

When choice motivates and when it does not: Research on choice, autonomy, and well-being

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Choice provision is a well-known and preferred practice among parents and teachers aiming to enhance students' internalization of the actions' value and experience of autonomy. However, there is some evidence that choice provision does not always promote motivation and can even, in some cases, hinder or reduce it. Based on the theoretical assumptions of Self-Determination Theory, I will argue that the provision of choice is beneficial and can promote motivation if it is provided by significant others (parents and or teachers) in a way that supports the psychological needs of the chooser for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Namely, when the choice is provided in a need-supporting environment, it enhances motivation, but providing choice in a need-thwarting climate can be harmful. I will present a few studies conducted with colleagues and students, focusing on the question: When choice motivates, and when it does not? We examined this question in the context of "significant life choices," such as a first career choice, as these choices have long life effects. The consequences of making this decision out of controlled rather than autonomous reasons might be significant. In these studies, we measured the following: a). The level at which significant others support the chooser's needs (i.e., was the choice made in a need-supportive or need-depriving environment?); b). How autonomous are the choosers in making their choice? (i.e., was the choice made out of autonomous motives such as interest, joy, or understanding the value of the action? or was it made out of compulsion or to avoid shame or guilt?); c). What are the choice outcomes (i.e., how persistent, successful in the chosen activity, and satisfied with the choice the chooser is?). In addition, various mechanisms that can mediate or moderate the association between the support provided, the motivation to choose, and the choice outcomes were examined. Reinforcing SDT basic assumptions, the findings

of these studies show that meaningful choices provided in a need-supportive environment promote chooser autonomy, choice satisfaction, well-being, persistence, and success in the chosen task. In this talk, I will suggest future research directions to understand better the benefits and drawbacks of choice provision.