

How different societies use control mechanisms to maintain social order

There are many different mechanisms that societies use to maintain social order in many different cultures. This essay will look at four mechanisms that are effective in keeping the structure and organisation of a society in place, and prevent decay or disruption of that structure. This essay will look at fear, sharing, shame and cosmology as instruments of control used by a number of different societies such as the Kiriwinans and the Sambia of Papua New Guinea, the Mbuti and Ju Hoansi in Africa and the Semai in Malaysia. During the research it became clear that many of these societies use a blend of different mechanisms that are woven together to create a unified force that maintains whatever structure they have created, keep the 'peace', whatever their definition might mean, and use a mixture of both formal and informal control tools, meaning some that are evident and some that are more subtle.

The Semai, through fear of upsetting other people, mainly in the form of mutual hurt that would arise if both parties were to not speak to each other, is a common outcome of conflict or argument between Semai people, and is an effective mechanism for reducing the instances that conflict occurs. (Dentan, 2003, pg. 170) Parents use fear tactics with their children, telling them to fear the foreigners 'pale people' and that they will eat them if they do not adhere their advice, as well as mentions of the weather which can often become quite violent. (Dentan, 2003). The Sambia use fear of hermaphroditism as a way of keeping men in control over women in their patriarchal society, especially with the use of secret, violent rituals that exist to release the 'femaleness' from the young boys and help them actively become more masculine. (Herdt 2006) 'What Herdt really stresses is the role of homosexuality in producing a warriorhood.' (Creed, pg 164). Fear is an inherent part of their culture, not used by the authority within it to control but rather something that is outside of all their control, which is what has maintained their structure for so long.

Shame goes hand in hand with fear, however I believe it to be a significant point of interest when discussing control mechanism and differs from fear in that it's not only about the anticipation of pain or consequence, but also that it's a consequence in itself that is worth noting. Shame, whether feared or experienced is an informal control method that keeps people locked within roles tied to their gender or status in society, therefore maintaining their societal structure that supports their daily life and the survival of their culture generally. In the case of the Kiriwinans on the Trobriand Islands, 'the fear of deserving such an epithet, of being laughed at or shamed (*kakayuwa*) is extreme. It arises from the characteristic dread and shame, found among savages, of not doing the proper thing, or worse still, of doing something which is intrinsically the attribute of another sex or social class.' (Malinowski, 1932, pg. 16) which is a common thread found within many societies including, especially, the Sambia, also in Papua New Guinea. This relates to the acting out of gender roles specifically, and keeps people doing the same jobs, and acting in the same way constantly, and makes sure that there are informal consequences, like the pain that comes from social disapproval, to keep people in line. "Abuse can be used deliberately to shame or startle people by putting their misdeeds before them in strong language..." '... but not so grave and shameful as to entail such tragic consequences as a broken relationship or suicide.' (Malinowski, 1932, pg 408) The Ju Hoansi use shame and humiliation actively to maintain their egalitarian society, by insulting the meat that a hunter has acquired, as they understand that humans tend towards self-pride and that it can lead to someone becoming more dominant over the others and ascending in power. 'We refuse one who boasts, for someday his pride will make him kill somebody.' (Lee, 1979, pg. 156).

Although the Kiriwinans of the Trobriand Islands use sharing in a different way to the Ju Hoansi, it is still the act of sharing that enables society, with the rules that come with it, to function. It is, more importantly, the *expectation* of sharing, that drives people to act in certain ways. With the case of

the Kiriwinans, 'a "generous" man attracts others to him, whereas a "hard" man makes others angry and afraid.' (Weiner, pg. 104) You can see here that the generosity and the importance they place on sharing, and the fact that it elevates them in their society, keeps people from being 'hard' and therefore potentially aggressive, and encourages them to become respected rather than feared. The Ju Hoansi, in an effort to maintain egalitarianism distribute the meat from a hunt fairly amongst all the members so everyone is adequately fed, almost eliminating all conflict regarding feelings of injustice when it comes to their subsistence. (Marshall Thomas) The Ju Hoansi, also in attempt to not feed the ego of its hunters, will share arrows around the group, to put the importance on the arrows, and not on the skills of the hunters themselves. (Marshall Thomas, Woodburn).

Although not considered a dominant control mechanism, cosmology does play a meaningful role in how societies function and influences the actions the members within them make, due to the collective knowledge and the narratives that the specific cosmology creates, and the fact that the members identify with the stories and truths. We can see this all over the world however I will be focusing on the Sambia and the Mbuti specifically here. The Sambia, and the actions they take to ensure the continuity of their social structure, are heavily influenced by their deity, called *Numboolyu* who is also their ancestor and 'culture-hero'. The cosmological story associated with their ancestor explains his reasoning for the institutionalized and ritualized homosexuality we see in their culture, focusing around the cure for hermaphroditism being homosexual fellatio and a connected fear of becoming one, the fight for actively creating and keeping masculinity is effective through this method, and what results is men who withhold this structure and faithfully defend the tribe and their people by their collective belief in this cosmology. (Herdt, 2006 Chapter 4) Another example of how a society might use, or inherently shapes social behaviour and maintains control is the Mbuti, with their connection to the forest. Song and music is incredibly important in their culture. Sound, using different instruments and voice, is used to bring cheer to the forest if there hasn't been much success when out hunting, as they believe that the forest won't provide if it's not in good spirits. (Mosko 1987). This maintains their order by encouraging the members of the group to gather and use sound to bring happiness to the forest, instead of blaming specific hunters for the lack of food. It takes the focus away from the people and places it in the hands of the forest instead, which is an excellent levelling mechanism. (Mosko, 1987).

In conclusion, control mechanisms are an important, arguably, the most important, aspect of maintaining social structure in different cultures. Without fear, shame, sharing and cosmology, as just some of the various mechanisms that prevail in the world today, the cultures we can witness might not exist, and the fact that there is such a spectrum, means there is so much diversity within the human species, and our ability to organise ourselves, and the rationale with which we do so.

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