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## ASSERTIVENESS IN THE PERSONAL PROFILE OF ADOLESCENTS

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### ABSTRACT

This paper deals with traced different author's positions on the nature, content and structure of the Assertiveness. There is analyzed the place of the assertiveness in the personality profile of the adolescents by examining the correlation with the personality components. The position supported here is that assertiveness should not be attributed to a personality substructure. As a complex construct consisting of multiple components, assertiveness is related to different spheres of the personality. In this sense, it cannot be defined as part of a specific personality subset but as a self-contained element conjugating with a variety of personality components. The substantiation of this hypothesis is based on an exploration of the relation (co-relational dependence) between assertiveness and the qualities of the personality as defined by N. Reinwaldt.

**Key words:** structure of the assertiveness, personality components

### INTRODUCTION

The concept of assertiveness is relatively new to the theory and practice of psychology. In the mid 20th c., based on the tenets of humanitarian psychology, A. Solter defines and delineates the conception. His theses are rooted in the work of E. Schoster and E. Bern as well as in the ideas of gestalt therapy. The problems of assertive behaviour are also dealt with by E. Christov, K. Kelly, D. Volpe, A. Lang, A. Lazarus, V. Romek, E. Krukovich, T. Novak, V. Kaponi, V. Makarov, and others (1).

The term assertiveness is derived from the word *assert*, which means state, endorse, prove. Its interpretations are quite different. Some authors use it as a synonym to self-sufficiency and confidence (2-4). E. Solter and V. Kaponi consider assertiveness a personality characteristic, defined as autonomy, independence of external influences, and ability for self-control of the behaviour. Assertiveness, according to T. Paul, implies uninhibited behaviour, tailored to the individual's own incentives and persuasions

regardless of the attitude of the others. A. Bandura claims that the basic manifestations of assertiveness are the feeling of self-respect, the willingness to make individual decisions concerning one's own life and to take responsibility for these decisions (5). In other words, these authors emphasize the attitude of the individual to herself.

Other psychologists add respect and the acceptance of others to these characteristics. R. Fritchie (Fritchie, 1990) suggests that an assertive person is one who is responsible for his/her behaviour, demonstrates respect for others, and aspires for compromise. Sue Bishop (6) defines assertiveness as a form of behaviour based on personal responsibility and an awareness of other people's rights. This position views assertiveness as the optimal and most constructive approach to interpersonal relations, founded on the principles of humanism, which renounces manipulation, violence, and aggression to other people and allows for no impingement on the rights of the interacting parties.

Certain authors focus on the nature of these rights. Yakubowski defines assertiveness as an act of defending one's own human rights without violating the basic rights of others (7). This is a mode of reaction which makes allowances for the boundaries between individual rights and the rights of others and

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keeps these boundaries stable. M. G. Smith defines the assertive type of person as an individual aware of his rights who is ready to use and assert them if needed. At the same time, the assertive person acknowledges the rights of others and strives not to violate them in the process of interaction. Smith is also known for the so called code of assertiveness – a list of 10 rights of the individual amongst which are “the right to evaluate one’s own behaviour, thoughts, and emotions”, “the right to be independent of the opinion of others”, “the right to make mistakes”, etc. (8). Similar lists of assertive rights are devised by other authors working in the field (6, 9).

Many authors treat assertive behaviour as a basis of self-development and self-realization (4, 5, 10, 11). The strife to assert one’s own importance is a crucial source of human creative activity. A number of authors discuss it using a diversity of terms – “struggle for survival” (Ch. Darwin), “will for life”, (A. Schopenhauer), “will for power” (F. Nietzsche), “strife for supremacy” (A. Adler), “confidence” (K. Volpe), “self-actualization” (A. Maslow), “self-realization” (E. Nikitin, N. Harlamenkova), etc. In this sense, assertiveness is a means of self-realization in the context of the social environment (12).

Drawing on the concepts of the authors discussed above, it is possible to define assertiveness as a complex personality construct whose basic constituents are self-respect and respect for others, ability to actively defend one’s interests and openly state one’s goals and intentions without impinging on the interests of the others.

V. Shamieva offers a comprehensive view of assertiveness analyzing it as a subjective quality of the personality which integrates self-confidence and a positive attitude to others, initiative and readiness to take risks in difficult situations, ability to make decisions and take responsibility for their consequences, persistence in defending one’s own rights and fulfilling one’s life goals aimed at self-development (5). Based on this definition, the following characteristics of assertive behaviour come to the fore:

- confidence in oneself and one’s actions;
- independence of the opinion of others;
- capacity for self-analysis and self-acceptance;

- respect for others and their rights and interests;
- capacity to empathize;
- ability to perform emotional analysis and determine one’s own feelings;
- ability to express freely one’s own feelings and thoughts;
- ability to evaluate adequately circumstances and one’s own behaviour;
- ability to take responsibility for the consequences of one’s behaviour;
- ability to communicate freely, adequately, and candidly with people at different levels.

V. Shamieva (5) structures these qualities defining three components of assertiveness: cognitive, affective, and behavioural.

**The cognitive component** includes the orientation and the adequate evaluation of the situation, the productive transformation of problematic situations, the adequate definition of the Self in the surrounding world on the basis of an awareness of the meaning of the individual life values.

**The affective component** of assertiveness is constituted in the acceptance of others, self-confidence and trust in oneself.

**The behavioural component** is manifested in the form of independence, responsibility, persistence of behavioural patterns, readiness to take risks, and constructive aggression.

O. Fedosenko (4) offers a similar structure, including an additional, fourth component – the motivational one, which incorporates the proclivity to solve specific problems in accord with goal achievement.

Certain authors do not include the behavioural component in the structure of assertiveness. Rather, they define it as a separate concept and treat assertiveness as a quality or ability of the personality to achieve goals assertively regarding the external manifestation of this quality as an assertive behaviour (13). Other researchers, however, use these concepts interchangeably.

Likewise, scientists are not unanimous regarding the position of assertiveness in the structure of the personality. Some authors claim that it is a component of a personality quality. Thus for example, Bar-On (qtd. by (14)) and Stephen Stein (15) incorporate assertiveness in the structure of emotional

intelligence. O. Podivilova treats assertiveness as a conative component of tolerance (16). Some of the supporters of the five-factor personality model define assertiveness as an element of extraversion. De Raad & Perugino (2002) contend that assertiveness is one of the facets of extraversion, along with warmth, communicativeness, the search for excitement and positive emotions. Costa & McCrae (17) define communicativeness, assertiveness, dynamicity, and activity as qualities associated with the dimension extraversion – introversion of the Big Five.

The position supported here is that assertiveness should not be attributed to a personality substructure. As a complex construct consisting of multiple components, assertiveness is related to different spheres of the personality. In this sense, it cannot be defined as part of a specific personality subset but as a self-contained element conjugating with a variety of personality components.

The substantiation of this hypothesis is based on an exploration of the relation (co-relational dependence) between assertiveness and the qualities of the personality as defined by N. Reinwaldt. Rather than establishing a high correlation between assertiveness and certain personality elements, which would demonstrate its incorporation within those elements, the experiment was expected to indicate a moderate correlation with several personality qualities.

The experiment was conducted at the beginning of April with 11th grade students from two classes (51) aged 16-17. 29 of them are female and 22 – male. The students attend a highly reputed high school in Blagoevgrad, they have no problems mastering up the educational content, and for the previous school year the majority of them had a very good GPA (above 4,50) based on a 6-grade scale where 2 is the lowest and 6 is the highest grade. There are no children with asocial or deviant behaviour among the informants, nor are there any who suffer serious and chronic diseases, including mental disorders.

The experiment uses the Personality scale method for the analysis of the assertive profile (18) and Reinwaldt's Personality Questionnaire (19).

The test for the analysis of the assertive profile is provided by Peer Power and adapted by M.

Yordanova for adolescents aged 13 – 21. It contains 38 assertions, 28 of which relevant to the characteristic subject to analysis. The items contain a description of different situations and behaviours with three possible answers: USUALLY, SOMETIMES, RARELY. The mean value is calculated in percentages and the respective scale is applied to its interpretation.

Reinwaldt's questionnaire belongs to the group of personality questionnaires and is modeled upon their typical format, representation and manner of result analysis. It explores the salience and the level of development of five basic personality qualities – organization, diligence, collectivism, inquisitiveness, and aestheticism. The test has not been standardized in Bulgaria but there are data concerning the indicators of adolescents in Russia. The questionnaire contains 115 items with three possible answers: YES, NO, I DO NOT KNOW. 20 questions are relevant to each of the five qualities under analysis. There is also a lie scale of 15 questions.

Reinwaldt's method is not among the traditional methods of personality analysis, which makes it necessary to expound on some of the theoretical views of the author.

N. Reinwaldt contends that in defining the basic personality qualities as stable and recurrent it is important to consider the motivation of this type of behaviour. As a result, each personality quality includes a motive determining a positive attitude to behavior which manifests the respective quality, on the one hand, and the established means or forms of behaviour, on the other. In this sense, Reinwaldt defines five most important, basic qualities of the personality, such as collectivism, diligence, inquisitiveness, aestheticism, and organization. These basic qualities and their opposites represent an axis that hosts a set of related, cognate features. They emerge as stable qualities manifested in activities performed on a regular basis and at the same time represent an internal motive for action. Each person demonstrates a different degree of these qualities, which defines his individuality (19).

The results of Reinwaldt's personality questionnaire survey are presented in Tables 1 and 2 where the following symbols have been adopted:

$\bar{X}$  - average

$SD$  - standard deviation

$t$  - Student's t-criterion

$p$  - significance of a t-criterion

**Table 1.** The summarized results of Reinwaldt's Personality Questionnaire

	number of students who received low results	number of students who received middle results	number of students who received high results
<b>organization</b>	4	35	12
<b>diligence</b>	14	30	7
<b>collectivism</b>	10	35	6
<b>inquisitiveness</b>	6	38	7
<b>aestheticism</b>	5	37	9

**Table 2.:** The intersexual differences observed in personality qualities

	$\bar{X}$	<i>SD</i>	$\bar{X}$ girls	$\bar{X}$ boys	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
<b>organization</b>	13,74	2,76292	14,13	13,22	1,1700	0,1238
<b>diligence</b>	13,29	2,75	13,37	13,18	0,2507	0,4015
<b>collectivism</b>	16,56	1,79	17,17	15,77	2,9715	0,0022
<b>inquisitiveness</b>	14,11	2,28	14,34	13,81	0,8120	0,2103
<b>aestheticism</b>	9,3	2,6	9,86	8,68	1,6031	0,0576

The subjects manifest a middle level of salience in all of the indicators under analysis, which exposes a uniform development of these personality qualities.

The results of the personality scale of

assertiveness are shown in **Table 3**.

	$\bar{X}$	$\bar{X}$ girls	$\bar{X}$ boys	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
<b>assertiveness (points)</b>	42,92	44,75	40,5	1,2566	0,1021
<b>assertiveness (%)</b>	51	53,2	48,2		

**Table 3.** The results of the personality scale of assertiveness.

The mean value of the indicator of assertiveness is 42.92 (51%), which reveals an average level of development of this quality among the students.

No significant differences with respect to gender are observed in both the levels of assertiveness and the personality questionnaire scales. The only difference is a slight increase in the

indicators of collectivism of the boys as compared to those of the girls.

The primary goal of the present research is the analysis of the correlation between assertiveness and the personality qualities as defined by Reinwaldt. The coefficients thus calculated are presented in **Table 4** where *r* denotes the correlation coefficient, *p* - significance of *r*.

**Table 4.** The correlation coefficients between personality qualities and assertiveness

	<b>organization</b>	<b>diligence</b>	<b>collectivism</b>	<b>inquisitiveness</b>	<b>aestheticism</b>	<b>GPA</b>
<b><i>r</i></b>	0,3026	0,1084	0,5952	0,2219	-0,1084	0,5087
<b><i>p</i></b>	0,0308	0,4487	<0,01	0,1175	0,4487	<0,01

The calculation of the correlation quotients indicate a significant dependence (cf. (20)) between assertiveness and collectivism and a moderate dependence between assertiveness and organization. There is a weak correlation between assertiveness and diligence, aestheticism, and inquisitiveness. A moderate co-

relational dependence is observable between assertiveness and the students' GPA.

No observation has been made of a strong or very strong co-relational dependence between assertiveness and any of the personality qualities as defined by Reinwaldt. On the contrary, the quotients concerning socialization and

organization suggest a partial overlap of assertiveness with these two personality qualities.

This confirms the initial hypothesis that assertiveness is not part of a specific personality quality. Rather, it is a self-contained psychological element which does not belong to any particular personality construct but rather is related to all spheres of the personality. In this sense, assertiveness should not be regarded as subordinate to the other qualities but as an independent personality component which greatly influences the characteristics of the personality.

The results of the present survey made it possible to clarify the place of assertiveness in the personality profile of adolescents. It is reasonable to claim that this conclusion is of theoretical as well as of practical importance because the establishment of the position of assertiveness in the structure of the personality allows for a more precise choice of the means and methods for the development of this significant personality quality.

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