Responsibility: Where Does Generation Y Stand?

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Abstract

Society perceives Generation Y as being irresponsible. This study investigated the attitudes of Generation Y towards the development of responsibility in childhood by surveying 20 male and female college students at the University of Wisconsin-Stout. It was hypothesized that parents and schools had the greatest impact on the development of responsibility in childhood. Survey data was statistically analyzed using frequencies and a reliability analysis. Results indicate that other factors such as birth order, teachers, and other activities were just as influential as parents in the development of responsibility. The implications of our findings are that family professionals need to become aware of the effects of other activities, in addition to schools and parents, in the development of responsibility in childhood. It is also important for members of Generation Y to become aware of their own attitudes towards their responsibility development in childhood to help remove the negative labels society has placed on them.

Introduction

A study conducted by Public Agenda found that "Most Americans say they are disappointed with kids these days" ("Kids These Days," 1999, ¶ 1). Many Americans describe teens as being lazy and irresponsible. Fewer than half of adults and only one-third of teens say the next generation will make America a better place. More people today than two years ago say that "failing to learn values such as honesty, respect, and responsibility" is the most serious problem affecting kids ("Kids These Days," 1999, ¶ 7). Only a handful of adults say it is very common to come across children or teens who are friendly, helpful, or who treat people with respect. The public holds parents fundamentally responsible for how well kids are doing. Fewer than one in four Americans say it is

Table 1

Frequencies of Variables

Variable	Responses				
	Freshman	Sophomore	Junior	Senior	Total
STAT	10%	5%	30%	55%	100%
	Male	Female	Other		Total
GEN	30%	70%	0%		100%
	Oldest	Middle	Youngest		Total
BO	55%	30%	15%		100%

Note. Frequencies of Status in School (STAT); Gender (GEN); Birth Order (BO); My Parents Played a Role in the Development of my Responsibility in Childhood (PAR).

Table 2

Frequencies of Variables

Variable	Response					
	SD	D	U	A	SA	Total
PAR	0%	0%	10%	15%	75%	100%
	SD	D	U	A	SA	Total
BOR	0%	10%	30%	40%	20%	100%
	SD	D	U	A	SA	Total
SCH	0%	5%	20%	25%	50%	100%
	SD	D	U	A	SA	Total
TEA	0%	5%	40%	25%	30%	100%
	SD	D	U	A	SA	Total
OA	0%	0%	10%	35%	55%	100%

Note. My Birth Order Played a Role in the Development of my Responsibility in Childhood (BOR); Attending School K-12 Played a Role in the Development of my Responsibility in Childhood (SCH); My Teachers Played a Role in the Development of my Responsibility in Childhood (TEA); Other Activities (Jobs, Sports, Religion, etc.) Played a Role in the Development of my Responsibility in Childhood (OA).

common to find parents who are good role models and many people are more likely to blame parents, rather than social forces, for problems with kids ("Kids These Days," 1999, ¶ 8). After doing some initial research, we came to wonder why society views our generation as irresponsible. It seems as if society holds parents and schools accountable for our perceived irresponsibility. However, we are going to investigate this question by asking, "What are University of Wisconsin–Stout students' attitudes towards the development of their own sense of responsibility in childhood?" For the purpose of this study, responsibility is "The quality or state of being responsible as a moral, legal, or mental account-ability," as defined by Merriam-Webster's Online dictionary (2005). Generation Y is defined by www.answers.com (2005) as, "being born between the years of 1977 to 1994."

Literature Review

In terms of our research question on the development of responsibility, we were unable to locate a study that attempts to explain how responsibility is developed from the viewpoint of adults. Our four articles explain what responsibility is and how responsibility is developed in childhood. Such and Walker (2004) wrote about children's understanding of their own responsibility. Parents are assumed to take responsibility for children's happiness. De Ruyter (2002) discusses the meaning of responsibility and how responsibility is taught throughout life. He states that responsibility means answerable or accountable. A responsible person is a person who is accountable to his or herself to others for what he or she has done. Cook and Douglas (1998) help to explain the formation of your sense of self using Symbolic Interaction Theory. They use the term "looking glass self" to describe the development of one's sense of self. The article explains that your sense of self is formed through how others view you and your perception of their views. Hwang (1995) addresses parents pushing the teaching of responsibility onto the school systems. Since the children are not coming into school with a foundation that includes responsibility, they are at an immediate disadvantage. This article states that parents are failing to instill responsibility and are leaving it up to the school system.

Theoretical Framework

We will be using Symbolic Interaction Theory to help explain the formation of responsibility in people's lives. Symbolic interactionists believe that how people view themselves is determined by how

significant others view them, that is, people observe how they are viewed by significant others and construct their self image from these observations. Our generation is perceived as focusing on our sense of self rather than maintaining the responsibilities of our family role. This perceived misinterpretation of Generation Y is the basis of our research problem. By surveying UW-Stout students and determining their attitudes towards the development of their sense of responsibility in childhood, we are hoping to be able to compare our findings to the societal perception of Generation Y. Our hypothesis is that students will express that parents and school had the most influence on their development of responsibility. This hypothesis is based on our literature and theoretical framework.

Purpose

The purpose of this study will be to examine the opinions of UW-Stout students to find out their attitudes towards their development of responsibility in childhood. It is our hope that the results of our study can determine how responsibility of UW-Stout students that are members of Generation Y was developed. By surveying a portion of Generation Y, we will be able to determine how they feel about their sense of responsibility and how they perceive its development.

Methods

Participants

We used our survey to sample a small section of UW-Stout students that are a part of Generation Y. For the purpose of this study, Generation Y was defined as any individual born between the years of 1977 through 1994. We were able to generalize the results onto the greater population of Generation Y. Our research team surveyed fifty people; through randomization we analyzed twenty of the fifty surveys. Because of our randomization our results are more likely to be accurate when generalized to the larger population of Generation Y.

Research Design

The population used for this research study was the student campus population at the University of Wisconsin – Stout. The quota method of sampling was used. Quota method sampling is selecting respondents from a location convenient to the researcher and based on a characteristic that is driven by the research question. Whenever a person with a visible relevant characteristic is seen, that person is asked to

participate in the study until the researcher has acquired the required number of participants.

Data Collection Instrument

Our instrument was designed by our research team to help assess the attitudes of college students towards their development of responsibility. We constructed a survey that contained five close-ended statements to help assess what social environments were instrumental in forming their sense of responsibility in childhood. For the purpose of this study, we defined childhood as any time between birth and young adulthood (0-18yrs). The survey utilized a Likert scale. This scale placed different respondents in relation to each other in terms of their intensity of their attitude toward an issue based on a categorical scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5).

The University of Wisconsin – Stout students in this study were asked to report their academic status, gender, and birth order on a paper-and-pencil survey. The forms of questions on the survey were developed as a result of reading the literature and choosing a theory that fit with the research question.

Two types of validity were assessed: face validity and content validity. Face validity implies that each statement on the scale has a logical link with the concept in question that spoke to the overall research question. Regarding content validity, the statements had to cover the full range of the concept in question, in this case, UW-Stout students' attitudes toward development of responsibility. Content validity was judged on the basis of the extent to which the statements represented the issue they were supposed to measure (use of the literature, prior research and piloting the instruments).

Prior to distributing the survey, we reviewed our survey with our research supervisor. After making the necessary changes suggested by our research supervisor, we proceeded with the distribution of our survey.

Procedure

During the week of October 25, 2005, our research team collected the data by walking through six UW-Stout classroom buildings and distributing our survey to willing participants. After agreeing to participate, the participants received our survey. Respondents were instructed to respond to five statements by circling the number that best represents their attitudes towards their development of

responsibility in childhood. Each survey was completed in the presence of the research team.

Upon collecting all of our completed surveys, we cleaned and randomized the surveys. Surveys were cleaned if they had any missing data or the participants indicated that they were an only child. We determined they were an only child because they were not able to answer our question discussing birth order. We did not include these surveys as part of our sample. Another way in which we randomized our survey was that we randomly put our clean surveys in a pile. We then took every third survey from the cleaned pile. The newly formed pile of randomly selected cleaned surveys was our final sample.

Data Analysis Plan

The research team assigned a participant number to each cleaned survey. We then developed a codebook, a set of rules for assigning numerical values to answers obtained from participants. A variable name and numerical value was assigned to each of the categories and responses on the survey. Each cleaned survey was then coded accordingly.

For each of the statements on the survey, a variable name was also assigned by the research team based on the main concept of college student's attitudes towards the development of responsibility. We assigned (PAR) for parents played a role in the development of responsibility, (BOR) for birth order played a role in the development of responsibility, (SCH) for school attendance played a role in the development of responsibility, (TEA) for teachers played a role in the development of responsibility and (OA) for other activities played a role in the development of responsibility.

To analyze the data, the research team used the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), a statistical computer package where the level of analysis in this study was the individual. One of the first steps in any data analysis is to perform a frequency distribution and detect missing data. Frequencies displayed the range of values for each variable and ascertained how many participants responded to each variable and the strength of each response. For example, the research team assigned the number 1 for strongly disagree, 2 for disagree, 3 for undecided, 4 for agree and 5 for strongly agree. We also conducted a reliability analysis to ensure our statements were a reliable measure of our overall concept of responsibility.

Results

Our frequency distributions were run on the variables: PAR, BOR, SCH, TEA and OA. Ninety percent of our participants agreed or strongly agreed to the statement, "My parents played a role in the development of responsibility in childhood (PAR)." Ninety percent of our participants agreed or strongly agreed to the statement, "Other activities I was involved in played a role in the development of responsibility in childhood (OA)." Ten percent of our participants were undecided. Seventy-five percent of our participants agreed or strongly agreed to the statement, "Attending school played a role in the development of responsibility in childhood (SCH)." Sixty percent of our participants agreed or strongly agreed to the statement, "Birth order played a role in the development of responsibility in childhood (BOR)." Fifty-five percent of our participants agreed or strongly agreed to the statement, "Teachers played a role in the development of responsibility in childhood (TEA)."

A reliability analysis was performed to indicate if our five variables (PAR, BOR, SCH, TEA and OA) were a reliable index to measure our major concept of UW-Stout students' attitudes towards responsibility development in childhood. Cronbach's Alpha is a method used to measure reliability in survey questions. Our Cronbach's Alpha analysis score was .644. This value indicates that overall our survey items are a reliable index of measuring our major concept of attitudes of UW-Stout students' attitudes towards responsibility development in childhood.

Discussion

This study's findings supported the original hypothesis that parents and schools would be the major contributors to the development of responsibility during childhood. Since our literature or theory did not reference other activities (other activities: jobs, sports, religion, etc.) in any way, we did not hypothesize about them. However, our research has unveiled that students feel other activities played as big a role as parents in their development of responsibility in childhood. Ninety percent of students surveyed agreed or strongly agreed to our survey statement discussing other activities. This part of our results sheds new light on prior research done on the concept of responsibility development.

The findings of this research suggest that parents and other activities (i.e., job, sports, religion, etc.) are the biggest influences on the development of responsibility in childhood. This is inconsistent with findings in the literature. According to the literature parents are said to

pass the task of responsibility development onto schools and teachers. However, our research suggests that parents have a strong influence on the development of responsibility in childhood. Such and Walker (2004) discuss that family support and care are very important in a child's development of responsibility. They state that children's and parent's responsibilities contribute to the functioning of the household. Children feel that being responsible is a facet of individuality that was socially and internally negotiated. Also doing things responsibly and doing responsible things are a start to the development of power and autonomy. We found that parents and school attendance are the two primary factors in the development of responsibility in childhood.

Cook and Douglas (1998) explain that the foundation of the Symbolic Interaction Theory lies between fulfilling your role while at the same time maintaining your sense of self. Parents have a set of expectations of each member of the family that they require for the family to function. The way one meets these expectations determines his or her role. Symbolic Interaction Theory applies to schools as it does the parents; when children are at school, teachers act as their parents.

Limitations

The first major limitation of our research was the fact that we were limited to surveying University of Wisconsin–Stout students. If we would have been able to conduct our research with a larger survey sample size, we would have had a more diverse respondent base. Along with a limited population, time was also a major limitation. We only had a semester in which to conduct our research. Because of varying student schedules, the availability to find willing participants was limited to the time between classes in classroom buildings, the student center, and the library.

Implications for future research

Overall, this research adds to the body of knowledge in the area of the development of responsibility in childhood. It presents information on the influences of the development of responsibility on members of Generation Y. This study has several implications for future research. Our research suggests that schools are having a great influence on the development of responsibility in childhood on members of Generation Y. Taking into account the various activities one has in his or her life could be linked to the amount of responsibility one shows. It is difficult to determine the definition of what the participants deemed as other

activities. This could be an area to be studied by future researchers. An additional possibility for future research on the topic of responsibility could be directed at an older age population. This way one could investigate how this Generation views themselves and compare the results to that of Generation Y.

Conclusion

Through this research, we have shed new light on the importance of other activities and hope that more research is done in the area of responsibility development. In addition, this research will inform the students of the University of Wisconsin–Stout and other universities on this particular subject. We have found that members of Generation Y find themselves to be responsible and had strong influences on the development of their responsibility.

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