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Psychological Variables Involved in Social Behavior

Mihaela PĂIȘI LĂZĂRESCU¹

Abstract

The rational thinking with moral character, like the intellectual one, go through stages of development, the two processes being inseparable. The stages must be crossed in succession, as each of them is based on previously developed reasoning. Development of moral reasoning differs from person to person and it is not always supporting a moral behavior. In the investigation of the level of internalization of moral rules and norms by adolescents were considered as variables the chronological age, intellectual level, gender, residence and personality traits and were used as methods: Personality Questionnaire HSPQ -14 PF - (to identify the personality factors), Raven Progressive Matrices (for setting IQ) and a situational questionnaire developed by us in which we identified manifestations of moral character among adolescents at this specific age of their life. The analysis of moral behavior had the morality of obedience and submission guidelines, good relations morality, public order and morality duty and contractual morality (civic engagement). The research results reveal correlations that might exist between chronological age phenomenon of moral and intellectual level, sex, residence and certain personality factors. Our research concluded the fact that at the adolescents the level of moral reasoning is higher than that of moral behavior, in the meaning that even knows how it should proceed teen act differently, being influenced by emotions, personality traits, socio - cultural behaviors earlier etc.

Keywords: moral autonomy, fear of punishment; respect, moral duty, contractual morality, moral nonconformity.

The children and youngsters nowadays should learn to adapt to the informational boom of tomorrow, to a type of society where computer prevails in all fields of activity, where the exploration of outer space becomes a necessity, where social conflicts are more and more numerous and profound, to a world where certainty would have disappeared; to a world marked by the absence of a reference point or too heavily marked by false landmarks, a world where the line between lies and truth, good and bad is becoming thinner, more slippery.

The system of moral values represents an *axiological* place, which is as necessary as other horizons that the human being needs. By means of a set

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of norms, moral and ethics *command* and *recommend* the human behaviour. Due to the inner system of moral values, human behaviour gains direction and a profoundly human significance – “*morality shapes and orders the biological manifestations, balancing them, placing them in a great measure under the sign of permissions or interdictions*” (Grigoras, 1982).

In what concerns our study of the moral phenomenon during adolescence, we have started from the ideas of M. Ralea, that we consider to be revealing: “*the moral act is never direct and automatic; the involvement of the affective – motivational component and the presence of more obligations complicates the moral decision and, without moral conflict there can be no moral development*” (Ralea, 1957, pp.146).

The specific nature of moral behaviour can be explained only through the ordering of the native individual frames of mind by the socio-cultural factors. The moral autonomy and not the moral non-conformism define, eventually, one’s moral personality.

Objectives of the Research:

- Identification of the dynamics in interiorizing the moral values in teenagers, by studying the moral attitudes and moral considerations/assessments;
- Identification of links between personality variables and moral attitudes in teenagers;
- Giving possible psychological reasons regarding the moral behaviour of teenagers, in different life circumstances.

Hypothesis:

We presume that, during adolescence, the interiorization of moral norms and rules viewing discipline and politeness is conditioned by the chronological age, intellectual level, sex, residential environment and personality traits.

The panel of subjects has been composed of teenagers – high-school students – and has been established with *the stratified sampling* method. In order to establish the final panel, we have classified the reference population/group according to relevant criteria that make the object of our work (chronological age, sex and residential environment), and then we obtained the final panel with the simple, randomized sampling method.

The methodology that we applied has been composed of the Personality Questionnaire HSPQ -14 PF - (for the identification of personality factors), the Raven Progressive Matrices (to establish the IQ) and a trial that we

elaborated, which we applied to investigate the moral manifestations among teenagers.

In drawing up this trial method we thought about both *the complexity of moral expressions*, where the attitudes and appraisals of moral kind are prevailing, and about the fact that there is *a great level of subjectivity* in expressing and assessing them.

We also took into consideration the fact that an exhaustive investigation of this matter becomes/is rather impossible in a singular research.

The first stage in our study has the shape of some empirical observations on the moral behaviour in teenagers, of moral attitudes and motivations that characterize their own behaviour or the one of their colleagues and other persons these teenagers relate with. During my teaching activity with teenager students I also had the opportunity to organize many debates and discussions that referred to their moral behaviour.

The second stage has been the identification of actual matters/issues that contribute to achieving a dynamics of interiorizing moral values in the teenager and of the becoming of moral personality. If personality is the key factor allowing us to anticipate an individual's reactions in a given context, then the investigation of moral attitudes allows us to draw up that person's moral profile.

Discipline and politeness have been the two moral values that we investigated, taking into account the stadial theory of moral development, proposed by J. Piaget (Piaget,1980) and continued by L. Kohlberg (Kohlberg, 1981), where they ascertain that for each stage there are some benchmarks.

From this starting point, each item of the trial offers five possibilities of response to the choices, regarding:

- Fear of punishment;
- Respect (fear) for adults or colleagues;
- Moral duty, either as moral practice and habit, or as respect for the norm, even if it isn't convenient;
- Contractual morality, civic commitment, moral belief, that presumes interiorization of the given moral norm, while respecting it has a relative, situational dimension;
- Refuse to obey moral rules, moral non-conformism, expression of moral autonomy.

The analysis of moral attitudes regarding discipline and politeness followed:

- *the morality of obedience and submission*, when observing the norms and moral rules is achieved as a result of moral obligation based on fear and punishment (***“what will happen to me?”***) or because of advantages or benefits obtained subsequent to such a behaviour (***“what will I get?”***). It is right what the adult requests and awards, the advantages offered. Doing the right thing doesn't have a value in itself; it is just a useful instrument;

- *the morality of good relationship*, when moral attitudes are structured such manner, that the entourage (family, teachers, group of friends) appreciate it, consider it trustworthy, respectable, honourable (***“what will they say?”***);

- *the morality of order and duty (duty towards norm)*, when “good” is a value in itself and law is necessary to preserve social order, for human beings to be able to live together. Even though law does not always bring satisfaction, it is compulsory and must be observed.

- *contractual morality (civic commitment)*, when moral attitudes and behaviour develop autonomously, “good/right” has a relative and situational dimension (“what is best/should be done”, “what do I/they think?”). Law is a convention that people decide to respect or not (*“this is what I believe it's right”*, *“this is the right way to act”*). The individual consciousness is the one that guides on various situations; law cannot be breached or changed. The appeal to moral standards cannot solve a questionable moral situation and, as for defending absolute values (such as life, liberty, equity etc.), the person adopts attitudes that apparently do not respect the socially agreed moral norms. At this level of moral autonomy we also find non-conformist attitudes and behaviour fitting in, that apparently do not express the interiorization of moral norms, but in no such case can be defined as immoral attitudes and types of behaviour.

If we question what moral values are guiding the moral behaviour of teenagers, what factors determine in adolescence the option for one moral attitude or another and whether the capacity of assessing what is right and what is wrong does structure itself stadially, we identify the relationship that may exist between the moral phenomenon and chronological age, intellectual level, sex, residential environment and certain personality factors.

We find out that rules and norms referring to school issues, that are interiorized and that lead to sanctions, in case of non-observance (such as: non-excusing motivations and marks) are much more respected than those referring to civic behaviour.

The interiorization of these norms is largely conditioned by the chronological age and intellectual level of the teenagers (we draw attention that most of the high IQs students belong to the Educational Sciences

Faculty/College and have a high social and cultural standard) and in a least measure by the other two variables (residential environment and sex).

The morality of obedience and submission, specific to the pre-conventional stage, still remains significant in circumstances of school discipline, mostly when the punishment affects school grades (avoiding examination, a low mark or even expulsion from school).

In young teenagers (15 years old) we find yet a morality of good relationships with their family, but with teachers as well and mostly with the colleagues (the school group plays an important role in decision taking – not complying with the group's rules at this age may lead to a certain pushing away within it).

The observance of norms (the morality of order and discipline) as to keep social order is not significant, if it does not provide immediate satisfaction, mostly in young teenagers and low IO teenagers. Those who grant importance to norms irrespective of the degree of satisfaction or circumstances are teenage girls of age 18, with a certain professional training in the field of educational sciences (students of the Educational Sciences High-School).

The autonomous observance of moral rules and norms puts the teenager in the situation to choose between right and wrong/good or bad, in the situation of even expressing his insatisfaction if the law does not offer an acceptable solution. Therefore, we considered that moral autonomy, under the shape of contractual morality, is expressed either as respect towards moral rules and norms because of the interiorization, or as the expression of a non-conformist attitude.

The moral experience of teenagers, their involvement in situations as varied as possible, the formulation of attitudes about moral phenomena, and not the mere acknowledgment and reproduction of the contents of some moral values, norms and rules represents the reason for a contractual autonomous morality. Only by experiencing will the teenager distinguish between good and bad (in this case, referring to school discipline norms), assessing the consequences in the shorter or longer run and thus convincing himself of the relativity of moral values. If not, he will become obedient; will comply to standards and discipline norms, in order to avoid negative consequences.

Keeping even at this age such a level of morality development (that of obedience) must be explained first of all with the school requirements, that greatly values obedient behaviour of the teenagers, without analyzing the reasons they obey norms.

Most of the times, as to solve the non-compliance with the school discipline rules, parents as well think they can solve the issues by applying more or less severe measures of punishment.

Although the **chi-square test** for independence does not provide significant differences between the intellectual level and the morality elements that we have investigated, there aren't perfect correlations in all cases; we cannot give definite solutions and state that a high intellectual level means that the teenager will develop an interiorized morality or on the contrary. First of all, we must underline that we have noticed, with the help of Raven Progressive Matrices, mostly the clearness of thinking, ability to understand circumstances and relationships between them, the ability of applying the methods of logical judgement. The test is not considered to be an intelligence test, lest a social intelligence test. It is true that a high IQ revealed by this test allows teenagers to distinguish more rapidly and exactly between the "shades" presented by ourselves within each item. But subjects with an average intellectual level, but a richer moral experience may react the same way. We notice significant differences in the case of a lower IQ (mostly for an at limit intellectual level).

Non-conformism in view of school discipline, expression of a contractual morality and in no such case of delinquency (none of the subjects has shown so far such a behaviour) is mostly the expression of a superior intellectual quota. School regulations, sometimes including requirements that fence in liberty without taking into account their particular application, cannot be fully respected without external constraints.

As noted in particular circumstances, *the residential environment* of the teenagers does not produce major differences in what concerns the compliance with school discipline, either the discipline norms outside school. The fact that teenagers have been educated in an urban or rural environment doesn't lead to differences regarding discipline, because during school education, the students coming from a rural environment spend as well most of the time far from their homes, making contact with other educational factors that have a much stronger action upon them at this age.

In the circumstances that we have presented, the options of the teenagers for attitudes and behaviour that elude the written norms or rules of discipline and politeness cannot be considered immoral acts. We have taken these options as shapes of expression of an age specific revolt, which happens to some of them only at the level of attitudes, not on the behaviour level (there are subjects that have chosen a non-conformist response, but they show punctuality and thoroughness in their behaviour).

We also draw attention that the display of non-conformism is more significant within the family than at school, mostly in older teenage boys; we think that this is the expression of a certain independence that might be restricted by some parents.

In other social circumstances, apart from school, when observing norms is less rigorous and holds more to a polite kind of behaviour, teenagers relate themselves more to the motality of good relationships. They think it is necessary to comply with these norms, in order to be, at their turn, respected, considered trustworthy (an aspiration which is almost unanimous in teenagers).

The variables we have analysed so far (chronological age, intellectual level, sex and residential environment) are not sufficient to explain the mechanisms of interiorizing the norms and rules of a disciplined behaviour. The hypothesis we have formulated considers that attitudes, as well as disciplined behaviour in teenagers, are favourized by a series of personality factors.

We can give an affirmative answer to the question whether there are inter-dependence links between the type of behaviour involving the observance of certain discipline rules and personality factors.

We consider as relevant in determining a disciplined behaviour, based on contractual morality at school, the traits of personality that reveals a strong personality profile, emotional stability, absence of frustrations, self-confidence, a great degree of sociability, temperamental activism, independence in decision taking.

The morality based on external constraints, that expresses the submission by fear of punishment or for obtaining appreciation from the others is characteristic to shy teenagers, less tolerated than the others, but disciplined ones, with a strong sense of duty, with average or high intellectual level, whose behaviour is based mostly on reason (sensitivity, intense perception on events are less represented).

Therefore, concerning *our hypothesis* presuming that the interiorization of discipline norms and rules by teenagers is conditioned by chronological age, sex, intellectual level and residential environment is partially confirmed. These norms being mostly interiorized, the moral behaviour of teenagers tends to be achieved according to moral duty ("what law says") and towards contractual morality ("what I think is right").

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