

Chapter #10

CONSTRUCTIVE AND APPARENT NONCONFORMISTS AT SCHOOL

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ABSTRACT

The article explores two specific types of nonconformists, with reference to nonconformity as a personality dimension based on an original theory of a human creative attitude (Popek, 1989). The aim of the present study was to determine the occurrence of constructive and apparent nonconformity among students at middle school, secondary school and undergraduate level, among girls and boys. Studies performed on 2239 school students in Poland employed the Creative Behaviour Questionnaire (CBQ III) (Bernacka, 2009). The study provides evidence that constructive nonconformists are predominant at all of the three stages of education and there are more constructive nonconformists among girls than boys, especially in middle schools. The study has shown that nonconformity as a personality trait is a mechanism of motivation and emotion which strongly stimulates the conduct and mental functioning of adolescent students in the school environment.

Key words: nonconformity, personality, school, student, gender.

1. INTRODUCTION

The notion of nonconformity appeared in the context of personality in studies by the Institute of Personality Assessment and Research in Berkeley aimed at determining the characteristic personality traits of creative people. Popek's original theory of the human creative attitude and the development of the CBQ questionnaire for diagnostic purposes triggered studies on nonconformity as a dimension of human personality (Popek, 1989).

Based on a systemic approach to the human being and the interaction paradigm, Popek claims that conformity v nonconformity perceived through the dimension of personality plays an important role in shaping a creative attitude (Popek, 2001). At the base of a nonconformist positive activation, understood as the personality-related core of creativity, lie such traits as high self-esteem, activeness, courage, resilience and perseverance, independence, and tolerance (Bernacka, 2008). Nonconformity as a set of inter-related traits constitutes a specific personality energy which liberates, organises, and determines the direction of activity. This energy is key in expressing (realising) the human capacity for self-actualisation. Nonconformity in personality is an emotion-shaping and motivation-building attribute of highly creative people, since it substantially increases the chances for an effective and constructive use of their large cognitive potential, defence of their creative works, and a capacity to convince others of their value. The progress of civilisation would not be possible if it were not for constructive nonconformity. According to Popek the diverse types of nonconformity are linked with the level of creative capacities related to individual's cognitive functions and they are reflected by the values the individual tends to follow. A discrepancy between the profound need for recognition and upward social comparison versus the low level of creative capacities may contribute to

some individuals' materialistic attitude to life. Today, society and culture promote confusion of values, materialistic models of success among young people, increasing the desire to own goods; they idolize people who have become recognizable as a result of their scandalous behaviours or forms of physical and mental exhibitionism which in turn are exploited by the mass media. At present apparent nonconforming behaviours are an object of public interest. They are a means to developing one's career, a tool for rapid financial success; this in turn may promote similar attitudes among young people. Constructive nonconformity is a result of interaction between highly nonconforming personality and high level of heuristic function in the individual's cognitive sphere (high creative capacities in cognitive domain), which in an adequate cultural and social environment contributes to the individual's activity enabling demonstration of his or her abilities in the form of creative output. Apparent nonconformity is a result of the interaction between a highly nonconforming personality and the highly algorithmic function of the individual's cognitive sphere (high imitative capacities in the cognitive domain), which in an adequate cultural and social environment contributes to the individual's efforts to gain the social status of a person recognizable or known for transgressions or breaking the formal or informal status quo existing in various areas of social and cultural life.

Studies of the differences between constructive and apparent nonconformists, albeit merely at an initial stage, have already provided valuable information confirming that apparent nonconformists think along algorithms and hold social values in the highest regard (Bernacka, 2013; Karwowski & Bernacka, 2008). Apparent nonconformity is a feature of those who feel that their self-esteem is threatened, since they do not have an autonomous system of values and identity (Niemczuk, 2008). An individual's drive towards nonconformity is largely conditioned by his/her personality subjected to social pressure in the form of social norms, customs, and idealistic, religious or political values (Popek, 2004). In today's world apparent nonconformist behaviour is an object of a particular social interest, a means with which to make a professional career and to improve one's material status. Thus, apparent nonconformity is quite attractive to the young generation geared towards consumption.

Personality nonconformity is, to some extent, shaped by the execution of important aims in the social and cultural milieu of human beings. Young Poles know that in each community that is peopled by conformists there are those who steer towards change, those for whom stability is a source of frustration and a sense of lack of self-actualisation. In order to combat this frustration, they aim at destroying the existing order in a certain area of activity. On the one hand, young Poles are aware of the significance of nonconformity in developing their creative and cognitive capacity to act. On the other, they are subjected to the effect of the schooling system.

2. BACKGROUND

School in its social and cultural dimension has the biggest effect on personality shaping processes and a personality-related nonconformist attitude. The results of studies indicate that at school students are expected to be students. Little wonder that those who demonstrate a high level of creative capabilities do not feel welcome there (Turska, 2006). Operating through its hidden curriculum (Janowski, 1995), the schooling system exerts a strong influence on students. In this environment, students are expected to be useful for and obedient to the institution. The hidden curriculum encourages students to conformity showing that nonconformist behaviour does not prove useful. Scholars agree that in a regular schooling institution a student's creative potential is insignificant at best

and even detrimental (Białkowski, 1995; Lemke et al., 2004; Turska, 2006). Under such circumstances, students have no incentive to develop their nonconformist personalities. A question arises as to whether the distribution of nonconformists differs in terms of numbers depending on the level of education, and, by extension, the age of the analysed groups of students. The need for social acceptance is particularly strong during adolescence, which may have an effect on shaping one's identity on the basis of personal adequacy and recognition of those who matter a lot (Brzezińska, 2000). Equally pertinent are socially accepted expectations relating to gender, which are manifested in the hidden curriculum. The school is ready to reward the irreproachable conduct of well-behaved students, in line with the principles that govern the conduct of girls. While minor infringements of discipline by girls are corrected with determination, misdeeds on the part of boys largely go unpunished. Nonconformist girls may subjectively feel that their attitude "may cost too much", since their nonconformity can be perceived as socially unacceptable (Turska, 2006). Although a more creative gender does not exist, the results of studies clearly point out that girls tend to underestimate their creative effectiveness (Karwowski, 2009, 2011). This assertion leads to a question about whether nonconformists differ quantitatively in terms of their gender. The subject of varied types of nonconformity during school is particularly interesting for research, firstly because during that period personality is evolving to assume a creative attitude in adulthood, and secondly because of the increased susceptibility of individuals to factors impacting development of personality (Bateson & Hinde, 1987; Bornstein, 1989; McCrae & Costa, 1994).

3. OBJECTIVES, DESIGN, METHODS

Constructive and apparent nonconformity at the three levels of school education has not been the object of in-depth analyses so far. A short overview of important factors that shape the personality of nonconformists in the context of school sensitivity leads to the formulation of the following research hypotheses:

1. The rates of constructive and apparent nonconformists are varied in middle, secondary, and undergraduate schools.
2. The rates of constructive and apparent nonconformists are varied among girls and boys.

The studies employed the Creative Behaviour Questionnaire (CBQ III) (Bernacka, 2008) as a modified version of the CBQ (Nęcka, Grohman, & Słabosz, 2006; Popek, 1989), 26 years since its construction. The theoretical background of the CBQ and CBQ III is the conception of creative attitude formulated by Popek (Grohman & Schmidt, 2012; Popek, 1989). The following changes were introduced in CBQ III: four separate scales of the questionnaire were combined into two scales reflecting the continuum of the trait intensity; the number of questions was reduced to 26; 4 items were removed because of their low reliability and their low discriminative power. The contents of some obscure or ambiguous items in the questionnaire were corrected in order to increase improve their diagnostic value. The instructions for the respondents were also shortened. A change was also introduced in the overly limited system of answers: "yes", "I don't know", and "no". In CBQ III the subject takes a stance with respect to the statements by choosing the following answers: A "yes" B "probably yes", C "I don't know," D "probably no", E "no". The key for the questionnaire was developed accounting for gender related norms (CBQ defined combined norms for both sexes). The CBQ is probably one of the most esteemed and most often used questionnaires in Poland when it comes to diagnosing the general creative attitude of people (Nęcka, Grohman, & Słabosz, 2006). The CBQ III

includes two subscales: Conformity - Nonconformity, which relates to the sphere of personality, and Algorithmic Behaviour - Heuristic Behaviour, which belongs to the cognitive sphere. Each subscale controls 13 traits distributed dichotomously, as continuous traits (continuum). The Questionnaire comprises 26 statements, all in the form of declarative sentences. The test-retest reliability of the scales is in the range 0.60–0.80. Reliability assessed with Cronbach's Alpha for the Conformity - Nonconformity scale is 0.69 and for the Algorithmic Behaviour - Heuristic Behaviour is 0.65. The norms are prepared in the sten scale for the age brackets ranging from 15 to 60 years of age including sex on the Conformity - Nonconformity scale and without sex on the Algorithmic Behaviour - Heuristic Behaviour scale (Bernacka, 2008). The text of the revised CBQ is presented below. The questionnaire CBQ III comprises statements related to various human activities connected with the process of learning or the situation of an action. The instruction read: Answer by underlining the letter appropriate in your case. Do not omit any statements.

Table 1. Statements the CBQ III.

No	STATEMENT	A – yes B – probably yes C – no opinion D – probably no E – no
1	I enjoy making written and spoken statements.	A B C D E
2	I quickly adapt to new places and situations.	A B C D E
3	I carefully analyse any new information or phenomenon I come across.	A B C D E
4	I enjoy being in charge, controlling a situation or commanding other people.	A B C D E
5	I believe other people are entitled to their own opinions, views and beliefs, even if I do not agree with them.	A B C D E
6	I solve problems, deal with difficulties myself and do not follow other people's ideas in this respect.	A B C D E
7	I am most efficient when dealing with a difficult and new task by myself.	A B C D E
8	When I study, I always aim to fully understand the gist of the problem.	A B C D E
9	I attach a lot of importance to performing tasks in a different way from my peers.	A B C D E
10	I am artistically gifted.	A B C D E
11	I enjoy fantasizing, creating visions of future projects and original ideas.	A B C D E
12	I usually make decisions myself and with a sense of responsibility, I do not follow the opinions or demands of other people.	A B C D E
13	I feel observational curiosity towards everything that surrounds me.	A B C D E
14	I try to solve tasks and problems using various methods.	A B C D E
15	While studying, I like being told by others what to focus on and how to learn.	A B C D E
16	I am a supporter of all novelties.	A B C D E
17	I construct and improve the appliances I use in my own environment.	A B C D E
18	I reach the set goals regardless of difficulties, misfortunes or life's adversities.	A B C D E
19	New arguments in a discussion usually make me change my point of view.	A B C D E
20	I perform strenuous and difficult tasks with persistence, eagerness and to the end.	A B C D E
21	I learn of various new phenomena and enrich my knowledge without the need for outside encouragement.	A B C D E
22	I enjoy taking the initiative and acting accordingly, before my friends, teachers or superiors do.	A B C D E
23	I like thinking of various improvements in my environment.	A B C D E
24	I am cautious when expressing an opinion, I fear being ridiculed.	A B C D E
25	Before I comply with regulations or directives, I first carefully analyse their rationality.	A B C D E
26	I get the impression that I am better than others, it gives me the courage to act.	A B C D E

Please write your age..... your sex

Thank You

The score CBQ III is calculated according to the following key: A (yes) - 4 pts; B (probably yes) – 3 pts; C (no opinion) – 2 pts; D (probably no) – 1 pts; E (no) – 0 pts. The exceptions are questions 15 and 24 in whose case the scores are reversed (with only c – 2 pts the same as for other questions). The traits comprising the particular scales are presented in Table 2 along with the numbers of questions diagnosing them.

Table 2. Traits and numbers of questions measuring them within the scales.

Conformism	Question number	Question number	Non-conformism
Intellectual stiffness		2	Adaptational flexibility
Subordination		4	Dominance
Intolerance		5	Tolerance
Reliance		7	Self-organization
Stereotypicality		9	Originality
Dependence		12	Independence
Defensiveness		16	Openness
Submissiveness		18	Consistency
Low resilience and perseverance		20	Resilience and perseverance
Passiveness		22	Activeness
Lack of criticism		25	Self-criticism
Low self-esteem		26	High self-esteem
Timidity	24		Courage
Heuristic behavior			Algorithmic behavior
Verbal creativity	1		Verbal imitiveness
High reflectivity	3		Low reflectivity
Intellectual self-reliance	6		Copying
Learning through understanding	8		Learning through reasoning
Artistic aptitude	10		Lack of artistic aptitude
Creative imagination	11		Imitative imagination
Independence of observation	13		Guided perceptiveness
Divergent thinking	14		Convergent thinking
Independent learning		15	Guided learning
Constructional skill and aptitude	17		Low constructional skill and aptitude
Intellectual flexibility	19		Intellectual stiffness
Cognitive activeness	21		Cognitive passiveness
Technical ingenuity	23		Lack of technical ingenuity

The analyzed group comprised 2239 persons including 745 middle school students (aged 15-16, average age =15.5), 760 secondary comprehensive school students (aged 17-19, average age=17.5), and 734 undergraduate students (aged 20-22, average age=21). The studies, conducted in Polish schools, also took into account the quantitative balance between boys and girls. The participants were duly informed that the data collected would be anonymous, and that they were used for research purposes only. The CBQ III was completed by the subjects. Afterwards the subjects' scores were matched with normative data according to age and sex related norms. Further analyses did not take into account results achieved by the subjects who in Conformity – Nonconformity scale were found with average or low scores (normative data 6 or lower). The application of such a procedure yielded 282 nonconformists out of 2239 subjects, accounting for nearly 13% of the whole study group. Given the previously reported findings the result is consistent with the

Gaussian distribution of personality traits in a population, and similar to scores achieved by other groups investigated in Poland (Bernacka, 2008).

Afterwards the following two groups were selected from nonconformists. The group constructive nonconformists have high scores (normative date 7 and above) on the Algorithmic - Heuristic Behaviour scale. Apparent nonconformists have low scores (normative date 4 and low) on the Algorithmic - Heuristic Behaviour scale. The application of such a procedure yielded 245 constructive nonconformists and 37 apparent nonconformists out of 282 persons analyzed.

4. RESULTS

In order to verify the hypothesis under which the rates of constructive and apparent nonconformists are varied at middle school, secondary school, and undergraduate level, a statistical analysis was performed (Tables 3 and 4).

Table 3. Number of constructive and apparent nonconformists on three stages of education N=282.

Type of Nonconformist	Middle school	Secondary school	Undergraduate Level
constructive	107	68	70
apparent	18	8	11
Total	125	76	81

Table 4. Chi-Square for constructive and apparent nonconformists on three stages of education.

Schooling stage	Middle school	Secondary school	Undergraduate Level
Chi-Square	65.323	46.413	45.000
df	1	1	1
Asymp. Sig.	.000	.000	.000

The results of the chi-square test (Table 4) indicate that there are significant differences at each schooling stage between the observed and expected distribution of constructive and apparent nonconformists. Constructive nonconformists are more frequent than apparent nonconformists at each schooling stage, with the biggest number of nonconformists in middle schools. Constructive nonconformists outnumber apparent nonconformists. Consequently, the hypothesis is deemed to have been confirmed.

In order to verify the hypothesis that the rate of constructive and apparent nonconformists is varied among girls and boys, a statistical analysis was performed (Tables 5 and 6).

Table 5. Number of constructive and apparent nonconformists boys and girls on three stages of education N=282.

Type of nonconformist and gender	Middle school	Secondary school	Undergraduate level
constructive boys	43	27	38
apparent boys	12	12	5
constructive girls	65	28	33
apparent girls	5	9	6
Total	125	76	81

Table 6. Chi-Square for gender and constructive and apparent nonconformists.

Stage	Middle school	Middle school	Secondary school	Secondary school	Undergraduate level	Undergraduate level
Nonconformists girls-boys	constructive	apparent	constructive	apparent	constructive	apparent
Chi ²	4.121	2.882	1.806	2.000	0.514	0.400
df	1	1	1	1	1	1
Asymp. Sig.	0.042 *	0.900	0.171	0.157	0.473	0.527

Note. *p <.05.

The results of the chi-square test (Table 5) indicate that significant differences between the observed and expected distribution of constructive nonconformists in terms of gender occur only at the middle school level. Constructive nonconformity is more frequently observed among girls than among boys. Consequently, the hypothesis is deemed to have been confirmed only at the middle school stage.

5. DISCUSSION / FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

The study aimed at identifying the occurrence of constructive and apparent nonconformity among students at middle school, secondary school and university. The achieved conclusions are optimistic, since constructive nonconformity is more common than apparent nonconformity at each stage of schooling taken into account. Equally important is the fact that constructive nonconformity is more frequently reported among middle school girls. The obtained results may be justified by referring to the standard course of development in adolescence (Brzezińska, 2000; Oleszkowicz, 1995). Nonconformity is an integral element of shaping the identity of a teenager at the middle school level. This is a fairly strong process, since the school as a system of culture operating through its hidden curriculum, ranks second in the student's hierarchy of importance. The present findings contradict the previous research claiming that students have no incentive to develop their nonconforming personalities (Białkowski, 1995; Lemke et al., 2004; Turska, 2006). Nonconformity is a tool with which they may seek to develop their own identity. And while high self-esteem, activeness, courage, resilience, perseverance, independence, and tolerance are the traits of mature identity, it is the personality-related energy created by these traits that liberates, organizes, and shows the direction of activity for adolescents. Students are filled with the energy of nonconformity to the full, and it is this energy that determines their functioning. It is worth pointing out that girls at middle school age outclass boys in the process of shaping their personality. This result suggests that at the initial stage of middle adolescence the creative element more strongly affects personality development in girls than in boys, and only grows weaker in the subsequent years. The effect of this is manifested by the fact that girls tend to underestimate their creative effectiveness (Karwowski, 2009, 2011). This finding may suggest that external factors are particularly ineffective in hindering the development of creative attitude in girls at middle school age and such an inhibiting impact may be intensified only at a later stage. This conclusion contributes new evidence related to the observation that during adolescence individuals may be particularly susceptible to factors influencing the development of personality (Bornstein, 1989; Bateson & Hinde, 1987; McCrae & Costa, 1994). In summary, the understanding of the specificity of psychological functioning observed in students with constructive and apparent nonconforming personalities would be clearer if we analyzed it from the standpoint of the theory of creative attitude proposed by Popek (Grohman & Schmidt, 2012). First of all it should be emphasized that the approach

taken by both constructive and apparent nonconformists is characterized by ambition, perseverance, assertiveness and readiness for taking risk as well as determination to achieve the goal; additionally, their persistence, self-confidence, individualism, and competitive attitude may instigate many conflicts between them and their teachers as well as peers. During adolescence both types of nonconformists are driven by a strong need to be recognized but they differ in terms of their cognitive capacities, systems of values, and tools employed to achieve this goal (Bernacka, 2005; Bernacka, 2013; Karwowski & Bernacka, 2008). Positive activation of personality in constructive nonconformists results in autonomous motivations which are strong enough to prompt them to demonstrate their capacities at school despite its atmosphere discouraging creativity. Constructive nonconformists aim for personal goals and show preference for values related to intellect and competences (Bernacka, 2013). They are independent and self-reliant in their way of thinking and evaluating, they question the information, attitudes and opinions conveyed by the school; hence nonconformity is a creative element in the development of their psychosocial identity and a constructive tool for satisfying their need for recognition, particularly strong during adolescence. A constructive nonconformist is driven to reflect upon the nature of a phenomenon by his or her inner-directedness. This quality is also related to the terms, plans as well as the methods of performing tasks. The inherent mental components of constructive nonconformity include masochistic conviction regarding usefulness of one's own work, being true to oneself, and a wish that others share one's worldview, as well as a self-propelling sense of mission to destroy the established order and to create things anew (Bernacka, 2005). Rather than adapt to the world, constructively nonconforming students wish to adjust the world to themselves. The world needs young people with creative attitudes, taking an active approach to the world and life, which is manifested in the need to explore, and most of all intentionally and deliberately transform both the established reality and their own "self". The findings presented in this article suggest that students who tend to "sail against the current, break the stale structures of opinions and rules, and despite fears wish to open Pandora's Box" outnumber apparent nonconformists in middle, secondary and undergraduate schools. This is a positive predictor related to creative human capital in the future.

The apparent nonconformist is aware that he has the potential to imitate, and so, in order to pacify the dominant requirement for acknowledgment, he engages in an alternative to the intellectual activities offered in the school, as a result of which, he will be noticed. Seeking popularity they want to stand out e.g. for the looks they gained during summer holidays, their manners and conduct. They feel very comfortable as leaders of informal groups. Being in trouble, a trademark condition for them, is also a way to draw attention to themselves, and they may be rather inventive in coming up with excuses to justify their misconduct. They are frequently labeled as freaks and if a need arises they may become the scapegoats, but even if they are not responsible for the wrong-doing they may "plead guilty". An apparent nonconformist finds his or her identity through opposing all and any norms and standards. They make a point of always saying "no", even if the other party is obviously right. They can rebel against and veto suggestions made by others, but they do not come up with any alternatives and refrain from constructive involvement. Apparent nonconformists' favorite behaviors include boasting as well as provoking scandals and confrontations. In order to prove they are right they may even resort to physical force. Their ability to provoke negative emotions in someone is perceived as a weakness of that person and consequently a proof of their victory. With a strong need to be acknowledged, apparent nonconformists may resort to marking their presence through spectacular incidents, frequently covered and amplified by the mass media. Other people's

success may be perceived by apparent nonconformists as a personal defeat and because of this they tend to demonstrate aversion to such individuals. Apparent nonconformists aim for optimizing their popularity in society and highly appreciate values related to emotions and interpersonal relations. Apparent nonconformist's need for being acknowledged is so strong that it is frequently expressed by narcissistic physical and mental exhibitionism, and a desire "to set tongues wagging". The above attempt to describe the characteristic performance of constructive and apparent nonconformists shows that the emotional and motivational strength of personality-related energy (nonconformity), which is at the core of creative personality (Popek, 2015), associated with varied cognitive capacities (algorithmic versus heuristic), during the three stages of schooling may lead to varied preferences in terms of values and behaviors and to orienting personality development in a specific way. In favorable social and cultural environments a constructive nonconformist may, in adulthood, realize his or her creative potential and perhaps contribute to the transformation of the world. The apparent nonconformist uses his or her personal creative energy for activities whose impact is measured with the quantity and time of public interest. Although they do achieve their own goal in a spectacular way, in fact they squander their potential.

The limitations of the study are taken into account. Because constructive and apparent nonconformity have not been thoroughly investigated so far, the purpose of the present study was to diagnose the incidence of the phenomenon rather than examine its determinants. It is recommended that future studies should use other tools for diagnosing the cognitive capacities of individuals and they should explore different factors and relations determining the development of nonconformity as a personality dimension e.g. temper, parents' attitudes, values, social and cultural determinants. The findings discussed here should be treated as initial evidence and a good beginning for further research, particularly in the form of a longitudinal study, designed to monitor the level of constructive nonconformity in girls. They can serve as an inspiration for future research and verification of the relations found in our study. Additionally further research should use a bigger sample in the group of apparent nonconformists to enable more complex statistical modeling and analyses as well as more effective generalization of the results. Notably, this study is part of a larger program focusing on a novel research problem, i.e. nonconformity as a personality dimension (Bernacka, 2008). Applying CBQ III for both research and practical purposes can be recommended in different countries.

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