

It is not just about autonomy-support or the lack thereof, it is about not creating a controlling environment.

Deci and Ryan's (1985) self-determination theory (SDT) offers a perspective on human motivation and personality. Within the SDT framework, it is well-researched that when one's innate psychological needs are satisfied, generally positive outcomes (like enhanced well-being, increased vitality, positive affect) can be achieved (e.g., Baard, Deci, & Ryan, 2004; Lim & Wang, 2009). When one's needs are not satisfied (e.g., when autonomy is not supported), one is said to be functioning non-optimally. Recent research (e.g., Bartholomew, Ntoumanis, Ryan, Bosch, & Thogersen-Ntoumani, 2011; Bartholomew, Ntoumanis, Ryan, & Thogersen-Ntoumani, 2011) has shown that the support of autonomy and the control of behaviour are not two sides of a same coin (Pelletier, Fortier, Vallerand, & Briere, 2001). Rather, need satisfaction (or the lack thereof) and need thwarting are two separate constructs and may at times, co-occur (Bartholomew et al., 2011).

Therefore, in trying to create a better learning environment for our students, it is not as simple as making the environment an autonomy-supportive one, but also to bear in mind not to create a controlling environment for the students. Often, teachers may use a combination of autonomy-supportive and controlling behaviours to different extent. For example, a teacher could use affection (i.e., **conditional regard**) to try and get the students to do the tasks that s/he has set for the students – controlling behaviour; At the same time, the teacher could have also given the students meaningful reasons for doing the tasks or even a variety of tasks to choose from – autonomy-supportive behaviour. As, **psychological need thwarting** has been shown to promote **ill-being** (i.e., not just decrease well-being) such as disordered eating in sport, burnout, depression and negative affect (Bartholomew et al., 2011), teachers need to be wary of creating a controlling environment that thwarts the students' psychological needs. The following are some pointers that teachers/coaches may wish to bear in mind in conducting their class/training:

- Adopt autonomy-supportive strategies to get students to be “on-task” rather than use controlling behaviour such as conditional regard. For e.g., give students choices of tasks to choose from so as to help them foster a sense of volition for the act, acknowledge their negative feelings towards the tasks, and explain the reasons for the tasks. Simultaneously, be mindful about giving “on-task” students more positive affection while withdrawing positive affection from “off-task” students in a bid to get them to be “on-task”.
- Avoid controlling behaviours such as forcing conformity simply by virtue of authority/command. For e.g., coaches shouting at athletes in order make the athletes do certain things, only praising athletes when they complete all the tasks set out satisfactorily, and giving athletes less attention because the athletes had displeased the coach. These controlling behaviours thwart the psychological needs of the athletes, cause them to experience more stress and become more likely to burnout from the sport.

KEY DEFINITIONS

Conditional Regard: Can be positive or negative. Conditional positive regard is where more attention and affection than usual is given to the student/athlete when s/he behaves in ways that the teachers/coaches expect. Conditional negative regard is where less attention and affection than usual is given to the student/athlete when s/he fails to behave in ways expected by the teachers/coaches.

Psychological Need Thwarting: Feelings that arise when individuals perceive their psychological needs to be actively undermined by others.

Ill-being: For example, the development of compensatory motives or rigid behaviour patterns that have significant negative consequences on health and well-being.

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