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English 2

31 March 2017

Instant Gratification: the Easy Way Out

Do your homework, or go out with friends? Go to college, or get a job? We live a life where we are constantly faced with choices. To make distinctions and decisions, people weigh in how they value their time and whether the end result will be worth the effort. Although much research suggests that resilience and delayed gratification leads to more success in life, usually, the path to instant gratification is chosen as the rewards can be reaped immediately. People are typically more inclined to seek short term happiness over long term progress because it is more easily attainable.

This sort of behavior is manifested in chapter 3 of *Lord of the Flies*, when the boys on the island are finally starting to adjust to island life. Ralph and Jack have split duties, with Ralph supervising littluns in building shelters while Jack is overseeing his hunters. However, Ralph is frustrated with this situation, as he feels the littluns are not qualified workers and Jack's hunters would be better suited for work. He addresses this frustration with Jack, calling the littluns "hopeless" and seeking Jack's sympathy and assistance, "You wouldn't care to help with the shelters, I suppose?" "We want meat-" "And we don't get it."..."We need shelters." Suddenly Jack shouted in rage. "Are you accusing-?" "All I'm saying is we've worked dashed hard. That's all." (51-52) As Ralph implies that he needs help with the shelters, Jack responds with disgust. Jack interprets his desire for meat and fun as a need instead of a want, so he believes his actions

hold equal importance with building shelters. This thinking is irrational, as they have other sources of food available but no pre-existing shelter. Therefore, by employing ineffective littluns as the shelter builders, they are inhibiting progress on that necessary front. The ones in charge, or the biguns and hunters, experience immediate gratification in their hunting adventures and play. This theme continues later on in the book, as the hunters are more successful and continue their sport over other duties, "You let the fire go out" Jack checked, vaguely irritated by this irrelevance but too happy to let it worry him. "We can light the fire again. You should have been with us, Ralph. We had a smashing time" ... "You and your blood, Jack Merridew! You and your hunting! We might have gone home-"(70) Again, Jack and the hunters find themselves at the source of Ralph's frustrations, as they put hunting above all else. Ralph is able to focus on the end result of having a fire- being rescued, while the majority of the others only have the capacity to see benefit from the instant gratification the hunt. They even suggest that Ralph should have come with them as he would have had fun, but Ralph is able to recognize that this "fun" would only be a temporary victory and too easy a path to happiness as opposed to being rescued.

People in the real world exhibit this impatient and unprogressive behavior quite often. Most notably recorded by the Stanford marshmallow experiment. Preschool-aged children were offered a small reward (typically one marshmallow) or a larger reward (two marshmallows) if they possessed the self control to wait for it. Much like the children in *Lord of the Flies*, most, about 70% of the subjects, sought instant gratification and could not wait for the larger reward. The study actually proved that the children who were patient enough to experience the greater delayed gratification had better outcomes later on in life. Those who were low delayers, or couldn't wait, experienced issues like obesity and lower test scores later in life. These issues can

be explained by the fact that they probably followed the same patterns of instant gratification, like frequenting fast food chains or snacking instead of taking the time to shop for, prepare, and eat a healthier meal. These behaviors and patterns propagate as it is temporarily simpler, cheaper, quicker, or more enjoyable to experience immediate fulfillment; they continue to disregard their own personal gain as it is too far in the future to affect their current decisions.

This issue of taking the easy way out can also be seen in modern day politics. Electing a new president is a common debate in America. Normally, people are roughly split between the Democrat and Republican candidates as the two party system upholds. However, this previous presidential election had many typical partisans doubting their stance with widely unpopular options. Many found themselves in the position to settle for one candidate, even if they weren't confident in either option, with many repeating variations of, "Honestly, I feel like this election is finding the lesser of two evils", as one voter stated in an interview with CNN . This suggests that they have little faith in the person they are helping elect to lead their country. Continuously conforming to this two party system is not something Americans were always satisfied with, but it has reaffirmed the tradition of settling. While there were other options besides Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump, or "the evils", very few Americans cast a vote for a third party candidate. Voting for a candidate like Gary Johnson may have felt more morally correct to some people if they agreed with his ideology, but the fact that he had a very low chance of getting elected discouraged people from voting for him. Third party supporters are so rare because they are less likely to experience instant gratification from their support, as they will not get the leader or policy they want right away. Those who settled for Clinton or Trump took the easy way out by alleviating the stress of not being instantly gratified- choosing temporary relief over progress.

Similarly, characters from Lord of the Flies seek the easy way out to avoid fears or unknown outcomes. As Samneric are dozing off during their watchmen duties, they see something frightening in the night. They do not know what startled them, but when reporting back to the group they describe a horrid beast in detail, “We’ve seen the beast with our own eyes...There were eyes- Teeth- Claws...” What they describe is the typical childhood monster that these boys may be very familiar with, making the beast a familiar and rational creature. While they may still be afraid, this assumption gives short term happiness by relieving them from their ultimate fear of the unknown. The most terrifying thing for the boys is their unpreparedness, and dangers of this unknown island. While they semi-adjust, some situations arise where they are utterly caught off guard and have no coping mechanism but to familiarize the situation through assumptions. It is more comforting for the group to create this beast instead of actually investigating what else could have happened, making the beast an easy way out of their fears. Previously Jack and Ralph discussed the issue of irrational fears within the group and how it was negatively affecting their stability and productivity. However, instead of making progress by looking further into what is causing the group’s fears, most find it easy to accept that there is a beast because that is defeatable.

Although it may have adverse effects on them in the future, people typically continue to chose short lived success and immediate gratification over working towards a greater result over time. In our fast paced society, these decisions are based on how people value their time, and if the end will truly be worth the means. Often times, working towards a greater result can pose a greater risk, so this creates a distinction between the few who are willing to take the chance and work for long term progress and those who take the easy way out. However, risk often leads to a

greater reward or unexpected gain. This shows us that human behavior includes putting priority on constant success or immediate progress without risk, therefore promoting mediocrity.

Works Cited

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