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Immediate-Return Societies: What Can They Tell Us About the Self and Social Relationships in Our Society?

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When researchers study their phenomena within a narrow range of participants (e.g., similar age, same culture), they cannot be sure if their results generalize to anyone outside of that range. This means they cannot be sure if their findings reflect context-free principles of behavior, or descriptive regularities bound to given local and historical contexts. To address this ambiguity, some social psychologists have begun to explore their findings using a wider range of samples. For example, they have compared Eastern and Western cultures (Triandis & Gelfand, 1998) or subgroups within a given culture, such as Americans of African, Asian, and European descent (Sinclair, Hardin, & Lowery, 2006).

Although important insights can be gained from such research, we believe that this research is, of all things, culturally limited. It compares groups that, although different along some dimensions, are very similar along other dimensions. For example, despite their well-documented differences, individuals in Japan and the United States live in highly technological countries, are relatively sedentary (in the sense of being non-nomadic), and are subject to the pressures of living in relatively dense populations. These are important commonalities that could lead to similarities in a number of psychological phenomena including the self and interpersonal relationships. To the extent that common cultural influences contribute to behavioral similarities, comparisons among cultures that are dominant in the world today may fail to reveal important cultural influences even though these influences are present.

To be especially informative, comparisons would have to be among cultures that share as few features as possible. In this chapter, we consider the conclusions drawn in social psychology research on the self and interpersonal relationships—but we consider them in the context of an extreme cultural comparison.

Specifically, we ask how well these conclusions hold up in certain hunter-gatherer societies.

The societies we focus on have been referred to in the anthropological literature as foraging societies, band-level societies, simple societies, egalitarian societies, or immediate-return societies. In this chapter, we use the term immediate-return societies (Woodburn, 1979, 1988) because we feel that this term captures key features of these societies, such as heightened immediacy and responsivity. For example, in immediate-return societies, individuals tend to receive feedback regarding their efforts more quickly than they do in most other societies, which are termed delayed-return societies (Barnard & Woodburn, 1988; Meillassoux, 1973).

Immediate-return societies represent an extreme minority in the world today. They are scattered across the world (e.g., Africa, India, South America, Asia), but their combined population can be counted only in the tens of thousands (Stanford, 2001). Despite their small numbers, these societies are important to us in at least two ways. First, they are the best approximation of what life was like for our evolutionary ancestors (Marlowe, 2002). Although we cannot be sure what life was like in the distant past, we do know that it was very different from life in the modern world. There were no cities, no agriculture, and no high technology. As Marlowe (2002) put it "Even if foragers are not living fossils, surely they are the best living models of what life was like prior to agriculture" (p. 249). So, by comparing practices in our current societies with those in immediate-return societies, we can get information about ways in which our current societies may be exerting pressures on us that are dramatically different from those with which our selves and interpersonal relationships initially evolved to cope.

A second reason to consider social psychology's findings in the context of immediate-return societies is that these societies allow for the most dramatic comparisons. Immediate-return societies differ in more ways from all other existing societies than any of the other existing societies differ from one another (Burch, 1994; Testart, 1982; Woodburn, 1988). So, comparing the conclusions of social psychology research with the behaviors observed in immediate-return societies may reveal important differences in human behavior that might otherwise go unnoticed.

We begin by describing the features of immediate-return societies and comparing them to the features of delayed-return societies. Then, we describe some central findings in research on the self and relationships. After that, we discuss ways in which life in immediate-return societies suggests qualifications on those findings. Finally, we speculate on some ways in which consideration of immediate-return societies can help us function better in modern societies.

IMMEDIATE-RETURN SOCIETIES: LIVING PLACE-TO-PLACE, MOMENT-TO-MOMENT, AND PERSON-TO-PERSON

Although all immediate-return societies subsist by hunting and gathering, not all hunting and gathering societies have immediate-return cultures. By formal definition, hunter-gatherers are those who obtain less than 5% of their subsistence from farming and/or herding (Murdock, 1981). Immediate-return hunter-gatherers are those who engage in the lowest amounts of farming and/or herding (e.g., 0%) and who engage in no significant storage.

What is life like in an immediate-return society? The answer was captured succinctly by Turnbull (1962) in his depiction of the Mbuti, an immediate-return group in Africa. He observed that the Mbuti

> were more than curiosities to be filmed, and their music was more than a quaint sound to be put on records. They were a people who had found in the forest something that made their life more than just worth living, something that made it, with all its hardships and problems and tragedies, a wonderful thing full of joy and happiness and free of care. (pp. 25–26)

Similar depictions have been offered by others (Bird-David, 1992; Ingold, 1980; Sahlins, 1972).

Of course, it is easy to idealize and romanticize the immediate-return lifestyle (for a critique, see Bird-David, 1992). Even when the depictions are accurate, however, they can still be difficult to believe (e.g., Greenberg, 1999; Kenrick, 1999). As Burch (1994) noted, "immediate-return or generalized hunter-gather societies are so unlike all others that . . . it is difficult even for anthropologists who have not personally experienced one to conceive how they can exist; it is almost impossible for nonanthropologists to do so" (p. 453). It is important to keep in mind, therefore, that the characteristics of immediate-return societies we describe in this chapter are not a matter of politically biased theorizing or wishful romantic thinking. They are based on the ethnographic experiences of many researchers.

FEATURES OF IMMEDIATE-RETURN SOCIETIES

Small, Nomadic, Ever-Changing Camps

Immediate-return hunter-gatherers live in small, temporary, autonomous camps spread out among the landscape as part of a larger population. There is frequent movement of individuals in and out while a camp remains at one site, and the camps themselves may move every few weeks (Woodburn, 1979). When it comes time for a camp to move, the members may either move together or they may move separately, and they may either establish a new site or they may move to a camp already established by others. There are no special criteria for acceptance in an existing camp. When members from one camp arrive at an established camp,

they are allowed to share equally in the camp's resources while they live there. In immediate-return societies, it is very easy for individuals to leave and join different camps. This so-called fission and fusion is simply a part of their life.

Because the composition of camps changes so frequently, each camp is defined primarily in terms of its present membership. There may be some stability in the composition of a camp (e.g., a family may move with the wife's mother), but nothing formally holds the members together except each individual's involvement in the current round of activity. There are no formal long-term, binding commitments (Woodburn, 1979). In immediate-return societies, individuals generally choose which relationships to pursue or abandon. They do so through visits, meal sharing, cooperative work, and even through the positioning of the openings of their huts.

Intentional Avoidance of Formal Long-Term Binding Commitments

Some behaviors that individuals in immediate-return societies perform can make them seem irresponsible from the perspective of most other cultures. For example, these individuals sometimes enter into trade arrangements with nearby villagers. They may agree to accept pots and pans from the villagers and promise to return in a few weeks with meat or honey from the forest. Their promises, however, are more likely to be broken than kept (Woodburn, 1988).

Obviously, the failure to respect formal, binding social contracts is evaluated negatively in most societies. In immediate-return societies, however, this is not the case. By avoiding such commitments, individuals in immediate-return societies also avoid the claims, debts, and future orientation that they find extremely undesirable. With a binding contract, the first party holds power over the second party until the latter delivers on his or her end of the deal. In immediate-return societies, individuals are not allowed to assert dominion over one another. So, by avoiding formal long-term, binding commitments, they reduce the possibility of social domination.

Fortunately, failure to respect formal long-term binding commitments does not cause problems in immediate-return societies. This is because individuals in these societies have few possessions and can generally get what they want through free and direct access to the natural resources. Couple this self-sufficiency with the changing composition of the camps and we see that it makes little sense for individuals in immediate-return societies to enter into formal long-term binding relationships with specific others.

It is important to keep in mind that the commitments that are avoided by individuals in immediate-return societies are those that are formal, long-term, and binding. These individuals do not avoid all commitments. A man and a woman, for example, may very well stay together for years in a monogamous relationship. It is highly unlikely, though, that the couple would formalize their relationship with a ceremony or with a " 'til death do us part" vow. Rather, they will simply start living together, and that is sufficient for them and the group to recognize that they are a pair. A divorce is recognized when the two no longer live together. There is also

some pressure for married couples to follow the mother of the wife when individuals move from camp to camp, but this is not a formal, binding requirement. The more general point is that in immediate-return societies, individuals are not allowed to have dominion over one another and the avoidance of formal, long-term, binding commitments is one way to facilitate autonomous, egalitarian social relationships.

Relational Autonomy

Given the ad hoc nature of their social relationships, it is not surprising to find that individuals in immediate-return societies develop a unique view of the relation between self and other. It is a view that differs from that in both individualist and collectivist societies (Triandis & Gelfand, 1998). Like those in individualist societies, members of immediate-return societies put a premium on autonomy. Their autonomy, however, does not contrast the individual with the society as it does in individualist cultures. Rather, immediate-return autonomy grows out of repeated, mutually trusting social interactions. Each individual acts with the other person in mind, and can assume that the other person will do the same (Bird-David, 1992; Ingold, 1980). As a result, the autonomy expressed in immediate-return societies incorporates significant degrees of relatedness.

On the other hand, individuals in immediate-return societies, like those in collectivist societies, develop aspects of their selves in relation to their group. In immediate-return societies, however, the social group is ad hoc in nature and does not promote formal long-term binding social commitments. As a result, there is little chance for individuals in immediate-return societies to lose themselves in their duty to the group. In other words, the relatedness individuals obtain in immediate-return societies does not come at the expense of autonomy.

Sharing

In each camp, the number of individuals is likely to be quite small (e.g., 25), the individuals are likely to be related to one another, and they are likely to have face-to-face interactions with one another on a daily basis. These features make it possible for direct person-to-person sharing to be the main source of economic distribution. Although individuals are allowed to possess some personal items (e.g., clothing, tools, weapons, small quantities of food), there is great pressure for individuals to part with any objects for which they have no immediate need (e.g., large animals obtained from a hunt).

This high degree of sharing, however, does not mean that individuals in immediate-return societies are inherently more compassionate than other individuals. Their sharing is a by-product of their social arrangements. In fact, the best explanation of the sharing appears to be "tolerated scrounging" (Marlowe, 2004b). Because individuals in immediate-return societies are not allowed to attain dominion over one another, their society has no clear mechanisms in place to sanction slackers or refuse scroungers. Doing so would place one person above another. Moreover, because the membership of the camps changes so frequently,

it would be extremely difficult for individuals to keep an accurate record of who contributed and who did not. The end result is a high degree of non-contingent sharing.

Highly and Intentionally Egalitarian

Because of the high degree of non-contingent sharing, differences in resources rarely occur in immediate-return societies. When they do occur, active steps are taken to eliminate them. For example, some individuals are routinely better hunters than others. This means that a large proportion of the meat in any given camp is brought in by a small proportion of the men (Lee, 1979). These successful hunters, however, are not allowed to translate their superior hunting skills into domination over others. The group accomplishes this through a variety of leveling mechanisms.

For example, individuals in immediate-return societies meet boasting and other forms of self-aggrandizement with scorn or ridicule—and the ridicule often comes from the children. A successful hunter may leave the kill on the trail, and on entering the camp, speak of the kill only in passing and in a deprecating manner (Lee, 1968). Alternatively, the hunter can walk into camp and let the bloody arrow speak for itself. Then, other members of the camp will go into the forest, retrieve the kill, and bring it back to camp. One sure way for individuals to lose esteem in an immediate-return society is to attempt to claim that esteem for themselves.

Reverse Dominance Hierarchy

The emphasis on autonomy and egalitarianism is so strong in immediate-return societies that it produces a society with no formal leaders. Individuals with certain skills (e.g., hunting, food collecting, communication) may have more influence on a group's decisions than other individuals, but these individuals have no coercive power. Moreover, the group seeks advice from different individuals in different situations. As a result, what passes for leadership in immediate-return societies is very transient and constrained.

Because members of immediate-return societies tend to believe that one individual should not dominate another, attempts on the part of one individual to become dominant are perceived by the group as a common problem. This leads the group to exert pressure on the would-be dominator to bring him or her back in line. Boehm (1993) has referred to this pressure as a reverse dominance hierarchy.

The group equalizes would-be dominators through criticism, ridicule, and simple disobedience. In more extreme cases, the group may desert or even assassinate the would-be leader. Woodburn (1979) tells of two Hadza who attempted to impress a visiting anthropologist by getting other members of the camp to clear a path to the river. The others in the camp merely laughed and walked away. It is difficult to be a leader if there is no one to lead.

Distributed Decision Making

If immediate-return societies do not have sanctioned leaders with coercive power, then how do they make decisions that affect the group as a whole? They appear to do so through a series of individual decisions. Woodburn (1979) described how he was

> particularly mystified by the fact that when I asked [members of a Hadza camp] about their plans, I was hardly ever given an answer that turned out to be correct. Little by little it became clear that the reason was that there was no procedure for reaching joint decisions about camp moves and statements made were no more than guesses. The Hadza are not in the habit of committing themselves to plans. Camps are very unstable units with constant movement of people in and out. Movement of a whole camp depends on a series of ad hoc individual decisions not on the decision of a leader or on consensus reached in discussion. (p. 253; see also Turnbull, 1962)

Cultural Instability

In a society that values equality as highly as immediate-return societies do, there can be no single, correct version of events or values. After all, if the values of one person are considered correct, then a different set of values held by another person must be incorrect. This dichotomy implies inequality, which is actively avoided in immediate-return societies.

The concrete result is that individuals in immediate-return societies have few verbalized rules of behavior, their rituals are highly variable (and may even be dispensed with altogether), and the individuals have no single, clear idea of a moral order (Brunton, 1989). Knowledge in immediate-return societies is idiosyncratic and gained by personal experience. It is not handed down by others. As one individual put it, "None of us are quite sure of anything except of who and where we are at that particular moment" (quoted in Brunton, 1989).

Benign View of Nature

Individuals in immediate-return societies view the relationship between humans and nature in much the same way that they view relationships between humans (Ingold, 1980; Turnbull, 1962). Both involve the sharing of resources and affection. Immediate-return hunter-gatherers think of the forest as a parent and think of themselves as children of the forest. Moreover, they believe that the forest, like any good parent, is morally bound to share food and other material resources. They also believe that the forest shares equally to everyone regardless of prior reciprocal obligations. Bird-David (1992) has described these beliefs as "the cosmic economy of sharing" (p. 122).

The benign view of nature held by individuals in immediate-return societies was expressed clearly in an observation by Turnbull (1962). He observed a Mbuti hunter singing to his young son. The words of the song, Turnbull noted, "like the words of most molimo songs, were few. They simply said, 'The forest is good' " (p. 83).

Present-Oriented

In immediate-return societies, individuals usually obtain a relatively immediate yield for their labor and use this yield with minimal delay (Barnard & Woodburn, 1988). They know within a few hours, for example, if their hunt has been successful. If it has been, they can return to the camp to eat, and if it has not, they have time to search for an alternative food source.

This relatively immediate feedback allows members of immediate-return societies to maintain an extreme focus on the present. In the words of Forde and Douglas (1956), individuals in immediate-return societies "are bound to the momentary present, scarcely ever striking out new lines for themselves, never forecasting the distant future, and seldom making provisions for the near future. Capable of anticipating its future needs only for a very brief span. Accumulation is difficult, long-term planning is impossible" (p. 332). In immediate-return societies, individuals seem to live by the motto "If it is not here and now what does it matter where (or when) it is?" (Turnbull, 1983, p. 122).

HOW MOST OF US LIVE NOW: THE DELAYED-RETURN LIFESTYLE

A fairly accurate description of the general features of most societies in the world today can be produced simply by listing features that are the opposite of those we described for immediate-return societies. This is because most societies today are delayed-return societies (Birdsell, 1973; Burch, 1994; Testart, 1982; Woodburn, 1988). Recall that in immediate-return societies, individuals receive relatively immediate feedback regarding their efforts. In delayed-return societies, on the other hand, there is often a delay between the effort individuals exert and the feedback they receive regarding its outcome. As a result, individuals may experience long stretches of uncertainty between their efforts and their payoff, and they may find at the end of this time that their efforts did not pay off. By that time, it may be too late for them to switch to an alternate strategy. This leads individuals in delayed-return societies to focus more on the future and past than individuals in immediate-return societies (Meillassoux, 1973; Turnbull, 1962; Woodburn, 1988).

How do individuals in delayed-return societies cope with the uncertainties and delays presented to them by their culture? They have developed mechanisms designed to give them confidence that their efforts will pay off. These include such things as formal long-term binding commitments, and adherence to ideologies that justify their efforts (e.g., work ethic, just world beliefs). The former is a social mechanism that demands the cooperation of specific others. Unless both individuals in a social commitment hold up their end of the deal, there is likely to be no payoff to the efforts of one or both parties. Moreover, the motivation to uphold one's end of a deal is strengthened in delayed-return societies by the societal sanctioning of a power hierarchy. Individuals in delayed-return societies have explicit laws and give certain members of the society (e.g., police) the power to enforce those laws.

One result of this more rigid social structure is that individuals in delayed-return societies experience less fluidity in their social relationships. Being party to a formal long-term binding commitment reduces an individual's autonomy, gives one person power over another, and makes it difficult for the individuals involved to fission and fusion. The individuals are bound to one another until their commitments have been fulfilled. Significant movement between groups is also difficult in delayed-return societies because the populations are larger and more sedentary. The members of these societies also tend to be bound to given locations and resources (e.g., farms, factories, universities).

The social rules developed in delayed-return societies make it possible for individuals in these societies to lay claim to personal property even if they have much more than others. In fact, some delayed-return ideologies (e.g., just world, work ethic, capitalism) allow individuals to see the unequal distribution of resources as appropriate and perhaps even desirable. After all, it can be taken as evidence that the rules work. Individuals who do the right thing get more rewards then individuals who do the wrong thing.

Because some individuals in delayed-return societies have more power and resources than others, status and prestige become resources in themselves. They facilitate access to other resources. Competition is also valued. Gender equality, on the other hand, is decreased relative to immediate-return societies. This is because in delayed-return economies, there is increased competition and an increased need to protect resources. This places a premium on the larger sex (i.e., males). Interpersonal equality is also weakened by an increase in preferential allocation of resources to those loyal to the leader. The maintenance of the power hierarchy is seen as crucial to the maintenance of the society as a whole. Without a sanctioned power hierarchy and formal long-term binding commitments, delayed-return societies would not function. The more general effect of living in a delayed-return society is that individuals may come to see the world as generally as hostile and competitive.

The hierarchical social arrangement and larger group size associated with delayed-return societies makes direct face-to-face social control difficult, if not impossible. In addition, the members of these societies do not live primarily among those to whom they are related. Together, these features make it difficult for the members of delayed-return societies to arrive at a consensus for decision making. When factions develop within the larger society, they cannot fission into more harmonious subgroups. The factions are compelled to cope with one another and often develop more polarized ingroup–outgroup attitudes. Because the larger society is composed of subgroups with different attitudes and values, the society as a whole may find it difficult to keep would-be dominators in line (i.e., reverse dominance hierarchy). The different members of a delayed-return society may not even agree on who needs to be brought back into line.

Delayed-return societies also differ from immediate-return societies in the nature of their child-rearing practices. Barry, Child, and Bacon (1959; Zern, 1983) compared hunting and fishing societies (i.e., immediate-return) with herding and farming societies (i.e., delayed-return). They noted that in hunting and fishing societies, each day's food comes from that day's catch. In addition, because of the

relatively short delay between an individual's efforts and the feedback regarding the outcome of those efforts, individuals in hunting and fishing societies can meet with initial failure and still switch to an alternate plan to acquire resources. This means that deviations from the established routine are not necessarily feared. If the deviation is not successful, then the individuals can return to the original plan. As a result, the child-rearing in these societies places an emphasis on personal initiative and skill.

In herding and farming societies, on the other hand, established social rules prescribe the best known way to bring in the resources. Carelessness in the performance of one's established duties can be detrimental to the entire society, and given the delay in feedback, the society may have no time to develop an alternate strategy to obtain resources if they find that the initial plan did not work. For example, in a farming society, individuals must plow the fields, plant the seeds, water the fields, and monitor them for weeds and pests. They must also harvest the grain and store it safely. Each of these activities must be done in the right way at the right time. It will be months, though, before the farmers know if their efforts were successful. If they were not, then the consequences (e.g., hunger or starvation) are likely to be severe, widespread, and long-term. As a result, the child-rearing in these societies emphasizes obedience and rule following.

EMPIRICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

We know of no studies that directly compared individuals from immediate-return societies with those from delayed-return societies on any classic social psychology phenomena (e.g., dissonance, self-esteem, persuasion). Such direct cross-cultural comparisons would be very difficult to do given the small size and inaccessibility of immediate-return societies. On the other hand, such direct comparisons may not be necessary. Researchers can gain information by comparing individuals who differ in terms of the features that distinguish the two cultures from one another (e.g., time orientation, benign worldview). This strategy is similar to that adopted by a number of cross-cultural researchers. They can study people who differ along an individualism/collectivism dimension, for example, even if these people do not come from different cultures (Triandis & Gelfand, 1998).

What features distinguish a more immediate-return person from a more delayed-return one (Martin, 1999)? We will consider three: temporal orientation, egalitarianism, and the pursuit of long-term goals. The question is whether individuals who differ in terms of these features also differ in the extent to which they display some traditional social psychology effects. There is evidence that they do.

Self-Serving Bias

Social psychology research has suggested that individuals are highly motivated to think of themselves in positive terms (Campbell & Sedikides, 1999). For example, they often take credit for success and place the blame for failure outside of themselves (Anderson & Slusher, 1986). There is reason to believe, though, that self-serving processing is a culturally dependent phenomenon.

Recall that individuals in immediate-return societies are more likely than those in delayed return societies to maintain a present-focused temporal orientation. Boyd-Wilson, Walkey, and McClure (2002) found that individuals differing in their present focus also differed in their tendency to display a self-serving bias. Specifically, Boyd-Wilson et al. had participants complete the time competence scale (Shostrom, 1964), which includes items such as: it is important to me how I live in the here and now and I spend more time actually living. Then they asked participants to rate themselves and other people in terms of a series of trait adjectives (e.g., friendly, insecure). There is a tendency for individuals to rate themselves more favorably than others in terms of their possession of positive traits (Alicke, 1985). This is a self-serving bias. Boyd-Wilson et al. found this bias, but only among participants who were moderate in their present focus. Those who were either very high or very low in their present focus rated themselves equal to other people in terms of their possession of positive traits.

According to Boyd-Wilson, McClure and Walkey (2004), being present-focused is related to positive well-being and a lack of defensiveness. This is why the present-focused participants were less self-serving. The accuracy of participants very low in present focus, on the other hand, was assumed to be the result of depressive realism (Alloy & Abramson, 1988). Only participants with a moderate focus on the present were inaccurate and unrealistic. In other words, only participants with a moderate focus on the present showed a self-serving bias. The main point of these findings, for present purposes, is that the extent to which participants displayed a self-serving bias, a well-established social psychology phenomenon, was shown to be a function of at least one of the features that distinguish immediate-return societies from delayed-return societies.

Blaming the Victim

Social psychology research has revealed that individuals often display a number of biases when they assign causes to the behavior of other people. For example, individuals may assign more responsibility to other people for the unfortunate events they experience than for the fortunate events they experience—even if they are in no way responsible for the events (Lerner & Simmons, 1966). There is reason to believe, though, that blaming of the victim is a culturally bound phenomenon.

Recall that individuals in immediate-return societies are more likely than those in delayed-return societies to endorse an egalitarian social structure. They are also more likely to pursue short range goals in non-binding relationships. Individual differences along these two dimensions have been shown to moderate

the tendency to blame innocent victims. Lambert and Raichle (2000), for example, had participants complete a measure of social dominance orientation and then read a scenario depicting a date rape. Participants were asked how much blame they assigned to the female victim and how much to the male perpetrator. Lambert and Raichle found that the higher a participant's social dominance orientation, the more he or she blamed the female and exonerated the male. In other words, blaming an innocent victim was higher among participants who displayed features common to delayed-return societies (i.e., desire to maintain social hierarchies) than among participants who displayed features common to immediate-return societies (e.g., desire for egalitarian social relations).

According to Hafer (2000), the belief that the world is just is especially important to individuals who are committed to the pursuit of long-term goals. After all, if the world is not just, these people would have no confidence that their long-term efforts would pay off. Because of the centrality of this belief to their continued goal pursuit, these committed individuals are highly motivated to maintain their belief in a just world. The suffering of innocent people, however, challenges that belief, so individuals committed to the pursuit of long-term goals may be especially likely to blame innocent victims for their unpleasant fates. Assigning blame to innocent victims allows these individuals to restore their belief in a just world (i.e., the person deserved his or her fate) and have greater confidence that their long-range efforts will pay off.

To test this hypothesis, Hafer asked participants to describe their long-term plans or to describe the university courses they were currently taking, then she had the participants watch a videotape in which a female student described how she had contracted a sexually transmitted disease. Some participants heard that the student had contracted the disease by accident (broken condom), whereas others heard that student contracted the disease through her own negligence (chose not to use a condom). Consistent with the hypothesis that the existence of innocent victims is threatening to individuals committed to long-term goals, Hafer found that participants who had been asked to write about their long-terms goals were more likely than those asked to write about their classes to blame, derogate, and dissociate themselves from the innocent victim. There were no differences between groups in the rating of the non-innocent victim. In other words, participants displaying features common to delayed-return societies (commitment to long-term goals) were more likely to blame an innocent victim.

In sum, we have seen that several features that distinguish immediate-return societies from delayed-return societies can moderate the occurrence of several well-established social psychology phenomena. This moderation may be revealed, however, only by studying cultures that are extremely different from one another, or at least by studying individuals who differ in the ways that these cultures differ from one another.

THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

In this section, we consider some ways in which the differences between immediate-return societies and delayed-return societies might have implications for additional topics. These are topics central to interpersonal behavior for which research relevant to the immediate/delayed distinction has not yet been investigated. Namely, we speculate on some ways in which the differences associated with immediate-return and delayed-return societies might moderate effects related to attachment, interdependence, social exclusion and self-esteem, and self-evaluation maintenance.

Attachment

A number of theorists (e.g., Hazan & Shaver, 1994) have suggested that the social interactions individuals have throughout their life are shaped in large part by the emotional attachment they form with their primary caregiver during infancy. If the primary caregiver provides consistent nurturance and security to the infant, then the infant develops a strong, secure emotional attachment with the caretaker. This attachment is especially important as the infant begins to explore his or her environment. In the course of this exploration, the infant may encounter objects that arouse feelings such as fear and uncertainty. These feelings, in turn, may curtail the infant's exploration and motivate him or her to seek out the caregiver. If the infant experiences nurturance and security on returning to the caregiver, then the infant can gain the strength it needs to return to reduce the fear and uncertainty and resume the exploration. A secure attachment in infancy may also make it easier for individuals to establish satisfying relationships later in their life (Hazan & Shaver, 1994).

If the primary caregiver does not provide nurturance and security, or provides them inconsistently, then infants will fail to develop a secure attachment. When this happens, infants may be reluctant to explore their environment and later in life they may have difficulty establishing satisfying relationships. Individuals with insecure attachments may also experience depression, moodiness, tension, and emotional instability.

What can life in immediate-return societies tell us about this view of social development? Although it does not argue against this view, it does suggest that the attachment process might unfold slightly differently in immediate-return societies. Consider first of all that, compared to infants in delayed-return societies, those in immediate-return societies spend proportionately less time with their mother (Marlowe, 2005). They spend relatively more time with grandmothers, aunts, uncles, siblings, and even non-related individuals. Thus the early attachments formed in immediate-return societies may be less focused on one particular person. This raises the possibility that individuals in immediate-return societies may feel more comfortable than those in delayed-return societies in relying on the social group during times of stress.

Consider also that, compared to children in delayed-return societies, those in

immediate-return societies spend more time interacting with their peers and do so at an earlier age (Marlowe, 2005). After age 3 or 4, the children are left in a safe place near the camp to be watched over by one adult while the other adults go out hunting and gathering. As a result, the children learn at a very early stage that they can derive nurturance and security from others their own age. This learning is likely to ease the transfer of attachment from the primary caregiver to the peers. This transfer might also happen sooner in immediate-return societies than in delayed-return societies.

Finally, recall that the attachment with the caregiver is important primarily when the infant confronts a stressful situation. While there are certainly dangers individuals in immediate-return societies must face, individuals in these societies also have a more benign view of nature. They learn from infancy that they can trust one another and that "the forest is good" (Turnbull, 1962). They are also socialized for autonomy. This means that infants in immediate-return societies may experience less frequent need to resort to the safety of their primary attachment figure.

Together, these differences suggest that it is possible for infants to develop secure attachments to multiple caregivers, live in an environment in which fear-based reliance on the caregiver is relatively rare, and still develop satisfactory social relationships throughout their life. Thus current social psychology theorizing may be placing too much emphasis on attachment to a single primary caregiver, and may be overestimating the difficulty involved in the transfer of attachment from the primary caregiver to others.

Social Exclusion and Self-Esteem

The early bond individuals establish with their caregivers is not the only affective bond in which social relationships can play an important role. Several theorists have suggested that humans have a need for belongingness (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Ryan & Deci, 2000). This need is satisfied when individual have social interactions that are pleasant, frequent, and stable, and that demonstrate concern for one another's welfare. Not surprisingly, satisfaction of this need is related to psychological well-being, including self-esteem and a meaningful existence (Williams, 2001).

The relation between social interactions and self-esteem was detailed by Leary, Tambor, and Terdal (1995). They proposed that individuals possess a built-in ability and motivation to monitor the extent to which other individuals appear to value and accept them. If individuals detect signs that they are being excluded by others who are important to them, then they experience negative feelings and they may alter their behavior in ways that put them back in the good graces of the others.

Leary also proposed that the negative feelings that accompany social exclusion are what we refer to as self-esteem. Specifically, the negative feelings that are elicited when individuals detect signs of exclusion constitute a large part of what we call low self-esteem, whereas the positive feelings that are elicited when individuals do not detect signs of exclusion (or do detect signs of inclusion) constitute a large part of what we call high self-esteem.

What can life in immediate-return societies tell us about this view of social relationships, affect, and self-esteem? Consider first of all that individuals in immediate-return societies experience a high degree of autonomy. They are socialized for self-initiative, can survive in the forest on their own, and are not bound by formal long-term binding commitments. They can also fission to other groups if they are receiving signs of exclusion from their current group, and immediate-return societies practice automatic social acceptance. Thus there is little chance that individuals in immediate-return societies would ever face complete social exclusion or suffer severe consequences if they were to be excluded.

There is also a great deal of cultural instability in immediate-return societies (Brunton, 1989). Thus there are few formal, verbalizable rules that individuals in immediate-return societies could violate that would lead them to be excluded. The end result is that social exclusion in the strong sense of that term is unlikely in immediate-return societies. It is unlikely, therefore, that the evolutionary mechanism that gave rise to the relationship between social exclusion and self-esteem was differential survival in the literal sense (Leary et al., 1995).

It seems more likely that individuals who reacted empathically to the plight of others were likely to be favored by other members of the group. These favored individuals, in turn, would attain a reproductive advantage over group members who were not moved by the plight of the other members of the group (e.g., sexual selection). A second possibility is that social groups composed primarily of individuals who responded with personal feelings to the plight of others outreproduced groups composed of less empathic individuals (Sloan-Wilson & Sober, 1994). In other words, the evolutionary mechanism that gave rise to the social exclusion/self-esteem link may have been more social than individual.

Self-Esteem Maintenance

Another role that social interactions can play in the development of an individual's self-esteem was articulated by Tesser (1988). He proposed that in evaluating their self-worth, individuals take into consideration at least three pieces of information. They consider their own performance relative to others, the relevance of the other person as a standard of comparison (referred to as closeness), and the relevance of the performance domain for the individual's self-esteem. For example, individuals evaluate themselves favorably if they outperform a close other on a task that is relevant to their own self-esteem. They evaluate themselves unfavorably if they perform worse than a close other on a task that is relevant to their own self-esteem. Individuals can also develop a favorable self-evaluation if they are outperformed by a close other on a task that is not relevant to their own self-esteem. In this case, the favorable evaluation comes vicariously, from what Cialdini (1976) referred to as basking in reflected glory (e.g., my son, the doctor).

Because each of the components of the self-evaluation judgment has a subjective component, individuals have some ability to change the experience of these components. For example, they can increase the psychological distance between themselves and close others if these others have outperformed them on a task that is relevant to assessing their self-esteem (Pleban & Tesser, 1981) and they can

decrease the psychological relevance of a task on which they have been outperformed by a close other (Tesser & Campbell, 1980). Individuals may even attempt to lower (i.e., sabotage) the performance of a close other if the other person outperforms them on a self-relevant task (Tesser & Smith, 1980).

What can life in immediate-return societies tell us about this view of self-esteem and interpersonal relationships? The first thing to consider is that immediate-return societies are highly egalitarian. Their sharing is relatively noncontingent and individuals are not allowed to profit personally from any superior skills they might possess. Thus self-esteem per se is not a commodity and there are no social status hierarchies. Consider also that most members of the camp are relatively competent in the sense of being able to satisfy most of their needs through unrestricted access to the natural resources. Although some hunters are generally better than others, hunting has a low probability of success even for the better hunters, so it is difficult to base one's self-esteem on such an unstable performance domain. It is also difficult for individuals in immediate-return societies to associate their self-worth with their behavior because of the leveling mechanisms. The bottom line, therefore, is that in immediate-return societies one's performance relative to others may not be associated strongly with one's self-evaluation.

What about the evidence that individuals psychologically alter the factors that influence their self-evaluation (i.e., closeness, relevance, performance)? Observation of life in immediate-return societies raises the possibility that individuals may not be doing this in order to maintain a favorable self-evaluation. For example, when individuals distance themselves from a close other who has outperformed them on a self-relevant task, they may be engaging in a form of fission. Individuals in immediate-return societies do not tolerate domination or self-aggrandizement. A close other who outperforms a person may be primed for both, so being around such a person may prompt thoughts of fission; that is, thoughts of increasing the distance between one's self and a potential self-aggrandizer. This distancing is less likely to happen if the superior performance of the other benefits the group, as with a successful hunt or reflected glory.

In sum, observation of life in immediate-return societies raises the possibility that behaviors that have been interpreted as being in the service of self-esteem may actually be in the service of maintaining equality and harmony within the group. From this perspective, any positive self-evaluation that accompanies the behaviors is a by-product, not the goal. When individuals engage in behavior the helps the group, they feel good. This interpretation fits with the assumption that groups whose members maintained equality and harmony out-reproduced groups whose members were more selfishly oriented (Sloan-Wilson & Sober, 1994).

Interdependence

What factors other than early attachment and the need for belongingness bind individuals to social relationships? Why do individuals stay in some relationships but not others? Question such as these have been addressed in the context of

Interdependence Theory (e.g., Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). This theory focuses on the rewards and costs individual accrue in their interpersonal relationships. Rewards and punishments in the context of the theory are defined very broadly and range from concrete (e.g., money) to abstract (e.g., social status).

If the ratio of rewards to costs an individual is receiving in his or her current relationship is higher than the level individuals are used to getting in relationships, then the individual will generally be satisfied in the relationship. Being satisfied, however, does not necessarily mean that the individuals will stay. If individuals experience a level of satisfaction in their current relationship that is higher than the level they believe they could obtain in other relationships, then they will stay. Although the current relationship may not be very good, it affords a higher level of satisfaction than they believe they could obtain in other relationships. Alternatively, if individuals experience a level of satisfaction in their current relationship that is below what they believe they could obtain in other relationships, then they will leave, even if their current level of satisfaction is high.

A second variable that determines commitment to a relationship is the level of an individual's investment (Rusbult & Buunk, 1993). Investments are resources individuals have provided to a relationship that they cannot retrieve if they were to leave the relationship. These include such things as time, self-disclosure, mutual friends, or shared material possessions. The higher the investment, the more likely it is that individuals will stay in a relationship even if they find it unsatisfactory.

What can life in immediate-return societies tell us about this view of relationship interdependence? Obviously, individuals in immediate-return societies exchange rewards and costs and make decisions about staying or leaving relationships. In fact, they do so much more frequently than individuals in delayed-return societies. They engage in considerable face-to-face sharing and interaction on a daily basis. They also make almost daily decisions about whether to leave or stay in a certain camp. Thus they are likely to be quite practiced in considering rewards, costs, satisfaction, and alternatives.

In fact, in immediate-return societies, individuals can come and go with ease and without paying any economic penalty. Their relationships in immediate-return societies are generally voluntary and freely terminable. Thus relationships in immediate-return societies may be influenced more by satisfaction than by investments. Individuals in delayed-return societies, on the other hand, enter into long-term, formal, binding commitments (e.g., legal marriage) and often receive delayed feedback regarding the outcomes of their efforts. As a result, they may experience more pressure to stay in relationships in which they are not satisfied.

Communal and Exchange Relationships

Clark and Mills (1979) distinguished between communal relationships and exchange relationships. In the former, individuals provide benefits to address the needs of their relationship partner. They also provide these benefits in a relatively non-contingent manner and they show little concern about the evenness or balance of each transaction. In exchange relationships, on the other hand, individuals provide benefits as a way to ensure future benefits or as a way to return past

benefits received. The individuals in these relationships keep careful track of their costs and benefits and are aware that the receipt of a benefit incurs an obligation to return a comparable benefit.

It should be obvious by now that immediate-return hunter-gatherers shun exchange relationships. Such relationships imply dominance, inequality, and formal, binding commitments. Moreover, the sharing in immediate-return societies is largely non-contingent and the individuals do seem concerned about the needs of their fellow group members. As we noted earlier, though, the abundant, non-contingent sharing in immediate-return societies is a by-product of their culture; thus it tells us little about the motivation of the specific individuals. In fact, individuals in immediate-return societies often grumble about the amount of sharing required of them, and they often attempt to by-pass the mandatory sharing (e.g., sneak food into camp at night). As Marlowe (2004a) noted with regard to the Hadza, individuals in immediate-return societies have "donor-fatigue," and when they have a chance to escape from forced sharing, they do. So, while the societal norms in immediate-return societies clearly dictate that relationships should be communal, the individuals in those societies display some ambivalence over this norm.

These observations suggest that researchers exploring costs and benefits in relationships need to consider not only the overt behavior but also the subjective experience of the participants. An individual could engage in non-contingent sharing, yet not be really oriented communally toward the relationship. Similarly, two people could be led by the situation to participate in an exchange relationship, yet one may enjoy the arrangement, whereas another may feel alienated by it.

More generally, it appears that interpersonal relationships in any society reflect the dynamic interplay between self-interest and societal norms. In immediate-return societies, the dynamics have settled in a range to communal relationships, whereas in delayed-return societies the dynamics have settled closer to exchange relationships. In fact, delayed-return societies are defined, in part, by their emphasis on formal, binding commitments (i.e., exchange relationships). Moreover, in delayed-return societies, individuals have developed ideologies (e.g., social dominance orientation, Protestant work ethic, just world beliefs) that not only permit selfishness and inequality, but that also turn them into desirable traits. So, if our species really did evolve in the context of social relationships approximating those in current immediate-return societies, then our current delayed-return societies may be requiring us to behave in ways that are discordant with our natural tendencies—or that at least overemphasize our individualistic side of the self–other dynamic.

SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

We have suggested that social psychology research might reveal new insights into basic social psychology processes if it were to move beyond its current focus on one or a few cultures. Even most cross-cultural research, we have argued, is limited to the extent that it compares cultures that have a great deal in common

(i.e., all delayed-return cultures). The most dramatic comparison, hence the most information, may be gained by comparing findings obtained in the prominent societies in the world today with findings obtained in immediate-return societies.

The main hurdle to adopting this suggestion is that it is very difficult to conduct research on immediate-return societies. These societies are rare, small, and generally difficult to access. An alternative strategy, therefore, is to identify the central dimensions on which immediate-return societies and delayed-return societies differ and see if individuals within a given culture also differ on those dimensions. This is similar to the strategy taken in research on individualism and collectivism. Researchers have developed scales to measure the extent to which individuals express individualistic as opposed to collectivistic values (Triandis & Gelfand, 1998), then they use these individual differences to predict differences in other psychological variables (e.g., cooperation, sensitivity to context).

A similar strategy could be used to see if the differences associated with immediate-return societies and delayed-return societies are psychologically meaningful. For example, researchers could develop measures of the extent to which individuals support equality as opposed to status hierarchies, are focused on the present as opposed to the future, or engage in formal long-term binding commitments. If individuals differ along these dimensions, then they may also differ in their display of the various social psychology phenomena we have addressed in this chapter (self-esteem, relationship investment, stereotyping). Research using this strategy may help us understand the extent to which social psychology research is revealing aspects of basic human nature as opposed to by-products of our current delayed-return culture.

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