



EXPLORABLE
Think Outside The Box

Published on *Explorable.com* (<https://explorable.com>)

[Home](#) > Drive-Reduction Theory

Drive-Reduction Theory

Sarah Mae Sincero49.2K reads

A theory of motivation developed by Clark L. Hull, the Drive-Reduction Theory focuses on how motivation originates from biological needs or drives. In this theory, Hull proposed a person's behaviour is an external display of his desire to satisfy his physical deficiencies.

EXPLORABLE
Quiz Time!

Quiz: Psychology 101 Part 2

Quiz: Psychology 101 Part 2

Quiz: Flags in Europe

[See all quizzes ⇒](#)

Origin of the Theory

Clark L. Hull was working at Yale University when he began to develop the drive-reduction theory. Inspired by several prominent scientists such as John B. Watson, Ivan Pavlov, Edward Thorndike and Charles Darwin, Hull based his theory on the earlier theories that relate to the concepts of motivation. His theory is grounded on the principle of homeostasis, believing that behaviour is one of the ways in which a person can maintain the state of homeostasis or balance. The theory was further developed by Kenneth Spence as it began to be a major theory of motivation in the late 1940s.

The Theory

A “drive” is a state of arousal or tension triggered by a person's physiological or biological needs. These needs include hunger, thirst, need for warmth, etc. In this theory, Hull stated that drives give rise to an individual's motivation. Furthermore, Hull explained that an individual is in a state of need when his survival is threatened. When a person's drive emerges, he will be in

an unpleasant state of tension and the person will behave in such a way that this tension is reduced. To reduce the tension, he will begin seeking out ways to satisfy his biological needs. For instance, you will look for water to drink if you are thirsty. You will seek for food if you are hungry.

According to the theory, any behaviour that reduces the drives will be repeated by humans and animals. This is because the reduction of the drive serves as a positive reinforcement (i.e. a reward) for the behaviour that caused such drive reduction.

Application

Today, the drive-reduction theory is largely ignored in the field of psychology, despite the glory it has enjoyed from 1940s to 1950s. While drive-reduction theory is not much put into practical application nowadays, it is useful for students to learn about the theory, its concepts and its influence to modern psychology. In this way, the students would be able to know how other theorists built on the drive-reduction theory and why some theorists proposed concepts opposing Hull's Theory.

Criticisms

While Hull's drive-reduction theory explains how primary reinforcers are effective in reducing drives, many psychologists argued that the theory is not applicable in the concept of secondary reinforcers. For example, money is a powerful secondary reinforcer as it can be used to purchase primary reinforcers like food and water. However, money in itself cannot reduce an individual's drives. Another problem with the theory is that it does not provide an explanation about the reason behind people engaging in behaviors that are not meant to reduce drives, such as a person eating even if he is not hungry.

Source URL: <https://explorable.com/drive-reduction-theory>