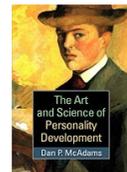




Designing Autonomy into Homeless Solutions

Maximize Autonomy for a Healing Human Environment

In “The Art and Science of Personality Development”, Dan P. McAdams (2015) describes the critical nature of Autonomy”



Self Determination Theory and the Big Three: Intrinsically motivating activities often find their reinforcing sources in the three big needs of self-determination theory. Behaviors that stem from the need for **autonomy, competence, and relatedness** often feel intrinsically rewarding. Moreover, acting and striving in accord with the three needs may promote psychological growth, according to Deci and Ryan (1985). In support of these claims, research shows that when people are pursuing goals that tap into the needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness, they tend to experience higher levels of self-esteem and psychological well being (Milyavskaya, Phillipe, & Koestner, 2013). Pursuing intrinsic goals also appears to promote a general sense that one is growing and changing in a positive direction for the future (Bauer & McAdams, 2010). Moreover, studies show that when people deprived of autonomy, competence, and relatedness, they feel strong desires to compensate for the loss and ever stronger urgings to meet those basic needs (Sheldon & Gunz, 2009)

Autonomy as the Biggest of the Big Three: Although Deci and Ryan give the three needs equal billing in their writings on self-determination theory, it seems to me that autonomy is the most basic of the three. As I read self-determination theory, **the need for autonomy lies at the heart of motivated agency.** If your need for autonomy is squelched, you feel that you have lost control of your own motivations. Gone is any semblance of free will or self-efficacy. When the need for autonomy is squelched, you lose the power of autonomous choice and decision making, and you feel that forces beyond your control – forces external to the self – ultimately determine your behavior. You feel like a dispensable pawn in a game of chess. You feel helpless. It seems to me that you that if you cannot feel some form of rudimentary satisfaction with respect to the need for autonomy, then your needs for competence and relatedness are essentially moot. As I see it, you cannot effectively *strive* for mastery or love if you cannot *strive*. Experiencing some rudimentary satisfaction of the need for autonomy is essential for agentic striving – striving for anything, be it competence, relatedness, or becoming President of the United States.

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Avoid the Homeless Concentration Camp Solution

Is the extreme polar opposite of Autonomy a Concentration Camp?

In a review of a preliminary design, a highly experienced architect warned Urban Camp to avoid the concentration camp look. Insightfully he remarked about an early design “Why don’t you just call it Kamp”. This idea embedded in our design thinking and led us to our human scale designs described in our whitepaper: An Architecture for the Homeless.

The architect was warning not to layout living modules in rows of barracks but to form small clusters of 10-12 homes with additional gathering points for human interaction. That’s part of the solution. The other part is maintaining an openness to the surrounding environment – no fencing and guard posts.

This means that the urban camp dwellings need to be designed with highly durable and damage resistant exteriors, and with security features for doors and windows. And the dwelling includes toilet, bath, and kitchen for secure self-care.



Some homeless solutions become guarded camps because:

- light shelter boxes and even tiny homes are not built for an urban environment, and
- the bathrooms and kitchen areas are outside and apart from the sleeping space
- the encampments are meant to be highly managed by social service agencies

This is an example of a guarded camp look from a West Coast Homeless Village.

Avoid the High Cost of Operating Homeless Guarded Camps

Homeless Guarded Camps have very high operating costs in contrast to an Urban Camp Solution. When an organization takes full responsibility for a persons eating, sleeping, bathing, and movement, it incurs a large responsibility which is very expensive to maintain.

This is particularly true if the sleeping facility does not conform strictly with the building and life safety codes as the facility has a liability for personal injury or death.

Here is a brief summary of the most significant costs:

- The cost of 24/7 security and facility operating personnel.

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- The cost of providing, maintaining, cleaning, and disinfecting common bath and toilet.
- The cost of providing all food and regular meals and drinking water.
- The cost of providing transportation if the site is isolated
- The cost of cleaning and disinfecting units if high turnover of tenants
- The cost of onboarding and offboarding tenants if high turnover of tenants
- The cost of counseling, training, and seeking work instead of individual initiative for same

Urban Camp Minimizes Cost and Maximizes Benefit by Fostering Autonomous Living

Design for Autonomy	Benefit
Long Term Housing	Time to create a plan and build a better life. Minimize turnover costs.
Code Compliant Homes	No special supervision of less safe / non-compliant tents or containers
Secure Homes Open to Street	Avoid expense of fenced facilities and full time security
An Architecture for Healing	“Light Touch” not Full Time Care for Social Services
Access for Emergency Services	The existing resources of the community are used.
Self-Control / Self-Care Environment	The expense of cleaning and food is avoided. Self-care is a healing process.