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Gender roles in society: A discrepancy between perception and performance

ANTH 100
Introduction to Anthropology
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Article Summary

The selected article investigates gender differences in behavioural regulation during early childhood. Results show that young boys (ages 3-6 years) in the United States possess lower self-control over their behaviour than girls of the same age. Despite this clear gender gap in the United States, there appears to be no significant difference between genders in Asian societies (China, South Korea, and Taiwan) in terms of self-regulation. However, when teachers in these Asian countries were asked to rate the self-regulation of their students, girls received much higher ratings than boys even though their directly measured performance was equal. This discord between results concretizes how there exists a discrepancy between perception and actual conduct in some societies. Finally, the author stresses the importance of learning self-regulation skills at a young age due to the academic and social benefits.

Relation to Course Concepts

The complexity of the aforementioned article may be difficult to unravel without some conscious effort. At first, one might conclude that the correlation between children and their behavioural regulation lies in genetics. However, by delving deeper into the structure of society it is reasonable to hypothesize that it is not necessarily biology at play. In anthropology, culture is defined as patterns of learned behaviour and ideas acquired by people as members of society (Lavenda and Shultz 2012:214-216). Moreover, it is important to understand that culture is a diverse, modern concept that varies depending on the community that you inhabit. This aspect of culture poses reason to suggest that there is a difference between student self-regulation in the United States and self-regulation in Asia. Furthermore, “[c]ulture is not reinvented by each generation; rather, we learn it from other members of the social groups we belong to...” (Lavenda and Shultz 2012:214). This means that the process of learning and acquiring the requirements of the surrounding culture (enculturation) can have a profound effect on the way a person lives their life. Emotions and behaviours of children at a young age are often determined by the culture in which they were raised, especially since children have not entered a period of identity moratorium where their concept of self is questioned. Although the cultural differences between the United States and Asia that cause the variance in student behaviour are uncertain, there is no question that the general fabric of these societies are fundamentally disparate. Through the studying of human culture and the sharing of anthropological knowledge, we may be able to eventually identify the social cues that cause anomalies like these.

Although the difference between Asian and North American societies is of interest in this article, the most intriguing aspect to discuss lies in the discrepancy in China, Taiwan, and South Korea between teacher perception of student self-regulation and actual student performance of self-regulation. Since we already know that culture has a profound effect on one's actions and beliefs in a society, we can transfer and expand this concept to include the cultural construction of gender and gender roles. There is an underlying desire in most societies for individuals to become accepted members and fulfill the needed functions and roles of groups in which they belong. Most importantly, individuals establish contexts of boundaries in which they can and cannot act. Due to the extreme variance between what it means to be a male and to be a female, there is a large division (gender gap) in today's society (Lavenda and Shultz 2012:169-170). Thus, even though the conduct of young students between genders may be equal, the creation of stereotypical gender roles in society affects the teacher's perception of the girls' self-regulation of behaviour. In other words, it seems that cultural expectations of girl behaviour versus boy behaviour are having profound effects on the perception of teachers. Throughout time, many aspects of living as a woman have been reduced from a universal level to one of generality; and the same is true for men (Lavenda and Shultz 2012:365). This is only causing the stereotyping of gender roles to become increasingly stronger which, in turn, makes it very hard for someone to be deemed "acceptable" and "normal" when they act outside of the socially constructed contexts.

Determining the complicated foundation for the discussed discrepancy seems to be no easy task for anthropologists, especially since the two areas of study are located halfway around the World from each other. However, there is a way that anthropologists will be able to put more of the puzzle pieces together regarding universal and culturally specific aspects of behavioural regulation in the United States, China, Taiwan, and South Korea. Ethnology is the comparative study that analyzes different cultures (two or more), its people, and the relationship between the cultures (Lavenda and Shultz 2012:12). Among their many goals, ethnologists aim to formulate generalizations about human nature, which is no easy task. Oftentimes, ethnologists use information compiled in ethnographies (in-depth studies of one particular culture through direct contact) in order to compare and contrast different cultures (Lavenda and Shultz 2012:12). Especially since ethnographies describe social behaviours and tendencies, ethnologists find this information very useful (Lavenda and Shultz 2012:12). By looking at the data in this case, ethnologists would hopefully be able to draw some conclusions about the way enculturation in Asia shapes the behavioural regulation of 3-6 year olds. Furthermore, they could hopefully shed light onto the reason for discrepancy between perception and performance of gender roles in Asian societies. Are they adopting Western stereotypes of gender? Because of media? Globalization? These are the sorts of questions that will help lead ethnologists on a path to solve this peculiar trend in society.

Conclusion

This article supports many previous findings. Based on previous research, we expect girls to have higher classroom behavioural regulation in the United States (Cameron-Ponitz et al.:141-158). Since most of the research was done in the United States, we have a very Western perspective when it comes to evaluating the contents of this article. Although this makes it easy to identify the gender gap in the United States (which we have done efficaciously), it poses serious difficulty in determining if the findings in Asia are in fact valid. In either case, the information contained in this article definitely adds to our current understanding of how perspectives of gender roles don't always line up with actual conduct of gender roles in society. Personally, I agree with the news article. I feel as though we live in a society where critically judging people's actions and behaviour is part of human nature. Since we have a very ethnocentric perspective regarding the gender gap created by stereotypical gender roles, it may be the case that this gap doesn't exist elsewhere in the World (for example, in Asia). Also, I agree with the authors in their stress over the importance of teaching self-regulation skills at a very early age. This will undoubtedly bridge the gap between genders and set each student on a pathway for success. For me, I wonder where the inequality between the gender gap in the United States and Asia lies? Is it based on enculturation at a young age? Does immersion in school have any effect on lengthening this gap? I believe it does, but will leave this question open for future research. If we can address these issues and understand how the gender gap in Western culture is created, we can hopefully allow children to live their lives freely, without judgment and let them become who they want to be.

Works Cited (3 different chapters of the textbook are used as the assigned readings)

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