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Globalization and Adolescence

The life-stage of adolescence is a topic that has interested anthropologists for decades. The anthropology of adolescence studies and attempts to identify cross-cultural aspects and characteristics of this specific and unique life-stage. Traditionally, adolescence is defined as the period starting at the point of puberty and ending when there is an assumption of full adult roles. Across cultures, these full adult roles can be different and the length of adolescence may vary depending on cultural and societal practices. Adolescence is known to be a life-stage during which there is an increase in risk-taking; this is marked as a cross-cultural occurrence. The focus of this paper is on the effects of globalization on adolescence. The essay will address the general effects as well as two specific case studies: one concerning Alaskan Inuits and the other concerning Asian Indians. Furthermore, the paper will analyze the academic relevance to the effects of globalization on adolescence and adolescents.

In general, globalization is causing adolescence to become a more prominent life stage across the world because of media and the spread of information. This will be discussed later in the essay. Identity is the underlying theme behind all research done on adolescence and globalization. This is because adolescence is the life stage in which people discover their identities and personalities. Globalization has had a great impact on the formation of identities because globalization is creating a multicultural, yet singular world. However, these effects can have both positive and negative sides.

Cross-culturally, adolescents have gained access to more information and scientific and technological knowledge. However, this increased access to information is partnered with access to Western media, which is causing a trend of adolescents practicing untraditional customs, such as dating in areas where safe sex practices are not taught. Another effect of globalization is the increase in job opportunities. This has benefited a number of adolescents across the world who are now accepting outsourced jobs. On a negative note, the job opportunities are still not accessible to some adolescents and they only see the world benefiting around them. Globalization, in this sense, can both increase and decrease social mobility. Also, as the essay will show later, the increase in opportunities can often overwhelm adolescents whose parents never had the same options. The easier transfer of goods, services, and people is another effect of globalization. This also opens the doors for new opportunities for adolescents. Though, this can prolong and exacerbate some negative aspects of society, such as the drug trade or child trafficking. Adolescents play a key role in both these societal problems. The last effect of globalization that will be discussed is the creation of a multicultural, yet singular world culture. This can lead to a possible loss of traditional or primordial culture. As a result, identity formation for adolescents becomes convoluted and often confusing. After discussing the effects of globalization, two case studies will be examined.

Case Study: Inuits in Alaska

Traditions, such as ice fishing and hunting, have become recreational

More and more adolescents are spending time in peer groups as opposed to family groups

They are getting a different education than their parents

With access to television, hockey has become popular among young men

Research shows that adolescent Inuits have very little hope for the continuance of their own society and culture; they believe they can’t compete with the globalization of the world and must choose what to do in life rather than traditionally staying in the village

This becomes overwhelming to adolescents and has increased suicide rates

Case Study: India

Arranged marriage is greatly affected by globalization in India

Marriage is essentially the mark of when an adolescent becomes an adult

It is an incredibly important event in Indian culture and society

Adolescents will often go against their parents’ wishes and attempt to form “love marriages”

Though arranged marriages are still far more common, “love marriages” are becoming more and more prevalent and this does not follow a conservative Indian tradition

This is a society in which dating has become more prevalent and therefore safe sex is not being practiced or learned, because sex is such a taboo subject

Course Relevance:

Identity formation and the creation of a single multicultural world is the main issue affecting adolescents in the world today.

I briefly mentioned the idea that the primordial and traditional cultures are decreasing in practice because of globalization.

Lewellen talks about primordialism vs. constructionism.

Does the theory of primordialism apply with globalization?

Or is it constructionism? It could even be relationalism?

Primordialism is that cultures always stay the original way they were.

Constructionism is that ethnicity and identity is in constant flux.

Relationalism is that ethnicity is based on relationships and are not “things”

In my opinion constructionism seems to suit the current situation among adolescents the most.

Appadurai’s *scapes*:

Adolescents are mostly affected by Mediascapes and Ethnoscapes

Mediascapes are what slowly transform their culture, because adolescence often wish to imitate western media

Ethnoscapes are important because adolescence is the life stage in which people form identities or begin to understand their own identity

Further Analysis and Summary

Overall, globalization has greatly affected the adolescent experience across the world.

Whether the effects of globalization are positive or negative is hard to determine and is based on the different cultures that it is affecting

So why is it important to study adolescents?

This generation of adolescents is about to become the generation that leads the new governments and societies

Unfortunately, they are often marginalized in society.

There are many different adolescent experiences around the world that I did not cover that are affected by globalization such as the Japanese suicide communities, and the increase of mental illnesses among adolescents across the world.

However, it is important to remember that the adolescent generation is very important

The creation of a multicultural world means that the world’s governments and societies need to adjust their teaching methods to accommodate the spread of knowledge

They need to work on making a world that the adolescents can sustain