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SOME TRAITS OF CONCEPTUAL IDENTITY IN ADOLESCENTS
AND YOUNG ADULTS

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Abstract

The present article takes up the certain aspects of conceptual identity of adolescents and young adults, focusing on their life-sense orientations and choices of values at the different stages of individual development. The results of an empirical study of conceptual identity in adolescents and young adults are presented. The study employs the methods "Test of Life-sense Orientations" of D. Leontyev, M. Rokich's "Value Orientations" and V. Mukhina's "Reflective Self-evaluation Test "Who am I?". Based on these methods as well as statistical processing of data the conclusions are drawn about the content and direction of conceptual identity in adolescents and young adults. These turn out to be oriented at achieving the life goals and purpose in the future, but in adolescents the values are more process-oriented while in young adults they are more result-oriented. Analysis by gender is carried out; we establish that at this age there are no differences for males and females with regard to conceptual identity. This may be due to the fact that at the studied age the personality development goals are the same for the both genders. The takeaway is that at adolescence the conceptual identity is formed, and at the older age its contents develop and specialize depending on the chosen directions of personal development.

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1. Introduction

What is conceptual identity? It is one of the chief substructures of personality, a specially organized totality of concepts (structures) and their connections that regulates all of a person's intentional behaviours (Leontiev, 2003). As a dynamic trait, conceptual identity manifests in the content and intension of life-sense orientations and choices of values. Both of these comprise a changing hierarchical system that contains not only particular meanings but also the meaning of one's life, a core concept that finds specific expressions in various situations or makes it possible to look back and evaluate a stretch of the past.

In fact, life-sense orientations are a complex and dynamic system: the personality does not stagnate but passes through the different stages of development, and one's ideas of oneself, other people, the world as a whole and change prompting shifts in life-sense orientations and the entire outlook.

Generally speaking, the meaning of life and life-sense orientations are a distinct feature of human mentality. Assigning a purpose to one's existence is one of the main spiritual needs of the people of all ages. It manifests during childhood and persists through all the stages of the life cycle. Every stage's meaning is influenced not only by present circumstances but by the past-stage development and assessments of past events.

This meaning of life for every age includes a number of components, some of which may be just forming, others peaking and still others dying away. Finding new meanings for oneself to fit a changing identity is a perennial job for humans throughout their lives (Sakharova, 2013).

Life-sense orientations begin to take shape in adolescence, because this is the most sensitive period for deep structures of personality. It is "growing up" that adolescents must face questions of finding themselves and their place in the world and accepting their new adult identity.

In adolescence, the core conceptual identity, the "meaning of life" begins to manifest. It contains the essential values of personality. As a person matures, the hierarchy of meanings and a central meaning are distinguished in the abundance of meanings available.

Adolescence is one of the earliest periods of development when life-sense orientations begin to be made up, and in the following years young adults complete their conceptual identity. Their importance has prompted our focus on these life stages.

R. Havighurst (1967) distinguishes the following development tasks for adolescence: the acceptance of one's appearance; the assumption of the male or female role and specifics of sexual behaviour; a revised relationship with the reference group; an emotional independence from parents and other significant adults; a professional orientation; building first relations to the opposite sex; a socially responsible behaviour; a system of values and an ethical consciousness as behaviour goals. A critical analysis of surrounding values should lead to an independent structure of values.

O. Khukhlaeva (2002) finds other tasks. In her opinion, for young adults one challenge is a personal self-definition: social, professional, moral, familial, religious and cultural. Another is achieving social maturity, characterized by the desire and ability to take responsibility for one's life. E. Erikson believes that young adults need to form a psychological identity after identity crisis (Erikson 2006).

But self-definition begins in adolescence. Bozhovich points out that senior school students develop an important need for self-definition (Bozhovich, 1978). They must put together a conceptual system that

combines concepts of the world and self and search for an answer to the question of the purpose of their own existence.

I. Dubrovina (1989) also stresses that in adolescents there is no self-definition but rather a psychological readiness for it, meaning stable and consciously worked-out ideas about one's rights and duty, responsibility, moral principles and convictions – those psychological mechanisms and entities that make it possible to live consciously and actively afterwards. Thus, in adolescents there is a need for self-definition, and in young adults it should be realized.

Regarding self-definition, M. Ginzburg develops an approach based on the interpretation of self-definition as driven by concepts and values (Ginzburg, 1988). According to Ginzburg the self-definition is an active formulation of a personal position towards the society's values and determination of the purpose of one's existence from that. Self-definition continues beyond adolescence and youth. Many times in later life one feels the need to redefine oneself, and youth years are only a starting point.

As young adults grow older, they hammer out values, value-driven goals, life plans and assert their independence, which tunes their personality to seek a future-oriented purpose. Unlike adolescence, when the growing persons are just discovering the plethora of concepts and trying them on, young adults build up the hierarchy of concepts – some primary and others less important (Sakharova, 2013). The question of the meaning of life to a young adult often looks like a plan to be carried out soon.

G. Vaizer (1998) notices a new psychological structure, the meaning of life, as early as in adolescence, which grows on the defining motive of one's life, life goal and central task defined but due for the completion in a distant future.

For his part, K. Obukhovsky sees the need to understand one's life as an integral process leading in a particular direction and says that purpose is one of the most important reference points for the personality, especially in young adults (Obukhovsky, 1981). In adolescence people start thinking about the meaning of their lives, and later this meaning transforms and becomes more sophisticated.

The choice of values is another crucial task for both of these age groups, it is a part of the process of self-definition and, as I. Dubrovina points out, an indicator of personal maturity of a young adult (Dubrovina 1989). According to Dubrovina's studies, most adolescents only start developing the system of values, but she believes that by the beginning of early adulthood values should already be in place to buttress the next addition to the personality – full-fledged life plans.

V. Mukhina (2008) in her work also says that in early adulthood people face choosing values; they try to define an internal position towards themselves and others and moral values. This is to say, a young adult perceives, interprets and assimilates certain social values.

She does not seem to draw a clear line between adolescence and early adulthood as far as the choice of values is concerned. The bases are laid in adolescence, and young adults continue to change and build up their personalities.

In the same work Mukhina points out that reflection plays a role in a personal development in adolescents and young adults alike. Adolescents use it to try to understand themselves and identify with their ego, primarily concerned with the question of "who am I?" Afterwards they develop their powers of reflection consciously.

On the whole, looking at the approaches to the conceptual identity in adolescents and young adults, we can say that adolescents are in a crisis and gradually begin to form the meaning of life, define values and find their place in the world. Early adulthood is certainly less stormy and presents different development tasks, but nonetheless, a personal development continues as young adults evaluate themselves and others, develop their attitude to the world, goals and meanings.

2. Problem Statement

Conceptual identity as a dynamic model manifests in adolescence and continues to develop at later stages, but keeps the personality integral at every stage. What distinguishing features does the conceptual identity have in adolescents and young adults?

3. Research Questions

- 3.1. What are the distinguishing features of conceptual identity in adolescents?
- 3.2. What are the distinguishing features of conceptual identity in young adults?
- 3.3. How do its content and intent change between these stages?

4. Purpose of the Study

To discover the distinguishing features of conceptual identity in adolescents and young adults.

5. Research Methods

Our study involved the examination of conceptual identity in adolescents and young adults, with the results to reveal their peculiar characteristics.

5.1. Subjects (cases)

We studied a total of 170 subjects. There were 70 adolescents (11 to 16 years old) and 100 young adults. Among the adolescents there were 35 girls and 35 boys, among the young adults (17 to 23 years) there were 50 men and 50 women. The average age of adolescents was 13.8 years, the average age of young adults – 19.5 years.

5.2. Procedure

We applied the method “Test of Life-sense Orientations” of D. Leontyev, M. Rokich's "Value Orientations" and V. Mukhina's reflective self-evaluation test “Who am I?” (Mukhina, 2015). Before this the participants filled out a questionnaire about their age, gender, social status and wrote what constituted the meaning of life for them. We applied Student's *t* criterion to the results.

6. Findings

After the methods application we use Student's *t* criterion to find out whether there are significant differences between the age groups. In the general degree of meaningfulness between the adolescents and

young adults there is no such difference ($p > 0.05$), nor gender-based ($p > 0.05$). There are only different tendencies in the content of conceptual identity.

The “Test of Life-sense Orientations” method does not uncover significant differences in meaningfulness for the age groups as a whole, but more boys in the adolescents group and more women in the young adults group have their conceptual identities structured with meanings. All in all, there is a certain development in the females from adolescence to early adulthood and practically no such pattern in the males.

The “Value Orientations” method reveals that the adolescent girls are more occupied with communication-type values (having friends, personal relationships), then they start valuing the independence and harmony as well as personal development (education, self-improvement). The adolescent boys have similar values. The both groups are mostly concerned with communication, but the boys, unlike the girls, also appreciate the fullness and intensity of life. Significantly, only the boys write about joy of life as a value. Thus, the adolescents emphasize communication, intensity of life and self-development.

In the young adults the focus moves away from communication to self-development and knowledge. A personal development is ahead for males, together with a professional development, but the values of fullness, activity, intensity of life remain important. As instrumental values, ethical and business values are present. Self-assertion and acceptance of others fade. In both the males and females in this older group the role of communication is not central, but the females value a personal life (family happiness) higher, they also appreciate altruistic concepts (happiness of others etc.). Both for them and the males self-development and a professional fulfilment are important. Among the instrumental values the females appreciate ethics and specific business values (that achieve objectives), also acceptance of others; the males are less enthusiastic about all of these.

We observe that values are dynamic indeed, do change from adolescence to early adulthood and relate to the development tasks before the groups. The adolescents value communication the most, while the young adults care about a professional and personal development. There are no significant gender-based differences in the choices of values.

We continue with the reflective self-evaluation test “Who am I?” In the test each participant has to give 15 written answers to the question “Who am I?” We use content analysis to process the answers, and it lets us determine relative preponderance of particular structural components of self-consciousness. In V. Mukhina's (2008) theory of structural components there are five: “name”, “claim to recognition”, “gender identification”, “psychological time”, “psychological personal space.” According to Mukhina, the structure is persistent, and the age only assigns it different content.

In their answers the adolescents sometimes include the made-up monikers like Maniac, Geek and others, names of professions such as a Banker (no present relation to the life of the adolescent), negative characteristics of the self – “I enjoy doing nothing” etc. On the whole, the adolescents have trouble answering the question 15 times, most has only given 7-8 responses. For the young adults there are no negative characteristics, made-up names and professions. The least number of the responses have to do with the “name” component. Among the adolescents the boys and girls have an equal share of the responses linked to this component.

Compared to the younger group, the young adults (of the both genders) give significantly more "claim to recognition" answers: "a future successful lawyer", "a good daughter", "a good friend", "a promising employee" and so on. But in the both groups the females are substantially ahead for this component.

The gender identification component, just as the previous one, is more prominent in the answers of the young adults and especially for the females for the both groups: "I'm in a couple", "I'm a young girl" and so on.

The psychological time in the both groups shows an orientation towards the future, e.g. "a future successful businessman." In the young adults the future-based definitions are more specific. More frequently the adolescents write of their present interests: "I like listening to music", "I like to party and have fun."

The psychological personal space is the most represented for the both groups ("I'm a human", "I'm a person", "I'm a member of my family", "I'm a student", "I'm a school student" and so on). This component is especially prominent for the boys in the adolescents group and for the women in the young adults group.

It is worth noting that a large number of the answers of the adolescents are marginal, that is, instead of answering to "Who am I?" they answer to "What am I like?" These marginal responses are predominant among the adolescents; moving on to the older group, the males begin to give fewer marginal answers, and the females give more.

All of the above shows that the most-represented structural components of self-consciousness are psychological personal space and claim to recognition for the both age groups. The adolescents try to understand their ego, explore the boundaries set by the society, try to understand the rights and responsibilities, create an outlook and set of values, an inner world; hence the importance of psychological personal space in the answers. This component continues to be important for the young adults, as they continue to define their positions and build their lives accordingly, understand the scope of the rights and responsibilities for the important aspects of their lives. One of the development tasks for both of the age groups is separation from the parental family, initiation of a new relationship with the society and, thus, a "claim to recognition" by the society or family as an attempted demonstration of their abilities. Hence the presence of this component.

In the beginning of the study, having been given the questionnaires with personal-information and social-status questions, the participants also had to answer the question "What is the meaning of life for you?" Adolescents generally responded along the following lines:

1. Personal development, self-knowledge, self-improvement
2. Achievement of something
3. Self-fulfillment
4. Family
5. Success
6. Search for meaning
7. New knowledge, education

8. Helping others

The older teens and youths answered as follows:

1. Self-fulfillment
2. Living itself
3. Family and children
4. Happiness for oneself and significant others
5. Career
6. Success in various fields
7. Creativity
8. Personal development and self-improvement

More adolescents had trouble answering this question than the young adults. The younger and the older respondents were both oriented at the future, coming successes and achievements. Among young adults there appeared answers about creativity and generally results of future living.

7. Conclusion

The present study has not confirm the hypothesis about significant differences between adolescents and young adults in terms of conceptual identity. We assume that for the first time adolescents start thinking about the meaning of their lives, choose values and life-sense orientations. These settings are built up to a personal outlook during the later period, the base for fledged-out life plans later. Thus, young adults continue to form their conceptual identities.

For adolescents communication is the most important value, to give place to a professional and personal development in young adults, which may have to be related to the features and tasks set by the both periods.

Reflection for these age groups is tied to the “claim to recognition” and “psychological personal space” components of self-consciousness, demonstrating the most important and personally treasured aspects of living and abilities. There are no significant differences between the genders for either group.

The personality in both adolescents and young adults is future-oriented, searching for more education, future professional activity and the family of one’s own. But it is not until one enters the later years when young men and women begin to point out not only the meanings of personal significance but also their social citizenship, a desire to create and to find fulfillment in the society.

Neither the qualitative nor the quantitative approach show significant differences between the conceptual identities of adolescents and young adults. This information from the study and others’ research lets us conclude that adolescence prepares and forms various structures of one’s conceptual identity while early adulthood completes them.

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