The role of the family in building adolescents’ self-esteem

* Florentin-Remus Mogonea, Florentina Mogonea

*a University of Craiova, 13 A.I. Cuza, Craiova 200585, Romania
b University of Craiova, 13 A.I. Cuza, Craiova 200585, Romania

Abstract

This empirical research analyses the role of the family in building adolescents’ self-esteem. We have used two questionnaires (to establish parental styles; to identify the level of self-esteem), for the interpretation of which we have used the Pearson correlation coefficient and the Z test. Within the experiment, we have carried out counselling activities with the parents of the subjects from the experimental sample. The results have confirmed a relationship between the authoritative style and positive self-esteem, which functioned in the case of parents’ counselling in what it concerns the positive self-esteem and the improvement of students’ school results.

Keywords: self-esteem, self-image, parental style, adolescence

1. Introduction

The self-esteem is a concept in relation with the self-image and self-conscience concepts. The attempts to define self-esteem are numerous, most of them admitting that it represents the way in which each person assesses oneself in relation to the group belonging to, the value attributed to oneself, the positive or negative attitude towards oneself as well as the level of satisfaction that a person has with oneself (Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger & Vohs, 2003; Mogonea, 2010). What distinguishes this concept from other similar concepts is the assessing component (Davis-Hean, Sandler, 2001; Băban, 2003).

* Florentin-Remus Mogonea. Tel.: +4-025-142-2567; fax: +4-025-142-2567.
E-mail address: fmogonea@yahoo.com
There is a global, general self-esteem consisting of internal factors (emotions, genetic, personality traits) and external ones (events, family, career etc.). Some authors distinguish between trait self-esteem – this being a value stable in time, as it is a part of the personality and the state self-esteem, which is much more labile – being affected and influenced by events, situations, emotions (Gilovich, Keltner & Nisbett, 2006; Lightfoot, Cole & Cole, 2009; Driscoll, 2013). The formation of self-esteem implies a long process, being correlated with the formation of one’s self-image and self-conscience. Its evolution in time involves also downfall periods especially during transition periods from one stage to another, from one status to another, as it is the case for instance, in adolescence (due to the psycho-somatic changes) or grand age, as a consequence of the change in status, retirement and the change in tasks and responsibilities (Orth, Trzesniewski & Robins, 2010).

The idea according to which success, irrespective of the activity field and its form is correlated with the existence of a positive self-esteem is not new. Numerous studies (Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger & Vohs, 2003; Crocker, Brook, Niiya & Villacorta, 2006) underline this link. In forming a positive self-esteem, the child’s experiences during childhood play a significant importance alongside the parents’ and educators’ attitude towards himself.

The parental styles representing the interaction between parent and child were classified for the first time by Baumrind (in Martinez, Garcia, 2007; Huver, Otten, de Vries & Engels, 2009; Alsheikh, Parameswaran & Elhoweris, 2010; Nixon & Halpenny, 2010; Preethi & Rosa, 2012), in four categories resulting from the interaction of two axes: the one representing affection (from warmth to coldness, distance) and the one representing the absolute demands (from the smallest one to the greatest one): authoritarian (characterized by lack of affection and high, absolutistic exigencies); authoritative (characterized by great affection, but also high demands); permissive (strong affection and low demands); sloppy (low affection and low demands). There are studies in the field literature underlining that the role of the family environment is essential in the formation of personality especially in the first childhood (Gottfried & Gottfried, Bathurst, 1995; Talib, Mohamad & Mamat, 2011).

The period of adolescence is important for the process of self-esteem formation. The formation of self-esteem can be stimulated, encourages both by parents and teachers. The level of self-esteem is mirrored in the adolescent’s attitude and behavior, both at home and at school. Hence, adolescents with a high level of self-esteem have the following characteristics: (Lavoie, 2012): they are capable of influencing positively the opinion and behavior of others; they tackle new situations positively and confidently; they have a high level of tolerance towards frustration; they accept easily responsibilities; they assess correctly situations; they communicate positive feelings about themselves; they succeed in having a good self-control and the belief that the things they are undergoing are the result of their own behavior and actions.

2. Objectives and hypotheses

The aim of the research was: to stimulate the shaping of a positive self-esteem, by counselling parents, in relation to their parenting styles. The objectives of the research were: Identify the parental styles of the parents of the adolescent pupils; Know the level of the adolescents’ self-esteem; Establish connections between parental styles and adolescents’ self-esteem; Implement counseling measures for parents in order to improve the self-esteem of their children (lectures with parents, extra-curricular activities, home visits, individual discussions); Establish a relation between the adolescents’ self-esteem and their school results.

Our research was carried out during a school year, 2012-2013, and was based on a general hypothesis about the existence of a close relation between the parental educative styles and the low or high level of self-esteem of the teenagers, with direct implications in their school results. On the basis of the general hypothesis, we have shaped two means of action, seen as specific hypotheses: a) counselling the students’ parents on the ways to stimulate the teenagers’ self-esteem improves the students’ self-esteem; b) There is a dependence relation between the improvement of self-esteem and school results.

3. Method

Participants - The sample of subjects was made up of 112 teenager students and 112 parents (from the family of each student, there was selected one of the parents or the legal representatives). Regarding the qualitative dimension
of the sample, we have used the class-sample because they are naturally made up, existing before the research, grouped according to the age criterion and with a stable homogenous inter-relational level. In order to make the investigation accurate, we have selected just teenager students which study in the same profile, from different schools and are between 16 to 18 years old (11th form). From the 112 subjects, 54 made up the experimental group and 58 the control group, both in the case of the students and their parents. The sample of parents was more heterogeneous from the perspective of the criteria referring to age, occupation, level of training, living standard and socio-economic level, They were informed with the aim and the objectives at the beginning of the research and they were asked to give their consent for the investigation, both for the students’ implication in the research and for their availability to participate.

Procedure and instruments - For this research, we used a questionnaire with 10 items adjusted to the Rosenberg scale (Driscoll, 2013), in order to identify the level of self-esteem among adolescent pupils and a questionnaire to identify parental styles (adjustment to Robinson, Mandleco, Olsen & Hart, 1995).

The 10 items of Rosenberg scale highlight the attitude of each subject in relation to the self, about different aspects of their personality: the value they give themselves (e.g. “I feel I am a valuable person, at least as valuable as the others” – item 1), in relation to the self and comparing to the others, the qualities they think they have (e.g. “I feel I have a number of qualities” – item 2), the defects (e.g. “I generally tend to think of myself as being a failure” – item 3), the satisfaction of the self (e.g. “I generally feel pleased with myself” – item 7), the feelings of failure versus success (e.g. “I am able to do things as well as the other do” – item 4), usefulness versus uselessness (e.g. “I surely feel useless sometimes” – item 9; “I sometimes feel I am not good at all” – item 10). The subjects gave value, on a scale from 1 to 4, to each item (1 – very little, 2 – little, 3 – much, 4 – very much), obtaining the following value ranges: 1–10 – very little self-esteem, 11–20 – little self-esteem, 21–30 - high self-esteem, 31-40 – very high self-esteem.

The questionnaire applied to the parents, to identify the parental styles, was made up of a series of statements about the way they relate to their children and their attitude towards their children’s needs. They gave values ranging from 1 to 6 (1-never, 6-always). Example of item from the authoritative style: “I offer my child comfort and understanding when he is upset” – item 7; “I praise my child” – item 8. For the authoritarian style: “I punish my child, taking away his privileges” – item 2; “I remind my child that I am his parent” – item 12; For the permissive style: “I find it difficult to discipline my child” – item 1; “I ignore my child’ bad behaviour”; For the authoritative and authoritarian styles, the subjects gave values to 13 items, while for the permissive one – 4 items. The score was counted by dividing the total number obtained to the number of items for each style.

We have also used the psycho-pedagogical experiment, within which we made formative activities, consisting of counselling the students’ parents from the experimental group, in order to improve their children’s self-esteem. The activities done with the parents were: organizing certain lectures, on different themes, especially on the way in which to inter-relate with the teenagers (e.g. “The importance of shaping the image of self-esteem in the adolescence”, “Good practice guide on the shaping of a positive self-esteem of the teenagers”), extra-curricular activities (e.g. organizing a “School for parents”).

4. Results

Following the application of work instruments to the samples of subjects involved in the research, we obtained a series of results confirming the hypotheses of our research. The results obtained after applying the questionnaire to identify the parental styles, for the 112 subjects, highlighted the fact that 22.1% of the parents have the authoritarian style, 49.6% - the authoritative and 28.3% – the permissive style. On what it concerns the level of the teenagers self-esteem, 8.1% have a very low self-esteem, 20.5% - low self-esteem; 23.2% of the teenagers have high self-esteem and 48.2% – have a very high self-esteem. In order to establish the connection between parental styles and the adolescents’ self-esteem, we used the Pearson correlation coefficient, the results being shown in table no.1 (**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level; *. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parental styles</th>
<th>High self-esteem</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 Results of the Pearson correlation coefficient.
The values of the Pearson correlation coefficient have revealed the fact that, the only style that associates with a positive self-esteem is the authoritative one, the value of $r (=0.578)$ being significant at a significance threshold of 0.01. Instead, in comparison with the authoritative style, the permissive one has a contrary effect. The results obtained confirm the basic hypothesis of the research, according to which affection, parents’ emotional closeness, but also the justified exigency create a positive self-esteem for children. About the particular hypotheses, according to which parents’ counselling on the stimulation of the teenagers’ self-esteem determines its increase and the reflection of the self-esteem’s improvement can be notice in the improvement of the school results. We compared the school results of the students; the comparisons were done both between the samples (at a certain moment of the research, meaning in the post-test), and inside the sample (by comparing the results of the experimental sample from the two different moments: post-test and pre-test). To establish the statistical relevance of the difference between these results, we used the $Z$ test. The findings are presented in table 2 and table 3:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Deviance ($\sigma^2$)</th>
<th>Value of $Z$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experimental</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>2.13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>8.21</td>
<td>2.51</td>
<td>5.28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Deviance ($\sigma^2$)</th>
<th>Value of $Z$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-test</td>
<td>6.98</td>
<td>2.24</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-test</td>
<td>8.21</td>
<td>2.64</td>
<td>5.12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. Conclusions

Through this study we have aimed at analyzing the problems of the relation between the parental, educational styles and the formation of self-esteem, on a group of subjects, consisting of high school pupils, adolescents, caught during an important and also difficult period (vital for some) of the formation and modeling of their personality.

The results have confirmed the supposed relationship between the parental styles and the level of self-esteem, namely, the high self-esteem in the case of the authoritative style and the low self-esteem in the case of the permissive one. In other words, adolescents express their need for both affection and closeness from their parents, but also exigency and high standards. By contrast, parents’ indifference determines a lack of self-trust among adolescents, an insufficient motivation and involvement in carrying out tasks as well as a low responsibility level.

Although parental styles, like any other type of style (didactical, managerial, academic, cognitive etc.) cannot suffer essential changes, nevertheless, through counseling activities of parents, regarding the exact ways of stimulating the formation of a positive self-esteem among children, we managed to determine an improvement for those subjects whose level of self-esteem was low in the beginning of the research. Taking into consideration the fact that through the investigations done, the hypotheses have been confirmed, we find it necessary to re-test them at certain moment, on the same group of subject (both the teenagers and their parents), in order to monitor the effects and the results that have been established.

References


