Culture and Socialization in Personality Development: Comparing Western and Eastern

Cultures

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Abstract

This paper goes over the link between socialization and the effects of culture on personality development. This paper goes over several differ articles on the subject of personality, culture, socialization, and the nature versus nurture debate. This paper also goes over several studies on the difference of development between children from Eastern cultures, like China, and Western cultures, namely from the United States. One article shows the differences that were made in personality development in Children when comparing how Chinese children and how American children were raised and socialized within their cultural contexts. It found that Chinese children were more attuned to be sensitive to emotions, more concerned with authority and morality, while American children were more attuned to autonomy and independence. This paper also went over a study that attempted to analyze how academic performance was affected by gender and culture.

Introduction

There are many contributing factors to the development of personality in individuals. If you believe Sigmund Frued, he will tell you that personality is developed under certain instinctual drives people have, influences of the unconscious, and his theory of psychosexual development; his bizarre theory where personality is developed due to experiences from early life and had something to do with sexual energy. Gordon Allport believed that personality development depended on the self and traits. Many theorists have put out their own theories determining how an individual's personality is formed, but none of them are considered a definitive truth. Not too many personality theorists took culture into account. When comparing the development and personalities of American and western children to the development and personalities of Asian children, there is a considerable difference in the ways they act and how they present themselves. Culture is an important factor in the development of personalities and depending on the culture, can change personalities drastically.

Personality and Culture

Personality is defined as the uniqueness of an individual. While personality psychologists tend to disagree on how personality is developed they do believe it encompasses many different factors and how the individual differs from other individuals. Personality tends to encompass behaviors, attitudes, values and beliefs that tend to define an individual. According to Lev Vygotsky, personality is socially (and culturally) determined, not only activity and consciousness (Leontiev, 2006). In studies of the ontogenesis of language and the human mind overall, there are arguments on what causes interiorization, or the process of making something a part of your own mental structure and being. While the arguments do have multiple different interpretations, there is somewhat of an agreement that the internalization of cultural facts and/or culturally

determined operations is basically what the process is reduced to (Leontiev, 2006). Basically culture is incredibly influential to the development of cognitive processes, and thus, personality.

Culture, in this case, is also a complex topic. From the article by A. A. Leonitv (2006), in the words of R. Brislin:

"'Culture' relates to those aspects of society in which all of its members participate and that they all possess it and pass it down to the next generation. 'Personality' correlates with the unique combination of features . . . that differentiates individuals within a given society" (Brislin, 1981, pp. 51–52) (p. 50-51).

In this case, culture is similar to personality, but is more of a generalization of society than of an individual.

There are still different definitions of culture. Armenian philosopher and ethnographer E. Markarian believed that culture was more related to human activity than anything. To make it even more specific, if it is a non-biological means that makes human activities goal oriented, while also actualizing these activities in various situations and spheres of its application, then it is a cultural phenomena (Leontiv, 2006). There are two interwoven dynamics in culture. The first is that there are standards and stereotypes, which, to a certain degree, are accepted and not accepted, negotiating between them whether or not they are stereotypes or actually standards. The second is that the said society accepts these standards and stereotypes (Leontiv, 2006).

Culture also tends to encompass many things about a group of people, from a specific location at a certain period of time. These things include art, customs, beliefs, institutions, and the zeitgeist of the era. It is a very relevant factor to say the least. Not to mention the fact that it is very influential when a person when their personality develops as their culture tends to affect how people are socialized.

Nature vs Nurture and Socialization

The nature vs nurture debate entails which aspect of development has more impact on the development of a person's personality. Nature, in this scenario, refers to a person's biological factors impacting their personality, specifically their genetics. When looking into a person's nature, they tend to look at their genes and what goes on inside their body that can influence personality development. According to philosophers, like Rene Descartes believed in innate ideas, where ideas came from the mind or consciousness (Schultz et al., 2008). This overlaps with the ideas of other psychologists. One psychologist, William McDougall, believed in instinct theory, which states that behaviors are derived from innate tendencies (Schultz et al., 2008). There was also a theory of Francis Galton of mental inheritance, which entails that there was a biological limit to how intelligent one person can be and now matter how much someone can try (Schultz et al., 2008). However not every psychologist will follow this side of the debate, as they believe that personality development has more to do with the environment an individual grows up in rather than their biology.

Nurture, in regards to the nature versus nurture debate, is referring to environmental factors to how we were raised and how that affects our personality. Going back to Rene Descartes, he also believed in derived ideas, meaning that ideas can be derived from external sources (Schultz et al., 2008). This idea of getting something from external sources also ties into several different psychological theories. The first, Julian Rotter, followed a social-behavioristic perspective, specifically, field theory. Field theory is a theory that postulates that behavior is derived from both cognitive and environmental factors (Ryckman 2008). Specifically, Rotter believed a variety of things can influence personality development, but the most influential part was a person's experiences with other people and how different those experiences are (Ryckman

2008). Rotter also believed that things like language and how children are reared have a lot to do with how their personality develops (Ryckman 2008). This ties into how socialization factors into development.

Socialization is the process in which people learn the norms, beliefs, and values of their society and learn to integrate that into their behavior. According to Eysenck, how people behave in society is based on their conditioned response. People will avoid doing things that they want to do if it has been conditioned that doing that thing will give them a punishment of some sorts. This includes things like theft, getting into fights, but it is not just limited to that (Ryckman 2008). This is because of socialization. Socialization practices incorporate the values and beliefs of society when it is done by family and the immediate environment of a child (Wang, 2000). However, when one compares two people from different cultures of origin, it is easy to notice that they act differently. During socialization, a lot of a person's culture gets pulled into the individual. When one compares people from eastern cultures to western cultures, the difference in how they act and what they believe is astonishing.

Comparing Western and Eastern Childhood Development

When comparing how children from different cultures show how differently they were raised based on the values of their respective societies. For starters, American culture values independence, self expression, uniqueness, and being self sufficient. American parents try to teach their child to have a sense of self and they encourage their child to be independent, assertive and to express themselves (Wang, 2000). American children are taught to express their emotions and to understand their own feelings as well as those of other people (Wang, 2000). When it comes to cognitive abilities, Americans tend to think about things in terms of something's internal attributes, whether it be an object or a person. They also tend to

decontextualize behavior from their environment and make a judgment on it (Wang, 2000). There are also patterns of how stories of past experiences are used to entertain and affirm things (Wang, 2000). This wildly contrasts how People from Eastern cultures are raised to behave.

Eastern cultures, specifically Chinese culture, have a different approach to development and this is evident by the way the values that people from these cultures instill into their children. In contrast to how Americans value autonomy, where individuals are taught to be more autonomous and independent, Chinese parents teach their kids to have a sense of connectedness towards other people. Children are taught to be obedient to authority, to be reliable, behave properly, taught they have an obligation to other people socially, and that achievements should be group based, not based on the individual (Wang, 2000). Children there are taught to learn restraint and help people. Behaviors that are aggressive and cause a disruption in overall harmony are severely punished. In contrast to how children are encouraged to stand up for themselves in America, Chinese children are often taught not to fight back under any circumstances. Stories of someone's past are told in China, but are primarily used to remind them of past transgression and invoke standards for morals and society, this contrasts how Stories of the past are primarily used in western cultures, where they serve more of as entertainment value (Wang, 2000). People in China are taught to be attuned to the feelings of others while also trying their best to suppress their own from leaking out. This is considered good manners and key to harmony in a group. Behavior such as this makes them feel more empathetic and sensitive to the feelings of other people. People in China also tend to think of things in a relational-situational context (Wang, 2000). Just based on a brief overview, there was considerable difference between these two cultures and Qi Wang and Michelle Leichtman wanted to show it.

In the year 2000, Qi Wang and Michelle D. Leichtman did a study on both American and Chinese children and their social, emotional, and cognitive characteristics. They wanted to see the difference between how the two of them acted. THey were going to interpret stories that the researchers set up and blatantly tell them how it is. Specifically they chose to use children in this study because they were able to make up stories with complex scenes, yet also be able to talk about the scenes. They believed children would be able to properly reflect the culture they were raised in because they are old enough to have undergone being raised and socialized somewhat, but they are not too old to be worldly or at least have too many influences upon them and what they think (Wang, 2000).

They had seven hypotheses about the outcome of their study. The first was that they believed that the Chinese Children would be able to show that they had more social engagement in their interpretations, by having more social interactions and more positive interpersonal relationships. The second was that there would be more evidence of a moral code appropriate and conduct being present when comparing Chinese kids to American ones. Third would be that there would be more concerns with authority in Chinese interpretations than American ones. Fourth, the interpretations of the American children would have more expressions of autonomy and self determination. Fifth, there would be more instances of aggression in the American children's interpretations than in the Chinese children's interpretations. Sixth would be that the Chinese children would more reference the emotional states of the characters in their interpretations compared to American children. And seventh, the interpretations of the Chinese children would be more concrete compared to the American children's in terms of details (Wang, 2000).

For participants, they had 26 Chinese children that consisted of 14 boys and 12 girls, and 24 White American children that consisted of 12 boys and 12 girls. All children came from middle class to upper middle class families.

For the procedure, they had 11 story beginnings as prompts for the children. There were human characters or animals in each prompt. The protagonist for these story beginnings were always matching the gender and ethnicity as the subject child. After being shown the first picture, the researcher took away the picture and asked the participant what happened next, and then prompted to go on. The participants were then asked how they felt about the story and what happened to the characters. After the task was completed, the children were asked to reveal a certain memory about how they felt a certain emotion. Each child was given 5 picture prompts and three memory questions.

While there were a few errors in the study, the results do speak for themselves. The Chinese children's responses had more social engagement, had more statements about a moral code, more concern with authority, more concrete in terms of cognition and more emotionally expressive than the American children. On the other hand, the effect of culture showed in terms of autonomous orientation, where the American children showed more than the Chinese children, as the protagonist there was more involved and resisted social pressure in their stories. An interesting thing to note was that while almost all Chinese children understood the concept of shame and had more instances of shame in their responses, only half of the American children understood it as a concept (Wang, 2000). Despite there being a lot of differences from the children based on their culture, the socialization was not only at a cultural level, but even at smaller levels including school and family. The way the kids were brought up didn't just reflect how their parents raised them, but how their teachers and society taught them.

Comparing Gender Performance Across Cultures

Another study sought to analyze how the differences in gender affected beliefs and individual achievements in children. The study noted that previous studies have observed that there were minimal differences between genders in some cultures, but that difference varied wildly in different countries (Lummis & Stevenson, 1990). For a more conclusive analysis, the study sought to evaluate children from various cultures to identify any gender differences through three different cultures: American, Japanese, and Taiwanese, and analyze the differences in performance between the subjects (Lummis & Stevenson, 1990).

The study suggested that boys and girls were not significantly different from one another overall, though cognitive tests suggested that boys notably specialized in spatial ability and general information while girls specialized in verbal and auditory memory as well as verbal coding (Lummis & Stevenson, 1990). In terms of beliefs, which were interviewed from interviews with the subjects' mothers, it was generally expected that girls would perform higher than boys in reading, despite their performances being incredibly similar to one another, and it was implied that these mothers were more likely to support their daughters more than their sons, though it was implied that they favored their sons when it came to mathematics (Lummis & Stevenson, 1990).

Conclusion

This paper went over how personality is influenced by cultural factors. There was a brief overview on how personality can be influenced with ties with the nature versus nurture debate, specifically how being nurtured from different cultures can influence their personality and how they see the world. It also analyzed how culture helped one view gender, and how those views affected academic performance. While not much was gone over, there is definitely something

there to work on. Not everyone from the same culture has the same personality, but it's more like

having a similar base to start out from.

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