

Quadrant II – Transcript and Related Materials

Programme: Bachelor of Arts

Subject: Psychology

Course Code: PSG 103

Course Title: Psychology of Gender and Identity

Unit: IV - Gender Differences

Module Name: Culture and Gender

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Notes

CULTURE AND GENDER

Culture, as we noted earlier, is what's shared by a large group and transmitted across generations—ideas, attitudes, behaviours, and traditions. Like biological creatures, cultures vary and compete for resources and thus evolve over time (Mesoudi, 2009). Cultures evolve through a “culture cycle,” noted Hazel Markus and Alana Conner (2011): “1) people create the cultures to which they later adapt, and 2) cultures shape people so that they act in ways that perpetuate their cultures.” Humans are culturally shaped culture shapers. We can see the shaping power of culture in ideas about how men and women should behave. And we can see culture in the disapproval they endure when they violate those expectations (Kite, 2001). In countries everywhere, girls spend more time helping with housework and child care, and boys spend more time in unsupervised play (Edwards, 1991; Kalenkoski & others, 2009; United Nations, 2010). Even in contemporary, dual-career, North American marriages, men do most of the household repairs, and women arrange the child care (Bianchi & others, 2000; Fisher & others, 2007). Such behavior expectations for males and females—of who should cook, wash dishes, hunt game, and lead companies and countries—define gender roles. Does culture construct these gender roles? Or do gender roles merely reflect men's and women's natural behavior tendencies? The variety of gender roles across cultures and over time shows that culture indeed helps construct our gender roles.

Gender Roles Vary with Culture and Time

Despite gender role inequalities, the majority of the world's people would ideally like to see more parallel male and female roles. A 2003 Pew Global Attitudes survey asked 38,000 people whether life was more satisfying when both spouses work and share child care, or when women stay home and care for the children while the husband provides. In 41 of 44 countries, most chose the first answer. However, big country-to-country differences exist. Egyptians disagreed with the world majority opinion by 2 to 1, whereas Vietnamese concurred by 11 to 1. When jobs are scarce, should men have more right to a job? Yes, agreed about 1 in 8 people in Britain, Spain, and the United States—and 4 in 5 people in Indonesia, Pakistan, and Nigeria (Pew, 2010, July 10). In the last half-century—a thin slice of our long history—gender roles have changed dramatically. In 1938, just 1 in 5 Americans approved “of a married woman earning money in business or industry if she has a husband capable of supporting her.” By 1996, 4 in 5 approved (Niemi & others, 1989; NORC, 1996). In 1967, 57 percent of first-year American collegians agreed that “the activities of married women are best confined to the home and family.” In 2005, when the question was last asked, only 20 percent agreed (Astin & others, 1987; Pryor & others, 2005).

Behavioural changes have accompanied this attitude shift. In 1965 the Harvard Business School had never granted a degree to a woman. In 2010, 38 percent of its graduates were women. From 1960 to 2011, women rose from 6 percent to 47 percent of U.S. medical students and from 3 percent to 50 percent of law students (AMA, 2010; ABA, 2011; Hunt, 2000). In the mid-1960s American married women devoted seven times as many hours to housework as did their husbands (Bianchi & others, 2000). By 2010, the gender gap had shrunk, yet persisted: 20 percent of men and 49 percent of women did housework in an average day; with women averaging 2.6 hours on their housework days and men 2.1 hours on theirs (BLS, 2011). The changing male-female roles cross many cultures, as illustrated by women's gradually increasing representation in the parliaments of most nations (Inglehart & Welzel, 2005; IPU, 2011). Such changes, across cultures and over a remarkably short time, signal that evolution and biology do not fix gender roles: Time also bends the genders.

References

1. Myers, D. G. (2010). Exploring Social Psychology (4th edition ed.). New York: Tata McGraw-Hill Edition.