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**FACULTY OF SOCIOLOGY AND SOCIAL WORK**  
**DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY**

**ADOLESCENTS IDENTITY**  
**PH.D. THESIS ABSTRACT**

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**Key words:** adolescence, gender identity, ethnic and cultural identity, vocational identity, identity crisis, self and self-esteem.

## **ARGUMENT**

*Contemporary society defined by consumerism, globalization, explosion of mass media, advancing of technology entail strong socio-cultural transformations that are reflected both in the adolescent's behaviour and in his attitude.*

*The diversity of alternatives which are available to adolescents and the high expectations from the social environment causes uncertainties, restlessness, anxieties, the emergence of certain complexes that can culminate with the inability of defining their own identity and/ or the inability of getting over this identity crisis which is specific to this age (I mention that not all adolescents go through the identity crisis).*

*The questions: "Who am I? What am I doing in this world? Where am I going?" and the afferent answers, create the existential future foundation. Although during lifetime, there is a continuous definition and redefinition of self, the completion of this step, with an assumed identity, means the successful passage to another level, to another stage of age.*

*The general objective of this work targets the achievement of a descriptive model of adolescents' identity and the achievement of its components, in order to highlight the specific features or elements of each of these components, in the way they are perceived by adolescents. The key concepts which I use in this work are: social identity (gender, ethnic and vocational identity) and personal identity, identity crisis and self-esteem.*

*In reaching the proposed desideratum I consider necessary that my entire theoretical and methodological approach to be structured in two parts (theoretical part and empirical research) and four chapters.*

*The theoretical part includes the first three chapters of the work and it is an overview of the main explanatory landmarks of the used concepts in this thesis and the related theories, as they are presented in the specialized literature.*

## THEORETICAL PART

**The 1<sup>st</sup> Chapter** of the paper is entitled **The Adolescence. General framework**. It contains senses of the concept of adolescence which was defined over time by Plato, Socrates, Rousseau, Parsons, Stanley Hall, and Coleman, respectively, *the adolescence is a stage that separates childhood from adulthood* (Larousse, 1993).

Subsequently, **the bio-psycho-social characteristics, specific to this age**, are described.

From a *biological* perspective, adolescence begins with *puberty* and with its related biological changes: the occurrence of menarche in girls, the thick voice to boys and girls, acne, the development of functional genital organs. Adolescence continues with *the stage of adolescence itself* characterized by the accommodation with the state of adult and by the identity attainment; and it ends with the state of *prolonged adolescence* based on financial independence, integration in employment and marital choices (Şchiopu, 2008).

From the *psychological* point of view we can sustain that there arise: the identity crises, the alternative states of behavioural manifestation, exaggerated attention towards body perception, oscillatory self-esteem. Also adolescent own gestures, values, aspirations, vocations are manifested.

From the *social* perspective the adolescent wants to show independence from parents; the influence of friendship group appears; the entering in a new cycle of education takes place; all these being premises for identity formation.

This chapter presents, also, **the identity conditions of adolescence** from past to present. Previously teenagers were involved in the field work and in the animal husbandry, thus they became parents rapidly, the transition from childhood to adulthood among boys was made through the fulfilment of military service. In the industrial age there was a shift from rural to urban areas where the young people found new jobs. Conformism and passivity, specific to past, are replaced now through autonomy and freedom. Today, however, the information explosions, the emergence of various gadgets that children can access, the exposure to mass media and to Internet change the options and the worldview (Radu, 1995).

Another subchapter presents **the theoretical approaches of adolescence** among which we mention (Marcelli and Braconnier, 2006):

- *Sociological approach* - adolescence means insertion into the social life of adults, it varies from one epoch to another;
- *Historical approach* – there are presented the differences between past and present in the definition of adolescence;
- *Cultural approach* - adolescence is different from one culture to another, the given example is offered by Margaret Mead who refers to adolescents' analysis from Samoa Islands; she reached the conclusion that the complexer is the society, the longer and the more conflictual is the adolescence
- *Psychoanalytical approach* - based on Sigmund Freud's view regarding adolescents' impulses and complexes; the distance from parents is done by rejecting childhood identifications;
- *Cognitive approach* - centred on Piaget's vision, adolescents have a formal operative thinking, they have the capability to use assumptions, scenarios, possible cases;
- *Inventory approach* - Stanley Hall (1904) sees adolescence as a socio-historical creation of adaptation through urbanization, the social division of labour, the segregation of social classes, the age-segregation in schools.

Among the most important ideologists who analyzed this stage we mention **Eric Erickson** who developed *the psychosocial model* using the concept of crisis in adolescence, he considers the identity formation as an unconscious process of differentiation from others. Also, he presents other concepts such as: self-esteem, self-awareness, role ambiguity, role conflict. Erickson's model contains eight stages, of which the fifth one is *identity vs. confusion* and this model regards the adolescent. During this period the Juvenile crisis occurs, the definition of its own being in time and space through questions such as: "*Who am I? Where am I going?*". If the answer is found to these questions then the identity is configured, if not, the confusion prevails (Erickson, 1968).

Erickson's ideas were caught up by **James Marcia**, who identified four statuses: *identity diffusion* (no crisis is experienced, no commitments occur); *identity foreclosure* (the development of hesitant values induced by others); *moratorium* (adolescent gets multiple identity

crises, and he cannot complete the goals); *identity achievement* (multiple crises were experienced and solved, permanent relative commitments were made, and adolescents have living options).

**Sigmund and Anna Freud** used the concepts of Id, Ego and Super-Ego. Continuing her father's tradition, the daughter saw adolescence as a period of turbulence, due to the sexual conflicts of puberty.

**Anna Davies** states *the theory of social anxiety*. The process of adolescent's development and socialization is shaped by values, norms, cultural attitudes imposed through social and regulatory control of the community, which is enforced by penalties, punishments, threats (*cited Radulescu, 2000*).

**Robert Havigurst** states the *developmental tasks theory*. Adolescents have to acquire cognitive, emotional, behavioural capabilities in order to face society's expectations in the completion of the statuses and roles. If they don't accomplish those then the development fails, and also the adolescents' anxiety and social disapproval increase. The most important acquisitions in this period are: the acceptance of their own physical, emotional independence from their parents, economic independence, preparing for employment, family, marriage, intellectual and social skills development (Radu, 1995).

**Robert Merton** has his own theoretical contribution with *the paradigm of anticipatory socialization* through which young people tend to join the reference groups to which they belong: friends, colleagues, neighbours of the same age. (Neculau, 2004).

**Talcot Parsons** states *the theory of attitudinal ambivalence in adolescence*. He uses the concept of "youth culture" regarding the adolescent's socialization which involves the internalization of values and the goal achievement. He claims that adolescents who come from classes with low socioeconomic status have more pronounced trends of juvenile delinquency (Radulescu, 2000).

**James Coleman** talks about *the youth subculture theory* that refers to the set of norms, values which characterize adolescent's lifestyle. This subculture is different from that of adults and involves relationships between members of equal age and social status, the performances being the autonomy and the identification with the standard models.

**George Herbert Mead** states a theory which sustains that the socialization and transformation of roles in adolescence are the most important than in any other period, this is based on: the increased independence from parents, interaction with people of the same age,

intensified sensitivity to others' assessments, activities on different themes: religious, political, leisure activities. If in childhood the identification models are the parents, in adolescence the standards are transgressed towards: public figures, celebrities, teachers, group leaders. It is a must to leave adolescent the freedom he needs in order to develop himself. (Adams and Marshall, 1996).

In the last part of the first chapter I tried to make a review of **the researches** which I identified on **the topic of adolescence and adolescents' identity**.

I identified a research on the topic of *Socio-cultural identity of youth* in which the general conclusions were related to: youth perception regarding: unemployment and the direction in which Romania is heading, corruption, the degree of confidence in state institutions, the consequences of European Union integration and the perception of globalization. Also the social construction of the socio-cultural identity is defined by: language, traditions, costumes, culture, history, religion, visited museums, press, Romanian music, reading as a leisure activity, the perception regarding family, the attitude towards school and the civic and political involvement of young people.

Another study - *The situation of adolescents in Romania* highlights the youth leisure activities and their lifestyle: how long they spend watching TV, how long they stay on Internet, when they start their sexual life, what other activities they develop in their leisure.

I also identified a research that was highlighting the *Romanian youth's values* on: their image, how do they see themselves over 10 years, how do they spend their free time, what are their values regarding education, family, society, volunteering; what models do they have, which are the discriminatory or tolerance attitudes manifested by youth towards ethnic and sexual minorities.

Another research conducted by Brasov County Statistics Department based on a demographic survey regarding the status of children and young people, measures: the evolution of fertility, of marriage, of divorce, the life expectancy and the migration of this age group.

Another study made by the same institution namely *The Youth access to labour market* highlighted the areas of training for youth, the relationship with the labour market, their age at leaving the national education system, the time required to find their first job and the percentage of young people who work .



In the 2<sup>nd</sup> chapter of the paper - **General approaches of identity** – I have achieved a defining of the identity and its related concepts: self and self-esteem. This represents the organized conception about its own person and about world; it consists of values, beliefs, goals, personal and professional roles to which the individual dedicates (Harwood, 2010).

Afterwards, it follows the multiple sociological approaches of identity described by Erving Goffman (Dramaturgical School), George Herbert Mead (social-cultural approach of identity); Ferdinand de Saussure (structuralist approach) and Michel Foucault (the role of the discourse in identity formation and cultural identities hybridization).

Each individual has a single self, but more identities, which varies depending on the relational contexts given by family, group of friends, school. Adolescents need to find answers to the fundamental questions, such as: "Who am I?", "Where do I come from?", "What do I want to become?"; adolescents experience different roles, they assimilate different values, they make different choices that will create their later identity. This identity is formed on the background of certain pubertal changes, on cognitive development and on social changes, which can develop a coherent sense of existence; if this is not formed then identity confusion or crisis occurs (Demir et al., 2010).

In this chapter are presented the Stage Theories of Identity: **Sigmund Freud's** theory of identification (Oedipus complex and Electra complex), psychosocial approach of identity described by **Erik Erikson** (in which the stage of *identity vs. confusion*, specific to the interval 10-20 years, it is crucial for the later evolution of the individual. Also, **James Marcia's** theory is operationalized as normative circumstances of socialization, being used terms such as *moratorium* (the full crisis period in which the subject seeks alternatives) and *foreclosure* (engaging in identity without exploring alternatives). Also, **Jean Piaget** speaks of moral ontology and self axiology, arguing that in adolescence it is developed the thinking based on hypothetical reasoning (abstract thinking centred on problems). **Lawrence Kohlberg** describes adolescent's moral behaviour based on the principles and concepts of life.

Regarding the types of identification, we have assignments made by others – *hetero identifications* (individuals ranking in a certain category based on directly observable signs - clothing, physical appearance, language) or *objective identity*; and identifications made by own self - self-identification (what do individuals think about themselves) or *subjective identity* (based on social - demographic categories: student, Orthodox, Romanian, etc.).

In the specialized literature we find the concepts of individual and collective identity, personal and social identity. Personal identity includes unique features that an individual possesses them, which distinguish him from other persons, his social roles that he holds; while social identity includes specific features compared to others, or the membership to a group (Hogg cited Scârneci, 2009).

It seems that the modern identity is comprised of several facets that are in a constant renegotiation and which involves multiple choices throughout life, identities becoming fluid and mobile (Baumeister, 1996).

The self (in the 2<sup>nd</sup> subchapter) is provided as a subcomponent of the identity, throughout life the self achieves a constant definition and redefinition, having as relief points the significant moments of our lives: the entrance to high school, college, separation from loved ones, marriage and others. Self is the collection of beliefs, feelings, it represents the image we have towards our own person (Taylor *et al.*, as cited Iluț, 2001).

I identified different types of self found at various authors:

- ✓ *Global Self* – the assessment of an individual's skills from various fields (Adams, 2009);
- ✓ *Specific Self* – we manifest depending on the contexts in which we operate (*apud* Iluț, 2001);
- ✓ *Relational Self* – based on interaction with others;
- ✓ *Individual Self* – differentiating from others (Seidikides and Brewer, 2001);
- ✓ *Collective Self* – identifications made in groups;
- ✓ *Stable Self* – given by the continuity and consistency of attitudes (Iluț, 2001);
- ✓ *Institutional Self* – based on rules, group standards, social purposes;
- ✓ *Spontaneous Self* – based on the needs and on the impulses of the moment (Turner *apud* Iluț, 2001);
- ✓ *Interdependent Self* - based on social relationships
- ✓ *Independent Self* - centred on individual characteristics (Chelcea, 2006);
- ✓ *Intimate Self* - based on weaknesses, own needs;
- ✓ *Public Self* – the image provided to others (Abric, 2002)
- ✓ *Current Self* – the representation of current image;
- ✓ *Ideal Self* - what a person wants to be;
- ✓ *Wanted Self* – what is expected by others (Chelcea, 2006).

In the contemporary society self is an ambiguous one. Socio-economic and cultural changes (globalization, social mobility, communication alternatives through social networks, mobile phones) all lead to more superficial interpersonal relationships due to the multiplication of interpersonal contacts (Modrea cited Baumeister, 2006).

Alternative jobs, various leisure activities, opportunities to compare yourself with the successes of others, all lead to multiple needs in which what is right and wrong does not count anymore, and thus moral relativism and axiological confusion is reached. (Baumeister cited Iluț, 2001).

*Social chameleons* appear due to different lifestyles, to multiple roles and to social contexts, in these situations the self fragmentation occurs. It is need of a capable self to cope with the changes that take place.

Also the adolescents who experience multiple changes both in relation to family, friends, the media, school and social various expectations; they live in a transition of the identity development (Santrock, 1996).

Adolescents have multiple choices that generate: depression, suicide, consumption of drugs and alcohol, anorexia, bulimia, consumerism, running away from home, motherhood during adolescence, sexually transmitted diseases: syphilis, HIV / AIDS. The lack of limits, of authority, all lead to arbitrary values, to hazard, that adolescent take it as such (Modrea, 2006).

In the last subchapter of this chapter I performed a conceptualization of **self-esteem**. This is defined as being the way in which we perceive our own physical, cognitive, social and spiritual characteristics which shape and strengthen our self (Larousse, 1999). This is formed both through *social comparison* - unconscious and permanent reporting to significant persons for individual; and through *the feed-back received from others* - positive or negative judgments made by others regarding our quality and performance. Women, more than men, take into account the assessments made by others in estimating the self.

Laery and Downs (cited Scârneci, 2009) sustain that self-esteem is a mechanism to avoid social exclusion (disapproval, rejection) alerting the individual in order to take action. To improve self-esteem we must be aware of our own capabilities and limits, we must assume the defects and we must value our qualities, we must accept failures and learn from them (Cocoradă, 2004).

Self-esteem is based on three components:

- ✓ *Self Confidence* - to act without fear of failure and of judgment;
- ✓ *Self Concept* - to believe in your abilities, to design yourself in future;
- ✓ *Self-love* - to respect yourself no matter what happened to you;

There are several types of self-esteem: *global* (hierarchical construct with three major components: performance self-esteem, social self-esteem and physical self-esteem). *Global self-esteem* accepts the self as a whole; it assesses the personality as a whole. *Specific self-esteem* is based on the evaluation of physical appearance, of popularity, of school or professional competence, of quality of the fulfilled roles (Heartherton and Vohs, 2000).

Global self-esteem in adolescents is associated with the feeling of success in a particular field, which leads to feelings of self-efficacy, it makes adolescents to be optimistic in other areas of life as well, and thereby increasing the level of motivation and the ideal self-image (Higgins cited Sica, 2009).

Rosenberg makes a difference between *barometric self esteem* (the self image at a time, depending on the circumstances) and *reference self-esteem* (long-term image, based on the evolutionary history of individual) (*as cited* in Santrock, 1996).

Regarding the age stages associated with self-esteem, we can say that the preadolescent's self-esteem decreases; physical appearance is often a source of devaluation because biological - hormonal changes occur. Adolescence is marked by the fluctuation of self-esteem, which stabilizes in the end - in youth and adulthood.

In the middle of adolescence the self adopts many roles that require different attitudes and it outlines in unique personal styles. Adolescents can comply or differentiate within the group of friends, colleagues, neighbours. Once with the internalization and the development of consciousness, internal standards of conduct are formed in order to control the behaviour (they assimilate new values, attitudes, roles, apart from those acquired in the family) (Harwood 2010).

It is said that the self-esteem that comes from your childhood sets the level of fulfilment in the adult life. Low self-esteem in adolescents is based on pubertal changes, the most common issues are: low or high height, nose / ears too big, rash acne on face and body, body malfunctions, foot odour, face redness, hair fall and fattening, girls with too small or too large breasts. These results were obtained from a survey conducted by students from Social Work Department on the targeted group of adolescents.

Early maturing of adolescent girls (compared to boys) leads to parental reactions, thus increasing the level of conflict and the degree of isolation or confusion. Girls attach greater importance to physical appearance than boys do; this because of media pressure to conform to models. These issues can lead to bulimia, anorexia, suicide and depression (Sudres and Lienard, 1995).

Boys' body assessment involves successful models such as: muscular, athletic, and not necessarily thin (Thompson and Stice *cited* Klaczynski, 2004).

The superiority complex is related with the concept of self-esteem and inferiority complex. The complex is an organized assembly of representations and memories with a great emotional intensity, partially or totally unconscious. This can form on the basis of interpersonal relationships during infant history and it can structure all psychological levels: emotions, attitudes, adjusted behaviours (Clerget, 2008).

Inferiority complex arises in childhood and it represents the exacerbated contortion of its own person, which appeared due to certain frustrations and to a pendulous activity. It manifests through the awareness of a deficiency or disability, due to its own or to others perspectives. This crystallizes around real or imaginary inferiorities, around language disorders, physical ugliness or personal characteristics considered disagreeable, unpleasant (Larousse, 1999).

Superiority complex is a major form of visualization the personal ability and accomplishments; megalomania or assumption of certain inadequate traits for its own self. Generally, in this case, the exacerbation of inferiority feeling occurs in ideal plan (Adler *cited* Modrea, 2006).

There is a compensation mechanism at attitudinal and behavioural level: the shy becomes aggressive, the weak seeks to demonstrate his power, the dominant wants to dominate, the one who has his own inferiority feeling seeks to demonstrate his superiority. Those with high self-esteem often assume more risks; they do not focus on the negative attributes which they possess.

Self-esteem is a self fence, a shield built by the subject around his real ego in order to survive in the social system to which he belongs. The self-esteem level relates to the type of love shown by family, to parents' self-esteem; its level in childhood leads to the educational progress, to the emotional, social, intellectual, sexual, professional and spiritual development (Humpreys, 2007).

There are various researches conducted on the correlation of self-esteem – parents' behavioural practices related to the growth style (authoritarian, indifferent, aggressive, passive), family climate, family types, communication styles between parent - child, conflict events. With regard to parenting practices, adolescents with high self-esteem perceive their parents as being warm, loving, tolerant, they provide clear rules and fair punishments, there is mutual respect and few hostility between children and parents (*as cited* in Adams and Berzonsky, 2009 ).

Also it was found that the growth style with authoritarian tendencies – a discipline based on explaining what did the child do undesirable and on offering him alternative means to behave and learn; is the most suitable for good habits to gear to stress, for a better psychological training and a higher self-esteem.

Disciplinary techniques through force - physical punishment, withdrawal of privileges, threats, and abridgment of affection - lead to extreme dependency, thus alternative ways of behaviour are not taught.

Growth styles are perceived differently by children, depending on their personality type, thus it is explained why siblings with same parents have different behaviours. Also parents go through some difficult times in their lives (unemployment, death of a loved one, divorce).

At the same time, the socio-economic status of parents, the school performances, the maintaining of certain healthy habits regarding the growth, the unconditional love and support can correlate with a higher self-esteem in adolescents; parents' claims must be realistic, reported to the child's needs.

Also, self-esteem is correlated with the success or failure in adolescent's education plan. The various evaluation tests through which child passes: capacity exam, Baccalaureate, the change of middle school to high school and then to college, all these involve the emergence of new friends and landmarks.

In addition to academic performance, there are rated items related to popularity - how sociable or friendly are you, what are your defining status markers - corporate clothing, mobile phones, tablets and accessories.

In conclusion socializing agents - school, family and friends should provide to adolescent the necessary support in order to succeed in the areas of competence.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> Chapter of the paper is entitled **Fundamental Components of identity** and it includes the gender, ethnic and vocational identity. Firstly I tried to perform a delimitation of the gender and sexuality terms. Sex is the biological and physiological component of characterizing women and men with the afferent concepts: chromosomal differences (XX - female, XY - men), hormonal differences (testosterone - men vs. estrogens - women), different sexual organs, and different brain lateralization (men having specialized the left hemisphere and women having the right one).

The gender is defined as a social component that makes the difference between masculinity and femininity (Iluț, 2001).

In this chapter I also tried to make the difference between gender and sexual identity, to define the concept of androgyny and to specify the gender identity disorders (heterosexuality, homosexuality, lesbianism, bisexuality, transgender).

There are the following theoretical approaches regarding gender identity:

- **Sigmund Freud's** psychoanalytic approach based on the awareness of sexual organs, by identifying with the parent of the same gender and subsequently with the parent of the opposite gender (Oedipus and Electra complex) (Mitrofan, 2003);
- **Albert Bandura's** social learning theory through which children are rewarded or punished if they meet the requirements and the role prescriptions regarding masculinity and femininity (Lynn, 1969);
- **Lawrence Kohlberg's** cognitive approach through which the child adapts its behaviour according to its own gender;
- **Sandra Bem's** gender constancy which is obtained at the age of 7 years, and through it, the child is aware that his gender is permanent and irrevocable (Modrea, 2006).

Since childhood there are specific gender differences: boys play with cars, girls play with dolls; girls are encouraged to be gentle, sensitive, boys are encouraged to be independent, active, tough. Crying is seen as a sign of weakness in boys (Coman, 2005).

Gender roles are learned both in family and in school, both through direct experience and through observing the behaviour of important people for us.

Girls have verbal skills, boys have spatial skills, girls are more competent in the sphere of social and human sciences, boys are competent in the exact sciences, girls are more willing to

social networking, they decode more easily the nonverbal messages, while boys are more inclined towards sports (Kulik, 2000). After the 80's, with the advent of the feminist movement, gender stereotypes diminish in intensity, women succeed to hold leadership positions, and small girls are taught to be financially independent and not dependent on men (Tudose, 2012).

Gender identity is built through gender socialization: the adolescent's social network - parents, brothers, sisters, grandparents, friends, colleagues, neighbours; they all transmit to the child patterns, norms, values regarding masculinity and femininity.

At first children are more attached to their mother who is instructing them with the expressive roles (tenderness, gentleness), while father has instrumental roles (he offers money, he solves factual issues). Mothers spend twice more time with adolescents than fathers; they teach their daughters the marital and maternal roles (ironing, washing, and cooking). Simultaneously they are confidants for the teenage-girls (they discuss about first meeting, first kiss, and school results). Fathers are centred on normative development: what did you learn, what did you do, what do you need. He spends more free time with the children, while mother spends her time in house holding, thus there is a greater probability to have a conflict with her (Stănciulescu, 1997).

Boys are given more freedom, while girls are more restricted (they have hours of entrance, they are frequently searched on the phone) (Dworetzky, 1993).

There is a need for parenting in order for adults to keep up with the new societal changes that imprints multiple identities to adolescents (Stănciulescu, 1997).

Parents should be partners in parenting roles; communication and mutual respect are needed for teenagers to acquire a positive social identity of gender (Santrock, 1996).

In adolescence it is also shaped the sexual identity, the interest grows in this issue; there are discovered ways of expression and sexual orientation. The main sources of information on sexual socialization process are: the media, the Internet, magazines and group of friends. Topics are various: sexual orientation, contraception, sexually transmitted diseases, pornography, ideal partner, abortion (Chapin cited Westerlund *et al.*, 2012).

In girls' case, sexuality involves also sensitiveness, in boys' case it is a purely carnal act. Premarital sexuality becomes a trend today. Sex life beginning is seen as a confirmation of maturity. Unfortunately there are negative consequences, which more often are not taken into consideration by adolescents: unwanted pregnancies, sexually transmitted diseases: HIV / AIDS,



syphilis. Much more awareness campaigns should be made among youth, or teachers should develop tutorial hours on the topic of sexuality for correct identity delineation.

Withal the 3<sup>rd</sup> chapter presents another component – **the ethnic and cultural identity**. These are formed since childhood. The most important sources of influence are: family, friends, neighbours, religious groups, community and occupational groups.

In this chapter I highlight the difference between *in-group* (to whom we usually ascribe positive traits) and *out-group* (to whom we usually ascribe negative traits) - ethnocentrism.

Ethnicity is “a population designated by a name that rely on the same origin, tradition, port, common culture, consciousness of belonging to the same group, language, territory, identical history, cultural practices and preferences - all being transmitted from generation to generation through socialization” (Larousse, 1993).

In this chapter I also delimitate the concepts of ethnicity and race. Ethnicity focuses on the cultural characteristics, while race focuses on the physical ones - hair colour, skin texture, and lips shape (*cited* DeCuir - Gunby, 2009).

Ethnic identity is a complex concept that includes the feeling of belonging to group. Possible items of ethnic identity: pride, culture, history, traditions, customs, cultural practices (Phinney, 1997).

An essential role in the construction of identity is represented by the mentors - models of social roles in the formation of young people.

Most of the studies about racial and ethnic identity are made in America. In this subchapter I described categories of adolescents: African-Americans, Mexicans, Asians, Turks, Arabs in America, Palestinians and Lebanese.

According to Phinney (*cited* Iluț, 2001) there are several categories of minorities: *bicultural* (individuals relate both to the basic ethnic group, and to the group that adopt them); *separated* (centred on the basic ethnic identity); *assimilated* (they gave up to the basic ethnic identity in favour of the dominant culture) and *marginalized* (they do not feel bound either by the majority culture or by their own ethnic group).

There are several stages of identity formation, presented by various authors, the most suitable staging on my target group – the adolescents - being the one of Helms (*cited* Iluț, 2001):

- ✓ *The pre-confrontation stage* - members accept uncritically the values, attitudes and lifestyle of the majority group;

- ✓ *The confrontation stage* - an resonance event and discriminative episodes determine the minority individuals to realize that they will never become full members of the majority group (identity confusion occurs);
- ✓ *The immersion* - individual adopts the view of his ethnicity, he rejects the dominant culture, he is angry because he was seduced by the practices of the dominant culture;
- ✓ *The emersion* - individual becomes autonomous (he believes in his own abilities, values) and rational, he is aware that not everything is valuable in his own culture; also not all the values of the dominant culture must be rejected.
- ✓ *Internalization/ employment* - there is a harmony between ethnic identity and self; fulfilment, detachment, determination to fight the various forms of oppression occurs.

However, not all the individuals go through all these stages, there are no clear defined boundaries between stages. The exploration and engagement in your own ethnicity involves the discovery of your own values, beliefs, acquisitions, by asking questions, by reading documentary materials, by storytelling with friends about the history of life (Phinney, 1993).

Today, because of the social mobility, because of the globalization, adolescents live in a much more diversified space than their parents. Relocation involves the change of school, of the friends group, of the neighbourhood - all these being perceived as stressful elements, which involve a more difficult adaptation (Kroger, 1991).

In adolescence it takes place the confrontation with the identity issues related to cultural differences; now future choices are made, expectations and aspirations are formed, we guide our career. It is said that there is a connection between ethnic identity and self-esteem which interact simultaneously; adolescents with a high self-esteem are more likely to engage in the exploration of ethnic identity (Phinney and Chavira *cited* in Bracey, 2004).

The variables that correlate self-esteem with ethnic identity are: school performances acquired through academic skills or athletic competences, family and friends. There are studies showing that adolescents who come from minority groups have a lower self-esteem compared to those from majority groups. Also families with a high socioeconomic level can create a positive self-esteem among teenagers due to the socio-economic welfare. There are also adolescents who come from poor families who have good results at school, parents making significant efforts to support them.

Also friends' acceptance is a source of positive self-esteem. Biracial teenagers have identification problems, and this aspect can also affect their self-esteem.

Stress among minority adolescents may be a source of negative self-esteem. That is why there is a need of social support from family's side. Also the discrimination faced by young people, the difficulties of language accommodation, the lack of status and role models – all of these are sources for a negative self-esteem. A solution in these situations is represented by the mentors. Teenagers who have mentors obtain better school results, they pass more easily over stressful situations, they feel better about themselves because the mentors discuss with them about outstanding experiences of discrimination, in this way the social bias is removed and a healthy ethnic identity is developed (Zimmerman *et al.*, 2002)

Studies show that adolescents who identify bicultural have a higher self-esteem (Domanico et al., Human cited Taylor *et al.*, 2002).

Adolescents with a strong ethnic identity when they receive negative attributes, they feel more solidarity with their group than those with a weak ethnic identity, who take others remarks personally (Phinney *et al.*, 1993).

Adolescents are helped to develop a strong positive ethnic identity when they are helped to learn about their group history, traditions and values, when they have the opportunity to interact frequently with persons of the same age who share similar experiences (Phinney et al., 2001 ).

It is a need of young ethnic integration programs in order to develop a positive self-esteem.

There are **rites of passage** - events that mark the initiation of adolescents towards another stage of age – maturity. Social group recognizes this, the adolescent is transformed, his new status is recognized, and he wins new rights and duties.

Various tribal rituals are described, initiations occur through high-risk samples in the less developed societies. Also religious rituals appear, such as: *confirmation* in Unitarian, reformed or evangelical religion, *mitzvah* in Hebrew. In tribes the rituals are related to the isolation of the community, body markings, symbolic mutilations in boys (Clerget, 2008).

On girls there are rituals related to the first menstruation, the puberty entry, the deflowering and the beginning of sexual life.

Modern rituals are related to getting the driving license, the pompous coming of age, the graduation balls, getting the Baccalaureate, the right to vote, stages that mark the identity development. The rituals serve to release the tension, so the ceremonies initiate the adolescent in the adult status (Santrock, 1996).

Another identity component marked in the third chapter of this paper is the **vocational identity**. In the specialized literature similar terms are used such as: occupational and professional identity. This category includes the adolescents' options regarding school and career (skills, abilities, values, competences, preferred subjects); most of the adolescents being in school during this period.

Wallace *et al.* (cited Kroger, 1991) found that vocational identity can be a strong predictor in the career maturity in what concerns the concept of self; those with high scores in exploring identity they have high self-esteem and they show more maturity in their careers.

Self Identity entails the acquisition of certain earnings at the end of adolescence based on experiences, thus the child has to be prepared for the adult task. Archer (1989) noted that for people with different identity distinct domains are important. Vocational development is related to character (if you are lazy, ambitious), to social, economic and cultural context (Adams and Berzonsky, 2009).

Adolescents' ideals must be consonant with reality, otherwise they will be disappointed. Today the society sets higher expectations, the report request – the offer is unequal on the labour market, there are many adolescents that prolong the schooling up to 23-25 years (college and master) and then they cannot find a job. Career and vocational development become increasingly less available because of: inflation, economic crisis, unemployment growth; adolescents are confused in which concerns their role in society. Having no jobs at college graduation, young people are trained only theoretically and not practically, employers require work experience after graduation, experience which young people do not have it. Adolescents spend too much time in school, without realizing their professionalization, but rather acquiring a general culture. Unemployment leads to a diffusion of identity, those who finish a college and have no job, they have negative feelings in what concerns their own status (Kroger, 2000).

It takes extra-activities such as: hobbies, leisure activities, volunteering, summer schools, part-time activities – all these are opportunities for vocational adolescents' development.

Today, increasingly more adolescents are thinking about going abroad, considering that educational options are more diverse and employment opportunities are higher after graduation.

An important role is played by family in the vocational identity formation through occupational and behavioural values transmitted to children. Today most parents, whether with university education or not, invest in the education of their children aspiring to forms of higher education with the thought that there is a greater chance of success (situation that does not necessarily correspond to reality).

Also the role of the school is very important. Teachers should be more involved in the educational process; not only to provide information, but also to listen the adolescents, to encourage expressing their ideas, to provide proper assessments.

Professional guidance and assistance centres or vocational counselling programs can help the adolescent to find the right professional domain for him.

School and family must work together to optimize the transition of adolescents from childhood to adulthood.

### **Empirical research. General conclusions and discussions**

The central theme of this paper is to explore the social and personal identity in adolescents according to its gender, ethnic and vocational subcomponents.

Regarding *the current state of knowledge of the topic*, it can be said that the idea of subdividing the identity it is an original one. Thus, a state of knowledge strictly related to this topic cannot be spoken. There are several important international studies aimed at adolescence or certain features of this. Stanley Hall (1904) was the one who initiated the scientific study of adolescence. He was followed by Erickson (1968) with a conceptualization of identity in adolescents and young people. In specialized American literature there are extensive studies about adolescence with all its subcomponents at Santrock (1996) and Kroger (2000): theories, bio-psycho-social development of adolescents, the social network influence on their development. There is also a treaty of psychopathology of adolescence conducted by Marcelli and Braconnier (2004) which is studying the dysfunctional behaviours at this age group such as: bulimia, anorexia, depression, suicide, running away from home.

Also, Clerget (2008) tackles the crisis in adolescence; Adams and Berzonsky (2009) realize a manual of adolescent psychology whose subchapter is the identity development.

In the specialized autochthon literature there can be find papers, such as that of Radu (1995) which provides a review of various historical stages from past to present regarding the adolescence. Another book identified by me was that of Radulescu (1999) describing adolescent subtended behaviours from normality towards deviance. Also Modrea (2006) wrote a paper that has as thematic the self-image and personality in adolescence.

Regarding *the placement of the obtained results in the context of other researches*, I would like to mention that I have found no other research in the Romanian studies which achieves a subdivision of the identity on the dimensions analyzed by me: social (gender, ethnic, vocational) and personal dimension.

There are papers in the current social space of the local researches which provide *the description of the lifestyle, of the socio-cultural values and habits of adolescents; correlations of their values with the self-image and ideal self; a perspective towards Romanian youth values; a research on the labour market for adolescents and youth in Romania*.

Regarding *the theoretical – methodological innovations* I can say that the present research comprised two stages: quantitative investigations followed by the qualitative study regarding the identity and its subcomponents on adolescents. This is the first step that makes a subdivision of identity in components.

The quantitative research involved:

- The description of adolescent beginning;
- The composition of their identity profile;
- The measurement of certain indicators such as social identity (positive and negative) and vocational identity;
- The capturing of identity coordinates – the self-esteem and the crisis in adolescence;
- The description of adolescents' lifestyle.

This type of research was based on the individual structured interview (the questionnaire) which was conducted on a sample of 365 adolescents who were students in 11<sup>th</sup> -12<sup>th</sup> grade, in the high schools from Brasov Municipality.

In this part I tried to realize the operationalization of concepts (social, gender, ethnic, vocational and personal identity; self-esteem and identity crisis) based on nominal definitions which I found in theory.

As *strengths of the quantitative research* I mention the innovative measurement approach of the key concepts mentioned above (the questionnaire was made by me).

I present below the conclusions of the quantitative research taking into account the aimed objectives.

In which concerns the significant elements associated by adolescents with the beginning of this period, the first places are held by: the entering in high school, the receiving of the identity card and the moment when they won their first money.

Regarding the identity profile, adolescents define themselves (both regarding the strengths and the weaknesses) through specific features more common to the *personal identity* category (ambitious, resourceful, funny, smart, beautiful vs. lazy, vain, credulous, jealous, naive) than to the *social* category (friendly, communicative, sociable vs. lonely, silent, with no friends). They claim that their identity is defined by language, friends, parents and apparel. Regarding the role models chapter, based on the answers provided, adolescents are split in two categories: one that specifies that parents – mother and father are the main models; and another one that specifies its own principles are its guidelines, being self-educated.

Negative social identity is given by elements such as: the music they listen, their clothing, generally the haircut/ the look and physical features. Positive social identity is given by the correlation between the satisfaction with their own lives and ways of spending the free time vs. the relationship with parents. Adolescents are satisfied with their life if they have pleasant ways of spending the free time and if they have a harmonious relationship with parents.

Regarding self-esteem, in the second part of the quantitative research, following a regression model, it came out that the main causes of a low self-esteem are: parents' criticism, self-criticism due to some parts of the body and focus on defects.

Regarding the identity crisis, a significant percentage of adolescents sustain that they have solved this problem. Those who were not able to overcome this crisis they come from families with problems and/ or with authoritarian parents.

Relating to vocational identity, I can say that teenagers claim that school is the major activity developed by them. This is favoured because they have interesting subjects and because teachers inspire them to love certain fields. Decisions regarding educational options were taken either with their parents or by themselves. The most attended specified school activities were: Olympiads and competitions, volunteering and sports. With regard to professional activities, the

main activity of adolescents is school, there are few who had seasonal jobs or part-time. Adolescents place on the top of their future options the career and on the second place the family.

The most common ways of leisure are: listening to music, using the Internet / Facebook / Messenger/ computer games and watching TV.

The qualitative approach of the proposed theme consisted in the achievement of semi-structured interviews with adolescents: between 16 and 20 years old, Romanian, Hungarian or Roma ethnic girls and boys; which come to supplement the quantitative research with more finite details regarding the components of identity. I conducted these interviews until the received information became redundant, meaning that I received the same answers (also called methodological saturation). The questions in the interview focused on:

- Highlighting some aspects of personal identity (perception of their adolescence and lifestyle description - leisure activities, clothing);
- Highlighting the specific of social identity with reference to the social network (family, friends, teachers, models, couple partner);
- Highlighting ethnic identity by describing rituals and discriminative behaviour in adolescence;
- Highlighting major events, specific for this period that marks the identity formation.

As *strengths of the qualitative research* I mention the complexity of the answers found in the data interpretation. There are conclusions that coincide both in the quantitative research and in the qualitative one. For example, it is both clear from the questionnaire and from the interview that the adolescent beginning is correlated with: starting the high school, receiving the identity card or the driving license.

Regarding the lifestyle of adolescents, the data from qualitative research completes the information from quantitative research; the main occupations are activities related to computer: Facebook, games; watching movies and TV shows, listen to music. In addition to these data, in the qualitative research, new information appears: adolescents are hiking, they have arts activities, they love to read or write, and the most important activity performed during leisure time is represented by having parties.

In the qualitative research it appears both qualities related to personal identity (physical traits, sportive qualities) and qualities that define the social identity (leadership skills, popularity,



skills related to counselling, verbalization). On the other hand, the defects are distributed to personal identity (laziness, selfishness, rebellion) or to vocational identity (related to school - school absenteeism, poor grades, and nicknames).

The social network that influences the formation of social identity is compound of friends, couple partner and family (mother, father, grandparents, brothers, sisters).

Friends are considered to be an escape valve after the conflicts with parents. Adolescents usually tend to be conformists to the group in order to be accepted; sometimes they have antisocial behaviours: consumption of drugs, alcohol, cigarettes. Adolescents are disappointed when they experience false friendship.

Couple relationship is seen totally opposite by girls and boys: girls want older, experienced partners; they want to spend more time with them, while for boys the sexual relations and the freedom are the most important.

Family is the source of gender identification for adolescents; its emotional support can lead to the configuration of an authentic identity. The relationship with mother is closer (she is the confidant) than the one with father who appears sporadically due to his job. The main activities carried out jointly are held in weekend: green grass, visiting grandparents, Sunday dinners. Brothers and sisters are also sources of gender identity and they have a role of initiation in the social relations. Grandparents may also be the primary agents in socialization.

Conflict relations between parents and children can lead to a negative social identity. The main reasons are: the lack of communication, of trust and freedom, parents' school expectations unfulfilled by their children, anti-social behaviours of adolescents, rejection of friends, inappropriate clothing styles, financial dependence on parents, inappropriate habits and behaviours (the lack of cleanliness, spending too much time in front of the computer, talking on the phone, listening music too loud).

As in the quantitative research, mother lies on the top of the models – a successful example in family life, she is followed by father whose career can be taken as reference. The qualitative research comes with additions, it appears that adolescents may have as models also teachers, head teachers - emblematic figures and mentors; also we can find media models and TV stars and businessmen. Both in the quantitative research and in the qualitative one there are adolescents who claim they do not need models, they guide themselves after their own principles, being self-educated.

Ethnic identity is defined by the rites of passage from childhood to adolescence in the minority groups: Boritza - Hungarian dances, Farsung –fancy ball, the bell; and also by generalized rituals that are found in the majority group: coming of age, first relationship, first cigarette. Discrimination against ethnic adolescents may create negative social identity and low self-esteem. The causes may include: skin colour, hair nature, deficient language.

Identity crisis, as a turning point, may have as source: the entry into a new group, the pressure and the negative influence of the group, religious identity crises, death of a parent, depression, divorce, unwanted pregnancy, incurable disease, parents' mobility in another country, outstanding experiences related to school (I do not pass the Bacalaureate, I do not enter to college), disappointments in love or anti-social behaviours: running away from home, suicide attempts, alcohol consumption.

Regarding *the applicability of the results drawn from the research*, we can sustain that these can be used as arguments to determine the change in Romanian social environment. A first step would be the social supportive policies making in order to develop adolescents' skills and abilities by shaping their identity. In this way there can be provided future employment opportunities through programs of professional and vocational counselling-orientation,

Also there can be implemented parent education programs in order to reduce the mentality disparities and to improve the communication between adolescents and parents. Through such programs it should be encouraged also the decay of social class differences in adolescents.

On the other hand, teachers and head teachers should be encouraged through various school programs, in order to have activities of mentoring, counselling, re-education of certain values, attitudes and behaviours which are taken wrongly from media, thus with an emphasis on civic, moral, sexual education and not only on the acquisition of information.

*The limits of the conducted investigation* are found in the fact that I can neither claim that through this study I have exhausted the identity issue in the context of ongoing changes, nor that these conclusions, that I have reached, are undeniable; each approached aspect may constitute a distinct theme of research in more extensive studies, possible at national level, in order to highlight many more features.

The sample, both from quantitative and qualitative research, does not provide representative data for the entire population; this only provides relevant data to measure the

objectives of the current study. Results are valid only for the investigated population, presenting a number of trends that can be extrapolated to the population from which the sample was drawn out. However, there can be conclusions that do not allow consistent generalizations across entire population.

*Future researches on the presented issue* in this paper can be expanded and diversified by investigating the identity coordinates separately. Correlations can be made with other socio-demographic characteristics that were not captured in this paper. Also, subject analysis might expand in terms of studied methodology, tools can be improved, or other strategies can be used in order to collect the data by conducting individual and group interviews with parents and teachers of adolescents.

I consider that through this thesis I achieved the proposed objectives. I enjoyed working on this paper which brought me many pluses in my own personal and professional development.

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