets of existential therapy and the idea that one should take full responsibility for one’s choices rather than behaving in “bad faith.”

It is also worth discussing *amotivation*, which according to SDT represents a sense of acting without having a clear intention of doing so—acting without knowing why or acting with a feeling of helplessness. In this view, an amotivated person is not a person who does nothing; instead, he or she acts, but with a feeling of passivity and without a clear intention.

Figure 24.1 presents a diagram containing the five forms of motivation, which could be used to help explain SDT to the students (Ryan & Deci, 2000). As can be seen, the motivations are viewed as lying on an *internalization continuum*, from not at all internalized into the self (amotivation and external motivation) to partially internalized (introjected motivation) to fully internalized (identified motivation) to automatically internalized (intrinsic motivation). The diagram also contrasts the three forms of extrinsic motivation (external, introjected, and identified) with intrinsic motivation. In addition, *autonomous* motivation (identified and intrinsic motivation) is con-

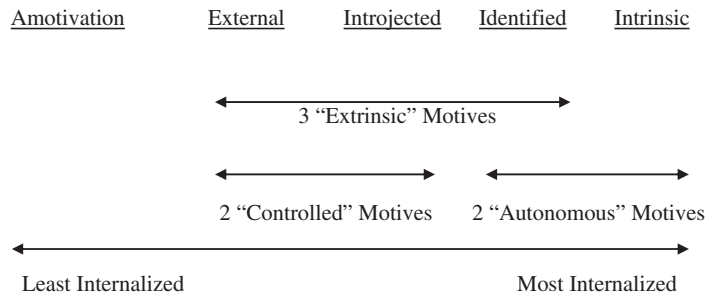


Figure 24.1. *The motivation continuum. Adapted from "Self-Determination Theory and the Facilitation of Intrinsic Motivation, Social Development, and Well-Being," by R. M. Ryan and E. L. Deci, 2000, American Psychologist, 55, p. 72. Copyright 2000 by the American Psychological Association.*

trusted with *controlled* motivation (external and introjected motivation). Considering these concepts highlights the importance of identified motivation: Although it is not intrinsic (and thus, like diaper changing, is no fun), it can nevertheless still be autonomous and volitional because one stands behind the values and purposes expressed by the behavior (keeping one’s baby healthy). Indeed, considerable research suggests that psychological maturity involves transmuted controlled motivations into autonomous ones; as people age, they tend to become more autonomous and less controlled in what they do, fitting the existentialist dictum to “grow up and take responsibility for one’s actions” (Sheldon & Kasser, 2001).

Students’ responses to the five questions can be handled in a number of ways. First, Question 5 in the handout assesses intrinsic motivation, and Question 2 assesses external motivation. Typically these ratings are negatively correlated, consistent with the undermining effect. Students might be prompted to think about why their external motivation is stronger than their intrinsic motivation (if this is the case) and to think about how they could enhance their intrinsic and reduce their external motivation. They could also be asked whether they agree that these two motivations conflict with each other. In addition, they could evaluate the extent to which that they feel amotivated, that is, the degree to which they do not know why they are in the class and do not expect to do at all well in the class. Amotivation is likely to be low in a positive psychology class, but students may be able to identify other classes that induce a sense of amotivation.

In line with typical research practice, students could also compute a *relative autonomy* score for their classroom motivation by adding the ratings for Questions 4 and 5 (identified and intrinsic) and then subtracting their ratings for Questions 2 and 3 (external and introjected). A relative autonomy score less than 0 suggests that the student has primarily controlled motivation, which is likely to impair his or her potential enjoyment of the class and ability to learn the material in a deep way. It may also reflect a maladaptive and disempowering way of “copping out” on one’s chosen behaviors, that is, of not fully committing to something one has decided to do. A relative autonomy score greater than 0 suggests that the student’s motivation is reasonably adaptive and optimal. The higher the positive score, the better. Thus, the combination of “5” ratings on identified (Question 4) and intrinsic (Question 5) and “1” ratings on

external (Question 2) and introjected (Question 3) would be optimal. Of course, it is hard to deny that extrinsic motivations will always play a role; grades do matter, and guilt can be a powerful motivator. Still, the question suggested by SDT research is, How can these extrinsic motivators be minimized and downplayed, or even transmuted into identified motivation, the most adaptive form of extrinsic motivation?

DISCUSSION

There are many other potential avenues of discussion. Students could be prompted to compare this class with another for which they have a different quality of motivation. Why does this difference exist? Is it due to social pressures or stresses that may have undermined motivation in one type of class but not in another? What types of teacher, teaching style, or classroom process style are most conducive to promoting intrinsic motivation, and what types tend to undermine intrinsic motivation?

Students could also be prompted to consider their motivational style in general. Are they typically too passive or reward focused in life, or do they typically motivate themselves with guilt? Can they see how the latter motivational strategies may backfire, undermining their inherent exploratory urges? They might also think about changes in their own motivation over time. When they were younger, they might have cleaned up their room only because parents insisted; now, do they clean their living space for more internalized (self-endorsed) reasons? In other words, can they see a developmental progression in themselves from left to right on the internalization continuum? If so, can they imagine this happening with respect to their current “controlled” motivations?

WRITING COMPONENT

There are a wide variety of writing possibilities. Students could be asked to write about and explain their ratings on the five questions. Why did they make each rating, and do they agree that these ratings have the meaning claimed by SDT? They could also do a developmental analysis of their own academic motivation. What was their motivation like on their first day of school or in grade school? What has changed since then and why? Students could also construct a plan for enhancing their own level of academic internalization (if not for this positive psychology course, perhaps for some other less positive course!). What negative patterns of thought or motivation might they try to notice, challenge, and change? What affirmations or restatements can they make to remind themselves that this is what they have chosen to do and to convince themselves that it is important? If they cannot convince themselves of this, should they consider making a change (e.g., from premed major to dance major or psychology major to nursing major)?¹

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¹To better grasp this topic, instructors and students are encouraged to consult the following sources: Deci and Ryan (1985); Ryan and Connell (1989); Sheldon (2004); and Sheldon, Kashdan, and Steger (2011).

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Appendix 24.1

“What Is My Motivation?”

ASSIGNMENT RATING SHEET

Past research suggests that people may be motivated to do something for many different reasons. In this task, rate the following reasons for *why you want to do well in this class*. Of course, people can have more than one reason for doing something, so you might give more than one high rating. Use this scale:

1 2 3 4 5
Not at all for this reason Somewhat Very much for this reason

1. ___ **I don't know why.** I don't really have any goals for the class, and I don't expect to do very well.
2. ___ **Because I have to.** Circumstances necessitate it. In order to get good grades, impress teachers, friends, or parents, or keep my scholarship, I must do well in this class.
3. ___ **Because I should.** I'd feel guilty if I didn't do well, and would worry that I was wasting myself or my abilities. Rather than feeling compelled by circumstances to try to do well, I compel myself.
4. ___ **Because I want to.** I fully agree with the value of this class, and do not have to force myself to try to do well. Even at times when the material or assignment is not very interesting, I have no trouble keeping going because I believe in what I am doing.
5. ___ **Because I enjoy it.** I am interested and engaged while trying to do well. I feel a sense of competence and mastery while doing it, and the sense that I am expanding my understanding of topics that deeply interest me.