EPC-TKS 2013

Self indicators in adolescent's self reports

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Abstract

Studying the construction of identity in adolescence (Erikson, 1968) we use some elements of Bruner's Cultural Psychology (1990). In particular we refer to the indicators of Self identified by Bruner (1998) in text-type self-reports analysis. Adopting Bruner's indicators allows to understand the most popular qualities that the current generation of adolescents uses as a point of reference in the identity construction process

1. Objective

The study intends to explore which are the main qualities referred to self image used by adolescents to describe themselves. The aim is to understand how adolescents between 15 and 17 years use to approach the phase-specific task consisting in the construction of their identity (Erikson, 1982; Kunnen & Bosma, 2005).

The possibility to write something about their self image through self-report allows the participants to be directly involved in the search for meaning, offering an opportunity to reflect on their identity, and enabling them to test a version of their significant stories. The narrative writing can also support informed choices at a crucial stage, as the adolescence can be considered.

2. Theoretical framework

Studying the construction of identity in adolescence we refer to the contribution of Erikson (1982), and the next revisions made by Marcia (1980), and Bosma (1985). We also use some elements of Bruner's Cultural Psychology (1990). In particular we apply the indicators of Self identified by Bruner (1998) in text-type self-reports analysis.

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Indicators of Self are listed below:

- action - practical activities in which the subject is personally involved, acts of free choice undertaken in order to create a design or a purpose (eg. I like football, I practice it 5 times a week; I'm a guy who loves nature and to stay outdoors)
- commitment - adoption and/or opposition to rules and actions done in their name. Direct involvement of the subject in action, company, task (eg. I am striving to find the easiest way to get to the point; I like to become a mechanic because I like riding bike)
- resources - cognitive and social strategies necessary to achieve goals or overcome obstacles that hinder the implementation of projects (eg. My character is open; I have a good disposition towards new ideas and change)
- consistency - the narrator's willingness to build a story with an internal logic, creating a scenario in which events make sense (eg. I realized that since all my friends -when they have problems- ask for my help)
- qualities – expressions about Self in terms of perceptual and qualitative dimensions related to the body and the inner world (eg. I think I'm an ambitious and determined person, that knows and wants to achieve his own objectives)
- reflexivity - refers to the meta cognitive part of Self and to the ways of thinking used by the author to carry out the analysis of past or current experiences (eg. in my life I use to think twice before doing things because you have to think about what you are doing or what you will do)
- social referencing - network and social ties which become a reference for the Self, for choices, and to justify own values and projects (eg. I'm very well with my friends, through their feedback I understand to be very funny and comic)
- evaluation - the narrator's desire to express an opinion on his own or other's behaviours and events, observing them as external, in a detached position (eg. this time I don't love so much; everyone says that adolescence is ugly and I agree with him)
- location - reveals how an individual is placed in time, space and social position (eg. I am a 13 year old boy, physically I consider myself as a medium height boys with green eyes and brown hair).

3. The sample

The analysed sample is represented by two groups of adolescents belonging to two different ages: 15 years old (54 subjects attending the last year of a second-grade secondary school: 27 males and 27 females) and 17 years old (40 subjects attended the penultimate year of a second-grade secondary school: 30 males and 10 females).

4. Method

We used a questionnaire of self-presentation (Zuczkowski, 1976; Nicolini, 1999) containing open-ended questions, requiring the participants to provide a description of themselves both for the direct image and the reflected image (Cooley, 1902). In this paper the analysis will focus the detection of self markers used in the first reply to the question: 'Talk about you: how do you think you are?' In this section of the questionnaire the focus is on the exploration of the direct image, that is to say the conception of Self based more on private reflection than on others' feedback.

We used NVIVO, a software that enables a lexicon-metrical analysis of texts. We agreed to adopt as unit-analysis the sentence from point to point and, in some cases, depending on the meaning, the sentence closed with a semicolon or a colon. For each unit-analysis one of the self indicators was attributed, according to the prevalent content expressed. We conducted the analysis independently, with an agreement of 93% of cases. The conflicting assignments were discussed, and reallocated at a later time.