

UNITED WISDOM

The Need for Autonomy and the Wish to Belong to a Group

The Person and the Inner World

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Epigraph

“Feeling of volition.”

Richard M. Ryan and Edward L. Deci, 2000, Self-Determination Theory and the Facilitation of Intrinsic Motivation, Social Development, and Well-Being, p.74. The Russian version translates this fragment editorially. In this approach, autonomy concerns experiencing participation in one's action, not necessarily independence from people.

What this article is about

Imagine a hypothetical team: you like the shared undertaking, the people, and the sense of belonging. One day, declining a meeting, suggesting another way to work, or saying a shared conclusion does not fit becomes difficult. You want to preserve belonging and participate without surrendering your judgment. An uncomfortable fork appears: either I am with everyone, or I choose myself and end up alone. Sometimes the group supports this arrangement; sometimes you attribute it to the relationship in advance.

Autonomy and connection need not be opposites. Yet one attractive statement about their compatibility does not change a particular family, team, or community's structure. This article helps distinguish belonging, agreement, personal decision, and agreed responsibilities. We examine where participation terms can be discussed and where actual consequences of refusal restrict freedom. There is no demand to leave every group or prove maturity through public disagreement. The aim is more modest: see which connection you need and how much room it leaves for someone who can answer differently.

I. Being connected does not mean being identical

Groups connect people through different things: a task, kinship, faith, profession, history of friendship, or place of residence. A common basis does not imply identical views and desires. A team can work together while differing over leisure, politics, and family decisions. A family can remain close without shared tastes in clothing. Some communities really require particular commitments, however, and calling something autonomy does not cancel them. Establish where agreement is necessary to the undertaking itself and where it has become an additional condition for being recognized as one of the group.

In a hypothetical example, volunteers have agreed on shifts and safety rules. Those requirements concern shared work. Then an expectation appears that participants spend every free evening together. This second rule concerns something different, although its obligatory tone may sound identical. Someone can ask whether the evening belongs to an accepted commitment or expresses friendship. This distinction does not make contact unnecessary. It helps stop a preferred form of connection being presented as a technical condition of work and allows it to be discussed separately with those for whom it matters.

Belonging has different meanings too. You can be a registered member and feel foreign; live far away and retain an important connection; perform a role without identifying deeply with the group. “One of us” does not immediately specify the experience required. Do you want shared action, trust, support, recognition of your history, or the right to be heard? An answer reveals what the existing group provides and what additional expectations are placed on it. Not every form of belonging must exist in one place. Work does not always become family, and friendship need not assume every task of professional recognition.

Difference does not guarantee good relationships. Disagreement can concern essential rules or participants' rights. If someone wants to violate safety in shared work, the group can set appropriate limits. If personal preferences outside the task differ, restrictions require another justification. Avoid calling every limit suppression or every habit necessary discipline. Either word can become a ready-made answer. Substantial consideration returns to the subject: which action is restricted, why, who adopted the rule, and how it relates to actual shared responsibility.

II. Autonomy concerns participation in an action

Ryan and Deci's 2000 review explicitly distinguishes autonomy from independence, detachment, and selfishness. In self-determination theory, volition matters and can exist within dependence. This is a particular research vocabulary; it does not prove every group safe or compatible with your interests. The relevant section was read here without individual forecasts or diagnoses.

In a hypothetical scene, you agree to help a relative because care matters to you. The action restricts your schedule and requires cooperation. It can still be your decision. In another scene, outwardly identical help occurs under threat of losing support or suffering humiliation. Schedules resemble each other while grounds differ. Autonomy therefore cannot be established through an action's outward appearance of independence. Clarify opportunities to consent, refuse, change conditions, and the meaning someone actually endorses. An observer gains no right to determine that meaning for the participant.

Group participation can include voluntarily accepting rules. A musician chooses an ensemble and follows its tempo; a researcher accepts procedures for checking work; a hiker agrees to route rules. Autonomy does not require inventing a personal version of every action each time. It concerns how someone enters participation and which conditions they understand. Initial consent does not grant unlimited power over future changes, however. If demands expand substantially, consent becomes relevant again. Agreeing to play together does not mean accepting every new responsibility later described as loyalty to the ensemble.

Voluntariness has limits: available options can be difficult. Someone may accept work for income without finding conditions they fully endorse. That cannot be declared unqualified freedom merely because resignation is formally possible. The exit cost may be unaffordable. Discussion of autonomy must see resources and power. At the same time, restriction does not erase every opportunity to participate: negotiating one task, colleagues' support, or clarification of rules may sometimes be possible. The scale of action depends on circumstances, not a demand immediately to prove complete independence from an environment in which one must live.

III. Agreement and similarity are different ways of staying together

You can agree to a particular proposal while retaining your own grounds. You can hold a similar view yet feel that saying otherwise is dangerous. Identical answers do not prove voluntary agreement; difference does not prove broken connection. In a hypothetical team, everyone supports a new schedule. One finds it convenient, another agrees for a limited period, and a third feared raising an objection. The vote is identical while participation differs. If genuine agreement matters, conditions and qualifications need space rather than treating an appearance of unanimity as sufficient evidence that no difficulties exist.

Sometimes refusal is treated as a statement about the whole relationship: “You did not come, so you do not need us.” Absence may concern timing, condition, interest in a particular meeting, or another commitment. Clarification requires conversation, not automatic justification of the participant. If someone repeatedly promises and fails to attend, reliability may be the issue. Declining an optional evening in advance is a different matter. Separate a connection's significance from assessing one action. The effects of absence can then be discussed without making every meeting obligatory proof of belonging.

Your own refusal also needs precision. “I cannot participate today” differs from “Your whole undertaking is pointless.” Sometimes the latter really expresses a position, but irritation should not make it a substitute for the former. Naming the area of disagreement clearly can help preserve connection where conversation is available and safe. Relationships are not

guaranteed to survive. A group may require another degree of participation and a person choose otherwise. Precision does not eliminate divergence but reveals its scale: a mismatch of schedules, a particular method, or the community's very basis. The next meaningful step depends on that difference.

No deliberate objection is needed to confirm autonomy. If the common method fits and the goal matters, agreement can be complete. Freedom is not measured by the number of refusals spoken. Sometimes the possibility of objecting matters more than using it now. A calm question about how the group discusses altered conditions or personal limits can examine this principle. If that question creates significant risk, however, it need not become a courage exercise. Observation, support, and preparation may be wiser than public testing; the person chooses the method.

IV. Warmth need not depend on every coincidence

A connection becomes fragile when each choice is tested for loyalty. Whom you met, what you bought, how you spent the evening, which book you read—everything must confirm belonging. In a hypothetical example, a community member takes interest in another school and receives suspicion of betrayal rather than a question about its content. If rules actually require exclusivity, they need to be known in advance. If not, expanding the demand changes participation terms. A group's anxiety is not by itself sufficient grounds to control every external interest.

A group may have understandable reasons for concern. Shared work sometimes requires confidentiality, consistency, or absence of conflicts of interest. These matters should be described specifically rather than through an obligation to feel the right love for the community. What must not be disclosed? Which actions contradict the accepted role? How long does the condition last? Less clarity makes a rule more easily become an endless examination. A person must guess expectations while a leader assesses loyalty through convenient signs. Such uncertainty does not equal relational depth; it may simply complicate responsible participation.

Connection amid difference does not oblige everyone to tolerate any behavior. Insult, breached agreement, and disagreement with an opinion are different actions. A group can restrict the first two without prohibiting the third. Sometimes “insult” means any refusal to support a leader, however. Return to an examinable description: what was said, which rule was broken, what were the consequences? Conversation will not always be available. Still, the distinction helps someone avoid automatically accepting blame or assuming full responsibility for a response controlled by another person.

V. Ancient affability does not mean modern unanimity

In Analects XIII.23, in James Legge's translation, Confucius contrasts affability with flattery. This is a particular formulation of historical relational and educational ethics, not a popular quotation about harmony from another translation. We compare it with connection without obligatory approval; modern autonomy is not declared a Confucian term or evidence that the teachings are identical.

The distinction is useful in a simple hypothetical scene. You respect a team member but think their decision mistaken. You can speak calmly without endorsing what you disagree with. Politeness need not consist of identical answers. Yet the ancient fragment cannot yield a ready-made meeting technique or a promise that calm tone resolves conflict. Power, rules, relationships, and the objection's content matter. Sometimes respectful wording helps people hear each other; sometimes divergence remains. Correct treatment retains value without guaranteed pleasant results or universal recognition of your position.

The historical boundary particularly matters. The Confucian text considers roles, cultivation, and moral order in its context. It does not equal a modern declaration of individual rights. A reader can accept the narrow affability/flattery distinction without accepting every historical hierarchy or rule of family loyalty. Comparison becomes more honest when what is not transferred is named. Ancient thought then serves neither as a decorative scientific seal nor justification of every elder's authority. It asks about the quality of relational participation; present conditions require their own consideration of consent, consequences, and participants' actual rights.

The reverse danger is to understand independence as obligatory harshness. Refusing flattery does not require conspicuous contempt. You can consider setting, timing, and another person's vulnerability while retaining the objection's substance. If a decision cannot be discussed now, another time or limited participation is permissible. Neither action must be capitulation. Its meaning depends on what is accepted and what remains open. Precise speech avoids an unnecessary war between warmth and judgment: I can be well disposed toward people without agreeing with every idea, and refuse without making refusal evidence of my superiority.

VI. Boundaries need agreements as well as a slogan

“I have boundaries” says little until an action is named. No calls after a particular time? A day to respond? You are not willing to take another role? The more concrete the condition, the more clearly it can be discussed. A boundary does not become law for someone else merely by being called personal. You can determine your participation, request conditions, and refuse some actions. Another participant can name their capabilities and requirements too. Sometimes agreement emerges; sometimes the available forms of connection prove unsuitable for both.

In a hypothetical family, you want shared weekends without always following one script. Meeting frequency and activities can be proposed. Such a proposal differs from demanding that everyone else stop wanting the customary celebration. They can retain their way while you participate differently. If refusal breaches a prior commitment, consequences must enter discussion. “Autonomy” does not erase promises. Yet a promise once made need not determine every future weekend without revision. Relationships exist in continuing agreement when that opportunity actually exists.

Sometimes people contest a boundary because they hear it as an assessment of their worth. “I do not want to discuss this now” becomes “I do not need you.” You can explain the refusal's subject and offer another format if actually prepared to provide it. No alternative need be promised merely to soothe someone. Nor must you endlessly prove that refusal is not rejection. After sufficient explanation, the other's response remains their participation. Reciprocity requires room for both, not one person's constant labor to remove every unpleasant feeling arising for the other around their decision.

VII. The scale of participation can be named

Wanting to belong sometimes becomes a promise to be available always. Participation can instead have a specific scale: one role, particular meetings, agreed tasks. Limiting scale does not necessarily mean weak connection. Someone can reliably perform a small part and matter to the undertaking. Conversely, promising everything without the ability to fulfill it makes shared work less predictable. Assess not only the intensity of wanting to belong but the contribution actually available. Acknowledging limits provides information to the group; it does not automatically show insufficient dedication or personal insignificance.

In a hypothetical team, another responsibility is offered because you have long been helpful. You appreciate the trust, but your current workload is full. You can respond with conditions: take the new task instead of an old one, participate for a limited period, or help find another person. These options require agreement rather than existing by default. If none fits, refusal or revised participation remains. Do not conceal the cost: accepting everything and repeatedly

missing deadlines also affects people. Autonomy connects with responsibility when promises match actual capabilities and changes are communicated clearly enough.

Reduced participation sometimes causes sadness. You may value a group without having the previous amount of time. This is not necessarily conflict between a real desire and a false excuse. Life conditions change. Particular ties can be maintained, a transition recognized, or another format sought if available. A group can discuss consequences for work; you need not declare every loss of former closeness your fault. Connection has a history without a guarantee of unchanging form. A more modest new agreement can be more substantial than an old promise no longer fulfillable without constant damage to other important parts of life.

VIII. The cost of exit reveals the connection's actual structure

Sometimes refusal exists only in words. After refusing, someone is threatened with lost employment, housing, access to loved ones, or public humiliation. These consequences differ significantly from ordinary group disappointment. Advice to explain feelings better cannot resolve them. Power, resources, rights, and safety require assessment. Appropriate local professional and social support fits concrete risks. This article does not determine which actions are safe for you. It preserves one boundary: inner permission to be independent does not replace conditions allowing that permission to be exercised without an unaffordable price.

In a less dangerous situation the price can still be real. Leaving a club changes social contact; refusing a role reduces influence; distance from family changes daily support. Recognizing the cost does not declare exit wrong. It helps plan, seek other connections, and avoid promising yourself instantaneous freedom from all difficulties. If the connection matters, changing conditions before leaving can be explored. If nothing changes, belonging and personal participation may be incompatible in their present form. A decision requires particular context, not a general order always to stay or leave.

A situation in which a group is called the sole source of truth about a person deserves special attention. If only its members determine whether someone deserves respect, every departure becomes a trial of identity. That rule can be noticed even when circumstances cannot yet change. Other relationships can be retained, information checked, and the fact remembered that belonging to one environment does not exhaust human life. These possibilities depend on access and safety too. No obligatory sequence should be prescribed. What matters more is seeing which external support is actually available and avoiding making its absence another accusation against the participant.

IX. Connection can be chosen while retaining your own grounds

Independence need not end in isolation. Sometimes someone chooses a group more clearly after clarifying its rules and their contribution. Belonging then stops depending on guessing every expectation. In a hypothetical scene, you remain in the team, accept two main responsibilities, and decline optional evenings. If others agree, connection becomes more definite. If not, an important divergence emerges. Both outcomes provide information. Conversation cannot be considered successful only when the group confirms the desired form; clarity can also reveal the limit of shared participation.

Personal grounds can include care for others. A decision need not be purified of every social motive to be called your own. Family history, a shared project, or the hope of cooperation can matter. The question is whether you understand conditions and can participate in examining them as circumstances allow. Wanting connection does not prove weakness. It becomes problematic within a particular relational structure when connection is purchased by surrendering all judgment. The distinction helps assess conditions while retaining closeness and the right not to make independence adulthood's only measure.

A new form of connection can take time without guaranteeing former warmth. Sometimes relationships improve after a clear refusal; sometimes contact decreases. There is no basis for promising that others will certainly respect you for a well-worded boundary. Examine changes in actual actions rather than treating reactions as an examination of your autonomy's quality. If chosen participation fits and agreements are met, that is a substantial outcome. If not, another question about conditions arises. In either case, you remain someone who can connect with others while retaining your own account of how you are willing to participate.

X. Other participants also need room for their own answer

Requesting respect for your conditions can quietly place a reverse demand on the group: it must preserve former closeness through any change in your participation. Other people also decide, allocate time, and assess compatible expectations. They can recognize the right to refuse and still choose another way to work or communicate. This is not always punishment for autonomy. Sometimes the actual scale of shared work has changed. Concrete description distinguishes punishment from consequence: are unrelated rights removed to exert pressure, or does participation change in a task someone no longer performs? An answer requires facts, not one unpleasant feeling.

In a hypothetical ensemble, a musician wants to attend only some rehearsals. Others value them but prepare a program requiring joint work. They can offer a smaller role or choose another performer. The musician's right to control their time remains, but a right to the same role under any conditions does not automatically follow. At the same time, loss of the role does

not justify humiliation or interference elsewhere in their life. This example shows both boundaries. Freedom to decide does not remove effects on shared work, and those effects do not license revenge against a participant for mismatched expectations.

When both sides can respond, connection becomes more honest. Perhaps someone reduces their workload, the group reorganizes, and relationships remain. Perhaps shared work ends while respect remains. Perhaps a divergence emerges that is difficult to accept. No single outcome should be prescribed as the only evidence of a proper conversation. Reciprocity recognizes both sides' actual decisions and boundaries, including disagreement. This lets belonging matter without promising eternal sameness, and personal participation be chosen without demanding that others secure the desired consequences of every choice in advance.

What this means in practice

Choose one group and situation if clarifying participation is useful. Name first what connects you: an undertaking, history, care, interest, support. Then describe the demand or expectation that causes difficulty. Do not immediately declare the whole group good or bad. Identify the area: safety rule, work responsibility, personal preference, additional meeting, demand for approval. If it remains unclear whether this is an expectation or obligation, clarifying conditions can be the next step when available and safe.

Record the scale of participation you are actually willing to accept. What belongs to it, what needs alteration, and what do you not promise yet? Name effects on others and the actual refusal cost separately. If income, housing, safety, or rights matter, consider appropriate professional information and support. Do not conduct a risky group test merely for an exercise. A first attempt can involve a small discussable area where conditions allow information without a large irreversible price.

Formulate one concrete proposal or question. For example: “I am willing to join two tasks; I can attend the additional meeting monthly. Does that fit our work?” This does not guarantee agreement. It makes scale visible and allows an answer. If closeness is involved, its importance can be named separately: “Being with you matters to me, but I need this evening for something else.” Promise no more than you can fulfill, and do not use warm words as a hidden demand that any terms you propose be accepted.

After conversation, examine actions and agreements. Is what is obligatory clearer? Can terms be revised? Does respectful treatment remain amid difference? An unpleasant answer need not become an immediate verdict against yourself. You can continue clarification, seek support, or revise participation. The practice is voluntary and does not replace help in danger. Its purpose is to name one connection and your place in it while retaining the right to value people, agree, refuse, and choose participation limits within actual life.

Key quotation

> *“Affable, but not adulatory.”*

Confucius, Analects XIII.23, James Legge's translation, The Chinese Classics, Volume1. The Russian version translates this fragment editorially. It is a historical ethical distinction, not proof that Confucianism and self-determination theory are identical.

Connections between traditions

Comparison	Proximity and boundary
Self-determination theory ↔ group participation	Autonomy does not equal isolation; no environment's safety follows from this.
Confucius in Legge's translation ↔ agreement without flattery	Affability differs from approval; historical role ethics differs from modern rights.
Obligation ↔ belonging	Shared tasks need agreements; their scope should not expand through loyalty tests.
Personal boundary ↔ reciprocity	Participation conditions concern both sides; naming a boundary guarantees no agreement.

This map offers an authored comparison of different questions, not a universal law of communities or proof of healing effects.

Sources

1. Ryan R. M., Deci E. L. Self-Determination Theory and the Facilitation of Intrinsic Motivation, Social Development, and Well-Being, 2000. American Psychologist55(1),68–78. Related sections on volition, internalization, and autonomy versus independence were read, especially pp.73–74. Individual studies cited in the review are not claimed as independently read.

2. Confucian Analects XIII, James Legge, The Chinese Classics, Volume1. XIII.23 and neighboring historical context were read. Legge's verified wording is used without mixing translations. Normative ethics, not empirical proof.

Tags

autonomy, belonging, group, relatedness, agreement, volition, independence, relationships, team, family, community, rules, commitments, boundaries, reciprocity, refusal, loyalty, Confucius, Legge, self-determination theory, Ryan, Deci, power, resources, participation conditions.

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