

**PSYRGGU 2020**  
**Psychology of Personality: Real and Virtual Context**

**SOCIAL IDENTITY OF TEENAGERS AND STUDENTS**

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***Abstract***

The article presents the results of an empirical study of the content and structure of identity of teenagers and students. The analysis of self-descriptions showed the predominance of subjective categories over objective ones. The identity of high schoolers and students contains positive and negative descriptions with a predominance of positive ones. The content of social identity consists of categories of family, civil, territorial, national, religious, professional, age, gender identity, as well as groups of favorite hobbies. The structure of social identity of both teenagers and students is dominated by family and gender identity, as well as hobby groups (in high schoolers) and of the human being (in students). In the hierarchy of types of social identity among high schoolers and students, the most significant is the educational and professional identity, which corresponds to the leading educational and professional activity at this age. Analysis of the ratio of on-line and off-line identity groups showed the predominance of on-line groups among both: teenagers and students. A comparative analysis of the content of identity of high schoolers and students revealed similarities in the number of social and physical categories; the similarities in the nature of identity are in the presence of negative characteristics; in the structure of identity – the dominants of family identity. There are statistically significant differences in the number of subjective categories and the positive character of self-descriptions. Dynamic changes were revealed: students have more subjective categories and positive characteristics than high schoolers.

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## **1. Introduction**

The increased interest of society and science in the problems of identity today is associated with the challenges of the modern world-social, economic, political, environmental, and others that affect the structure, content, dynamics, and balance of its types. Martsinkovskaya (2016) characterizes the current stage of development of culture and society as transitive, which is characterized by variability, variability, uncertainty, and fluidity of renewal, and therefore it is necessary to determine their impact on the identity of younger generations, for whom constant changes have become the natural background of life.

### **1.1. Relevance**

The set of contexts in the analysis of identity transformations is determined by the boundaries of its permanence and variability in situations of fluid and rigid transitivity, as well as different options for interaction with the virtual space – online and offline (Martsinkovskaya, 2018). With the development of the Internet space and digital technologies, online reality becomes more important, affecting the ratio of personal and social identities and their development. Researchers note that in the digital environment, the dynamics of reality and virtuality leads to the emergence of a mixed space, the appearance of mixed (hybrid) forms of behavior, when actions are performed simultaneously in reality and on the Internet, and the forms and modes of behavior that were acquired on the Internet can be transferred to behavior in real life and back (Voyskunsky, 2019). The digital environment provides a person with new platforms and opportunities for constructing various aspects of identity. Transitivity is a General quality of offline and online realities and is a factor that affects the blurring of boundaries between them. Speaking about the need to analyze the influence of transitivity on identity, research on social identity in high school students and students is particularly important, which is acutely affected by modern social transformations that coincide with the normative age crisis of identity (Erickson, 1996), the stage of psychosocial moratorium, during which young men and women are searching for information that helps to resolve the crisis, determine their place in the world, understand themselves as part of society, find purpose and meaning in their own lives.

### **1.2. Theoretical and methodological basis of the research**

When studying the social identity of high schoolers and students, the development of which reflects their cognitive style, the ability to reflect, the use of intellectual abilities to solve various life situations and problems (Developmental psychology, 2011), we turn to the ideas of cognitive psychologists who consider identity as a cognitive system that includes personal (physical, intellectual and moral traits) and social (race, nationality, gender) subsystems, those who perform the role of behavior regulators note the variability and variability of identity, the correlation and inter-transitions of personal and social identities, and the contextual of the process of self-categorization.

Tajfel and Turner (as cited in Developmental psychology, 2011) proposes to consider identity as a bipolar continuum, at one pole of which personal (found in interpersonal relationships), at the other – social identity (manifested in intergroup relationships). Actualization of a particular type of identity occurs due to a form of behavior that supports the self-esteem of the subject. Tajfel notes the continuous “balancing” between the variability and stability of the identity structure. Important is the concept of Turner about self-categorization as a cognitive grouping of a person with a certain class of identical objects and

structuring information about the surrounding world, highlighting three levels: universal identity (as a human being), social identity (as a representative of a group), and personal identity (as an individual). Categorization emphasizes differences between different categories and mitigates differences between elements within the same category. Significant are also the provisions of Breakwell (as cited in Developmental psychology, 2011) about the role of interaction with the social world, during which a person learns concepts and knows himself, about the formation of the content of personal identity, characteristics for self-description and evaluation of elements of its structure on the basis of learned social categories (Antonova, 1996).

When studying the content of identity, we accept the position of representatives of symbolic interactionism, first of all, Mead (as cited in Developmental psychology, 2011) about identity as the ability of a person to perceive their behavior and life as a whole and to realize this in accordance with the development of cognitive processes, the appearance of reflection, the assimilation of language and the categories developed in it in the process of social interaction. Considering two aspects of identity, “I” (man as an individual being) and “Me” (man as a social being), he emphasizes the role of society, which determines the identity of the individual, setting the norms of existence, and the role of the individual in choosing his own environment, goals, values, and needs. The condition for the development of social identity is the individual's assimilation of social experience and acceptance of social roles in relation to the fact that the reaction to a particular role characterizes personal identity. The concept of and is essential. Goffman's idea of a sign as a sign of a person's expression of their qualities and differences in interaction with others, as well as their separation of actual (based on easily provable, obvious, objective attributes) and virtual (based on imaginary attributes that are possible under certain conditions) social identity. This view is completed by Habermas, noting that social identity provides the ability to fulfill various requirements of all role systems to which a person belongs (as cited in Antonova, 1996).

## **2. Problem Statement**

In our research, we consider identity as a certainty and integrity that unites its personal and social aspects. Social identity as a type of identity is the result of defining oneself through membership in a social group in the form of self-categorization. In contrast to personal identity, which grows out of a person's awareness of individual qualities and personality traits, as well as the definition of life goals, values and beliefs, the content of social identity is filled with social roles, statuses, categories and identifications with a particular group. The content of identity is made up of identity elements – identification categories and characteristics, and the structure is made up of identity groups arranged in order of significance for a person. The development of identity is understood as an incomplete process of continuous identification and categorization of a person. This makes it necessary to study identity taking into account new contexts, to study it through the search for new social connections and identification categories through which it is reflected or constructed.

### 3. Research Questions

The study aimed to answer followed questions: whether there are differences between high school students and students in the content and structure of social identity, in the ratio of online and offline identity groups-news.

The study asked whether high school students and students have differences in the content and structure of social identity, in the ratio of online and offline identity groups.

### 4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to study the features of social identity in high schoolers and students.

#### 4.1. Objects of the study

- To study the categories which make up the content of identity in high school students and students.
- To study the structure of social identity in high school students and students.
- To identify online and offline groups that high school students and students identify with.
- To analyze similarities and differences in the content and structure of social identity, identify dynamic changes in them among high school students and students.

### 5. Research Methods

**The following methods were used to study the social identity of high school students and students.**

- “Who am I?” (Identity and Socialization, 2015). The method is aimed at determining the structure and content of identity.
- Method “Structure of social identity” (Identity and Socialization, 2015).
- The author’s questionnaire, aimed at identifying on-line and off-line social groups and communities among high school students and students, consisted of 5 questions, including “Where do You study?”, “What communities and social groups, real and virtual, do You belong to?”, “What attracts You to these groups? What are you interested in?” During the survey, it was clarified that virtual groups and communities are located on the Internet and social networks. We identified real and virtual groups that include boys and girls. The number of people in real and virtual groups was determined, as well as criteria for the attractiveness of groups for high school students and students” (Ivanova, 2019).
- Questionnaire “Hierarchy of identities” (Identity and Socialization, 2015). Mathematical data processing was performed using the Mann-Whitney U-test and the Fischer  $\varphi^*$ -test (Fischer angular transformation).
- The Mann-Whitney U-test was used to find differences in the content of identity, in the structure of social identity, and in the ratio of online and offline identity in upper – graders and students.

- $\varphi^*$  - Fisher's criterion (Fisher's angular transformation) was used to determine differences in the frequency of occurrence of criteria for attractiveness of social groups, justifications for entering groups in high school students and students.

The research was based on the school № 28 of Blagoveshchensk, Amur region, Blagoveshchensk state pedagogical University, Blagoveshchensk, Amur oblast (psychological and pedagogical, physical and mathematical, historical and philological faculties).

The sample consisted of 68 people: 34 students of the 11th grades, 17 boys and 17 girls aged 16-17 years (average age  $16.7 \pm 0.4$ ) and 34 2nd year students studying at the psychological, pedagogical, physical, mathematical and historical-philological faculties, 17 boys and 17 girls aged 18-20 years (average age  $18.6 \pm 0.6$ ).

The study was conducted in November-December 2019.

The collection of empirical data was carried out by L. N. Kondratieva, a 4th-year undergraduate student of the Faculty of Psychology and Education, under our guidance

## 6. Findings

### 6.1. Identity Content

The results of the method “Who am I?” high school students in the self-descriptions, the number of responses ranged from 2 to 21. The total number of them amounted to 353 response, the average number of 10 responses.

Students' responses ranged from 3 to 20, with a total of 533 responses, and an average of 16 responses, which is an indicator of their more differentiated self-image compared to high school students.

In high school students, personal, evaluative, subjective characteristics predominate 66 % (232), for example, smart, humane, positive, open, kind, creative, friendly, sociable, beautiful, lazy, philanthropist, etc. Physical characteristics and physical descriptions are rare (4%) (14). Fewer self-categorizations 30% (107), containing social, objective characteristics, social roles, belonging to a subculture, for example, a student, daughter, girl, granddaughter, sister, artist, student, musician, citizen of the Russian Federation, Russian, son, grandson, brother, Internet user, doter, athlete, use participant, etc. The responses of students are also dominated by personal, evaluative, subjective categories – 70 % (371), for example, responsible, purposeful, resourceful, loving, quick-tempered, funny, beautiful, caring, boring, interested, modest, indecisive, ambitious, fair, calm, honest, responsive, bold, hard-working, patient, generous, sociable, athletic, strong, reliable, punctual, organized, unlucky, stupid, individual, personality, egoist, etc. Fewer social objective categories are used – 28 % (151), for example, student, girl, daughter, student, girlfriend, wife, student, future teacher, Marxist, atheist, gamer, or three-year student. Much less frequently, the answers contain physical characteristics, descriptions of appearance, health status, and the body 2 % (11).

Thus, the predominance of personal characteristics in the content of identity shows that high school students and students are dominated by personal identity (and it is more pronounced with age), awareness of identity is more based on subjective self-concept categories and personal parameters, they are aware of and position themselves as an individual, a person, and less often as a representative of a group, social community.

It should be noted that in the self-descriptions of high school students, positive characteristics prevail 87% (308), less negative 11% (39) and 2% (11) neutral. Students also have positive 85 % (454), less negative 14.8 % (78) and 0.2% neutral characteristics. High school students have more positive characteristics in their self-descriptions than students. Thus, the identity of most high school students and students is positive. Self-descriptions in which negative characteristics quantitatively predominate (in 2.9% of high school students and 5.8% of students) are identified, which is an indicator of the formation of a negative identity.

## 6.2. Social identity Structure

The results of the study of the structure of social identity are shown in table 1.

**Table 01.** Structure of social identity in high schoolers and students

No.	Group / Indicators	Average / (rank)		The number of people who identified the group as significant (the first three positions)	
		High School	Students	High School (%)	Students (%)
1.	Family	<b>2.8 (1)</b>	<b>2.6 (1)</b>	74	71
2.	Human	5.4 (5)	<b>5.4 (3)</b>	26	35
3.	Citizen	6.6 (9)	5.5 (4)	12	21
4.	City	6.2 (7)	6.3 (9)	9	9
5.	Nation	6.1 (6)	6 (7)	12	15
6.	Religion	7.3 (10)	7.6 (10)	15	21
7.	Profession	6.3 (8)	5.9 (6)	21	23
8.	Generation	5.2 (4)	6.1 (8)	29	21
9.	Gender	<b>4.3 (2)</b>	<b>3.8 (2)</b>	56	56
10.	Hobbies	<b>4.8 (3)</b>	5.6 (5)	47	29

For high schoolers and students the most important is family identity, they define themselves primarily through family roles. Gender identity is also significant for both groups. For students, it is also important to define themselves in the category “human”, which expresses the generic identity (belonging to the human race). For high school students, belonging to a group of their Hobbies is important.

In General, the structure of social identity in high school students and students revealed more similarities than differences.

## 6.3. Online and offline identity groups

The results of a survey aimed at identifying identity groups showed that most of the groups that they belong to are virtual (64.7%). High school nicknames indicated from one to six groups. Virtual groups are dominated by Vk, Instagram, and WhatsApp, which attract them with communication, news, the ability to keep up with other people's lives, memes, interesting information, and the ability to find new friends. From real groups, high school students distinguish the classroom and family, in which communication is important.

Students in their questionnaires named from one to ten groups, most of which are also virtual (88%), primarily in Vk, WhatsApp (including Anime, Poetry, and others), which attract communication, interests, publications, creativity, scientific data, facts, files, and cognitive information. Among the real groups, students distinguish sports, dance, and study groups.

Thus, the ratio of online and offline identity groups among high school students and students is dominated by online groups.

#### **6.4. Hierarchy of identities**

The results of the methodology “Hierarchy of identities” showed that in high school students in the situation of a conflict between educational and communicative identity is more important than educational (67.6 %); over professional family dominates (85.3 %), over family-educational (67.6 %). For 64.7% of high school students, academic identity is more important than identification with a vacationer. For 64.7%, learning is more important than communication. In a situation of competition in sports competitions between two groups of different sexes, high school students (47.1 %) choose the opposite sex group, while the majority of high school students tend to support the women's team. Among national, civil and religious identities, they have a more pronounced national identity (47.1 %). At the same time, while abroad, high school students (58.8 %) will prefer to be accepted as local residents. The difference between educational and material identity is more significant (76.5 %). Thus, for high school students, the educational identity is more important in the hierarchy of identities.

In a situation of choice, students' academic identity (85.3 %) dominates the communicative one; family identity (85.3 %) dominates the professional one. When choosing between school and family, 70.6% of students prefer educational identity; in the situation of choosing between school and home, 64.7% have a dominant educational identity. 55.8 % of students choose a group of the opposite sex and the majority tend to support the women's team. 73.5 % of students who are abroad, in contrast to high school students, strive to preserve their national identity. At the same time, the national, civil and religious identity of students is dominated by civil identity (76.5 %). When choosing between Hobbies, communication, and study, academic identity is more important (79.4 %). When choosing between academic and material identity, students prefer academic (85.3 %). Among the communicative and educational identities, the most significant is the educational one (85.3 %). The results show that in the situation of choice, students' academic identity dominates. Thus, in the hierarchy of identities among high school students and students, the most significant are educational and family identities, while in the situation of selection, both of them are dominated by educational identity.

Data processing showed that statistically significant differences in the content of identity in high school students and students are only in the number of subjective categories ( $U_{emp}=323.5$ , at  $p=0.002$ ) and positive self-descriptions ( $U_{emp}=355.5$ , at  $p=0.006$ ). Students have more subjective and positive characteristics than high school students.

Calculation of the Mann-Whitney test ratio groups online and offline identity allows to exclude that statistically significant differences among students exist only in the number of virtual groups: the students they predominate ( $U_{emp}=353$ , at  $p=0.005$ ; mean rank for the sample of students 41,12 with the average

rank in the sample of high school students – 27.88). There were no statistically significant differences between high school students and students in the offline identity groups ( $U_{emp}=563$ , at  $p=0.774$ ).

Data processing of the “hierarchy of identity” methodology showed that there were no statistically significant differences in the hierarchy of identity between high school students and students.

Statistically significant differences in the frequency of occurrence of criteria for attractiveness of a social group were found only in relation to the category “interests” ( $\varphi_{emp}=2.23$ , with  $p\leq 0.05$ ): this basis is more common in students than in high school students. According to the criteria “communication” ( $\varphi_{emp}=0.33$ , at  $p\geq 0.05$ ), “information” ( $\varphi_{emp}=0.76$ , at  $p\geq 0.05$ ), there were no differences.

## 7. Conclusion

The content of the identity of teenagers and students is dominated by subjective, evaluative categories over objective ones, which shows the dominance of personal identity over social.

The Identity of teenagers and students contains positive and negative self-descriptions with a predominance of positive ones.

The Content of social identity of high schoolers and students consists of categories of family, ancestral, civil, territorial, national, religious, professional, age, gender identity, categorization by hobby groups.

In the structure of social identity of teenagers and students, the most significant are family and gender identities, as well as hobby groups (for high school students) and belonging to the human race (for students).

The hierarchy of types of social identity in high schoolers and students is dominated by educational and professional identity (which corresponds to the leading educational and professional activity at this age).

Analysis of the ratio of online and offline identity groups showed the predominance of online groups among high school students and students.

Comparative analysis of the content of identity of teenagers and students showed a convergence in the number of social and physical categories; in the nature of identity – in the presence of negative characteristics; in the structure of identity – family dominates.

Comparative analysis of the content of identity of teenagers and students revealed statistically significant differences in the number of subjective categories and the positive nature of self-descriptions.

Dynamic changes in identity are revealed: students have more subjective categories and positive characteristics than high school students.

Thus, high school students and students have certain differences in the content and structure of social identity.

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