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Social autism as a degenerative psychosocial syndrome in changing societies

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Abstract

We have developed three behavioral scenarios activated in natural urban interaction (total participants: 2240 subjects): the explicit ones ("the lucky driver" – S3, "passerby hot hand" – S2) or implicit one ("the communitarian spit" – S1). We have observed the incidence of pro-social behavior as a very low rate of helping 'others': in the explicit scenarios, the specific score was 63.4 % in S2 (in a context characterized by very high social desirability) and 10.41 % in S3 (context with low social desirability). All of these findings have articulated the social autism concept for better describing a degenerative psycho-social syndrome, expressed by public disengagement and closeness.
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1. Pro-social behavior and interpersonal trust

In recent years (2007-2011) we examined the dynamics of several indicators associated to default rules based on behavioral scenarios that go beyond their imaginative design (Sparks, Harris, Raats, 2003). Conducted in western Romania (Timisoara), but also in Bucharest, studies have attempted to operationalize various species of pro-social behavior (Levine, Norenzayan, Philbrick, 2001) to assess interpersonal trust-building mechanisms in everyday contexts. We consider both *explicit* behavioral scenarios - involving a non-ambiguous response, activated directly as a result of conscious deliberation of the engaged subject, but also some *implicit* scenarios, the conduct engaged by the subject may *suggest*, through means of conduct, a genuine option of the subject.

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2. Behavioral scenarios and "how we know to be together"

The first explicitly experimental scenario induced ("passerby hot hand") was articulated based on behavioral descriptors for actors: a man dressed modest, middle-aged (our accomplice) "lost" by "mistake" a bill while passing his coat over his shoulders. Behavior of the "other" (the naive) was monitored only if the person who is required using was in a range of about 10 m, within about 5 seconds of "loss". Otherwise, the bill was lifted up and returned to the "old accomplice" by another student accomplice. However, for reasons pertaining to avoid "contamination" of public scene could not reproduce in the same location, but within a radius of about 200 meters from the first "accident" and the area gradually widened, and not earlier than 10 minutes of the first "incident" or more than 5 times consecutively in the same "session". In such a scenario, the call for help was obvious, explicit. To undertake the task, the accomplice randomly lost different bills (1, 10, 50, 100, 500 RON). Table no.1 can follow the typology of behavioral responses activated by naive subjects.

Table. 1. Explicit behavioral scenario – „quick hand passerby "

VI (amount "lost" by an accomplice)	No. naive subjects faced with the task N	VD (rate of impropriety) N _i	VD (rate of impropriety) (%)	No. subjects to "flee from the scene" with "unexpected earnings" n	No. subjects to "flee from the scene" with "unexpected earnings" (%)	Explanations volume (words) media
500 RON	51	26	51.0 %	4	7.8 %	33.3
100 RON	56	23	41.1 %	2	3.6 %	22.7
50 RON	54	20	37.0 %	0	0 %	15.5
10 RON	60	20	33.3 %	1	1.7 %	17.4
1 RON	53	14	26.4 %	0	0 %	19.5
TOTAL	274	103	37.6 %	7	2.6 %	21.35

Obs. 4.2 RON = approximately 1 €

The more the "note" (which was a photocopied paper carefully, reproducing the original) was more "valuable" with both the number of those who saw the scene and returned his money back to the "careless" was lower. The overall rate of impropriety is daunting: nearly four subjects from 10 "robbed" and over half of those who experience such a "chance" decides not to miss, if the "bill" is very valuable (500 RON). It was just like the "notes" "price", "fight" is sometimes "life and death" in 4 cases for the 500 Ron bill and in 2 cases for the 100 Ron bill, passers decided to confiscate "money" so vigorously that although psychologists have said then - for deontological reasons - that were involved in an experimental scenario with "scientific purposes", "discoverers" to fulfill in their pocket and take quick the corner. Were spectacular, but, post-experimental explanations of those involved in the study. First, it was observed that as we speak more effectively had done less to help. The explanations volume it can be seen as (measured by number of words produced in post-standard experimental interview of 120 seconds) is even higher, as the incidence of non-honest behavior is higher and the amount "won" more consistent. Then absurd explanations abounded that contradictory behavior of real engagement, such as "just waiting to look back, to return the money" (male, approximately 35 years) or "know it's only a worthless piece of paper, and I wanted to see how well it was copied" (male, 50 years). Finally, almost no trace of shame or guilt: the overwhelming majority describes with cold implacability their gesture: "However, if I were worldly wise, people around me would have done exactly what I did just now" (male, approximately 40 years). Moreover, a subject concluded revealing: "If something is given to me, I must grab right away, because I always lose something, I don't receive anything" (female, approximately 45 years). Symbolic gesture

converted pulling in a "winner" gesture of that strategy of whom, in a normal world, gathers resources persevering through work in a climate of fair competition. If the "bill" is more or less "valuable", almost in every case of two ordinary people steal, without feeling any responsibility for their duplicitous behavior, and that the said city is as a model of Romanian "citizenship", which recorded the highest scores on civic engagement and community responsibility (Gavreliuc, 2011), and the only thing that matters is "to go out now and here, because nobody knows what will be tomorrow" (male, approximately 35 years). A second explicitly scenario developed in the summer of 2010 both in Bucharest and Timisoara ("lucky driver"), investigated how the leaders in traffic came to a "difficult" situation forced to enter a secondary road The main one, had a part of "goodwill" from the "lucky" with the favorable access, which were on the road with priority. Although intersections were similar (as symbolic placement in the city, as traffic volume), and comparison was done in the same period of the day, watch the engaged behaviors by social psychologist were very different in different cities. Thus, in one case from twenty in Bucharest (5.07%) and in a case from six in Timisoara (15.75%), the driver in need is given permission to enter the main road.

A third scenario behavior - "communitarian spit" - evaluate the frequency and expressive gesture in question, executed in a shared space with similar peers (such as those encountered in the waiting tram or bus). Always made the same time slot and the same type of areas as "distance from the center," recalled indicator measure how many passengers pass through the station and how many of them spit "not caring" for others in time of 30 minutes. Interesting is not the share of those working such unpleasant behavior, but the way they do it. Through a sui generis observation grid operators registered, therefore, "if spit", but above all "as citizen spit". Moreover, in each of these contexts of interaction, were made by operators ad hoc "expert groups", consisting of 2-3 passers, possible clients of means of transport, which after a short training specialists conducted by social psychologists and after acquisition-based typology of behavioral descriptors, gave his consent to enter the "experimental game", which were to evaluate the spontaneous behavior of the "spitters" that occurred in the station. Once integrated into a specific category on "breathing", they were encouraged - and registered as such with audio ways - to categorized this behavior, trying to establish the motivation for such a activation of rude public gesture. The typological description below we mentioned in <...> some of the "motives" identified by these "researchers" full of ingenuity. Global speaking, note that Timișoara people spit in very different ways (see table no. 3).

Table. 3. Scenario default behavior - "communitarian spit." Typology

Typology	Relational aggressiveness explicit (+) / implicit (-)	Focus on "other" (+) / self (-)	N	Share sample
" Uncivil"	+	+	215	22 %
" Passive-aggressive"	+	-	440	45 %
" The intellectual"	-	+	205	21 %
" The shameful one"	-	-	127	12 %
TOTAL			978	100%

A combination of manifest aggression, explicit (+) vs. implicit aggression, hidden (-) with focus on "other" (+) in the relational opening vs. self-centeredness (-), results based on behavioral descriptors specify four categories.

The first is the subject undertaken by the passive-aggressive, which <"spitting mechanical, routinely, without knowing"> is the most frequently (45% of those who spit). <Such man will never greet you (unless he has an punctual interest to do it)>, <will not give you a hand when, abruptly, you will need urgent help>, <will not say a word if you feel down>.

It can be identified and explained brutal aggressive type (22%), which would be able <to „spit you between the eyes”> Accompanied by a heavy and menacing gestures. <We recognize of course, among those who push you "naturally to the tram"> <that „puts manele” until they dance your flat windows> , <that bounces your soul when he curses with the holy things in front of your children> or consider "qualified" after <a significant whistles> , <"Yo, your wife is too hot!">.

It holds a special place "the spitter with principles" (21%). <He spits' short and wacky>, <from frustration>, <he's unhappy that again he „was cheated”>, <he felt for the „conspiracy theory” (of the boss, of the wife, of the mother-in-law, of the masons, of the Hungarian people and everyone else >. Since its <"truths" are "tumbled"> <the only thing to do is to express he's own anger>. Therefore, this subject is always centered on "other" and <"lesson" that has given the "mob"> <from the heights of his symbolic stature>.

The lonely is, however, the type <"the shy spitter with remorse">, self-centered (12%), embarrassed by the clumsy gesture set in motion. Can be easily recognized by its tendency <to look around, "knowingly", > , And, later, <sneak, and to "let go">. Symbolism of such behavior suggests that the subject in question <almost always live under the sign of failure, so no longer remains, in fact, only to spit on himself> . Thus, is and <focused in achieving the heavy tasks>, which is why sometimes even misses the bus (those who monitor the behavior of subjects involved in the scenario were observed in 3 cases of this kind). Also among human types wander in the crowd, a logical explanation of these serious symbolic default procession: <life passes, we are alone, however, "everything goes as they want”>.

3. Social autism as psychosocial degenerative syndrome

Methodological choices that we have assumed are not accidental. It is part of close and broader theoretical perspective of social sciences, closer to *social constructivism* (Gergen, 1973, 2001; Grant, 2007; Poerksen, 2004; Schmidt, 2007) and *narrative psychology* (Gergen, Gergen, 1986, Bruner, 1987, Crossley, 2000). A reading of this kind highlights the role of identity construction dialogue of social networks in which *meaning is constructed in interaction with the "other"* through a common and contextual negotiation of meaning. Virulence and expressive ad hoc narrative descriptions evoke the need *to get sense* and clarify on the interpersonal conversational game between the specialized researcher, the naive and the analyzed subject that can understand more deeply and more authentic than the standard investigation with quantitative methodologies. All these identity symptoms testify about what we could qualify, in analogy with individual clinical description, as *social autism*. People that share a community space and a network of interactions in a historical and biographical context urging generalized disengagement, retractable, irresponsibility, briefly to loneliness with the "other" (otherness is seen either as a single actor or as a group membership, institution or imaginary scenario), describes a kind of group process is not a prerogative of individual life strategies. We are dealing with collective ownership of powerlessness, fatalism, implacability of failure, which enhances the unbalanced behavior, seemingly inexplicably, typical clinical autistic. The last one is described in individual pathologies as a character that moves the repetitive actions, monomania, poor quality maintenance of relationships with others, while proving an inability to share common interests with his companions in life (Silverman, 2008). Therefore, the behavior register is profoundly deficient, public actions are disjointed, despite the wealth of inner life, but you can not share with the partner role. And just as clinical trials argue, autism determinants are predominant genetic ones (Abrahams, Geschwind, 2008), only that they come, as for social autism, in a "social biology", through a transgenerational "legacy" of a basic set of attitudes and value orientations of personality, tacitly assumed by the social tissue, including the "sick" person (in our case, as studies on representative samples illustrated, symptomatology grouped deficient interpersonal and institutional trust, assistential values, conservatism, fatalism and disengagement) (Gavreliuc, 2011).

4. Conclusions

Learned in an implicit way the experience of routine failure in tasks through an adaptative identity strategies (cognitive dissonance, externalist attribution, symbolic dependence in relationships with significant partners), the subject is integrated in a group process of negotiating the role of a world overwhelmed by a too accelerate changing, that it couldn't been integrated. As the social psychology studies conducted describes in the key of symbolic interactionism, any form of excessive self-opening mask a lack exactly on the dimensions that produces excess. In other words, for example, someone who exteriors himself with a symbolic violence, appears to be "most" volunteer, wants to communicate to the audience his "omnipotence", always coveted to sit in the public spotlight through his aggressive - exactly the type of social lout the standard described above - is, in fact, the weakest, the most vulnerable (Goffman, 1969/1992). With such an expressive excess he does nothing but mask the insecurity they feel as overwhelming, and he thinks that this seize hold substitute the "other". In fact, both originator and addressee as narrative identity is not only a collection of very lonely people who cannot and do not know how to share a communitarian destiny.

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