

Differentiated Personality Structuring in Institutionalized and Non-Institutionalized Teenagers – A Study of Two Groups from Bucharest –

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Abstract

Introduction: *The authors tried to understand whether there is a significant difference between the institutionalized and non-institutionalized teenagers, in terms of self-esteem; whether the institutionalized ones have positive, negative or average self-esteem. We considered that self-esteem is linked to neuroticism, due to the individuals' background.*

Objectives: *We studied institutionalized teenagers of both genders, aged 16-18 (from the „Life and Light” Orphanage) and non-institutionalized youngsters from „Mircea Vulcanescu” High-School. Our main objective was to study the values of self-esteem, neuroticism and other dimensions of personality for the groups mentioned above.*

Methods: *We used three psychometric instruments: Berger, Eysenck and Berkeley tests. Self-acceptance, neuroticism and self-esteem were measured, on the five dimensions of personality.*

Results: *When processing the collected data, it became obvious that there were significant differences between the two groups concerning self-esteem, neuroticism and other dimensions of personality: institutionalized teenagers have the lowest level for three of these scales. There is a strong connection between self-esteem and neuroticism in the institutionalized teenagers, negatively correlated at a 0.50 level and we had a positive correlation of 0.37 in those non-institutionalized. Moreover, institutionalized teenagers present lower levels of self-acceptance, high levels of neuroticism and low self-esteem for work, emotional and intellectual styles.*

Conclusions: *Our interventions on the level of counseling and short psychotherapy sustain and help us diminish the negative self-image shown by orphans and they also help ease the teenagers' adjustment due to a supportive background (benefitting from the help of the social workers and maternal assistants). The results of our study showed that, as far as the measured characteristics are concerned, the institutionalized adolescents do not form a single population, but they represent distinct populations.*

Keywords: *self-esteem, neuroticism, self-acceptance*

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I. Introduction

Our study aims to emphasize the importance of social background in developing personality, to investigate the repercussions of institutionalized background on the teenager's structure of personality and on his/her self-esteem.

Adolescence is a „bridge” between the child and the adult. Defining the concepts we deal with in this study, we need to point out some aspects:

- **Self-image**, as revealed by Cristea D. (1999), represents the subjective form through which we acknowledge and represent ourselves (as a system of abilities, relations and psycho-social qualities that give the social identity of the individual), an ensemble of traits and relations with the natural and social background. Self-image is constituted reflexively on the ground of some identity feeling and continuity of the self, prevalently lived as a state of the psychological present: „I am, I do, I have.”

- **Self-esteem**, as Duclos G. (2006) states, represents the way each person evaluates himself/herself as compared to his/her own expectancies and to the others and it is directly related to the awareness of his/her value.

- **Self-confidence** is realistic and predictable, as it rests on concrete results, obtained in the past, on the real experiences a person has lived and that allow that person to predict the results he/she expects to have in the future (Duclos, G., et al, 2006).

- **Identity** is an active, emotional and cognitive process that helps representing oneself in a social circle, associated with the subjective feeling of permanence, allowing the person to acknowledge life as an experience with continuity and unity, thus making that person act accordingly (Doron, R., 1999).

- **Personality** represents the specific way of organizing the psycho-physical and psycho-social traits and abilities of a person. Personality has the characteristics of an axiologically and ideologically vectored structure and the values – attitudes – ideals trinomial entity is the main functional core that mediates the development of social conducts (Cristea, D., 1999).

II. Hypotheses

It is possible to have a statistically significant difference between the levels of self-esteem presented by the institutionalized adolescents, as compared to the ones who live with their families.

We expect a significant difference between the levels of neuroticism showed by the two groups of adolescents.

We estimate that the institutionalized adolescents have lower self-esteem than the ones living with their families, for the Expressive-Self, Interpersonal-Self, Interpersonal Work-Self, Emotional-Self and Intellectual-Self dimensions.

We estimate that there is a connection between neuroticism and self-esteem in the institutionalized adolescents as compared to the ones living with their families. The lower the level of neuroticism is, the higher the level of self-esteem and the higher the neuroticism is, the lower the self-esteem.

The model of the study

In our study, the independent variable is represented by the institutionalized adolescents, since we considered that they had to adjust to an adverse background in order to develop a positive self-esteem.

As compared to the independent variable, the dependent variable in our study is represented by the measured trait of personality, which is self-esteem.

Another variable, which is not in direct relation with the independent variable, is neuroticism.

Concepts in operation

Self-acceptance

One of the first scales for self-acceptance was given by the psychologist Emanuel Berger. According to him, there are 3 types of self-acceptance:

- *Low self-acceptance (low scores, 0-110)*; Those with low scores for this scale have a low level of self-acceptance. Such a score could be interpreted as reflecting a negative opinion on himself/herself and such people also believe that others have a negative opinion about them.

- *Average self-acceptance (average scores, 111-150)*. It describes the way most people are, sometimes boasting and sometimes condemning themselves. For most people it is a good enough reflection of their abilities and desire to get better.

- *High self-acceptance (high scores, 151-180)*. Such a person trusts his abilities and considers himself a valuable person. This individual is confident; he can solve any problem or challenge that might come his way and he has great vitality.

III. Methods

The main objective of our study is to observe the impact of background on teenagers from orphanages, the impact on their personality, the way this background influences self-image, as compared to the teenagers who live a normal life.

In addition, we want to find out if institutionalized adolescents have a negative self-esteem on all 5 dimensions (traits) of personality or only on some of them: Expressive-Self, Interpersonal-

Self, Interpersonal Work-Self, Emotional-Self and Intellectual-Self.

Another objective is to find out if there is a relation between the level of neuroticism and self-esteem. We consider that a positive self-esteem helps development on all levels, the subject being prepared for the future, for adjustment to social life.

For the above reasons, we try to detect the institutionalized adolescents who developed a „negative self-image”, in order to have them under specialized therapy, under the care of specialists.

Our study was conducted on a group of 60 institutionalized teenagers and a group of high-school students who live with their families, all aged 16-18. The adolescents were randomly selected from the „Life and Light” Orphanage in Bucharest and from „Mircea Vulcanescu” High-school, 11th grade, Bucharest.

The group of students from „Mircea Vulcanescu” High school consisted of 30 subjects (14 boys and 16 girls), aged 16-18. Most of the subjects in this group have a normal family life, 2 of them live with a divorced father or mother and one had only a parent because the other parent had died.

The group of subjects from the „Life and light” Orphanage in Bucharest consisted of 30 subjects, 18 boys and 12 girls, aged 16-18.

In order to measure self-esteem, we used Emanuel M. Berger’s „Scale for self-acceptance”. For the measurement of neuroticism, we used the Form A of the „H. J. Eysenck Inventory of Personality”. For the measurement of neuroticism owed to background (the phenotype), and not the genetic neuroticism (genotype) and the measurement of self-esteem for the 5 dimensions of personality, we used the Berkeley Test, by Keith Harray (Institute of Advanced Psychology, San Francisco) and Eillen Donah (University of California, Berkley).

IV. Results

Our micro-research concerning the dynamic psychic structuring of personality in young adults from different social and cultural groups tried to highlight the needs, the desires and the expectations of those young adults, according to the usual standards. At the same time, we discussed with our subjects and their parents or guardians – and this is a major imperative for the psychologist’s activity, for teachers, but mainly for therapists.

Our results could be closely set up if we ensure the accomplishment of the following: working on feedbacks like counseling, short term dynamic psychotherapy, both for the teenagers living with their families and the ones living in orphanages.

Our experience in this field showed there was a great opening in the case of many adolescents in both groups towards the complex counseling process and short term dynamic psychotherapies. We noted the fact that self-esteem seemed to have greater values once the subjects were participating to psychotherapy sessions and neuroticism also seemed to reach lower values.

We offered some solutions in this respect as well as a plan for the psychotherapy sessions – which is now in progress.

V. Conclusions

Following the collection and statistical processing of the data, we have noted that:

- For self-acceptance: it is obvious that institutionalized adolescents have low scores for the scale we used to measure this variable. The low value of the score is between 0-110 and the average value they obtained, for the entire population, is 100.20. This indicates that the adolescents from the „Life and Light” Orphanage have low self-acceptance, under the average of the entire population, which is 129.

- As for neuroticism, it is obvious that institutionalized adolescents have a higher level of neuroticism than the average value of the scale we used. The high score of the scale is between 16-22 (meaning neuroticism) and the average they obtained is 17, above the average of the entire population, which is 11 (stability) – and this means the institutionalized adolescents are neurotic. Those from the second group (adolescents living with their families) had an average of 3.97, well under the average of the entire population (10.48, meaning stability), an indicator of the fact that they have stability.

The results of our study showed that, at least for the characteristics we measured, the institutionalized adolescents do not form a single population, but they represent distinct populations.

The same conclusion was reached in previous studies. In order to obtain better results for the real growth of self-esteem, it is more important for the individual to be successful, to have positive results in the domains he is interested in; conditions should be created to make them get involved in different activities; to separate children from adolescents (to create smaller groups or find foster families) and to work with them individually.

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