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Student's attitudes to the “others” and their sense of wellbeing – Polish sample

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Abstract. Main aim of our study was to explore the attitudes of young people from majority to peers from the groups of minorities and their subjective wellbeing. We used the Questionnaire “Do you like other people?”, the Questionnaire for assessment of aggression written by Buss and Perry (1992) and the Questionnaire SWLS useful for measurement the satisfaction with life. The whole sample includes 261 subjects: 100 students at the age 9 – 11, 100 hundred students at the age 12-15 and 61 students at the age 17-19. . In this presentation we focused on the results obtained for the last older group made of 31 girls and 30 boys. The study was carried out in spring 2014 in a city of over 400 thousand inhabitants in Poland. The results of comparative analyses are discussed in this paper.

Key words: minorities, majority, aggression, attitudes, satisfaction with life, youth

Introduction

Multiculturalism is an important idea in contemporary world supported and developed in many European societies (Flammer, Alsaker, 1999). It is generally contradicted by two attitudes. Some environments show a tendency towards cultural unification, so tend to eliminate idiosyncratic features of different cultures, while others show negative or hostile attitudes to multiculturalism within their countries.

Many legal acts have been proposed to protect the cultures of social minorities and many institutions are engaged in realisation of the idea of multicultural Europe (Kosikova, Liberska, 2014, Huse at all, 2014). In general, the idea has been accepted by most of environments (for example: by politicians, journalists, scientists involved in the development of the European Union structures) but there are still some environments rejecting it. Some nationalistic movements or groups show their openly hostile attitude to other cultures and want to coerce the majority to exclude the members of minorities from different spheres of social life, including education, health care, politics and others. Such activities and attitudes hamper and delay realisation of the idea of multiculturalism. In extreme cases, members of social minority groups are excluded, separated and marginalised. As a consequence, the persons representing the social majority and those representing ethnic minorities develop the sense of rejection, aversion, alienation or even mutual hostility (Liberska, Farnicka, 2014). Negative stereotypes concerning the ethnic minorities are still believed and negative attitudes towards “the others” are still met.

Aim of the study

The main aim of our study was to recognise the attitudes of young people representing the social majority towards those representing social minorities and correlate these attitudes with aggression and subjective sense of wellbeing measured by the satisfaction with life.

The fundamental study question was as follows.

Are the sense of satisfaction with life and a tendency to aggressive behaviour significantly correlated to the attitudes towards ethnic minorities?

According to a number of earlier studies, women more often than men show indirect verbal aggression (e.g. backbiting) (Kenrick, Neuberg, Cialdini, 2002), while men more often than women show direct physical and verbal aggression (insults, invectives). In view of the recent results of the studies on aggression, in the period of adolescence (16 -17 years of age) girls reveal much higher level of direct aggression, including physical aggression, than boys in the same age (Liberska, Matuszewska, 2003, 2007). However, as yet the results have not been confirmed and this problem needs further exploration (Liberska, Farnicka, in press).

Observations of some nationalistic groups point out that their members are predominantly men. Women dominate among the persons revealing averse attitudes toward people of different religions. However, these observations have been made for elderly persons, while the data for young people are scarce (Liberska, Franicka, 2014). Our previous study showed very positive attitudes of our adolescents towards different nationalities in Poland (see: Flammer, Alsaker, 1999) – but it was at the end of 20th century. In last period we observe many transformations in socio-political context of life in Poland (Liberska, 2009 – it is one of the reason that we expect also changes in the attitudes of majorities toward ethnic minorities.

That is why the following particular questions were asked: (1) do boys show stronger aggressive tendencies than girls ? and (2) do boys show less positive attitudes towards ethnic minorities than girls ?

On the basis of peruse of literature, the following two hypotheses were put forward.

H1 – There is a significant relation between the intensity of tendencies towards aggressive behaviour and the intensity of positive/negative attitudes towards ethnic minorities.

H2 – There is a significant relation between the sense of satisfaction with life in young people and the intensity of positive/negative attitudes towards ethnic minorities.

The study tools

The study was performed with the use of the questionnaire for assessment of attitudes towards ethnic minorities entitled “Do you like other people?” written by the authors of this presentation, the questionnaire for assessment of aggression written by Buss and Perry (1992), version of Amity, and the

satisfaction with life scale (SWLS) written by Diener, R. A. Emmons, R. J. Larson, S. Griffin (1985), adapted by Z.Juczyński (2001).

The first questionnaire is composed of the part with basic data and 31 items divided into two groups. The first group (19 items) permits evaluation of the attitudes towards ethnic minorities in general, while the second group (12 items) provides information on the attitudes towards German, Russian and Ukrainian minorities. The responses are marked on the five-degree Likert scale (from (1) *I am strongly againstto ... (5) I am strongly for....*). The higher the result the more positive are the attitudes towards ethnic minorities. The maximum result referring to the first group of items (attitude to ethnic minorities in general) is 95, while the minimum result is 19, while the maximum result referring to the second group of items is 60 (60= 12x5), and the minimum is 12 (12 =12x1).

The study group

The study group comprised 261 persons, including 100 pupils aged 9-11, 100 pupils aged 12-15 and 61 students aged 17-19. In this presentation I am going to focus on the results obtained for the last group made of 31 girls and 30 boys. They were a students of high schools. The study was carried out in spring 2014 in a city of over 400 thousand inhabitants in Poland.

Results

1/ Attitudes towards ethnic minorities in general were less positive than those towards German, Russian and Ukrainian minorities. The attitudes of boys towards ethnic minorities in general were more positive than those of girls, but the opposite result was obtained for the attitudes towards the three selected minorities, the attitudes of boys were less positive than those of girls.

2/ Intensity of tendency to aggression

- The highest result was obtained in the scale of *hostility* (M=21.75, SD = 6.37). The mean result obtained for girls (M=22.16, SD =5.71) was *higher* than that for boys (M=21.33, SD =7.06).
- In the scale of *anger* the mean result obtained for girls (M=20.26, SD=4.62) was *higher* than for boys (M=18.2, SD=7.02).
- In the scale of *physical aggression* the result for boys was *higher* (M=19.57, SD=6.66) than for girls (M=16.26, SD=5.16).

- The lowest were the results in the scale of *verbal aggression*, the mean result for girls (M=14.48, SD=3.44) was *lower* than for boys (M=16.5, SD=3.38).

Aggression of girls is more hidden (hostility and anger, indirect aggression) than in boys.

3/ In order to check if boys show greater tendencies to aggressive behaviour the results were analysed by U Mann – Whitney test (table 1). A significant result was obtained for physical aggression and verbal aggression, which means that boys men show significantly higher tendency towards physical and verbal aggression than girls.

Variable	Girls			Boys			Z	p
	M	SD	Sum of ranks	M	SD	Sum of ranks		
Physical aggression	16,26	5,16	673	23	6,35	1218	- 4,15	.00
Verbal Aggression	14,48	3,44	789,5	16,5	3,38	1092,5	- 2,34	.02
Hostility	22,16	5,71	998,5	21,33	7,05	892,5	0,53	.59
Anger	20,26	4,62	1075,5	18,2	7,02	815	1,64	.10

Table 1. Tendency to aggression in boys and girls (test U Mann-Whitney).

c/ The attitude of girls and boys towards ethnic minorities

Although girls show more positive attitude towards ethnic minorities than boys, the differences related to sex are not statistically significant (U Mann – Whitney test).

4/ Aggression and attitudes towards ethnic minorities

There is no statistically significant correlation between the intensity of positive attitudes towards ethnic minorities and the intensity of tendencies to aggressive behaviour in the scale of anger only. In the other scales studied (*physical, verbal aggression and hostility*) we find statistically significant correlations with the intensity of positive attitudes towards ethnic minorities (table 2).

Attitudes to:	Total		Girls (N=31)		Boys (N=30)	
	To all minorities	To selected minority	To all minorities	To selected minority	To all minorities	To selected minority
Manifestations of aggression:						
Anger	-0,15	-0,19	-0,26	-0,31	-,06	-0,19
Hostility	-0,34	-0,13	-0,48	0,00	-0,16	-0,21
Physical aggression	-0,08	-0,24	-0,01	-0,04	-0,32	-0,46
Verbal aggression	-0,07	-0,44	-0,14	-0,33	0,04	-0,43

Table 2. Aggression and attitudes toward ethnic minorities in boys and girls – correlation coefficient r Spearman.

However, the strength of correlation between the particular dimensions of aggression and the intensity of positive attitudes towards ethnic minorities in general and towards the three selected minorities was different for boys and for girls (table 2, 3).

A significant negative correlation was noted between the intensity of *hostility* and the intensity of positive attitudes towards *ethnic minorities* for whole group (boys and girls) (r Spearman = -0.32) ($p < 0.005$) and also for girls ($r = -0.48$) ($p < 0.005$).

A significant negative correlation was revealed between the intensity of *physical aggression of men* and the intensity of their positive attitudes towards the *three selected minorities* ($r = -0.46$, $p < 0.005$).

Another significant negative correlation was between the intensity of *verbal aggression* with the intensity of positive attitude towards the *three selected minorities*, for boys ($r = -0.43$, $p < 0.005$) and for girls ($r = -0.44$, $p < 0.005$).





Sex	Positive attitude toward	Type of aggression
Female	Three of the minority 	non
	Whole of the minority 	Hostility
Male	Three of the minority 	Verbal and physical aggression
	Whole of the minority 	Non

Table 3. Significant negative correlation between sex, positive attitude toward “the others” and type of aggression (summary).

5/ Significance of satisfaction with life

A strong positive correlation was observed in the whole group of respondents between the level of satisfaction with life and the intensity of positive attitude towards ethnic minorities in general ($r_{\text{Spearman}}=0.55$, $p<0.05$). However, the correlation between the level of satisfaction with life and the intensity of positive attitudes towards the three selected minorities was moderate ($r=0.41$, $p<0.05$). Taking into account the impact of sex, for boys a strong significant and positive correlation was found between the level of satisfaction with life and intensity of positive attitudes towards the three selected ethnic minorities ($r=0.79$, $p<0.05$). Also for boys a significant but weak correlation occurred between the level of satisfaction with life and the intensity of positive attitudes towards minorities in general ($r=0.33$, $p<0.05$).

6/ For the whole group of respondents a significant negative correlation was noted between the level of satisfaction with life and the intensity of aggressive behaviour revealed as hostility ($r_{\text{Spearman}} = - 0.55$, $p<0.05$) and verbal aggression ($r = - 0,28$, $p<0,05$).

Discussion and conclusions

The study was undertaken to check if the tendencies to aggressive behaviour and the level of satisfaction with life are correlated to the attitudes towards the ethnic minorities living in Poland. Such studies have not been performed earlier in Poland.

Results of the analysis confirmed a limited correlation between the above-mentioned variables.

It has been shown that the attitude towards a certain behaviour - directed to the object of attitude, in contrast to the general attitude including the emotional, cognitive and behavioural components towards this object, is the best predictor of subsequent behaviour towards this object (Wojciszke, 2011). Results of our study have confirmed that the correlation between aggressive behaviour, including physical and verbal aggression, and the attitudes towards the three selected ethnic minorities (German, Russian and Ukrainian) is stronger than the correlation between the aggressive behaviour and the attitudes towards ethnic minorities in general. However, it should be remembered that our study had only declarative character (the respondents declared their attitudes towards the minorities). Therefore, it can only be supposed that the stronger the tendency to direct aggressive behaviour in boys the less positive their attitude towards the

three selected minorities that are the most numerous in Poland. It cannot be excluded that this correlation has a different sense, that is the negative experience from the contacts with the most numerous minorities provoke less positive attitudes towards them and generate aggressive behaviour. However, we have checked a correlation between the intensity of the positive attitudes towards ethnic minorities and the number of contacts with them – and we found no significant correlation, so that - the second explanation should be rejected. According to our results the aggressive behaviour is not a consequence of bad experience, but the tendency towards aggressive behaviour leads to less positive social attitudes.

The results have supported the thesis that the tendencies to aggressive behaviour prompt the search of objects that to use to release aggression. However, we have found a significant correlation between direct aggression (both physical and verbal) and hostility and the intensity of positive attitudes towards minorities and not between anger and the intensity of positive attitudes towards minorities.

Open, direct aggression (physical and verbal) is observable and cannot co-occur with anger. Anger is a subjective emotion accompanying physiological agitation and cognitive processes which can modify this emotion. Hostility is a feature of personality related to anger and direct aggression (Pilecka, 2001).

As we have not found a correlation between the anger and the attitude towards minorities but only a correlation between direct aggression and hostility and the attitudes towards minorities, it is justified to suppose that both the aggressive behaviour and intensity of positive attitudes towards minorities are a consequence of imitation and modelling (cf. Wojciszke, 2011). Therefore, working on the program stimulating positive changes in the attitudes towards minorities, attention should be paid to social stereotypes, family and school environments as well as the media. The above considerations have concerned boys.

For girls a significant negative correlation was found between hostility and the intensity of positive attitudes towards minorities in general and towards the three selected most numerous minorities in Poland. Therefore, in the girls the cognitive component of aggression becomes significant, although no correlation between the attitudes towards minorities and the earlier experience of contacts with the minorities was found. However, a negative correlation was found for girls between verbal aggression and the intensity of positive attitudes towards the three selected most numerous in Poland minorities, similarly as for young men. It means that young women develop structures regulating the aggressive behaviour with extended cognitive element of hostility, that hampers the manifestation of direct aggression towards minorities in general but not that towards the three selected minorities. One of the reasons responsible for poorer positive attitude of girls towards German, Russian and Ukrainian minorities is

the intergeneration transmission which is stronger than in boys. In particular the transmission of knowledge of historical events [and war experience]. However, a certain restriction of aggression to verbal one may follow from the socialisation of girls propagating the standard of a delicate and submissive girls or from weaker physical constitution.

The obtained significant correlation between the satisfaction with life and intensity of aggression and intensity of positive attitudes towards minorities has a serious positive social meaning. It indicates that the activities increasing satisfaction with life will enhance the intercultural integration.

A certain limitation of the outcome is a small number of the group of respondents. Moreover, as some immigration from Arab countries may be expected, the list of ethnic minorities considered should include them. The obtained image of attitude towards the ethnic minorities can soon change as a consequence of immigration of new ethnic groups or even when such immigration will not take place.

Satisfaction with life is recognize as an individual's base to more positive perception of human diversities and supporting factor to a more positive attitude towards compliance with the norms of social conduct. When aggressive reactions are activated by situational stimuli (e.g. behavior of model, provocation, social exclusion), high level of satisfaction with life is a factor which may prevent negative attitudes toward "others". However, such an interpretation should therefore be investigated in future research.

Our further exploration will go also in the direction of the examination of the relationship of satisfaction with life and a sense of control on events and own life and its significance for different forms of aggression of adolescents (indirect and direct) towards different ethnic minorities (see: Liberska, 2004, 2014; Tangney, Baumeister & Boone, 2004, Baumeister, Vohs, Tice, 2007, DeWall, Finkel & Denson, 2011, Jian-Bin Li at all, 2014).

In conclusion, presented study considers the relationship between adolescents' attitudes toward ethnic minorities, their satisfaction with life and aggression. A particular contribution is that it clarifies that less positive attitudes towards "others" may not only rely on a person's tendency to aggressiveness but also depend on his/her subjective wellbeing or level of satisfaction on life. Probably is that despite an evolutionary roots of aggression, a resentment and hostility towards "the others" may to be activated in civilized society by lack of social security (see Augustynek, 2001). If we manage to raise the standard of living of the majority, it is her attitude towards ethnic minorities will become more positive. Identification of potential preventative factors for hostility towards "others" is an important challenge for researchers.

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