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SELF-REFERENT MOTIVATION AND THE INTRINSIC QUALITY OF FRIENDSHIP

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Some observations suggest that friendships are developed and maintained because they involve some form of reinforcement or interpersonal reward. Other observations suggest that friendship has an intrinsic, end-in-itself quality making it unnecessary, if not contradictory, to assume that friendships must be rewarding to be formed and sustained. The present paper outlines a model of friendship based on a conception of self and self-referent motivation. The model represents, in part, an effort to reconcile the observed rewardingness of friendship with its intrinsic, end-in-itself character.

When we try to give balanced consideration to widely varying yet, I believe, equally valid observations about the importance of interpersonal rewards in the formation and maintenance of friendships, we are confronted with a paradox. It is axiomatic that friendships develop between some pairs of acquaintances but not others, and that friendships grow to different levels of strength or intensity. It is equally axiomatic that the friendship relationship is rewarding — sometimes profoundly rewarding — in a number of specifiable ways. People are often able to articulate quite clearly what they ‘get from’ their different friends (or their different friendships) that makes each one special, and they are generally more detailed and articulate in this respect about their stronger than their weaker friendships. Such observations seem to compel us to conclude that friendships are formed and maintained because they are rewarding.

On the other hand, friendships that develop beyond superficial levels often have an intrinsic, end-in-themselves quality; they involve persons whose participation as unique and irreplaceable individuals equals or transcends the importance of any specifiable set of rewards. Some friendships become self-sustaining; they are maintained even when identifiable rewards that may have led to their development are no longer available. Friends do not ordinarily

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count the cost of their contributions to the relationship, and they do not necessarily expect an equal or equitable return for effort expended or favours extended. It seems to be a contradiction of common observation, if not an affront to the relationship, to suggest that one person becomes and remains a friend of another only because he or she finds that person (or that friendship) rewarding.

Exchange models (e.g. Kelley & Thibaut, 1978; Kelley, 1979) and related equity models (e.g. Hatfield et al., 1979; Hatfield & Traupmann, 1981; Walster et al., 1978) concentrate upon — in fact, are restricted to — observations of the first kind. Such models have yet to provide conceptually adequate ways of dealing with observations of the second kind (Davis & Todd, 1982; Murstein, 1983, unpub.). Descriptive psychology (Davis & Todd, 1982) gives due consideration to observations of the second kind, but eschews emphasis upon the rewardingness of friendship on the grounds that such means-end thinking precludes regarding friendship as an intrinsic relationship.

A previous paper (Wright, 1978) presented a tentative investment model based on self-referent motivation that was, in part, an effort to reconcile the rewardingness of friendship with its intrinsic and self-sustaining character. This model was unfortunately premature in the sense that it could have been developed more clearly, completely and confidently had it been previously informed by the work of Murstein et al. on exchange orientations (e.g. Milardo & Murstein, 1979; Murstein et al., 1977) and Clark et al. on communal versus exchange relationships (e.g. Clark & Mills, 1979; Mills & Clark, 1982). As it turned out, the investment model served more to illustrate than to solve the rewardingness-intrinsicity paradox. Davis & Todd (1982), for example, interpreted this approach as basically an exchange model with an internally contradictory emphasis upon the personalized interest found in friendship.

The Davis-Todd reaction was helpful in underscoring points that needed to be clarified or amplified, and the contributions of Murstein et al. and Clark et al. were extremely useful in suggesting directions that the needed amplification should take. More specifically, these latter contributions highlighted the importance of examining the contrast between relationships that are based on exchange or equity and those that are not. This led to a more thorough consideration of the implications of self-referent motivation in friendship and, eventually, to the abandonment of the investment analogy.

Let us first review the conception of friendship. For the most part, this will be a condensed version of the original (Wright, 1977; 1978). However, some important changes will be introduced. The most notable of these are the discarding of investment terminology, an amplified treatment of the implications of self-referent motivation, and an added emphasis upon friendship as a communal relationship. Finally, we will consider the model in its present form as a potential compromise between the approaches of exchange/equity theories and descriptive psychology. This will include an analysis that attempts to reconcile the intrinsic quality of friendship with the seemingly essential presence of some form of rewardingness. The central point to be made is that friendships are, indeed, formed and maintained because they are rewarding, but the rewardingness need not imply selfishness, self-centredness or exploitation on the part of the persons involved. Rather, the rewardingness follows from the facilitated expression of behavioural tendencies related to the self and its attributes.

A self-referent model of friendship

For several years studies of friendship were conducted apart from either an explicit conceptual model or a specific conception of the behaving person (see Wright, in press). These studies, along with various other sources of information and feedback, eventually pointed to the relevance of the psychology of self for understanding friendships. Moreover, theories and research attempting to articulate the relationship of individual characteristics to the development and maintenance of personal relationships often focus upon the self-concepts or self-referent behaviours of the partners involved. Therefore, for purposes of the present model a perspective on the psychology of self was worked out in as much detail as possible (Wright, 1977, 1978).

A perspective on the self

The ubiquitous reference point for the behaving person's experience is the entity he or she identifies as self. The self is a conception made up of the individual's sense of distinctiveness, unity, continuity, causal power and uniqueness. As such, the self is omnipresent and does not change. However, the individual comes to attribute to this

entity various qualities or characteristics and thus develops a conception of what the self is like. These self-attributes are subject to change over time, but because some of them change while others do not, and because those that change usually do so gradually, the person's conception of self tends to be relatively stable.

There are several lines of theorizing about the manner in which a person comes to regard particular attributes as characteristic of the self, for example, modelling and social learning (Bandura, 1977), symbolic interactionism (Webster & Kobieszek, 1974) and self-perception (Bem, 1972). These various approaches are often seen as different if not contradictory (Gecas et al., 1974). However, from the present perspective they are seen as complementary parts of a broader process. The observation of models, in addition to direct exhortations from significant others, cue the individual to act in certain ways or to be a certain kind of person. This gives the individual much of his or her conception of what he or she should be like. Attempts to behave in ways that follow through on the cueing conditions may or may not be reinforced. If the cued behaviour is reinforced, it is likely to be repeated and sustained, and eventually become characteristic of the person. The individual becomes aware of his or her own characteristic behaviour through self-observation and through the reflections and feedback he or she receives from others. This self-observation and social feedback give the person his or her conception of what he or she is like in actuality. Due to humankind's penchant for forming concepts, such characteristic behaviours are generally labelled not as behaviours but as self-referent traits or attributes.

Because of its ubiquity as a reference point for his or her experiences, both good and bad, the behaving person develops a concern for the well-being and worth of the entity he or she identifies as self. This concern is reflected in five behavioural tendencies that function as self-referent motives. First, a person behaves in ways that maintain and, when necessary, reaffirm his or her sense of uniqueness or individuality (Fromkin, 1970; 1972). Second, a person behaves in ways that assert and, when necessary, reaffirm his or her more important and highly valued self-attributes (Bailey et al. 1975; Swann & Read, 1981; Swann & Hill, 1982). Third, in situations compelling or encouraging self-evaluation, a person will evaluate his or her self or its attributes in a positive way (Jones, 1973). Fourth, a person will be oriented in some degree to changes in his or her self-attributes in the direction of growth or positive elaboration (Sherwood, 1970). Finally, on the negative side,

a person will attempt to avoid or neutralize situations or events that threaten the well-being or worth of the self (Kelvin, 1977). An individual may fulfil these self-referent motives in a variety of ways. Among the most important of these is through interpersonal and person-group relations. In some respects, friendship seems ideally suited to helping the individual 'live out' these self-referent behavioural tendencies.

Self-referent motivation and friendship

At its simplest the present conception proposes that friendships are formed and maintained because they are rewarding, and they are rewarding because they facilitate the fulfilment or expression of self-referent motivation. The most basic facet of this rewardingness follows directly from the definition of friendship itself. Friendship is defined as a relationship involving voluntary or unconstrained interaction in which the participants respond to one another personally, that is, as unique individuals rather than as packages of discrete attributes or mere role occupants. This definition includes two separate but correlated criteria called *voluntary interdependence* and the *person-qua-person* factor. The former refers to the degree to which two persons commit free or otherwise uncommitted time to interaction with one another in the absence of pressures or constraints that are external to the relationship itself. The latter refers to the extent to which a relationship is characterized by a mutual personalized interest and concern as reflected in the degree to which the partners react to one another as unique, genuine and irreplaceable in the relationship. The more in evidence these two aspects of the relationship, the stronger the friendship. Thus, to the degree that two people are friends, each provides the other with consensual validation concerning his or her sense of individuality.

While it is foundational, an enhanced sense of individuality is not, in and of itself, a sufficient basis for developing a strong friendship. Other rewards related to one or more of the remaining self-referent motives come into play. However, the individual's behaviour and experience are more often implicitly rather than explicitly self-referent. Therefore the rewards of friendship are ordinarily perceived in terms of their self-referent implications. These direct implications constitute different classes of rewards called 'friendship values'. Thus the subject's self-referent tendency to evaluate his or her self in a positive way is facilitated by a friend

who is seen as having *ego support value*, that is, a friend whom the subject regards as supportive, encouraging and in general as behaving in ways that help the subject maintain an impression of him- or herself as a competent, worthwhile person. The tendency to assert or reaffirm one's conception of what one's self is like is enhanced by a friend who is seen as having *self-affirmation value*, that is, a friend whom one regards as characteristically behaving in ways that facilitate the expression and recognition of one's more important and highly valued self-attributes. One's tendency towards growth and positive elaboration of one's self-attributes is facilitated by a friend who is seen as having *stimulation value*, that is, a friend whom one regards as interesting, stimulating and in general capable of fostering an expansion or elaboration of one's knowledge, perspectives or repertoire of favoured activities.

Kelvin (1977) observed that the growing breadth and depth of personal knowledge implied in a developing relationship increases each partner's vulnerability to hurt from the other. By 'hurt' Kelvin means damage to the integrity of one's self-concept. We have noted that a person will attempt to avoid or neutralize situations that threaten the well-being or worth of the self. The potential threat implied in the growth of a personal relationship is discounted to the degree that one's partner is seen as having *security value*, that is, the degree to which one's partner is regarded as safe and non-threatening due to his or her disinclination to behave in ways that would betray trust, cause embarrassment or draw attention to one's points of weakness or self-doubt. It is likely that a minimal level of security value is necessary before a friendship can develop to a significant level of strength. Beyond this minimal level, friends may be found to vary rather widely in the degree to which a subject feels free to interact spontaneously and unguardedly with them, making security value a common but not inevitable positive value of friendship.

Another friendship value remains to be considered apart from any specific self-referent behavioural tendency. The importance of self-referent motivation notwithstanding, any given person spends a certain amount of time doing necessary chores that are regarded as mundane or tangential. Therefore one thing that often makes a friendship rewarding is a partner's helpfulness and co-operation in meeting one's specific day-to-day needs and carrying out activities that are merely instrumental in reaching one's goals. Such *utility value* is a concrete way of expressing a personalized interest and concern.

Maintenance difficulty: a potential by-product of interdependence

Growth in friendship is reflected in increasingly broad and detailed acquaintance and in increasing levels of voluntary interdependence. Assuming that there are aspects of a friend's behaviour that one may not like, the more one learns about the friend, the more likely one is to become aware of it. In addition, the more interdependent two people become, the more likely they are to run into some degree of conflict in motives, interests or momentary goals. This could happen to the degree that the friends' goals were not unified or compatible. Davis (1973) suggested another factor that may introduce strain into a close relationship. The partners' conceptions of self may overlap so completely that one or both of them may see this as a threat to their individuality. According to Davis, this often leads to behaviours creating a 'fission' of selves that compete with those creating the 'fusion' of selves basic to interpersonal intimacy. Thus while some friendships are free of tension or strain most of the time, we should expect to find some that are difficult to maintain.

Economic analogies versus the incorporation of friendships as self-attributes

According to the exchange analogy, personal relationships are akin to transfers of commodities following the implicit calculation of rewards and costs. The individual 'purchases' rewarding behaviour from another person with the 'coin' of his or her own rewarding behaviour or characteristics. If he or she can find a better bargain — that is, a more favourable reward-cost balance — in an alternative relationship, the current relationship will be abandoned and the more advantageous one pursued.

This analogy does not do justice to the depth, the personal involvement or the continuity of many friendships. The other person is not a merchant from whom the subject buys something. Rather, a friendship that develops beyond superficial levels becomes one of the subject's self-attributes. One's friend becomes a person whose well-being and worth have direct implications for one's own well-being and worth. If the other person benefits, the subject benefits, even in the absence of tangible or immediate gain; if the other person suffers, the subject suffers, even in the absence

of tangible or immediate loss. Such friendships develop as the subject devotes time, energy and other personal resources to interaction with the other person in ordinarily spontaneous and often unplanned ways. Then, in true reinforcement fashion, the interaction is found to be rewarding in varying degrees — or not rewarding at all — with predictable consequences for further interaction. The rewards involved are most often of the so-called intangible kind and relate to one or more of the self-referent motives.

Identifying a friendship as a self-attribute would follow from consistently behaving towards the other person as one would towards a friend. This is akin to what McCall (1974) refers to as an attachment, that is, 'an incorporation of alter . . . into the contents of one's various conceptions of self' (p. 219). Moreover, this suggestion is consistent with Allport's (1961) proposition that an initially instrumental activity may become incorporated into one's 'proprium' and hence become 'functionally autonomous'. Other explanations for developing a strong positive attachment to a particular other person are possible. Lott & Lott (1974), for example, proposed that it results from the sheer association of one's reinforcing experiences with whatever person — as an identifiable stimulus — happens to be present at the time. Such 'particularization' could also be seen as a dissonance-avoiding or dissonance-reducing effect following significant expenditures of time and effort. In short, the proposal that a friendship with a particular other person may be incorporated by the subject as one of his or her self-attributes is compatible with a number of different — and not necessarily contradictory — theoretical positions.

Friendship as a communal relationship

From the present perspective, most friendships that develop beyond superficial levels would qualify as communal relationships as defined by Clark et al. A communal relationship is one in which 'members assume that each is concerned about the welfare of the other. Each person has a positive attitude toward benefiting the other when the need for a benefit exists, or when a benefit would be especially pleasing to the other' (Mills & Clark, 1982, p. 123). This is in contrast to an exchange relationship in which 'members assume that a benefit is given with the expectation of receiving a benefit in return. The receipt of a benefit incurs a debt or obligation to return

a comparable benefit' (p. 123). Several lines of research support both the validity and importance of this distinction in understanding personal relationships (Clark & Mills, 1979; Clark, 1981).

The concern for the welfare of the other that is basic to communal relationships seems closely related to the personalized interest and concern embodied in the person-qua-person factor posited by the present model. Although communal relationships do not involve an equality or equity in the exchange of benefits, Mills & Clark suggested that they imply an 'equality of affect'. That is, 'at any given point in time, the members . . . should be experiencing about the same affect. If one person experiences good fortune and, consequently, positive affect, the other person should feel good as well. Similarly, if one person experiences misfortune and feels bad, the other should feel bad also' (pp. 123–4).

People are assumed to vary in the degree to which their relationships with others are treated as communal. 'Some people restrict their communal relationships to only a very few persons, while others have communal relationships with a wide circle of others. There are some people who do not make a distinction at all. Some people treat every relationship, even with members of their own families, in terms of exchange' (Mills & Clark, 1982, p. 125).

Along with the assumption of individual variability, there is a hint that communal relationships are regarded the rule rather than the exception: 'We believe that most people consider themselves to have weak communal relationships with everyone' (Mills & Clark, 1982, p. 126). Research and theorizing to date suggest that most people to some degree and some people to a large degree form and maintain relationships that are communal in character or communal in some aspects. Such a contention makes a good deal of sense from the present perspective on the psychology of self. Most individuals spend a good portion of their earlier years observing and participating in relationships that are basically communal. This has two important self-referent implications. First, most people have ample opportunity to observe their parents and other role models performing 'communal acts'. Moreover, it is not unusual for children to be directly exhorted to behave in implicitly communal ways, that is, to be unselfish, generous, considerate and concerned for the welfare of others. Such potential cueing conditions may or may not be followed up in ways that eventuate in the development of related self-attributes, but to the extent that they were, it would become a matter of one's sense of worth and well-being to express those attributes.

Second, being on the receiving end of a communal relationship means that many of the benefits a person receives are contingent upon identity rather than behaviour, that is, they are given because of who the person is and not because of what he or she does. This is probably one of the reasons why, developmentally speaking, a person's sense of distinctiveness or individuality becomes motivationally important (Fromkin, 1970; 1972). Moreover, one's sense of individuality is enhanced by being part of a communal relationship. Thus we have what might be called a 'benevolent circle' effect; the importance of maintaining one's sense of individuality develops, in part, due to behaviourally non-contingent benefits received in communal relationships, and participating in communal relationships facilitates the maintenance of one's sense of individuality.

If the preceding analysis is valid, it is understandable that a personal relationship need not involve exchange or equity with respect to clearly identifiable benefits to be rewarding. In fact, as the results of Clark & Mills (1979) suggested, communal relationships are more rewarding if such exchange or equity is not in evidence. Communal relationships are formed and maintained because they are rewarding in and of themselves. The fact that it is possible to identify, at least theoretically, the source of this rewardingness does not negate the intrinsic quality of the relationship. Some relationships must be communal to fulfil certain kinds of self-referent motives. It seems clear that some types of relationships are more likely than others to develop along communal lines. Because of its emphasis upon unconstrained, non-obligatory interaction and a personalized interest and concern, friendship is potentially a communal relationship par excellence.

Friendship and other relationships

The variables identified as important in friendship may be equally important in other close personal relationships. This leaves us with the problem of differentiating between friendship and other relationships. Recently (Wright, in press), four variables have been identified that should be more closely related to the type of relationship under consideration than to the characteristics or typical behaviours of the particular persons involved. In other words, these variables should be found to vary more between than within types of relationships and hence to differentiate among

them. These variables are *exclusiveness*, *permanence*, *degree of social regulation* and *salience of emotional expression* (see Wright, in press).

Measuring the friendship variables

We have now specified a set of twelve variables which includes two separate but correlated indices of friendship strength, five potential rewards or 'friendship values', a maintenance difficulty factor and four relationship differentiation variables. Each of these variables is measured by a separate scale in a self-report technique called the Acquaintance Description Form-F (ADF-F). The ADF-F includes an additional non-substantive scale called *general favourability* for assessing respondents' positive response biases. The present conception of friendship and the ADF-F evolved together over several years from an original five variables specified in a descriptive model. Details of this development and a full treatment of the ADF-F are available elsewhere (Wright, in press).

The self-referent model as a compromise

The self-referent model was formulated to give due attention to some of our loftier and more idealistic — yet none the less valid — observations about friendship without ignoring the definitive role of interpersonal rewards. The shortfall of exchange and equity approaches in this regard has been cogently argued elsewhere (Davis & Todd, 1982; Murstein, 1983, unpub.). Suffice it to say that exchange/equity formulations propose that if we look hard enough, long enough and with sufficient flexibility about what we are willing to consider costs (inputs) and rewards (outcomes), partners in even the most intimate relationships show a concern for the most favourable reward-cost balance or an equitable exchange. In an appeal to an extreme but not unusual example, Hatfield & Traupmann (1981) note that 'if intimates were *really* totally insensitive to issues of fairness, then intimate relationships could not survive, since people are simply not willing to give and give with no thought of return' (p. 169). This may be generally true in the unqualified case. It is unlikely that any friendship in which one member persistently neglected to act on behalf of the other, or persistently took his or her partner's favours for granted, would

survive. But from the perspective of self-referent rewards, this is true only because the put-upon partner would have ample reason to doubt that the exploiter was demonstrating the personalized interest and concern that is basic to the enhancement of one's sense of individuality, not because he or she was being treated unfairly *per se*. Suppose, for example, that one of a pair of good friends suffered a serious illness or accident that left him or her incapable of providing tangible rewards. In many such cases the unafflicted partner will maintain the friendship by giving and giving with no thought of return. This is not to say that maintaining such a friendship is without its rewards, but the rewards are not of a 'selfish' kind. Rather, they are rewards related to one or more of the self-referent motives.

At the other extreme, descriptive psychology considers attempts to identify underlying rewards as 'causes' or 'reasons' for participating in friendship to be reductionistic and unnecessary. Moreover, it could be misleading. For if we were able to identify a reward, we might conclude that the reward was actually the reason for the subject's participation. But rewardingness in the form of, for example, enjoyment is not a cause or a reason, it is something that is inherent in friendship. This is not to say that enjoyment is never a reason, but is not always or necessarily a reason. There are, for instance, other moral or ethical reasons that do not entail getting something in return. Thus the motivation for benefiting a friend is not the expectation that the benefit will be reciprocated, or even the satisfaction one might get from being a 'nice person'. Benefiting one's associate apart from any consideration of a reward or return is an essential part of what it means to be a friend.

In response, it would appear that evidence for an essential link between some form of reward or reinforcement and the formation and maintenance of personal relationships is too overwhelming to be dismissed. On the other hand, according to the self-referent model, the rewards need not be of a crassly hedonistic kind. Self-referent does not mean 'selfish', 'self-interested', or 'self-centred' as these terms are commonly understood. However, from the specialized perspective of descriptive psychology, the initial statement of the present model was seen as an inconsistent rather than a reconciling position (Davis & Todd, 1982, pp. 111–12). Part of the Davis-Todd reaction may have been semantic, following from the understandably misleading implications of the recently discarded investment terminology. However, part of the reaction was substantive,

stemming from definite differences on the rewardingness-intrinsicity issue.

The major question raised by Davis & Todd seems to be, 'How can friendship be considered an intrinsic relationship if one finds it necessary to specify why it is rewarding?' Given the highly restrictive limits upon what the proponents of descriptive psychology would be willing to call intrinsic, it cannot (see Davis & Todd, 1982, p. 111). However, from the present perspective, there are two reasons why friendships that develop beyond superficial levels may be considered intrinsic. First, it was proposed above that a friendship with a particular other person often develops to the point that the relationship itself becomes one of the subject's self-attributes, creating a communal relationship in which the worth and well-being of the friend becomes of direct concern to the subject. One indication of the extent to which a friendship has reached this point is the person-qua-person factor. We have already alluded to several theoretical positions with which the development of such particularization is compatible. Second, a friendship may be considered intrinsic if the rewardingness ensues from factors within the relationship itself and is not contingent upon some external goal or activity for which the relationship is merely a channel. For example, a person may find a friendship ego supportive because of the characteristics or behaviours of his or her partner. On the other hand, he or she may find the friendship ego supportive because his or her partner is a highly respected person with whom a close acquaintanceship is a mark of distinction. The former would be intrinsic, the latter extrinsic.

Related to the intrinsic quality of friendship is the observation that some friendships become self-sustaining, that is, maintained when clearly identifiable rewards are no longer available. The reason some friendships become self-sustaining follows from the tendency to behave in ways that assert and reaffirm one's more important and highly valued self-attributes. We have noted that a friendship with a particular other person often becomes identified by the individual as one of his or her self-attributes. Less directly, the continuation — or non-continuation — of a friendship that is no longer rewarding in specifiable ways may have implications for other self-attributes, for instance, loyalty or a sense of personal commitment. In either case, maintaining a 'non-rewarding' friendship would be a way of reaffirming self-attributes.

Conclusion

For the present, the self-referent model of friendship remains at the level of assumption, conjecture and untested hypothesis. It is also open to the charge of circularity. But this need not be the case permanently or in principle. The model is potentially capable of verification or invalidation, or some of each. Conducting research bearing directly on the model presupposes the availability of measures estimating the degree to which a given friendship is capable of fulfilling various self-referent motives as well as measures estimating the salience of different self-attributes. Some such measures are currently available. Most of the research related to the model has been devoted to developing the ADF-F (see above) which measures relevant aspects of friendships and other personal relationships. In addition, Murstein has developed an Exchange Orientation Scale (see Murstein et al., 1977) which may be regarded as a measure of a self-attribute indicating the degree to which the respondent is predisposed to maintain equity in relationships.

The availability of such measures suggests the feasibility of a number of studies. To cite just one possibility, the person-quaperson scale in the ADF-F could be taken as a measure of the degree to which a subject has incorporated a friendship as a self-attribute. In the same instrument, the permanence scale could be taken as a measure of the subject's self-attributed commitment to maintaining the friendship. Add to these the Murstein Exchange Orientation Scale, and one should be able to predict when a friendship that is no longer rewarding in clearly identifiable ways will or will not be sustained.

Until the necessary corroborative or non-corroborative research is forthcoming, it is hoped that the direction of conceptual analysis represented by the present model will provide a viable point of departure for personal relationship researchers favouring a middle-ground on the rewardingness-intrinsicity issue.

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