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Marks of social and psychological identity of Romanian students

Natalia Burtoiu\textsuperscript{a}, Andreea Arsene\textsuperscript{a}, Marinela Tanase\textsuperscript{a,}\textsuperscript{*}

\textsuperscript{a}University of Pitesti, University of Pitesti, University of Pitesti

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine the personal factors that influence role-identity formation of students and its correlation with interpersonal identity and social identity and to emphasize the types of social identity manifested among young students. Young students are influenced not only by the desire for personal development but also the whole social context in which they activate as individuals. Because an individual brings his personal characteristics in a particular social context, there is a pressure on the individual components coming from the physical and social context. Pressures may take the form of: attitudes, values and stereotypes expressed by attributes of others. © 2012 Published by Elsevier B.V. Selection and/or peer-review under responsibility of PSIWORLD2011

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1. Introduction

We will place our investigational approach on Romanian students’ identity in the general frame defined by the relationship personal – social identity, including here the particularities that define each, but also the permanent and inherent interconnections between these two types of identity. The social identity, the role and the personal identity are considered to be the base on which the self constitutes and not mutually exclusive. The integration of the three bases of identity – personal, role and social – is a research direction that remains open, and this perspective can lead us to a much more complex understanding of the whole process of construction and reconstruction of the identity (Boneu, Sulea, C. 2007).

\textsuperscript{*} Corresponding author. Tel.:+4072 333 1641; fax:+40 248 220 352.

E-mail address: natalia_burtoiu2002@yahoo.com.
The basis of this paper is the quantitative and qualitative research. For this purpose, to identify the markers that define the underlying identity of young Romanian students, we have chosen to apply the test – Twenty Statement Test of Self-Attitudes in the Romanian academic environment.

The baseline study of the work is done by the author in 2010-2011, on a sample of 515 students, which made their studies in nine institutions of higher education across the country: Bucharest University, Polytechnic University of Bucharest, Bucharest Military Technical Academy, Ovidius University of Constanța, Pitești University, Transylvania University of Brașov, West University of Timișoara, Ștefan cel Mare University of Suceava, Petre Andrei University of Iași. The questioned subjects are Romanian students, enrolled in undergraduate (years I-III), with daily rates of some faculties and different specializations: Letters, Foreign Languages, Business Administration, Public Administration, Sociology, Psychology, Pedagogy, Special Psycho-pedagogy, Journalism, History, International Relations, Polytechnic, Theology, Social Assistance, Electronic Systems and Military Intelligence, Mechatronics and Embedded Systems Munitions. This broad spectrum of institutions of higher education and specializations offered us a broad representation of different views of self-identification of young Romanian students, allowing the issuance of judgments and conclusions as a generalization on the young students in Romania, in general, even if the number of respondents appears to be reduced to the total number of Romanian students.

Starting from the diversity of the interviewed students and their opinions and visions on their personal identity, this study intends to develop an integrative approach, which will capture the common and essential characteristics that define the Romanian student.

2. The purpose of study and objectives

Keeping us in the general framework described, the objectives of our research aim to: identify the social groups to which the Romanian students relate to and the identity roles they assume; to identify the attachment level to the student role identity of the sample investigated, personal profiling and axiological hierarchy of values and common meanings assumed in relation to the role identity of the student; determining the factors that condition the formation of the role identity of the students and its interconnection with the personal and social identity; identifying the self perceptions and other people’s perceptions through the assumed roles and statuses (Tajfel, 1982).

The hypotheses of the research were: in defining the role identity, the students find themselves in the process of interconnecting the personal with the social identity; the student role identity prevails in the hierarchy identity of respondents; the level of adopting the role of student identity varies by area of residence and education profile; individuals experience a much more emotional affiliation to a social group of students and tend to emphasize more this membership, students differ both in age group and as a professional group, which conveys a specific image.

The average age of the 515 students is 20.10 years. Of these, 61.35% are boys (316) and 38.64% are girls (199). By area of residence, the sample of questioned students is as it follows: 22.72% of subjects come from rural areas and 77.28% come from urban areas.

1. Students define themselves primarily by personality traits, the states and behaviors related to their personal identity, independent of the social identity. The main tendency of the interviewed subjects (86.37 %) was to highlight the positive attributes, only 13.63% of the subjects also mentioned negative attributes that characterised them.

2. The items related to social self, social statuses and roles play an important role in shaping the students’ self. The main specification of the student role was predictable to some extent, while the test was applied in the university environment. Even given that it was a different context (not a lesson or any assessment), the role of student was cited most frequently, appearing in 331 (of 515) of cases.
3. Students consider relationships with others to be relevant to their self-identity. Numerous responses with direct reference to social relations with others have led us to group them in a separate category. Although directly related to social identity, these responses highlight several key characteristics of the relationships that are considered important to the respondents when they define themselves.

4. The physical self does not stand out in students’ identity description. Only a small part of the interviewed subjects have referred to their age (15 persons), to their name (132 persons), their physical traits (such as tall/short, thin/fat, beautiful/ugly etc.) being relevant to the self-definition of 195 subjects. This result becomes very interesting to study in the future, considering that numerous identity researchers support the importance that young people give to their physical appearance as a central element of self-definition. Thus, the exterior look seems to prevail compared to being identified by their age and name, but it does not stand out as one of the prominent identity characteristics of the Romanian students.

5. Students tend to hide behind general answers and behind general truths in order to avoid self-disclosure. Very general answers appear, on the one hand, in the first three answers, respondents then gradually starting to self-disclose (98 questionnaires). On the other hand, there are many cases where, although the initial responses are open, the subject starts to close gradually and finally to give general answers (180 questionnaires).

The study has led to the analysis of those groups students value and that they belong to. The data have established that using the status of student and educational institution in self-identification is often used by subjects, so that in 7 of 10 cases this was expressed as: “I am a student at ....”. The respondents’ tendency of self-identification with the role of student identity is thus strong, noting that they are students -54.4%, in a certain year of study / university. These data confirm the hypothesis, according to which young people understand and assume the status of student, tending to describe themselves in terms of it. Only after having identified themselves socially, do students show their personal traits such as: friendly - 9.9%, optimistic - 7.7%, honest - 6.0%, communicative - 5.7%. Also, students often characterize their attitude towards themselves rather through positive than negative personality traits, which is less common among young people.

The concern for physical appearance and the importance that students attach to it occupies a self-definition environment of their own. References to physical appearance appear in 37.87% of the subjects interviewed, as a way of avoiding disclosure of profound aspects of the personality of the person who completed the questionnaire.

3. Conclusions

Students self analyze and self interpret as a physical reality, in term of their exterior appearance associated with the respective judgment values. It’s interesting to notice that students rarely identify themselves with big social groups, as work groups, groups that suppose assuming certain social responsibilities. The only group of this nature that students identify with is that of the citizens. Most of the interviewed students still feel teenagers, which makes them not willing to identify with the role of the adult or to assume an adult’s responsibilities. They depend on their family, especially on their parents, even though most of the times they live in another city and they prove to have a different understanding of their relationships with the family compared to that of the teenage period. These relationships become now more valued, being described as close and cooperative, due exactly to the fact that the student is in a stage of transition towards the adult stage and that he/she perceives the family as a support they can rely on and not as a factor that restricts their freedom of expressing their own values, behaviors and attitudes.

The axiological system of young students is a “puzzle” of values, where the values of open society appear to be dominant (the democratic society, promoting individualism), such as self-esteem, wisdom, intelligence, logical thinking, independence in action, freedom of opinion and professional competence.
At the bottom of axiological hierarchy are specific values of the closed society (which supports the order, discipline and collectivism), represented by: selflessness, fellowship, sociability, understanding others, listening and respecting others. In the construction of personal identity the young people include high moral values such as honesty, sincerity, truth. Also, young students attributed their own identity values of intelligence, rationality, independence, courage and the strength to express their views.

Family (73%) and friends (60%) are important values for young Romanian students. The analysis of test results from the application with reference to student groups they identify with, establishes thus a strong identification with the group of young students, family and friends group and a weak identification with the group of citizens. The intensity of the given identities is conditioned by: the frequency of students’ relationships with these groups, by the community interests and common aspirations, etc.

Romanian students have a low interest in social, communitarian values, but they manifest a paradoxical tendency of attachment for sociability, compassion and of empathy with the people around them, on the one hand, and they assert their individualism, on the other hand. The affirmation of their individualism is pregnant, sometimes tending towards egocentrism and non-acceptance of imposing the social rules. Young students feel the need for self-accomplishment and prestige (both personal and social), for recognition and dignity. At the same time, they want to assume responsibilities.

The results of the study determine us to state that the social-political situation from our country is reflected directly in the lack of ethics of the students across the country. Identifying with the society as a whole is a less characteristic fact for students, which leads to the limitation of their visions on the future, focusing more on the problems than on the solutions. The specific dimensions of defining identity of the Romanian students can be summarized as it follows: the accumulation (assimilation) of information, social spontaneous relations, their own culture that comes mostly from the assertion of their generation, consumption, the desire to know as much as possible, the involvement in the present, the poor assuming of social roles, family attachment, selective attitude in accepting some of the family values, a certain immaturity though, biologically speaking, they are mature.

Social identity, role and personal identity are considered bases on which constitutes the self. The integration of the three bases of identity - personal and social role - is a research direction that remains open, and this perspective can lead to a more complex understanding of the process of identity construction and reconstruction.

An individual’s multiple identities cover several main areas: the influence of gender in identity formation, identity development throughout life (with emphasis on adult age) and influences of family factors on identity development in adolescence.

Students have their own identity determination, on the one hand a typical age range, and on the other hand as a group that brings together young people from all walks of life. Students define themselves primarily through personality traits, the states and behaviors related to personal identity, independent of social identity.

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