

## ADOLESCENCE, MUSIC AND EMOTIONS. AN IDIOGRAPHIC APPROACH

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### Abstract

*Phylogenesis and ontogenesis confirm the importance music has in man's life. It is considered to accompany man during the entire life, from birth until death. Every age has its own music and rhythms... According to age psychology, it is well known that adolescence and post-adolescence close the first cycle of human development. Out of the two, the adolescence period has always raised the researchers' interest, being carefully investigated. The interest granted to this period even led to the development of a distinct new field, namely that of the teenage psychology, which gave birth to a study subject for the teachers to be, at the Master's Degree programme level, in Romania, called the Psycho-pedagogy of teenagers, youths and adults. This article shall not insist on the theoretical components concerning the teenage years, also detailed in the specialised literature, but it is an attempt at scanning the teenage soul, through music, based on the analysis of the papers produced by 1<sup>st</sup> year Master's Degree Programme students, attending the National Music University in Bucharest, and handed in for the study subject of the Psycho-pedagogy of teenagers, young people and adults.*

**Key words:** emotions, interpretative phenomenological analysis, music

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### Introduction

The irrefutable evidence of the interest taken in adolescence, as a significant stage in an individual's life, on the one hand, but also in the teen personality, on the other hand, is the vast number of works in the specialised literature in this field, both worldwide, and in Romanian psychology, by authors such as: Stanley Hall (1904), Maurice Debesse (1936), Jean Piaget (1955), E. Erikson (1962), R. M. Lerner and D. F. Hultsch (1983), Helen L. Bee (1986), Vander

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Zanden (1993), Gerald R., Adams, Michael D. Berzonsky (2007), Ursula Schiopu (1982), Elena Bonchis (2004), Anca Munteanu (2004), Tinca Cretu (2001) etc. Furthermore, it is well-known that events experienced by the teenager, whether unique or not, have major implications for the emotions recorded during this period. Some researchers (Adams & Berzonsky, 2009, pp. 305-316) differentiated between several aspects of the emotional phenomenon, amongst which: the emotional states, experiences and manifestations, a synthetic characterisation of which being presented hereinafter.

Emotional states are induced moods involving specific physiological and behavioural changes taking place as a reaction to a certain stimulus. The emotional experience is how an individual interprets and assesses the emotional state and behaviour. The emotional manifestations are potentially noticeable changes, changes at the level of the face, voice, body, and activity, taking place as a reaction to the emotional states and experiences. The Romanian psychologists Ursula Schiopu and Emil Verza (1995, pp. 228-247) estimate that, during this period, the emotion range becomes very vast and the emotional vibration (affective resonance) extremely vivid. Regrets, satisfaction, disgust, sadness, repulsion, shame, flight, envy, jealousy, fear, bitterness, prudency, horror, pride, excitement, impetus, exaltation, pleasure, calmness, aversion, happiness, misery, joyfulness, delight, care, concern, anger, elevation, ecstasy, tenderness, etc. are just several types of affective states obvious during puberty and adolescence.

Furthermore, as per the same authors (Șchipu & Verza, 1995), the sound sensitivity records important changes during adolescence, since this is the time when both the capacity to understand music, and certain preferences in the field develop. Music is listened to rapturously (particularly modern music), but oftentimes at an excessive intensity, which mirrors not only some sort of auditory insensitivity, but also some auditory aggressiveness which demands satisfying. The teenager's cultural consumption diversifies. Gatherings for recording and listening to music are highly prevalent - the field of modern music becoming a method of expressing autonomy. These aspects are interesting, both generally, and particularly in case the Subjects of this research are persons with musical training. The specialised literature (Adams & Berzonsky, 2009, pp. 305-316) shows opinions related to the fact that teenagers can analyse their personality, as well as that of others, and can live emotional reactions related to the common personality traits. Enhanced cognitive abilities make it possible to recognise own emotions, be they complex, multiple and pluri-determined, as well as the others'. Teenagers are more capable to introspect and analyse their own emotional life. Moreover, it is well-known that the same event could trigger negative emotional reactions in different persons.

In this context, this article is an attempt at catching an x-ray of the teenage soul, through music, based on the analysis of the 1<sup>st</sup> year Master's Students' works, with the National Music University of Bucharest, prepared for the study subject Psycho-pedagogy of teenagers, youths and adults.

## **Research Methodology**

### **Topic description**

The undertaken study (micro-research) was performed at the National Music University of Bucharest, where the Author of this paper performs her activity as an Associate Teaching Staff. For their assessment during the semester, at the study subject Psycho-pedagogy of teenagers, youths and adults, the students received the following complex work assignment: Identify 5 to 6 features of your own adolescence and reminisce the feelings and emotions corresponding to them. Then, make a musical collage of music fragments reflecting those feelings. The Students' final products, namely the collage, as well as a document including the corresponding explanations (the chosen features, the emotions they faced, the reasons why they chose those particular music fragments, which technical elements of the chosen music fragments are correlated to the feelings experienced during adolescence, etc.), or a movie detailing the same issues, or a Power Point presentation bearing the appropriate music background, were to be saved on an optical storage device and submitted for assessment.

### **Research Purpose**

The research focused on the performance of an interpretative-phenomenological analysis of the adolescent personality, through the recognition of own emotions and the correlation thereof with the music fragments appropriate for them.

### **Research Hypotheses**

H1: Are the teenagers' cognitive and emotional experiences reflected in the way they speak about them?

H2: Does the musical language influence the way Students perceive their emotional experiences?

### **Sample**

This study was performed on a *sample of 25 Students* in their 1<sup>st</sup> year Master's Degree, all majors (Compositional style and language, Musicological synthesis, Orchestra conducting stylistics, Jazz

and pop musical cultures, Musical education and religious musical cultures), Students who study, as per their study curriculum, *Psycho-pedagogy of teenagers, youths and adults*. Then, out of the 25 students whose works we had previously analysed and assessed, 8 were asked to attend an interview. The sample was selected based on convenience criteria, so this sample may not be representative for the entire population it was taken out of.

### **Data Collection Methods**

*The method used* in conducting this investigation was the *content analysis method*. It consists of describing, explaining or theorising a testimony, experience, event or phenomenon through specific ways of systematisation and hierarchy classification. Although it is used in analysing qualitative data - some authors considering it to be a quasi-qualitative method - the content analysis method also includes an important quantitative element (Antonesei, Popa, & Labăr, 2009, p. 63).

In order to accurately catch the complexity of the investigated phenomena, it was necessary to use a research method allowing the Participants to access their own feelings and explore the associated significations in depth. In this respect, in order to perform an idiographic analysis of the subjective experience, we considered it appropriate to use the interpretative-phenomenological analysis method (IPA) as a qualitative research method. Furthermore, for a better understanding of the employed strategy, several theoretical insights thereon are provided hereinafter. The interpretative-phenomenological analysis (IPA) focuses on understanding the personal experience each single individual has, thus exploring the way people understand or engage in certain life events or processes. This provides the opportunity to research, describe and construe the way individuals understand their own experiences (Smith, Larkin, & Flowers, 2009).

Smith and Dunworth (2003, p. 41) describe three IPA core characteristics: ideographic, inductive and interrogative. IPA is strongly ideographic through the way it starts with the detailed examination of a case, up to the moment when it achieves a comprehensive form, continuing then with a detailed analysis of the second case, and so on, and so forth, through the entire corpus of cases.

Most of the IPA studies include a small number of Participants, making it possible to subsequently promote the idiographic logics and to conduct an IPA on a singular case.

The idiographic approach of the analysis therefore starts with particular examples, and slowly moves on to more general theories or category-building (Smith, Jarman, & Osborne, 1999). At the methodological level, an IPA study involves an intensive and detailed analysis of the

information gathered from a relatively small group of Participants. The textual information is collected through semi-structured interviews, focus-groups or data journals, and the subsequent analysis generates a series of patterns which can then take on a thematic form (Smith, Jarman, & Osborne, 1999). Starting from the assumption that the Participants are experts in terms of personal experiences, the IPA is a completely non-invasive manner of learning their personal history told in their own words and in the finest details possible.

We made use of the semi-structured interview, as a data collection method, on 8 out of the 25 Master's Degree Students whose works we had previously analysed.

### **Data Analysis and Interpretation**

The data were analysed and interpreted using qualitative methods (analysis, synthesis, comparison). The specialised literature gives no unique and unitary point of view concerning the method to approach the data during the analysis process. Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) give positive arguments as regards opting for a flexible approach in the analytical process. In general, data processing in the IPA context was described as an iterative and inductive process, which can be instrumented through various strategies. In the context of the research we herein propose a data analysis first stage consisting of the descriptive line-by-line analysis of the experiences the Participants presented. The associated purpose aims at having an individual understanding of each Subject, by reading and re-reading the presented experiential background. This first stage allows the researcher to gain access to the researched Subject's world, thus facilitating the transition to the following stage.

The second analytical stage consisted of making initial notes and observations, a strategy drawing near to the free text analysis. Descriptive, exploratory and conceptual comments were associated to the analysed material. At the end of this stage, all the highlighted aspects were re-read and, where applicable, the comments were supplemented.

If the first two stages described how the text was worked with from an immersive perspective, the third one consisted of reducing the identified details to a series of topics. The emerging topics were identified based on relevant quotes (extracted during the previous stage) and on the exploratory comments. In order to keep the coherence (particularly in the absence of the initial narrative flow), we used a matrix relating the emerging topics, the extracted quotes and the exploratory comments. A sequence of this matrix shall be shown and discussed in the section dedicated to the research results. After the matrix was filled out, the following stage implied

searching for connections between the emerging topics. Strategies such as abstraction, polarisation and correlation were used. Some of the established correlations are entered in the matrix section dedicated to descriptive and exploratory comments.

### Recorded Results

The content descriptive analysis implies building 3-column matrices (tables) (Smith, Larkin, & Flowers, 2009): the middle column contains fragments transcribed from the interviews, the right column contains comments related to these transcripts, and the left column contains the emerging topics associated to these comments and fragments transcribed from the interview. These topics are related to every Participant’s personal experience concerning the problematics of adolescence. Hereinafter there is a fragment of the IPA matrix corresponding to this research.

Table 1. *Analytical Matrix*

<i>Emerging Topics</i>	<i>Quotes</i>	<i>Descriptive and Exploratory Comments</i>
<i>Optimism</i>	<p><i>F.S:</i> I felt like the arrow in a nocked bow and could not wait to be released to fly. <i>Full of impetus, of energy.</i> This state of mind was making itself evident in the first part of the Concerto for violin and orchestra in E major, by J. S. Bach.</p> <p><i>U. E:</i> My adolescence was as <i>energetic</i> as all the semiquavers played by the violins, in the first part of Dixit Dominus by B. Galuppi. This is a psalm transposed on notes and played so carefully and masterfully. The composer made sure to highlight every important word and to hold back everything that should not stand out.</p> <p><i>B. B:</i> The 2<sup>nd</sup> part of the symphonic suite <i>Prin Muntii Apuseni</i>, by Martian Negrea, entitled <i>Tarantella</i>, renders very well the state of <i>optimism, zest and exuberant energy</i> characteristic for that period in my life. The fast tempo, the violins playing in unison, in the medium to acute register, energetically, the marked march rhythm, very well highlighted by the</p>	<p>The same aspects are highlighted, using different terms:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•happiness;</li> <li>•vivacity;</li> <li>•zest;</li> <li>•energy;</li> <li>•adolescent optimism, which knows no boundaries.</li> </ul> <p>The Master’s Degree Students use comparison to catch the complexity of the characteristics of the recorded feelings. The easiest way for them to do this is by using their specialised language, the musical language.</p> <p>Optimism is clearly related to the teenagers’ expectations.</p> <p>The specific impatience emerges (<i>II</i> could not wait to be released to fly).</p>

<i>Emerging Topics</i>	<i>Quotes</i>	<i>Descriptive and Exploratory Comments</i>
	percussion, describe perfectly the happiness and vivacity.	
<i>Feeling Mix</i>	<i>D. L:</i> <i>Italian Symphony</i> , part 4, shows the feelings specific to the period of the early high-school life: <i>unrest, disorientation</i> , a lot of activity, school-related <i>concerns, anguish</i> regarding the Maths semester test paper, etc.	Notice the multitude of recorded feelings correlated to the personal and to the parents' expectations. The concerns and anguishes also denote motivational aspects, perhaps a lack of confidence, etc.
<i>Instability; Dual Feelings</i>	<i>F. S:</i> As a teenager, I was not immune to the typical oscillations between <i>dreams and disappointments, trust and fear, happiness and sadness</i> . <i>F. Mendelssohn Bartholdy</i> very expressively renders these feelings in cadenza in the first part of the Concerto for violin and orchestra. <i>U. E:</i> That was how my teenager life was also: with <i>sun and shadows</i> .	The Master's Degree Students used the comparison again, and the easiest manner of rendering the feeling expressivity is by using musical terms.
<i>Hope</i>	<i>F.S:</i> Following the biographies of great men and how they succeeded to surpass themselves, I was <i>hopeful</i> again. The oboe music, accompanied by the horn, appears like a ray of sunshine (the beginning of the second part of Symphony no. 5, by P.I. Tchaikovsky).	Just like the Sun coming out after the storm, for the teenagers having experienced a mix of repetitive dual feelings and states of conflict, the hopes and wish to excel oneself emerge. Also, the matter of the teenagers' role models if brought to the foreground.
<i>Love</i>	<i>D. L:</i> <i>Ballade</i> , by C. Porumbescu shows the states and feelings I experienced during the moments when I felt butterflies in my stomach. <i>G. A:</i> I was very in-love, and that <i>love</i> soothed my soul just like the tonalities of the piano keys when playing <i>Mariage d'amour</i> in the performance of Richard Clayderman.	The teenage love, its turmoil and feelings are masterfully portrayed and compared to the violin sounds or to the tonalities of the piano keys.
<i>Relationship with the divinity</i>	<i>F.S:</i> The violin solo in the second part of the Concerto for violin and orchestra in E major, by J. S. Bach, is like a <i>prayer</i> rising above this world (represented by harmonic wave of the orchestra) which, through the melody and modulatory inflexions catches the most varied nuances of the feelings a	This special type of relation, described as worship, prayer, respect and fear of God, can be correlated to the religious education received in the family environment and has no boundaries related to the religious cult the teenager belongs to.

<i>Emerging Topics</i>	<i>Quotes</i>	<i>Descriptive and Exploratory Comments</i>
	human being can experience. None escapes the divinity's attention.	
<i>Freedom versus Lack thereof</i>	<i>U. S:</i> I became a bit <i>rebellious (RBD-Y soy rebelde)</i> . My parents were somewhat starting to turn into enemies. I felt they didn't give me any freedom, I felt I was held in a cage, which is why we fought almost daily.	The lack of freedom, its restriction ( <i>I felt I was held in a cage</i> ) will lead to tensions and situations of conflict with the parents, to a degradation of the relationship with them and to the manifestation of the rebellion.
<i>Relationship with the Friends</i>	<i>U. S:</i> My friends had become my family.	The group of friends replaces the family, until disappointment appears. Then, an improvement of the family relationship is seen.
<i>Relationship with the Parents</i>	<i>W. A:</i> Frantz Shubert - Musical Moment Op. 94. I chose this song because of the stacatto elements he uses, elements creating <i>tension</i> . This song will always make me think of my fights with my mother, during my teenage period, tense fights when we both felt like we were about to explode unless one gave in.	The comparison with the stacatto elements brings about that way in which the parents communicate, repetitively and markedly, causing tensions and conflicts, which degrade the relationship.
<i>Social Integration</i>	<i>T. N:</i> The <i>Bolero</i> , by Maurice Ravel, is repetitive and it builds up, which depicts <i>the way I gradually blended in with the new group</i> , at the music school where I transferred at 15. The rhythm of the bolero dance played by the drum keeps repeating itself and it represents the school, which does not change. Then comes the flute, which represents me, blending in with the new class, shy at first, and then bolder and bolder. The increasing dynamics of the melody highlights all of this. The fact that the theme is resumed, but with different instruments, shows the way I present myself in various situations in the new school.	In this case, the social integration is related to the identity development. As sense-giving systems providing, emotions are invariably related to the identity; when the emotional experience changes, the identity changes with it. Haviland considers the identity reconstruction process to be related to the development of new emotion-event connections and to the emotional processes, in general (Adams & Berzonsky, 2009, pp. 305-316).



## **Conclusions**

Some of the descriptive and exploratory comments presented in the matrix hereinabove are also preliminary study conclusions. The emerging topics identified following the performed analysis are: optimism, feeling mix, instability; dual feelings, hope, love, relation with the Divinity, freedom versus lack thereof, relation with the parents, relation with the friends, social integration, etc. Different Subjects, both in the textual language, as well as in the musical language, picture the same feeling differently. The musical pieces selected by the Students are representative for the mentioned emotions and feelings. They are taken both from the national repertoire, as well as from the international one, from various music writers, and various music genres and styles.

The first research hypothesis, H1, is confirmed by the data obtained both from the Students' papers (written language), and especially from the answers given during the interviews (spoken language). In our case, the emotional state and behaviour are interpreted and assessed retrospectively.

The ease and accuracy the comparisons are made with between the experienced emotions and feelings and the technical features of the musical fragments lead us to conclude that the Subjects are more familiar with using their specialised language (namely, the musical one), compared to other languages. Thus, the second research hypothesis is also confirmed.

Although the research purpose was reached, the IPA we started does not end here. The complexity of the approached phenomena leads us to continue the research in order to find macro-topics, holding a strong explanatory value related to the purpose of this research and to the questions raised herein.

The analytical process shall be resumed for every case. In the end, we are interested in identifying inter-subject patterns, but such aspects shall be detailed in a future article. This study thus provides an idiographic analysis catching, in detail, both the cognitive and emotional aspects of the adolescence, as an individual experience, focusing on the manner this experience is managed. Adolescence is a portal to adult life, and the changes characterising it are an adaptation to the transformation from child into adult (Adams & Berzonsky, 2009, pp. 305-316).

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