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RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EMPATHY LEVELS AND STUDENT
BEHAVIOR STRATEGIES IN CONFLICT SITUATIONS

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Abstract

The work examines ideas about the peculiarities of empathy and strategies of behavior in conflict situations of young men 21–22 years old. It was found that at this age, the average level of empathy prevails, which is characterized by a selective attitude towards people, the ability to separate their and other people's emotions in communication, understand the experiences of the other and take them into account when interacting. A third of students show a high level of empathy, are distinguished by the ability to maintain friendships, easy understanding and empathy of other people's emotions. From the sample, significant gender differences in the manifestation of empathy in favor of girls were calculated. Also, students of a technical university have revealed values of the conflict coefficient above the average, although compromise, avoidance and cooperation are the predominant strategies for behavior in the conflict. It is determined that the average values of all strategies of behavior in conflict, except the strategy of adaptation, are in the range of the average level of development. We also proved that there are gender differences in the manifestation of behavior strategies in conflict and the level of development of empathy in late adolescence. Girls are dominated by compromise behavior, and guys are dominated by adaptive behavior in conflict.

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1. Introduction

In recent years, the media has often reported on the conflicting behaviour of young people (unauthorized rallies, pogroms in public places, etc.). This causes economic damage and social instability in society. At the same time, students of different ages are one of the main drivers of society, so it is important in this environment to study the behavior of young people in conflicts in order to identify the nature, factors and characteristics of such behavior. As a result, methods of managing and resolving conflicts in the youth environment should be developed. The study of conduct in conflict is also becoming relevant in the context of the study of readiness for professional activity. It is known that conflicts are an integral part of the life of any interactions. It is impossible to avoid a conflict in organizations, since they are a mandatory element in establishing the boundaries of communication, harmonizing the interests and ways of mutual influence of employees. But conflicts cannot be ignored, since, growing, they can move from interpersonal to intergroup, and then corporate, and then lead to unpredictable, destructive consequences. Therefore, it is necessary within the walls of the university to form conflictological competence among students as part of professional competence, based on their individual personality characteristics. In our opinion, this will allow, on the one hand, to update the problem of business communication in a new way, on the other hand, to optimize this communication based on taking into account individual manifestations of student behavior.

Youthful age is, first of all, the period between adolescence and adulthood, the final stage of secondary socialization. During this period, the personality is actively formed, the transition to independent life takes place. Youth is characterized by maximalism, defending positions, actively entering into informal movements, the desire to search for themselves in society and self-affirmation in German. Therefore, they develop both internal contradictions and conflicts in relations with society. However, someone does this through competition and dominance, and someone through cooperation and cooperation. It is important to identify what determines the choice of behavior in interaction, including in conflict.

The problem of studying conflict behavior in young men is described and considered in the works of domestic and foreign researchers (Khuziakmetov et al., 2015; McAuliffe et al., 2019). Research proves that the style of behavior of young men in conflict is determined by characteristic features and communicative abilities, the nature of the development of the "I-concept," value orientations, and gender identity. There are studies demonstrating the reverse effect of affective experiences of young men in conflict on the harmony of the development of their personality (Byankina, 2020). There are also publications in the literature that prove the dependence of young men's choice of a specific behavior strategy on a certain level of development of their empathy – the ability to empathize with another person (Feldman, 2013; Petukhova & Seregina, 2020). In our study, we want to specify the data for a sample of students at a technical university of late adolescence.

In psychology, there are various definitions of the concept of "conflict." So, Grishina (2008) defines the conflict as "a bipolar phenomenon (confrontation of two principles), manifesting itself in the activity of the parties, aimed at overcoming contradictions, and the parties are represented by an active subject (subjects)" (p. 26). According to Glazkova (2014), the conflict is the emergence of disagreements, a clash of various desires, opinions, interests, supported by emotional tension and the emergence of

relations between the warring parties. Conflict is always a confrontation between subjects interacting with each other, characterized by mutual damage (moral, psychological, material, physical, etc.) (Mikhailova, 2003).

As we see, the wording of the term "conflict" emphasizes the existence of a contradiction, taken as a form of disagreement in the interaction of people. Based on this, strategies of behavior in the conflict are distinguished "depending on their orientation towards achieving their own goals and/or orientations towards the goals of the partner" (Grishina, 2008, p. 251). The most common idea of types of behavior in a conflict is the K. Thomas model, according to which five main styles (strategies) are distinguished:

1. rivalry (competition) as a desire to satisfy interests at the expense of another participant in the interaction;
2. accommodation means, in contrast to rivalry, sacrificing one's own interests for the sake of the opponent;
3. compromise, as the focus of the participants in the interaction on joint activities in which they strive to satisfy the interests of all parties, to find the optimal solution that satisfies all parties to the conflict;
4. avoidance, such as a lack of desire for cooperation and a lack of tendency to achieve their own goals. The conflict participant refuses to realize his own interests, does not participate in the decision, chooses a losing position for himself;
5. cooperation as the desire of the participants in the incident to find an alternative that fully satisfies the interests of both parties (Vorozheikin et al., 2003)

2. Problem Statement

One of the important personal factors of a person's choice of style of behavior in a conflict is empathy. It is proved that it is one of the factors of constructive communication, the manifestation of which is characterized by understanding and accepting the state of another person, compassion for him, representing himself in his place, feeling the same as another person, not using himself as a benchmark in assessing other people, lack of categoricity in assessing people, the ability to take into account the characteristics of character, habits, attitudes of other people (Smith, 2006). Most researchers emphasize that empathy is not just identification with different people, congruence with their opinions, correlation with their views, but also the basis of altruistic and respectful attitudes towards others (Altmann & Roth, 2020; Boyko, 1996; Galiullina, 2020; Shafikova, 2019; Zhuravlev, 2017).

In general, such responsiveness becomes the motivating force of a certain style of behavior. Researchers note that the ability to conduct dialogue, constructively solve conflict situations, build optimal interaction with representatives of different cultures depends on its level of development in adolescence (Byankina, 2020; Galiullina, 2020; Petukhova & Seregina, 2020; Tretyakov et al., 2013). Consequently, the development of empathy is an important component of the competence of a modern graduate of the university. Therefore, when forming professional communicative competence of students, it is necessary to pay attention to the development of human empathy. But studies also emphasize that a high rate of personality empathy interferes with building partnerships in communication (Kazanovich, 2020). Emotionally responsive people can be exploited by competitive persons who use their empathy to

realize their own goals. Emotionally responsive people lack the ability to defend themselves in a clash in communication, in a meeting with individualism, self-love, self-determination of other people (Fetiskin et al., 2002).

3. Research Questions

In our study, we want to test the hypothesis for students at a late youth technical university (undergraduates 22–23 years old) – is there a significantly significant linear relationship between the level of empathy and the style of behavior in conflict in guys and girls students?

We conducted an empirical study of the level of empathy and strategies of behavior in conflict situations among young men, the purpose of which was to study the characteristics of the relationship between the level of empathy and strategies of behavior in conflict situations. The study was attended by 98 people, namely students of FSBOU VO "USPTU" aged 21–22 years in Ufa, of which 67 were girls and 31 were young men.

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to study the relationship of behaviors in conflict situations of students of a technical university of late youth with their level of development of empathy.

5. Research Methods

To solve the goal set for the ongoing study, we used K. Thomas's questionnaire "How you do in a conflict situation" (as cited in Vorozheykin, 2003) in which the styles of behavior are presented as: rivalry, cooperation, compromise, adaptation and avoidance. To study the level of empathy, the method of diagnosing the social empathy of Fetiskin et al. (2002) was used. The relationship between the level of empathy and the style of behavior in the conflict was calculated in STATISTICA 13.3. The validity of differences in the results of studies was determined by the Mann-Whitney U-criterion.

6. Findings

The results of the study of empathic trends revealed that 53 % of respondents show an average level of empathy development. They know how to control emotions, are more selective to people, judge people by their actions. The low level of empathy development is characterized by only 16 % of students, which shows that they have difficulties in establishing contacts with people, in encoding and decoding information, in understanding the emotional manifestations of other people, as well as expressing their own emotions. Quite a lot of young men with a high level of empathy – 31 %. They are distinguished by the ability to maintain friendships, understanding and empathy for the emotional states of other people. Significant gender differences in the manifestation of empathy were also identified (according to the Mann-Whitney criterion, $p < 0.05$). Guys have a lower level of empathy than girls (Table 01).

Table 1. Level of development of empathy in students, %

	Low	Average	High
Girls	6	34	22
Boys	10	19	9
Total	16	53	31

Thus, it can be noted that the majority of respondents are dominated by the average level of empathy, which corresponds to the age norm. Girls have a higher level of empathy than boys.

On average, among strategies of behavior in conflict, girls are dominated by compromise and cooperative behavior, and guys are dominated by avoidance and competing behavior. Girls more often go to joint activities, to find a solution that will satisfy the interests of the parties to the conflict. They are ready for active interaction during the incident, and the guys – for the quick elimination of the collision even through the refusal to realize their own interests, from participating in decision-making. It is important for them to maintain a good opinion of themselves, they prefer either not to express point of view because of the fear of being incomprehensible or ridiculous, do not realize themselves as participants in the interaction, do not see role in resolving contradictions. Either the guys choose a rivalry strategy, actively defend positions and ignore the interests of others. The least pronounced style of behavior among respondents was rivalry. This did not reveal a significant difference in its manifestation between guys and girls ($p > 0.05$).

It should be noted that a significantly significant predominance over the entire sample of the conflict coefficient ($Kk = 4.78 \pm 0.47$). At the same time, the differences between the sample of guys and girls are not highlighted. The non-conflict rate was identified throughout the group of subjects as low, although it is significantly lower in guys than in girls. This is confirmed by studies of the age characteristics of youth that this age is characterized by conflict (Kazanovich, 2020). However, the values themselves for our sample are in the middle range of manifestation.

The average level of development (in the range of 6–8 points) can be observed for all styles of behavior of students in the conflict, except for the fixture style. This indicates the need for their formation for the optimal level of communicative readiness for professional activity (see Table 02) (according to Vorozheykin, 2003).

Table 2. Average values of student behavior styles in conflict situations

	Rivalry	Cooperation	Compromise	Avoidance	Fixture	Conflict rate	Non-conflict rate
Guys	3.7±1.37	6.7±1.43	6.23±2.01	7.9±1.54	4.5±2.73	4.89±0.51	0.18±0.08
Girls	3.79±1.51	6.84±1.92	7.47±2.23	6±2.1	5.74±1.89	4.67±0.43	2.13±0.17
Distinctions	$p > 0.05$	$p > 0.05$	$p < 0.05$	$p < 0.05$	$p < 0.05$	$p > 0.05$	$p < 0.05$

According to the results of correlation analysis, students found a directly proportional linear relationship between the high level of empathy development and such styles of behavior in the conflict as cooperation (0.35), adaptation (0.36). This suggests that the higher the level of empathy of the other, the higher the concession, altruistic behavior, active search for alternative solutions and joint constructive

interaction in the incident. Emotionally responsive students find it difficult to defend themselves in a collision with the individualism of other people.

The feedback between the level of empathy and the strategy of behavior in the conflict was also identified – competition (–0.19), compromise (–0.18), avoidance (–0.36). This suggests that the lower the level of empathy among young men, the brighter the avoidance and competition are expressed as the dominant ways of behavior in the conflict. Such students have difficulty establishing contacts with people, do not understand the emotional manifestations and causes of other people's actions, often do not find understanding with others. Therefore, most often they either initially avoid solving the incident, are not included in the search for alternatives, do not try to protect values and beliefs, take a losing position for themselves, or are involved in the fight against the opponent, try to prove right by any means, without fear of offending another.

The detail of the correlation analysis data showed that only 16 % of subjects with low levels of empathy have a compromise style of behavior in the conflict. The rest of the students, with a weak development of the ability to understand the emotions of other people, prefer to avoid incidents, are used to silent and keep suggestions to own bailiwick. No gender differences were found for this parameter.

Most students (53 %) with an average level of empathy choose the dominant style of behavior in the conflict, allowing others to neglect their position, accept disadvantageous conditions of interaction. The rest of the respondents at this level resort to compromise behavior. Significant gender differences were identified here: the guys are dominated by adaptive, and the girls have compromise behavior.

7. Conclusion

Thus, the hypothesis has been proved that the dominant style of behavior in conflict in late adolescence is associated with the level of development of empathy. The most preferred strategies for behavior in conflict among students are "compromise" and "cooperation".

Behavioral strategies in conflicting situations have pronounced gender-specific characteristics in the manifestation of styles such as avoidance and competition (predominant among guys), compromise and cooperation (predominant among girls). The degree of development of constructive behaviors in difficult interaction (cooperation and compromise) is inflated among students at the "secondary level," which indicates the need for their formation in the process of study in higher education organizations.

The obtained results of empirical research can be used in group and individual work with students of technical universities, in the formation of professional readiness for activities with people.

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