POSTER PRESENTATION

Vladimir SOLODNIKOV, Russian State University for Humanities, Russia

YOUTH’S SOCIAL PERCEPTIONS OF FAMILY: CROSS-CULTURAL COMPARISON OF BASIC ATTRIBUTES

Keywords: family as social construct; cross-culture comparison

The aim of this paper is to continue analyzing the social representations of modern family forms. Earlier several approaches for defining a family were determined. They can be described in a number of dichotomies:

- Objective VS interpretative approach;
- Structural \ functional VS interactionist \ constructivist approach;
- Theoretical-operational VS phenomenology, empirically oriented;
- Natural/classical scientific, objectivist, positivist VS understanding, humanitarian, postclassical, modern;
- Deductive VS inductive.

The previous survey showed that the social perceptions of Russian and American students about family (“the norm”) are more harmonized (especially it concerns nuclear and extended family forms), the perceptions of non-families on the contrary are different. Therefore the Russians have a clearer representation of normative family (especially nuclear one) and other forms (for example different forms of social parenting), (quasi)familial structures and especially groups which can be described through family connotations, when family is interpreted metaphorically (a group of coworkers or office workers, police squad, or community group, etc.) (See more detail: Solodnikov, 2013).

The theoretical framework of the survey in general is actors’ social construction of the concept of family on everyday life. Now we are going to continue cross-cultural comparisons using the same empirical data.
Method: written formalized questionnaire filled in groups with Wiegel’s tool (2008) was presented to matching university student aimed non-representative sample.

Sample consisted of university students (№=101, including 17 young men) from three faculties (Sociology, Psychology and Social Anthropology) of Russian State University for Humanities. Average age was 20,9 years.


The sample of the American survey (2008): 148 people (90 females, one did not specify the gender), students of Development and Health course. The average age was 23,1 years (median = 22 years). 73% of sample were white people.

So the American students were two years older and there were more males among them.

Preliminary results and discussion.

Contrary to popular belief about Russians and Americans (in our case, university students of humanitarian profile) there are the following main tendencies in differentiation of basic attributes for social construct “family”:

- Americans relatively higher estimate its “romantic”, “psychological”, “fun” attributes (affection/hugs/kiss; acceptance; friendship; intimacy; fun; laughter etc.).
- Russians – on the contrary – stressed “business” parameters of family (sharing struggles, support, responsibility, safety, togetherness, respect, caring etc.).
- These results need more detailed analysis. Now there are several possible venues for interpreting the cross-cultural differences in social perception of the family among young people:
  - The differences in behavioral displays (and verbal descriptions) of love and affection in family (but first of all in couples’) relationships;
  - Another indicator of the aspiration to be loved (with less pronounced motivation to love and orientation for mutual affection) that was revealed earlier among young Russian married couples (Солодников, 2002).
  - Collecting more information on social context in terms of economic data on society well-being, the size and/or forms of social (incl. family) policy.

As a result it will be possible to define the main areas for research that will allow to deepen the understanding of the topic.

References

