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## **SOCIABLE RULE-ADAPTIVENESS IN THE EVOLUTION OF HUMAN SOCIALITY: PERIPHERAL AND PROTOTYPICAL GROUP MEMBERSHIPS**

*ABSTRACT: The evolution of social structures has influenced the way in which individuals relate to the core or the periphery of given social networks. The present theoretical outline discusses differences in the use of various evolutionary strategies from the perspective of different positions within the social structures of humans. Two groups of strategies were discussed, the strategies of balancing between inclusiveness and distinctiveness and dispositional strategies for stress management. Chronic stress levels in group members seems to be one of natural consequences of the cooperative, gregarious living of a social species. The use of strategies is discussed from the perspective of individuals in peripheral and prototypical positions. Prototypical group members are suggested to use strategies that utilise the main social network. Dispositional coping activity of prototypical group members can be characterised by the direction "towards", i.e., towards social structure, towards family, towards peers. In contrast, peripheral group members are more prone to use strategies based on creative cognitive processes and their self-oriented coping can be characterised by the direction "inwards", or even by the direction "against", because of their thing-oriented individualistic behaviour motivated by self-willed attitudes. The direction of stress management activities represents a new, interesting variable for future discussions about the evolution of social structure and the evolutionary differentiation of individuals' positions within a social structure.*

*KEY WORDS: Human evolution – Social structure – Self-willed attitudes – Human sociality – Social network*

Human sociality is made up of an interrelated myriad of processes on both group and individual levels. Social living within dominance hierarchies also significantly influences the domain of personal traits. Chronic stress levels in group members seems to be one of the natural consequences of the cooperative, gregarious living of a social species (Moosa, Ud-Dean 2011). I would like to show that the emergence of dominance hierarchy has also influenced another sphere of human psychological functioning. The repertoire of

coping mechanisms for stress management reflects specific aspects of the dynamics of human dominance hierarchies. Individuals differ in the levels of acceptance of authority within the social structure. Such adaptiveness to sociable rules may influence individual dispositions to apply specific patterns of strategies for stress management. This theoretical study aims to explore the relation of compliance with authority with evolutionary strategies of group members with different positions in the human social structure.

## SOCIAL STRUCTURE AND SELF-WILLED ATTITUDES

The presence of social hierarchy causes chronic stress levels in group members (Moosa, Ud-Dean 2011). Individuals in a social structure may differ in the ways in which they manage their stress. For example, perception of authority influences the choice of strategy for coping with stress (Harburg *et al.* 1979). Van der Molen (1990) developed the concept where conflicts of needs is the key determinant of social differentiation within the social unit. Group members may perform either social behaviour including compliance with authority, or thing-oriented individualistic behaviour motivated by self-willed attitudes. Most non-dominant individuals have to balance between the strength of the desire for social contact and the strength of the desires to fulfill other biological and material needs (Van der Molen distinguished the desire for social contact and the desires to fulfill other biological and material needs as separate constructs, however, an anonymous reviewer of the present study pointed out that the desire for social contact may be also driven biologically). Social harmony and peace is supported by social behaviour including conformity and compliance with authority. Such individuals are sometimes even able to sacrifice their own personal needs in order to maintain social harmony. Sacrificing personal needs to maintain social harmony may be driven by an individual's efforts to avoid conflicts with other group members. On the other hand, self-willed individualists are more prone to generate higher stress levels in the social group by asserting their own personal needs.

Van der Molen (1990) further outlined the turn-over cycles of society in terms of prevailing personality traits and social stability or instability. Providing a detailed description of this concept is above the aims of the present study (but see Van der Molen 1990). I will rather focus on the impact of sociable rule-adaptiveness on behavioural flexibility and innovativeness.

According to Van der Molen (1990), an increase in sociable rule-adaptiveness causes a decrease of thing-oriented innovativeness and independent creativity in individuals. As mentioned above, social living causes chronic stress levels in the social unit. Individuals have various strategies for mastering this stress and psychologists call them coping strategies (for a review, see, e.g., Carver, Connor-Smith 2010, Skinner *et al.* 2003). How do the dispositions for the choice of a coping strategy relate with the level of thing-oriented innovativeness and independent creativity?

Self-willed individualists with high levels of thing-oriented innovativeness and independent creativity may be more prone to producing coping activity that requires more creative ways of thinking. High levels of thing-oriented innovativeness and independent creativity are not related to actual position of self-willed individualists within a social structure, but to their lower sociable rule-adaptiveness. Coping strategies of self-willed individualists may be based on cognitive work and they include, for example,

cognitive restructuring (Connor-Smith *et al.* 2000, Tobin *et al.* 1989), positive reappraisal (Coleman 1992, Mattlin *et al.* 1990), redefinition (Stone, Neale 1984), or mental disengagement (Epstein, Meier 1989). Furthermore, self-willed individualists are supposed to apply strategies that are highly related to human imagination. We can mention, for example, imaginative transformation (Butler *et al.* 1989), or escapist fantasy (Quayhagen, Quayhagen 1982). Both groups of coping strategies require increased levels of creativity and they are also relatively independent on the actual quality and quantity of social contact.

On the other hand, coping strategies of individuals with higher levels of social behaviour including conformity and compliance with authority may be based more on social contact and on utilizing a social network. Social conformists are supposed to be more attached to the social network than self-willed individualists and they can also experience higher confidence in the expectation that society will help them with managing their stress. They may be thus more society-dependent. These individuals may be more prone to perform social support seeking (Hobfoll *et al.* 1994), authority seeking (O'Brien *et al.* 1995), peer support (Frydenberg, Lewis 1991), solace seeking (Rohde *et al.* 1990), or social entertainment (Glyshaw *et al.* 1989). They may also perform another group of strategies based on communication processes. This group of coping strategies can be represented by talking with others (Sidle *et al.* 1969), understanding situations through communication with others (McCubbin *et al.* 1983), or family communication (Fanshawe, Burnett 1991).

Social conformists are supposed to be more attached to society than self-willed individualists. They should experience higher social acceptance and lower social exclusion. On the other hand, Van der Molen (1990) pointed out that self-willed individualists often perform quite problematic social functioning. They often compete for a dominant position, but, if failing, they may drift into marginal omega-like social positions. In extreme cases, self-willed individualists become outcasts and leave the social structure (Van der Molen 1990).

It does not mean that social conformists are invariably adjusted to optimal social functioning. Negative emotions and stress may occur in them, for example, when their social roles are not played satisfactorily. Satisfactory playing of social roles is understood in the sense of "to be a good father", "to be a good husband", "to be a good employee" etc. Conflicts with social partners can elicit other reactions in the sphere of stress management. Social conformists may then externalise their unsatisfactory relationship with society just like self-willed individualists. Projective social externalising is present in coping strategies like blaming others (Perrez, Reicherts 1992, Tolor, Fehon 1987), criticising parents (O'Brien *et al.* 1997), or emotional reactions – externalising (Causey, Dubow 1992). Such transfer of stress and negative emotions to other individuals can be also understood within the concept of redirected aggression (see Butovskaya, Kozintsev 1999).

As we have seen above, functioning within a dominance hierarchy has shaped the structure of human repertoire of stress coping strategies during the process of evolution. Higher differentiation of strategies reflecting social relations proceeded probably in individuals performing higher levels of conformity and compliance with authority. In contrast, self-willed individualists represent the key forces for the differentiation of individual strategies based on the creative cognitive processes.

## **PERIPHERAL AND PROTOTYPICAL POSITIONS WITHIN THE SOCIAL STRUCTURE**

Peripheral and prototypical group memberships are key concepts that describe different positions of individuals within the group. Prototypical group members share typical features with Van der Molen's (1990) social conformists, whereas peripheral group members share typical features with self-willed individualists.

Empirical research found out several interesting differences between peripheral and prototypical group members. Prototypical group members are more likely to be group leaders (Eagly *et al.* 1992, Hains *et al.* 1997) and they are also more successful in eliciting attitude change in others (van Knippenberg *et al.* 1994). Prototypical group membership relates to the definition and maintenance of socially shared norms, because significant others are supposed to be especially powerful elicitors of normative thoughts and behaviour (Stapel *et al.* 2010). On the other hand, peripheral group members are less typical or central to the group and they are more variable in their behaviours than prototypicals (Jetten *et al.* 2003).

Why do some individuals occupy prototypical intragroup positions and others peripheral intragroup positions? Hornsey and Jetten (2004) considered a basic conflict between the need to belong and the need to be different as the deep foundation of peripheral or prototypical group membership. They discussed possible strategies enabling individuals to reach an optimal balance between inclusiveness and distinctiveness (Hornsey, Jetten 2004). Past theoretical discussions have paid little attention to the question how individuals with different attitudes toward authority could utilise strategies of balancing between inclusiveness and distinctiveness.

Individuals vary in the ways in which they balance the need to belong and the need to be different. Hornsey and Jetten (2004) reviewed and discussed eight various strategies for reaching optimal balance between inclusiveness and distinctiveness:

- Identifying with a numerically distinct group;
- Subgroup identification;
- Identifying with a group that defines itself against the mainstream;
- Perceptually enhancing the distinctiveness of one's group;

- Differentiation through roles;
- Identifying with a group that normatively prescribes individualism;
- Tailoring self-perception: seeing oneself as loyal but not conformist;
- Seeing oneself as more normative than other group members (the PIP effect).

How may prototypical group members and self-willed individualists be disposed for resolving conflict between the need to belong and the need to be different? Self-willed individualists may be more prone to identifying with a group that defines itself against the mainstream and to identify themselves with a group that normatively prescribes individualism. Both strategies are in harmony with peripheral group memberships of self-willed individualists. On the other hand, self-willed individualists may be less disposed to see themselves as loyal but not conformist. They are not supposed to be ready to place the interests of the group ahead of self-interests. They are also not likely to perceptually enhance the distinctiveness of their group as well as to identify with any subgroups due to their individualistic nature and weaker bonds with the main social network.

Of course, some peripheral or prototypical group members often support self-willed individualists competing for a high status positions. In that case, "followers" perceive self-willed individualists as "future authorities" who can change the existing norms, either on the group, or on the societal level. Membership of self-willed individualists changes when they reach desirable high status positions. They become leaders and their memberships are shifted from peripheral to prototypical group membership. The strategy "Seeing oneself as more normative than other group members" may be then used to balance the need to belong and the need to be different by newly established authority.

On the other hand, prototypical group members are supposed to use strategies like "Perceptually enhancing the distinctiveness of one's group", "Subgroup identification", or "Differentiation through roles". Their pro-social attitudes and behaviour enable them to balance between the need to belong and the need to be different within the social network. On the contrary, prototypical group members are not supposed to be highly motivated to identify with a group that defines itself against the mainstream and to identify themselves with a group that normatively prescribes individualism.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The present theoretical outline has discussed hypothetical differences in the use of various personal strategies from the perspective of different positions in the social structure. Two groups of strategies have been discussed, the strategies of balancing inclusiveness and distinctiveness and dispositional coping strategies. It is distinguishable that

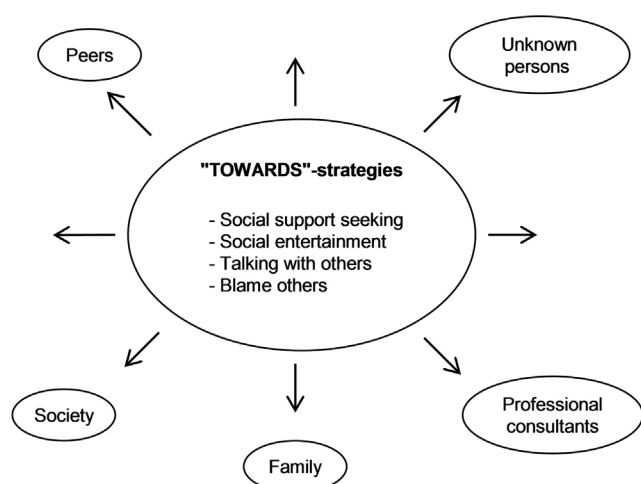


FIGURE 1. Dispositional coping strategies of prototypical group members.

self-willed individualists and prototypical group members vary in the orientation of above mentioned strategies. Dispositional coping of prototypical group members can be characterised by the direction "towards", i.e., towards social structure, towards family, towards peers (Figure 1). Prototypical group members are also likely to use strategies of balancing inclusiveness and distinctiveness that utilise the main social network. They try to differentiate themselves "within" the main social network with the help of strategies like "Perceptually enhancing the distinctiveness of one's group", "Subgroup identification", or "Differentiation through roles".

In contrast, self-willed individualists are more prone to using coping strategies based on the creative cognitive processes. Such self-oriented coping can be characterised by the direction "inwards" and by increased requirements on creative cognitive abilities of individuals (Figure 2). The strategies of balancing between inclusiveness and distinctiveness of self-willed individualists can even be characterised by the direction "against". This orientation is recognisable, for example in the strategy "Identifying with a group that defines itself against the mainstream". Self-willed individualists may identify themselves

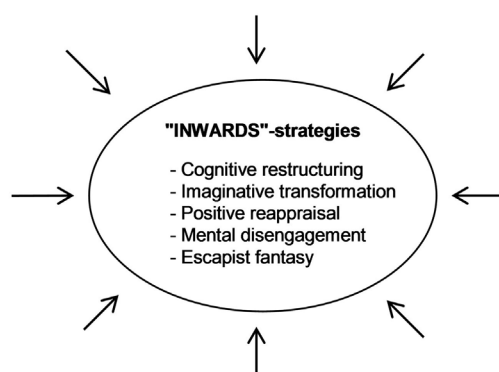


FIGURE 2. Dispositional coping strategies of peripheral group members.

"against" the mainstream, because of their strong need for differentiation.

The limitation of the Van der Molen's concept (1990) lies in the insufficiently covered group of ingroup members with peripheral group membership. In reality, not all peripheral group members are self-willed individualists. Jetten *et al.* (2003) pointed out that peripheral group membership can be based also on other factors like age, sex, or race. Future discussions about the formation and maintenance of prototypical and peripheral group memberships should take into consideration the very differentiated structure of peripheral group members.

Future theoretical development of the present theoretical fundamentals would be based on evaluations of different effects of dominance hierarchy in different types of societies in terms of primate top-down or bottom-up hierarchies. Actually, it is difficult to determine if human social functioning is more similar to primate top-down hierarchies or bottom-up hierarchies, because human social structures and their interdependencies are extremely complex and ambiguous. However, such theoretical reasoning might be inspiring for future anthropological research.

Detailed elaboration of the evolutionary basis for coping and stress management in relation to social functioning is recommended for future theoretical progress in this field. The direction of coping activity may represent an additional interesting variable for relating discussions about the formation and maintenance of human dominance hierarchies. The rich variability in the human repertoire of coping strategies may help us better identify various causal links in the course of evolution of human sociality.

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