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Culture and Its Role in Decision Making

Culture helps shape personality

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USPA NEWS - Culture helps shape and even dictate family norms, values, expectations, and interactions. Culture can have a major influence on one's life choices and the decisions made, and may even predetermine social status.

Culture plays a huge role in regards to shaping the characteristic that form our family dynamic and influences how we behave, make decisions, and in some cases conform both within this microcosm. Culture can also mold our experiences, interactions and relationship outside the family influencing both our personal beliefs, values and habits and yes, our choices in life.

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Since ancient times, family corresponds to a social group that has a marked influence on people's lives, having a fundamental role in the make-up of individuals, and as a deciding factor in determining and organizing both personality and behavior through beliefs and actions of their own. From the beginning our parents are the models of how to live and even understand life. People are born into the social and cultural environment in which they live. Each family has its own shared customs, beliefs and values, these create a kind of cultural identity.

At birth a child starts to observe the world around them, and both learning and expectations begin. Experiences within families and close-knit social groups during childhood place an emphasis first on schooling and the importance of a getting an education, and later during adolescence, on forming a solid work ethic. Placing cultural value on success at school through nurturing and support builds confidence. Later in a child's development through interaction with family, friends and peers, an individual learns the cultural value placed on work, the satisfaction of a job well done, and the responsibility of not just working, but on productivity as well.

Culture defined as family norms, beliefs and values play an undeniable part in shaping the lives of individuals and the choices these individuals will make. It provides the necessary role models needed for positive development and help to form an overall larger cultural identity for people to belong to. Cultural norms can also influence the decision-making process. This can happen both negatively by frowning upon, limiting or even restricting free thought, or positively by revering and encouraging open expression thus broadening the decision-making process for life choices.

For example, studies say that parents are still among the biggest influences on a person's life when choosing a degree, a career, partners in life etc. When children move to adolescence, they often begin looking for their parent's advice or use them as a role model. From their parents they take cues regarding what opportunities will be given to them, what behaviors are deemed acceptable and which are not.

Which decisions the culture of the family will accept, and which are not accepted. In some families, the culture might be to never disagree or debate, while others encourage open dialogue and constructive criticism. The culture of one family might be to be less supportive of a child's dream preferring instead to praise completed thought or work while still others support and encourage their children's hopes. The family dynamic can be a culture that sets limits or opens the door and throws away the key. How we are raised inside our family culture can shape and permanently affect the decision-making process, and ultimate influence our life choices. Traditions, customs and even gender roles within a family's culture can influence or even hinder a person's social status.

Parents can be guilty of designing a profession for their child or in some cases purposely limit culturally acceptable options. These suggestions can be significant for young people, but they are not always positive. In some cultures, family members want to see their descendants in traditional and self-limiting roles dictated by their own family, norms, beliefs or cultural values regarding sex or religion. An example might be someone raised as Amish or those who practice the Mormon faith. In other cases, to simply follow in the footsteps of your parents is to aspire to their best. One only has to look at the Indian caste system as an example. Although, officially outlawed in 1950, the caste system, based on and ingrained into the Hindu faith as the order and regularity in society, is still very much practiced today in rural India. It divides all Hindus into four main categories each descending from the Hindu God of creation. They are

the Priests, The Warriors, The Farmers, and the Laborers. Below even this are the street sweepers and untouchables. Your place in society is determined at birth and you cannot move out of your caste.

Religious, political and socio-economics norms and customs can affect or pre-determine life choices, and supersede any previous cultural value placed on education and work ethic. Culture influences life choices in so many ways because family culture varies based on individual but shared norms, value and beliefs. From birth children are indoctrinated into their family unit, their family culture. They are taught what the expectations are, perhaps what limitations exist, and in some cases way to overcome them. But the experiences are vital to self-development and to healthy participation in society in general. Outside forces like religion, economics and politics can play a hand in how one individual can affect another, how the culture of the many can become the culture of the individual.

As human beings our physical and mental development is dependent upon the family unit, so we mustn't be quick to judge life choices. They may be different from our own, but we too, were raised with customs, norms and beliefs. Instead, we must take each person identity as a whole, and take their personality and their development equally into account.

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