

CULTURAL IDENTITY IN ADOLESCENCE

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Definition of social and cultural Anthropology

- Ethnocentrism
- Cultural relativism
- Androcentrism

Identity

- Social relations: social interaction
- Ways of positioning ourselves in the social structure and the social organisation of a culture: assigned roles and acquired roles...
 - Age
 - Ethnic group
 - Racial features: colour of skin
 - Physical appearance: thin, obese, tall, short, ugly, healthy, sports person...
 - Social-gender sex
 - Social class
 - Religion
 - Political beliefs
 - Educational level
 - Status, roles: married, parent, son/daughter, widow...
 - Work, profession...
 - Member of a political party, association, urban tribe, football team, fan of a music band, etc.
 - Sexual orientation

Values

- Definition of values
- Rules, law, punishment and prize.
- The culturally desirable.

Identity and values of adolescents

- Generational identity.
- Gender identity.
- Ethnic identity.
- Class identity.
- Social and professional identity.
- Religious identity.
- Neighbourhood, village, city... identity: local identity.

Identity and values of parents and teachers

- Generational identity.
- Gender identity.
- Ethnic identity.
- Class identity.
- Social and professional identity.
- Religious identity.

Sociability

- Formal and informal sociability: adolescents.
- Social interaction.
- The playing of roles in social interaction.
- The cultural codes: jargons, gestaltism, proxemy...
- Symbols and rites in the social relation.
- Verbal and non-verbal confrontations and conflicts.
- Latent and manifest, explicit and implicit confrontations and conflicts.

Adolescence and education

- Definition and deconstruction of the concept of “adolescence”.
- The diverse types of “adolescents”.
- The cultural construction of age.

The processes of socialisation

- Family environment
 - New models of family.
 - The playing of roles, duties and obligations.
 - Intergenerational conflict inside the family.
 - The concept of power and authority.
 - Change of values and family.
 - Times, spaces, and family interaction.
- School environment:
 - The classrooms.
 - The school playground
 - The cafeteria
 - The out-of-school activities.
- Other environments:
 - The media: cinema, television, radio, press.
 - Sports environment.
 - The parish.
 - Leisure areas: amusement arcades, pubs, bars, shopping centres, discotheques, drinking in the streets...

Violence

- The cultural construction of violence.
- Violence: types.
- Violence in the family environment.
- Violence in the school environment.
- Multicultural specificities of violence in the educational environment.

Authority-power and legitimacy conflict

- Legitimacy of parents.
- Legitimacy of teachers.
- Legitimacy of the student.

School integration and social insertion

- “Local” identification.
- Identity claim.
- Common end and objective in the school.
- Identity markers amongst adolescents.

Rites of passage: age

- Personal life cycle.
- Family life cycle.
- The teacher as a mediator between student-family.

Education: Integration or exclusion of cultural diversity?

- Integration.
- Cultural diversity.
- Resocialisation-cultural clash-acculturation.
- Interculturality, school, and education.
- Interculturality and training.
- The construction of intercultural discourses.
- Assimilationist policy.
- Affirmative action.

Identity and consciousness-raising

- Identity markers.
- Identity blocking catalysts and factors..
- Claiming conscience of identity.
- Territorialisation of identity.
- Slang, clothing, identity symbols.

Culture

Humans are the only carriers of culture as they are who have the properties to create and sustain a culture. These unique properties are language (the use of symbols) and a complex nervous system with elevated functions such as the ample memory for details, reason, etc. But although we all have culture we have to speak of different cultures as each of us, as members of a certain society, has a specific culture. Hence there are no humans without culture nor culture without humans.

The beliefs and behaviours shared by those who belong to a same culture play a role of offering logic, cohesion, and of reconstructing the binds amongst them. In this way the individual ensures a certain security, as in front of a certain situation he/she has a series of behaviours and ideas that indicate him/her how to act, which enables a social and life stability and order.

Let us see Tylor’s classical definition of culture: “culture is every complex that includes the knowledge, beliefs, art, law, customs...” However, culture is not a collection of loose features and pieces. If it were so the anthropologist’s job would be very easy as he/she could perfectly go to a certain town and “join the features of its culture”: vases, clothes, rites, prayers, weapons, etc. Culture is not a mere collection of varied objects and customs; we have to consider it as a system. A system is something more than the

sum of the parts, it consists of elements that are interrelated in such a way that they form a particular structure and a whole. Two systems can have the same elements, but being related in a different way they end up being totally different. Thus, if I want to explain a system, for example if I want to study it, not only do I have to enumerate the elements but I also have to explain how they are related between themselves. Culture is a particular way of interrelation of the integrating elements. For this reason anthropological work is difficult as it has to find the precise way in which the elements of a certain culture unite, integrate, oppose, and hide themselves. So culture can also be defined as the integrated total sum of the features of learned behaviour that are shown and shared by the members of a society (Adamson Hooble E. 1993).

The human being is the only one that has culture, which is socially inherited. From the first moment a child enters the world it contacts its culture and it starts to be moulded (acculturated). Thus, culture is a human invention and a social inheritance. It is opposed to biological inheritance, the inheritance of physical features, for example, as well as the innate and reflex instincts. In man and woman the behaviours are not biologically inherited, they are learned inside a certain culture.

Ethnocentrism-Cultural Relativism

Our behaviours seem to us the most “logic”, the most “acceptable”, and the most “normal”, and occasionally we look upon other behaviours with strangeness, calling them ridiculous, barbarous, uncivilized. This is so because we were born in a culture, we incorporate this culture, and we see the world as we learned to see guided by it. This is why we find the actions of inhabitants of other places strange. This fact is related to another basic concept of anthropology: ethnocentrism.

The ethnocentric attitude consists in considering the practices, beliefs, and customs of the community where we have been formed as superior to those of different communities. This feeling of superiority is normally based on the pretence that our habits and customs are universal, that our culture has deserved the preference of some divinity or that it is the agent of some historical destiny that places it above others whose customs are then judged as wrong. We have even reached the extreme of not recognising the humanity of others whose customs are different to ours.

On the other hand, to consider the behaviours that are different to ours of the subjects of other cultures with respect and thinking that we have to understand them in their cultural context is to analyse such behaviours from the point of view of cultural relativism (not ethnocentric).

Identity

We start from an ideological position according to which there does not exist only one reality with multiple interpretations, but different constructions of particular realities. This approach enables us to reconstruct the concept of identity offering us the opening for the analysis of diverse elements that allow us to point out which are the needs of the adolescents, identified by themselves, by their relatives, and by teachers.

Identity is conceptualised by some authors as an internalised system that represents an organised and integrated physical structure that requires the mental distinction and development between the internal self and the external-social self.

The identity of the individual develops from childhood with the positive and negative experiences acquired during the psychological, social, and physiological development.

The concept of identity is a wide term that describes the general aspects of the total personality of the individual; this includes the assimilation or integration of new cultures, for example, social rules, values, beliefs, cultural customs, etc.

Identity is determined by the interpersonal and intrapersonal characteristics, the ecological context, and the interactions of the significant components of the only world of the individual, for example, the family.

Dolores Juliano¹ (1992) declares that identity is a game of assignments in which each of the players builds and inhabits a flexible scale of contents assigned by themselves in the social relations, limiting the conceptual mobility to a previously agreed field. In this way society is perceived as a whole of individuals that are interrelated by common rules and purposes, not knowing the asymmetrical power relations and the conflictivity of the hegemonical process in the supposed “agreement”.

There exists a dialectic relation between the identity representations of the subordinated group and the dominant group. Both identities are updated in the process of domination in which the dominant group forms itself and the subordinated population. But at the same time the identity given to a social group from outside can be very different to the same identity experienced subjectively. In this way, the degree in which the social and cultural identities are rooted in previous cultural realities is variable.

We are aware of the need for a social category that explains the construction processes of hegemony that intervene in the processes of forming of a group.

According to Trincherro y Maranta² (1987) identity is defined as a structuring “we” that will always be reproduced, resignified as a product of the relations with other groups; relations that at the same time make reference to a social structure.

The identifications and classifications, in a wider frame, as social categories generated in complex social processes, must be analysed in their synchronic and diachronic connotations.

We are interested in emphasising that the habits and practices of adolescents take us to multiple and fragmented identities that question the pretended homogeneity ascribed to this age group from the prevailing views of the other hegemonical age groups. We then believe that as a starting point for the analysis of the identities of a social group it is necessary not to deduce the identities from the material conditions of life (should we say as if they were something “given”, observable) but to start from the ways in which this identity is symbolically represented inside this fight for social recognition.

¹ Juliano, D. 1992 “Estrategias de elaboración de la identidad”. In *Etnicidad e Identidad*, Hidalgo, Tamagno (comps), Buenos Aires, CEAL, #74:64-70.

² Trincherro, H. and Maranta, A. 1988 “Las crisis reveladoras: historia y estrategias de la identidad entre los matakochi del Chaco centro-occidental”. In *Cuadernos de Antropología*, UNL, EUDEBA.

Identity is built based on difference, involving inclusion and exclusion procedures. This symbolic fight to impose a certain vision of the world –that is processed in the daily life of adolescents- is permanently dependent on the view of the other: the identity of the social actor is the result of two definitions: the external and the internal. On the one hand we find then the classifications originated in the “exterior” of the group that show how the group is recognised by the others (alter-attribution). On the other hand this definition is completed with the identity that “originates” in the interior of the group, the forms in which the identity is symbolically represented by that same group (auto-attribution). These two directions that intervene in the building of social identities are articulated in a complex way.

It is interesting to see how the stigmatised adolescents recognise an “other” worse valued than themselves to which they “displace” the accusations that society intended to load them with. This *displacement cunning* allows, in the same gesture, to reject the attributed identity and to legitimate the pretended identity, trying to give new contents to the hegemonical classification system. In other words, these subjects also “play”, scheme strategies, and manoeuvre identities so that their recognition games also act on the power relations, reproducing them or transforming them.

Adolescence- social and cultural identity

The development of identity has its crucial moment in adolescence. This stage is important from the point of view of the development and configuration of the personality, as in it are defined aspects of great importance for the future life. Adolescence is a stage of *growth* (increase, expansion) and *development* (new capacities and enhancement of personal resources).

The youth arrives by his/her own path and in his/her own way at this growth and maturation. But he/she finds himself/herself facing daily the problems that surround him/her. It is normal that he/she experiences a crisis and that he/she shows a certain degree of disorganisation and confusion, as he/she must establish an achievement of identity, defining key aspects of his/herself and of his/her relation with the surroundings and his/her cultural environment.

Belonging groups and identity

The family is the first group which we belong to. But as we grow we begin to relate with other people and we begin to form part of other groups: the group of friends, the group of the classroom, the group of the club. What characterises a group? That its members have common expectations, they share tastes or preferences, its members recognise themselves as a part of it and at the same time they are recognised as such by other persons that do not belong to it. This means that what unites the members of a group also distinguishes them from the rest.

There are groups, such as the family, in which the members occupy different positions (grandparents, parents, sons and daughters, brothers and sisters). In other groups, such as in the group of friends, all the members occupy the same position, either because they have a same occupation or because they belong to a same generation. The group in which all the members occupy a same position is called “group of peers”. Thus, in school the classmates form the group of peers because they are students, and at the same time the team of teachers are another group of peers. Particularly in the case of the adolescent his/her group of peers is extremely important for his/her search of identity.

The group offers the adolescent security, attention, and dignity in a world that often results anonymous, complex, insensitive, and weakening to him/her. The need of having a belonging group and of being accepted in it defines his/her behaviour. In the middle of a confusion of roles and not being able to maintain the infantile dependence nor to assume yet the adult independence, the adolescent delegates to the group a great part of his/her attributes and to the parents the majority of his/her responsibilities. By means of this mechanism the adolescent can feel that he/she “has nothing to do with nothing” and that it is the others that “must handle it”. This can also explain a certain “inconsiderateness” they experience towards the beings and things of the real world. As a consequence of this stage that the youths have to go through it is adequate that the functioning of the school, its rules, and its pedagogical project are oriented to enhance liberty, independence, responsibility of action, of thought, and of coexistence.

We then consider “identity” as unity of personality felt by the individual and recognised by others, as this “know who I am” is a critical matter for youths. Although this identity is built by the adolescent it is also fundamental to recognise that the others have a lot to do with its constitution, through their view, their appreciations, and the place they give it. These “others” are both the peers and the adults. Furthermore, the process of building the identity is shared by the group of adolescents and in general it is very conflictual for them.

The identification models

In the construction that a collectivity makes of a certain identification model there are landmarks that are incorporated to the collective imagery to recreate the identification discourse. And it is for this reason that when we approach the study of social identifications we should consider diverse components that integrate the identification models such as symbols, symbolic actions, discourses, and images. By symbols we understand a series of culturally connotated elements and hence loaded with meanings for the members of the studied collectivity. Symbolic actions are the rituals, collective expressions where a whole load of symbols and meanings are brought into play. Discourses are the means by which symbols are given meanings. Finally, images are the “artificially” built elements (of symbolic character) that can become symbols or not and remain as nature of symbol and not of image.

The projection of the identifying image

We must analyse the existence of legitimating ideological discourses built to project the group identification of the adolescents we are working with. Thus it becomes necessary to approach the discourses that create the sensation of feeling part of and recognising oneself as a member of the group (of that school, that neighbourhood, that age, that gang, etc) and hence how those discourses are built: from inside the group and from outside of it, who create them, how they are internalised, how they are projected, and how they are received, etc. We must point out that the image these adolescents identify themselves with is built in relation with the image of their age group that is projected in the society in which they are inserted. This image will be conditioned both by the one they show to the world as by the one that is given to them from outside. These images of how we are, how we live, what differentiates us from the others, what makes us

proud, etc. form a part of the identification references that every community or group elaborates for its permanence and its own existence.

The consciousness-raising of the generational identity

The manifestations of the social identities, as in our case those of the adolescent students of the schools we analyse, are very varied and are subjected as every social fact to continuous changes. Amongst these manifestations would be the different responses that adolescents adopt faced with submission and rebelliousness strategies, and their reactions of conflict and/or violence or acceptance will be imposed to a certain extent by their generational identity, their gender identity, and their ethnic identity amongst others. On the other hand, the forms of sociability out of the educational environment will contain ideologies and values originated in the school itself.

Although from the point of view we adopt certain contexts and age groups create a specific group identity, this identity must be differentiated from the claiming positioning the individuals have of it or not. That is, the existence of an identity does not imply the existence of a claiming position of it, a “political” conscience of that generational identity.

Space as an identity marker

On the other hand, we are interested in analysing the fight that the students establish when at the identity level they appropriate the common spaces they share. In this fight for the appropriation of the urban and school space we must reveal in what way the appropriated places configure identity strategies for these adolescents (graffitis, daubs, posters, various symbols...). It is also important to examine in depth the practices and discourses that are built in relation with the “others” of the neighbourhood and the school (parents, teachers, students of a nearby school...), and at the same time to show in what way the students appropriate differentially the material and symbolic goods of these sceneries (squares, streets, school playground, gymnasium, classrooms, school cafeteria, amusement arcades, etc.).

These places are then adopted as emblems of identity to mark, from the views of outside, the specificity of that social group. The described features and practices are given priority in the dominant schemes of perception and classification as a criterion for the attribution of the mark of member of this or that group of students, gang, year, class, team, neighbourhood...

Coming back to the symbolic strategies of these groups of adolescent students in our schools it is interesting to reflect on how they are expressed in an urban context marked by an enormous diversification of lifestyles and conceptions of the world, where “...an experience of the totality, widely shared, capable of generating a common and long-lasting social identity” becomes unthinkable. Faced with this framework of social fragmentation, how can the same adolescents confer a new status to that term they are named with?

In terms of Bourdieu³, the social space is modelled as a space of relations where the social actors are defined by their positions related with said space: "...the social world is presented (...) as a symbolic system that is organised according to the logic of difference", and this is why "the social space tends to work as a symbolic space".

Identity-adolescents conflict

A first approach to the problems of the youth is to know how the aspects that define a personality in agreement with his/her reality are being configured. This achieved personal development, called identity, will allow the adolescent to project him/herself at the personal and social level.

The identity conflicts of adolescents are multidimensional and many factors can contribute to the development of the ethnic identity with success or not.

Adolescents can be commonly in a phase of turbulence of life and conflict due in part to the physical and mental changes that are characteristic of their age. Adolescence is a stage that is associated with considerable changes of the self. Adolescence is a stage of life that is very important in the formation of identity and the individual development inside a social and cultural context. The acceptance of the community and of the friends may affect the adolescent's behaviour.

Adolescents usually have "identity crisis" or "self-esteem crisis", that is, they do not value themselves as what they are but they have in mind that "ideal type" of person they think they will never become. On many occasions this undervaluation is determined by physical aspects of their body they do not agree with. This may cause situations of insecurity, phobias, and inadequate behaviours. On other occasions, some failures at school, in their relations with friends or with their parents can produce emotional problems (anorexia, bulimia, depressions...). It is important to value oneself and to value the people around us, because we hold that self-esteem is essential for psychological survival. Those who have a high ambivalence about their identity tend to have more difficulties.

We have to learn to recognise that what is adequate for one adolescent may not be adequate for another, as each adolescent is unique with his/her own personal history and this will determine his/her healthy development of identity. As counsellors we need to be aware that the particular objective of our culture and our position in it have an influence on us.

Ethnicity-conflict

Whilst the development of identity is a complex task for all adolescents it is particularly complicated for adolescents belonging to a minority ethnical group in the host society. On the one hand they have the messages of their home culture, on the other hand they have the ones of their groups of friends, and finally they have the messages of the new society to which they have to adapt. Despite the fact that sometimes this is a great

³Bourdieu, P. 1978. Capital simbólico y clases sociales. In: Georges Duby, L'Arc, Num. 72, pp. 13-19 and

Bourdieu, P. 1988. La distinción. Criterios y bases sociales del gusto. Taurus. Madrid.

opportunity for their development, due to these different pressures that they experience the adolescent feels as if he/she were trapped between the beliefs and ethnic values of his/her parents, his/her group of friends, as well as those of society. This causes stress, which adds up to the already existing natural conflictual state of the identity development of the self.

When we integrate our cultures in our personal identity we are recognising the influence of different contexts where we have grown and where we are living. The ethnic identity develops with the experiences of life. Many times the stereotypes that society has about our cultures can affect the formation of the ethnic identity in some adolescents because many times the stereotype that society places on a culture (s) can cause humiliation or shame about your culture (s) and can be a great resource for the conflicts of the ethnic identity of the adolescent.

We are interested in analysing the relation between the process of building the identity/group and that of the building of hegemony in the area. The different imaginisations of the collectivity (of adolescents) are directly related with the conflicts that are generated in the multiple relations students-parents-teachers. The differential appropriation of history, the different definitions of “we” and of the “others”, as well as the definitions of the notion of “culture” make sense in the process that generates these relations. Thus, a second question arises: What factors have affected the diversification of perspectives amongst those who from the official view are “members of a same generational group” and of a same community?

Self-esteem, adolescence, and identity

Adolescence is one of the most critical periods for the development of self-esteem; it is the stage where the person needs to achieve a firm identity. It comprises the years in which the child passes from dependence to independence and to the confidence in his/her own forces. It is a time in which many basic matters are laid on the table; think of vocation, the plans to make a living, matrimony, the basic principles of existence, the independence of the family, and the capacity to relate with the opposite sex. And to these aspects we have to add all those conflicts of childhood that have not been solved and that arise again, conflicts that also have to be faced.

In the “identity crisis” of adolescence youths question themselves automatically, including the opinion of themselves they have acquired in the past. They can rebel and reject any evaluation another person offers them, or they may find that they are so confused and insecure of themselves that they only asks the rest for approval and advice of all types. Whichever the approach to their new identity the adolescents will inevitably pass through a critical reorganisation of their way of seeing themselves with the subsequent change in their self-esteem.

Education: Integration or exclusion of cultural diversity?

According to many authors our educational system, especially the school, is modelled for a urban industrial society and for a rule of law. It is a teaching body formed in the idea of a superior culture (the western) that is uniform and of a concrete ethnic group. And we could discuss if our educational policy tries to apply acceleratedly to the cultural minorities an assimilationist reform (affirmative action?).

The increment in recent years in Spain of foreign children and adolescents in primary and secondary schools puts to the test some principles of the new educational rules, such as tolerance and the impulse of the students' cultures. Numerous studies have focused on certain immigrant minorities showing a strong tendency of the school to uniformity that produces the relegation of the minorities' cultures. Habitually, these cultures are not perceived as an intercultural enrichment but as a "problem".

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