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The Lack of Gratitude's Practice in a Hyper Individualist, Hyper Consumer, and Hyper Technologized Society

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Abstract

This paper proposes to identify the gratitude practice of a group of 40 master students at Petroleum-Gas University of Ploiesti, young people that have been raised in a society dominated by capitalist values: individualism, consume, competition, efficiency, and financial power. Research objectives have followed to analyse the gratitude level for their lives, to the investigated master students, to identify the important persons from their lives and the changes determined by the exercise of Gratitude Journal. Content analyse of the journals demonstrated the lack of gratitude practice of master students, their focus on negative aspects of their lives, the limited number of persons their feel gratitude for, the negative perception on today society, but also positive changes in their lives as a consequence of the exercise of Gratitude Journal completion (reflections considering their own live, the important persons and the importance of spending time with family, the satisfaction for making charitable activities).

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1. Introduction

In a hyper individualist, hyper consumer, and hyper technologized society, young people and adolescents learn to believe that the individual and the individualism are fundamental reference points for the world, that them represent the reason for decisions and aspirations. Everything is happening around, life models from mass media, their own

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experiences demonstrate to the adolescents and young people that they have to manage their lives alone, to impose (with tenacity, and also aggressiveness) in order to have social success or to use any means to reach their objectives, desires, dreams. Interests about choosing the school, professional and socio-economic route are priorities, in spite of the concern for the human relations quality, for emotions, for admiration and gratitude for the close persons of their lives.

Competition and celebrity culture influence today adolescents and young people to excessively concentrate on success. Many of them make applications for at least two faculties for different reasons: to be the best, to have a certain “image” in the society, to deal with social conveniences, to have a high socio-economic status. The adolescent (and his/her parents) pay attention to the status and prestige of the university, to the qualification that they intend to obtain, to the financial perspective of future job, and less to the educational values (curriculum, competences, values and attitudes).

Unfortunately, today more than ever, the universities are not always proud about the candidates’ basic competences (for the specialization they are opting for), but still we can observe a powerful willing of young generation to get diplomas. After graduation, the option for master degree is almost compulsory. The obsession for universities, classes, profession, as a condition for better financial possibilities, contrasts with the joy for living, for relationships, for giving love, patience, help, and time for the other human beings. As Pleșu (2011, p. 8) commented, “we are developed and precarious. It is striking, for example, the disappearance almost complete of some essential issues from the horizon of our interrogation and reflection.” More, “we are contaminated by a career and gain’s wildness that disfigures us. The rhythm of everyday life do not either spare the interior peace” (Pleșu, 2011, p. 55). Unfortunately, the reflection of adolescents/young people on own life is replaced by a barbarian emotivism, and an excessive preoccupation for material gains.

Since the beginning of the 20th century, in his work “Rationalization of the education”, Max Weber identified the new orientation of rational education which was focused on developing more the “the specialist” and less the old type, “the cultural man”. Later, in 1972, S. Bowles, in his work “Unequal Education and the Reproduction of the Social Division of Labour”, enunciated the idea that the capitalism have wicked the role of the family and the church and diminished their roles as socialization factors, and causing the growth of geographical mobility of all the segments of a family with consequences on the internal connections of the extended family. The effects of all these social changes could be seen in the personality profile of nowadays young people which, without the emotional support of their families, without the cultural roots offered by traditional family, become easily influenced by the educational contexts offered by the modern educator with great impact: mass media (and the “models” that this institution proposes).

As a paradox, in a society that, theoretically, promotes the respect for the individuality and the necessity to create the contexts for optimal development of every individual), we still recognize the effects of a bureaucratic educational system. As the promoters (see L. Althusser) of the model of the institutional repression consider, the educational system induce the conformism conduits to the people by using mechanisms that limit children’s spontaneity and creativity.

All these aspects worry us, especially when thinking that today adolescents are parts of the tomorrow society, and its quality depends on the values young people internalized and put into practice.

2. Research Methodology

2.1. General aim and objectives of present research

The idea of present research has started from the experiment of doctor Robert Emmons from Davis University, California which has asked the students to complete a Gratitude Journal, for 10 weeks; every week, the students had to write 5 events for which they were grateful. The results have been surprisingly: 25% of students were happier, more faithful in their lives, and even get less ill during the experiment. Then, Robert Emmons repeated the study, but this time, the students have been asked to fill in their Gratitude Journal every day for 2 weeks. In order to evaluate the state of the participants, he has sent questionnaires to students’ friends, which have noticed that the subjects of the experiment have become more involved for helping and morally supporting the others. In fact, Robert Emmons has demonstrated that our genetic structure could be consciously controlled; forcing the students to

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