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The Child and the Formation of Self-Identity

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Abstract: The child builds himself through continuous searches and differentiations from others, which are not devoid of tensions, conflicts and frustrations. Physical changes, and especially psychological ones, in childhood do not occur linearly, but with oscillations, with periods of inequality, dependent on educational, social, and environmental factors. Following these changes, the personality presents itself for the first time with all its components as an organized and unitary ensemble, but still insufficiently stabilized. The concept of self-identity refers to the definition of one's own person, the sense of who one is and the questions: Who am I? What are my moral and religious values? What are my goals and aspirations?

Keywords: change; personality; childhood; environmental factors

1. Introduction

During the period of adolescence and puberty, the individual goes through a series of transformations in all aspects, and at the moment when he fails, based on the new bio-psycho-social equipment he has acquired, to move from the status of a child to that of an adult, a *crisis* appears, the adolescent permanently oscillating between adolescence and maturity, even if he is permanently oriented towards the adult world.

A. Munteanu (1998) considers that there are several dominant features that confer specificity to this stage of development: the individual's aspiration for independence, the interiorization of mental activity and individuation, which is structured once the specificities of sex and the impact caused by environmental influences are complete (Munteanu, 1998, pp. 217-219).

2. Concept and Terms

In terms of personality formation, the child finds himself faced with a permanent conflict between, on the one hand, behaviors imbued with childish attitudes, protection demands, anxiety specific to young ages in the face of more complex and demanding situations and, on the other hand, new attitudes and behaviors formed under the impulse of internal demands for autonomy or imposed by society.

It tries to more clearly outline the distances between what society demands from the young person and what he can offer, as well as between what the young person demands from society and life and what it

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can offer him. During adolescence, maturation is centered on identifying personal resources and building one's own identity and independence, beginning with detachment from parental tutelage.

The young person begins to discover his attitudes, abilities, physical and spiritual strengths, he begins to build his inner world of aspirations, interests and ideals. Under these conditions, attitudes and beliefs about the world and life develop, manifestations of creativity and sincerity take place, and parental motivational structures emerge (Șchiopu & Verza, 1981, p. 91).

The separation from childhood status is not felt with any tension only by the adolescent, but also by parents and educators, who are also obliged to change their system of communication and interaction with adolescents. Independence and autonomy are gradually gained, a process that has been equated with a second birth.

Bio-physical development, with changes in body structure and shape, which occurs in stages, determines fluctuations in behavior, from periods of hyperenergetic activity to periods of fatigue, from the desire for protection to unjustified assertions of independence, from outbursts of anger and rage to emotionality and a great need for affection, from the desire for school and social affirmation to deviant behavior.

The psyche has a kaleidoscopic character, which will provide the raw material necessary for the reconstruction of the personality. The process of consolidation and differentiation of the inner self and the social self, a process that starts in childhood, becomes alert in puberty, but knows the authentic eruption in adolescence. The process of consolidation and differentiation of the inner self and the social self, a process that begins in childhood, becomes alert in puberty, but experiences its true blossoming in adolescence.

Self-awareness records a remarkable qualitative leap, due to the individual's frequent reflections on his own inner self. He explores himself as the time of the conflict demonstrates the difficulties related to knowing their hidden resources better (Pavelcu, 1969, p. 48).

The process of *crystallization of the self-image* resembles the pulsation of a heart, which always functions between polarization and depolarization (Pavelcu, 1974, p. 73). The phenomenon involves many facets: the identification of the corporeal self, the spiritual self, and the social self.

Regarding the corporeal self, in order to familiarize himself with his new anatomical entity, the adolescent's dialogues with his body are particularly frequent, oscillating between satisfaction and virulent criticism. The room cleaning for clothes and hair becomes obsessive. Discretion is totally abolished: clothing ensembles become grotesque, the obligatory haircut is at odds with the standards of good sense, gestures are excessive in the extreme, using eccentricities to shock.

In addition to the terrible clothing and behavior, the range of manifestations also subordinates its modalities of sublimation through art and literature, but also criminal acts (running away from home, theft, rape, vagrancy, etc.).

As for the formation of the spiritual self, this refers to the individual's ability to correctly evaluate their activity, as well as the level of knowledge and attitudes they possess.

Social identity means the individual's social reputation and the awareness of the statuses and roles that he or she currently holds, or those that he or she projects in the future. The self constitutes the instinctual part of the personality, containing unconscious elements both innate and acquired through repression, being the main core of psychic energy. Some authors emphasize the role of the environment, showing that the self is constructed in the relational context of cultural, economic, and political

macroenvironments, as well as of microenvironments created by interpersonal communication, the media, and current routine interactions (Modrea, 2006, p. 86).

Self-esteem should be understood as a positive attitude towards oneself. While feelings about oneself fluctuate, to a certain extent, depending on the situations one finds oneself in, self-esteem remains stable. Those who had high self-esteem in childhood seem to manifest it the same way in adolescence. The greatest fluctuations in self-image are in the transition interval from preadolescence to adolescence and less between early adolescence and middle and late adolescence (Hagborg, 1993, pp. 132-136).

3. Analysis

Self-esteem is the result of estimating one's own value. It manifests itself as a satisfaction or insatisfaction to which man associates images of himself consciously or not (Iacob, Boncu & Lungu, 2000, p. 102). Self-esteem refers to the evaluation of one's own self, this evaluation resulting from self-acceptance and self-respect, either absolutely or in comparison with others. Although it may change from situation to situation, there is a stable tendency for everyone to evaluate themselves, which functions as a personality trait.

In Adriane Băban's opinion, self-esteem is closely linked to self-image, being a fundamental dimension for any human being, regardless of the variables. This refers to the way a person evaluates themselves and compares them to their own expectations or to other people. Self-esteem is the evaluative and affective dimension of self-image (Băban, 2001, p. 72).

Self-esteem has a staged development, depending on age, just like self-image. For example, preschoolers only mention general characteristics about themselves: age, gender, height, etc.

At 7-8 years old, self-esteem begins to consolidate, but it is still anchored in physical characteristics and is situational. At this age, it also has selective globality. In adolescence, globality is accentuated and shifts to stable internal traits.

An achievement, even exceptional in the eyes of others, but little valued by the person in question, does not automatically equal or compensate for weaker, but intensely desired, performance (Iacob, Boncu & Lungu, 2000, p. 103).

Adults are important role models, their role in building self-esteem in children being very large. Sometimes, children are scared by their own emotions, when these are intense. If these emotions are invalidated by the adult, then the child may develop low self-esteem, have inappropriate behaviors, and be unable to differentiate between positive and negative emotions. To avoid this situation, it is necessary for the adult to help the child appropriately express these negative emotions, as well as to understand them (Băban, 2001, p. 79).

Self-esteem is formed, like self-image, by taking on attributes issued by parents, the values that the student receives from the study group, comparison with peers, and the roles that the student performs and that confer prestige or disgrace him (Farcaş, 2004, p. 56).

Self-esteem research can be closely correlated with those of self-awareness, of which it is an important component. Although researchers are looking for tools to scientifically measure and evaluate the self-esteem of children under 8 years old, this has not yet been possible.

However, it has been observed that around the age of 3-4 years, concern for social acceptance begins, this concern being closely related to self-esteem. However, to increase self-esteem, autonomy from parents is necessary.

Ion Al. Dumitru considers that the breast is a relatively stable psychic structure that is formed in the ontogenesis of the individual within and through the processes of socialization and education. In the same author's opinion, the self consists of a constellation of attitudes of the person towards himself and towards others, whose relative stability confers consistency and coherence of the self. The complexity of the soul, the multitude of its aspects, explains the flexible adaptation to its environment, and consequently, the optimal functionality of the personality (Dumitru, 2008, p. 81).

C. Rogers considers the concept of self to be our image of who we are, what we want to be, and what we would like to be. N. Hayes and S. Orrell state that self is the idea that an individual has of themselves. R. Iluț considers the concept of self as the central mental schema of the self, its essence or identity, the way we categorize ourselves, external behaviors and internal states, while E. Alpay defines it as the sum of all mental and physical characteristics, perceived and desired by the person, as well as their value as and how much it is perceived by the person. Self-concept is a term that encompasses, in a dynamic ensemble, the self-image, the ideal self, and the self-esteem of the individual (Modrea, 2006, p. 88).

Self-identity represents the core of personality, and self-image, as an element of self-identity, begins to form at the moment when the adolescent becomes aware of his or her own attitudes and, in turn, his or her own behavior.

The self makes progress in adolescence in three areas: physical, spiritual, and social.

The corporeal self represents the main component of the adolescent's self-image, but is chosen because it is particularly valued in interpersonal relationships with the opposite sex. In relation to physical breasts, some aspects related to sexual identity intensify during adolescence. It is about, first of all, the consolidation and, at the same time, the broadening of behaviors that express belonging to the sex.

Conger and Peterson have emphasized that an important part of self-identity is the awareness and acceptance of one's biological nature. Sexual identity is early. As early as three years old, children are concerned about the real differences between boys and girls. Pubertal transformations deepen the differences between boys and girls and bring the problem of sexual identity back into the field of consciousness.

The corporeal self also takes into consideration one's own body, clothing, family, circle of friends, and the material goods one possesses. During this period, there is an increase in concern for physical appearance and in this sense, disharmonious physical development can have the effect of the appearance of an inferiority complex that is expressed in awkwardness, passivity, shyness, etc.

Spirituality refers to the awareness of one's own activity, to the need for knowledge, for culture. Thus, the adolescent is interested in his intellectual level, his qualities and attitudes, and wants to overcome his shortcomings. Adolescents are interested in their spiritual qualities as well as their physical ones, seeking opportunities to discover and evaluate them. They are particularly interested in their intelligence and the degree of culture they have acquired and want these to be noticed by others.

A primordial place in the field of interests regarding one's own personality traits is occupied by those traits that have great significance in relationships with friends and colleagues, such as honesty, sincerity, trust, team spirit, empathy, etc.

There are children who are actively involved in school activities, interested in academic success and achieving first place in the class. In relation to defects, they manifest active attitudes, especially if they realize that they can remove them.

There are also children who show concern for developing characteristics that are considered qualities only by a narrow group and which, from the point of view of social values, should be restrained.

Social self. The transition from preadolescence to adolescence leads to the stabilization and consolidation of the social self and its integration into a more unified and clearer self-image. It is worth remembering that social self consists of the reputation and recognition of a particular identity, the consideration that a person obtains in his environment (Șchiopu, Verza, 1981, p. 187). An important role belongs to the group which, through its requirements, helps the young person to become aware of and demonstrate his qualities in practical activities; in this way, the young person carries the status of a member of the group.

The child builds a place for himself within the group, the attitudes of others towards him are clear, he feels the sympathy of some and the resentment of others, he enjoys the reputation and is referred to for something specific by those in the stable group he has built.

Therefore, everyone goes through a valuable social experience together, within the group, regarding the stabilization and consolidation of the social self. This, in turn, supports the overall unity of the self-image and makes it a more conducive factor for all kinds of adaptations that the child attempts.

The social self is also defined within other social relationships, such as those within the family or those in educational institutions, but these will not fully emphasize the influences of the peer group.

The three planes of the self represent subjective elements with important roles in initiating, stimulating and sustaining attitudes and behaviors, in engaging in activities and relationships, and in the formation and development of personality.

The confrontation of what the young person believes and feels with what others believe and feel gives rise to self-awareness. The need for socialization, status, esteem, affiliation, the desire to utilize one's mental and physical abilities are fully satisfied by the group (Bonchiș, 2000, p. 169).

After the identification of the personal self, self-affirmation is quite high, with periods of crisis being overcome thanks to affection and communication between the child and the family.

In relationships with parents, affective states can be tense as a result of resentment and guilt, but the desire to find positive attitudinal availability remains. With all the instabilities, the child feels the need for affection and protection from his parents, along with the perception of a slight Oedipus complex and the expressed desire for independence. Towards the opposite sex, he manifests feelings and emotions of sympathy and love, which brings him immense pleasure and gives him intense psychological comfort. Often, the feeling of love is idyllic and filled with fantastic images. Affective resonance broadens through the presence and respect of situations that provoke emotions of satisfaction, sadness, revulsion, shame, envy, jealousy, shame, horror, anger, exaltation, pleasure, aversion, happiness, joy, pride, tenderness, etc.

The controversial spirit takes on corrosive accents, which causes a series of distortions in the atmosphere. The first recipient of this virulence is the family, since it exercises the oldest and most persistent guardianship. Consequently, relationships are tense. Even the teacher does not shy away from this criticism at this age: the defects, the small mistakes are accounted for with maximum perseverance in order to be transformed into demolishing arguments for his authority.

In terms of personality, the child increasingly develops states of acceptance and restraint, in relation to adults, in which moral and value judgments are subject to internal demands and negative attitudes towards compromises. Added to this are the cultural distances between children and parents, due not

only to the conditions of natural development of knowledge and changes in the cultural status of youth, but also to the contemporary evolution of new fields, which involve unprecedented activities of great social significance.

The adaptation is making notable progress, on several hierarchical levels: satisfying biological needs, expanding moral coherence, social relationships, social attachment, rules and behaviors morally correct.

Regarding the level of social relationships, we are witnessing a considerable expansion and differentiation of the network of interpersonal relationships that the individual engages in during this period.

General social adaptation (including school) is clearly improving. The aim is to assimilate both civilized and moral lifestyles. The adolescent generally possesses the alphabet of civilized communication, but uses it sparingly when supervised.

In searching for answers to these questions about self-identity, the child needs a standard to which to compare himself. This standard is constituted by the peer group, because the young person is not satisfied with what he thinks about himself and needs someone else to confirm his self-perception. Group values represent the criteria by which one's actions and experiences are compared with those of others. From the peer group, adolescents receive feedback about their abilities. In this context, they learn whether what they do is better or worse than what their equals do.

In the process of being constituted, self-identity is shared by many sub-identities: family, cultural-social, occupational, axiological. During this period, cultural-social and axiological sub-identities are in full development and occupy a central place in comparison with family sub-identity which is beginning to enter a critical situation (Șchiopu & Verza, 1989, p. 103).

D.C. Dunphy argues that once a child reaches the age of 12, he or she feels the need to be resocialized because the values he or she has assimilated through identification with his or her parents no longer have the same relevance and no longer occupy the same place in a changing society.

The tendency of young people to take part in group life is due to the fact that family life becomes insufficient to ensure optimal development and social maturation, and the roles learned in the family no longer constitute a sufficient source for the development of identity and for fulfilment in social life. Thus, one of the most important functions of the group is providing information about what is happening in family life (Muuss, 1990, p. 54).

For Havighurst, the *developmental task* appears in a specific period in the individual's life, the achievements and successes achieved constituting the prerequisite for achieving success and future tasks, while failures lead to an increase in the degree of difficulty in achieving goals, to the appearance of a feeling of dissatisfaction, and to social disapproval.

In this sense, the author argues that every young person must accomplish *ten developmental tasks:*

- obtaining a male or female social role;
- engaging in new and more mature relationships with those of the same age and of both sexes;
- confirmation of the proper appearance;
- gaining emotional independence from parents;
- obtaining economic independence;
- choosing and preparing for a certain occupation;

- preparation for marriage and family life;
- development of intellectual skills and the necessary skills in social life;
- acquiring responsible social behavior;
- assimilation of a set of values and an ethical system to guide behavior (Muuss, 1990).

4. Conclusions

The groups maintain the tension that arises between parental dependence and parental control over children; likewise, peer groups reveal new social learnings that are no longer relevant in the family environment and always restructure the adolescent's beliefs and value system.

The child builds himself through continuous searches and differentiations from others, which are not devoid of tensions, conflicts and frustrations. Physical changes, and especially psychological ones, in childhood do not occur linearly, but with oscillations, with periods of inequality, dependent on educational, social, and environmental factors. Following these changes, the personality presents itself for the first time with all its components as an organized and unitary ensemble, but still insufficiently stabilized.

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