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SELF-PRESENTATION IN PRESCHOOL CHILDREN

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Abstract

The article addresses the issue of self-presentation in children of preschool age. Self-presentation is understood as an outward expression of a form of the internal position of the child's developing personality. The author suggests that the content of self-presentation changes as the child's personality matures from the younger to the older age group. An empirical study of self-presentation in the preschool children showed that at this age the child's personality emerges, and the child begins to map out the social environment creating the inner world. The foundational dual mechanism is that of identification-separation that manifests in the unique way; every child fills in the structural components of self-consciousness and determines the content of the self-presentation. The latter touches on all of the components, but especially the first, "name and bodily self," second, "claim to recognition," and third, "gender identification." The filling of the self-presentation contents of the child's personality changes throughout the preschool period of life. The thing or toy remains the fulcrum for the self-presentation during the whole preschool time. By the end of the preschool period the content based on "self" grows in importance. With maturity of the child, the most frequent behavioral reaction involved in self-presentation changes: from passivity to striving to overcome frustration. Boys' and girls' self-presentation develops in a similar manner, but boys' content has more masculine and that of girls' more feminine patterns. The content is also different when interacting with strangers and familiar people.

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Keywords: Identification; separation; child personality; self-presentation; content and foundations of self-presentation..



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1. Introduction

The world of the child reveals to us a special perception of life. The environment makes possible social inheritance of knowledge, skills and psychological qualities. A developed universe of objects and man-made things demonstrates to the child the experience of generations. This experience is transmitted by various books, advertisements, cartoons and memorials and shapes the child's upbringing and education and lets the child develop the abilities to present himself later in life.

W. James defines self-presentation as activity based on an inborn property of the psyche – self-perception (James, 2011), and supposes that a human being can create its image from its own sense of self without any social environment. G. Mead believes that the self-image is created as a form of adaptation, a power derived from humans' intrinsic ability to assume the role of another (Mead, 2009). E. Goffman allots significant importance to society, noting that humans can consciously correct their behavior according to society expectations (Hoffman, 2000). C. Cooley reaffirms these notions and says that an image created for others is social by its nature (Cooley, 2000). The desires to attract attention and establish the “right” image are intrinsic to humans and manifest at infancy (for example, in the so-called animation complex), and the person can manage the image.

D. Myers interprets self-presentation as “an act of self-expression and behavior directed at creating a favorable impression of oneself or impression corresponding to someone's ideals” (Myers, 2007). M. Snyder agrees with Myers and treats self-presentation as management of impressions one makes, noting that some people do not do this at all, others manage with an eye on their “inner self”, and still others with an eye on the impression they make (Myers, 2007).

In L. Festinger's work the same phenomenon is seen as an activity of the personality directed at overcoming cognitive dissonance so that the “image of self” remains integral (Festinger, 2000). G. Tedeschi, B. Schlenker and T. Bonoma develop this notion to point out that a human being as a person always maintains integrity by the self-presentation and only tries to be consistent in the impression they make. R. Vickland adds that personality shows individual traits, based on motivation, when presenting itself to society. B. Schlenker and R. Baumeister support these notions and bring to bear the idea that self-presentation reflects our thoughts and character.

V. Schepel defines self-presentation as “an ability to present oneself, attracting attention, inciting others' interest in one's visual or audial qualities” (Schepel, 2002). J. Krizhanovskaya and V. Tretyakov describe it as “an ability, in most cases unconscious, to direct a partner's perception of oneself along a certain path” (Krizhanovskaya, et al., 2005). Disagreeing, E. Petrova says that self-presentation is largely conscious (Petrova 2015), the process by means of which people define themselves and “show” that they are of a certain sort. According to Petrova, during self-presentation a person develops psychosemiotic competence and reflection, based on success in the presentation of the self. O. Pikuleva considers self-presentation as an activity, conscious to various degrees and employed in an interpersonal interaction to present information on the ego (Pikuleva, 2005). Y. Sidorenko, echoing A. Johnson, and A. Lebedev-Lyubimov put forward the idea of “self-advertisement”, speaking of self-presentation as a process for achieving goals and controlling impressions. E. Dotsenko analyzes self-presentation from the angle of “manipulation” (Dotsenko, 2003), which produces a required image. In line with the manipulation idea Y. Zhukov has developed “rules of communication” for a better self-presentation.

The conditions in which a modern-age child grows up make it necessary for the child to be able to present their nascent personality based on ready cultural features (norms) of a social development, because every new generation “encounters a certain material result, a sum total of productive relations, a historically defined relationship of people to nature and each other... which *prescribe* to them their own conditions of living and a certain direction of development” (Marx, 1995).

We believe that the pair mechanism of identification-isolation (Mukhina, 2014) is responsible for the individuality of the child and his self-presentation in the social space – for a unique filling of the structural components of personality self-consciousness: name, claim to recognition, gender identification, psychological time and personal mental space.

Preschoolers present their interests, desires and intentions to society, which acknowledges or rejects them. They can assert their drive to independence by showing defined structural components of self-consciousness, and so demand recognition (Mukhina, 2015).

C. Cooley has noted that in self-presentation an image of the ego with individual, age-related and gender-related characteristics is delivered (Cooley, 2000).

For child personalities, the content filled in is the relationships described by V. Myasishev, founded on “the thing” as a psychic relation to natural events or the world of objects; “friends” and “an adult,” as the relation to people and social events; “self,” to the subject of personality itself (Myasishev, 2003).

2. Problem Statement

A preschool age child’s self-presentation emerges at the joint of the remaining infantilism and already-existent and fairly stable inner world of the child in the situation when the society expects an ability to organize behavior and apply its norms being assimilated.

3. Research Questions

1. Do the particular features of the child personality find an expression in preschoolers’ self-presentation?
2. How do the contents of self-presentation change during the preschool childhood?
3. Is the ability similar for boys and girls?
4. Do the contents change when interacting with familiar people and strangers?

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to determine the tendencies and dynamics of self-presentation of the child personality at preschool age.

5. Research Methods

5.1. Research Methods.

The following methods were used: 1) the deep reflection method “Who Am I?” of V. Mukhina, modified by the authors; 2) the projection-based method “Deprivation of Structural Components of Self-Consciousness” of V. Mukhina, modified by the authors; 3) the authors’ own method called “Direction of Personal Self-presentation,” intended to find the contents of self-presentation.

5.2. Procedure.

The study was performed at Moscow child education centers on 50 children aged 3-4 years old, 90 children aged 5 years old and 70 children 6-7 years old for a total of 210 subjects..

6. Findings

Most often the children present the first structural component “name and bodily self,” when they are 3 to 6-7 years old. At 3-4 the children say their name when presenting themselves. At 5 they add the characteristics of themselves: Vanya Sunshine, Marya Princess etc. By 6-7 years they show themselves capable of using the full and shortened names: Sasha-Alexander, Lena-Yelena, Gosha-Georgy. The name takes on a special personal significance and is presented as absorbed cultural and folk traditions. Surnames peak at 5 due to a spurt of curiosity and desire to come off as an adult. At 3-4 and 6-7 the children use the surname much more rarely, and even more so for patronymics.

One's personality finds more expression in the second component, “claim to recognition.” This component comes to the forefront for the boys and girls by 6-7 years, but especially for the boys. The boys in their responses lay claim to skill, recognition as masterful, and call themselves “master”, “cyclist”, “athlete”, or say “I look after the computer”, “I can swim.” The girls' answers show diligence and achievement as a female pattern. They say “I always come to dinner,” “I say hello every day,” “I'm a gymnast,” “I sing,” “I dance,” “I can sew.”

The third component, “gender identification,” has a stable presence in self-presentation and colors it. The boys orient themselves at strength as a sign of masculinity (“strong”, “athletic”, “fast”, «clothed»), the girls correspondingly to beauty as a feminine quality (“pretty”, “red hair”, “I've got clothes”, “green eyes”, “they cut my hair like a boy”, “long hair”, “princess”, “doll”, “small”).

By the age of 6-7 years old some future-oriented elements creep in: “graduate”, “future student”, “I will study.”

By the upper limit of the preschool age the importance of “mental space” increases. The idea that children have a fairly stable and developing inner world finds confirmation in descriptions such as “sociable”, “upset”, “simple”, “angry”, “good at guessing.”

The “Deprivation of Structural Components of Self-Consciousness” projective method, modified by the authors, identifies five forms of social reactions. For self-presentation of the children the characteristic dominant reaction in the situation of deprivation of the components is inadequately loyal behavior in the boys and girls. It may have to do with their dependency on the evaluations of the adults or peers or their inability to present the image of self they form in a conscious and deliberate manner through action.

The younger children in the age group often display another distinctive reaction – passivity. By the time they reach the upper limit the children increasingly show adequately loyal and frustration-overcoming behavior, accompanied with a new look at the situation and searching for the reason for deprivation. The children knowingly try to establish a certain approved or disapproved image.

Self-representation when interacting with the parents and adults (a group instructor) usually features adequately loyal and frustration-overcoming behavior by the upper age limit, perhaps, because the relations with the adults are relatively “mature” compared to the relations with the peers. In the self-presentation situations, the boys react “with aggression”, and girls do without.

“Direction of Personal Self-presentation,” the authors’ projection-based method, show that at each of the stages within the age group the importance of “thing” was greater than the other three foundations the children use to present their personalities (figure. 1).

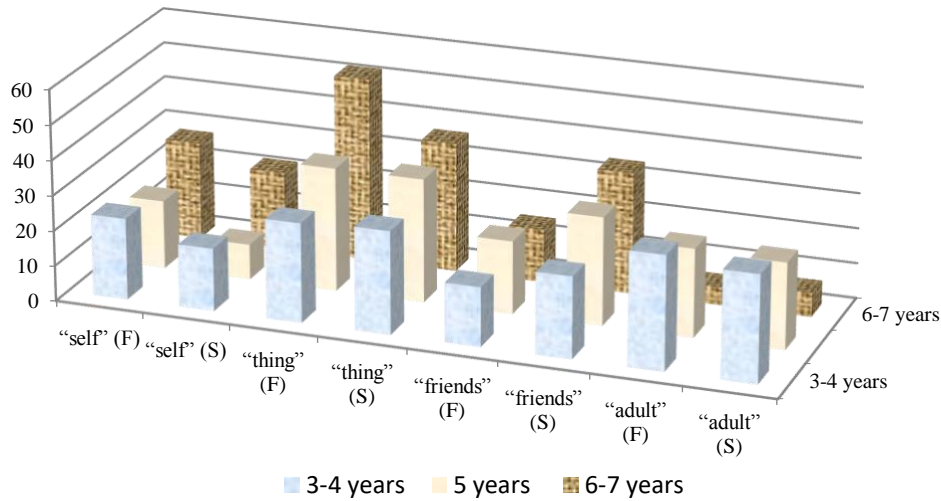


Figure. 01. Foundations of self-presentation of the girls when meeting familiar people (F) and strangers (S)

When meeting strangers, in an unfamiliar group of peers the child must interact with, “thing” usually comes to the forefront regardless of the age subgroup.

On the whole, the use of the “self” category correlated with age, which means that the children can create images for presentation with personal characteristics.

“Friends” as a foundation peaks at the middle preschool age, possibly because at this point the peers become the main source of evaluations, and the child wants to be successful among them in socializing. Vs. strangers the importance of “friends” increases in the boys and girls from 3 to 6-7 years old (figure. 2).

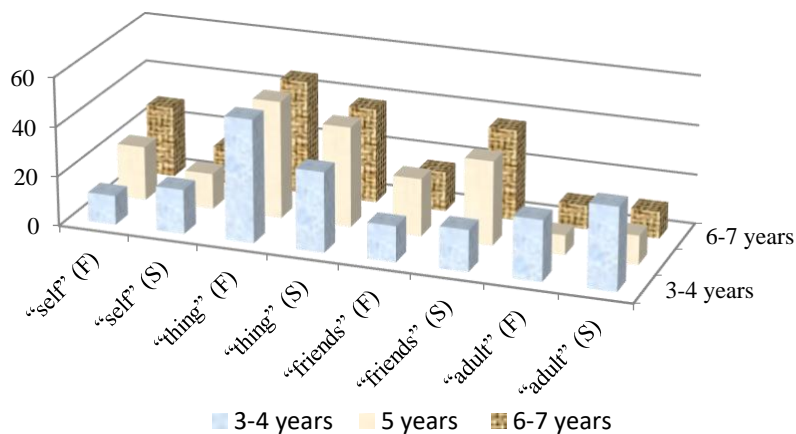


Figure 02. Foundations of self-presentation of the boys when meeting familiar people (F) and strangers (S)

The “adult” category clearly loses importance for self-presentation towards the upper age limit, which also manifests in the child’s desire to be independent and successful and separate from the adults. The elimination of “adult” in boys’ case happens earlier, by 5 years old, in girls it lingers to 6-7, which may mean that girls are more dependent on grown-ups’ opinions.

7. Conclusion

The study results have allowed us to reach the certain conclusions:

Children manifest their particular personalities in self-presentation and give a unique content to the structural components of self-consciousness.

We found the first elements of self-presentation in the middle preschool age group. Younger children consciously, or more often unconsciously demonstrate their abilities, but not in the ways we can consider conscious self-presentation. Only in the senior group is there a forming self-presentation of personality as something that is presented in the interactions with adults and peers.

The most important foundation throughout the time period is the category “thing”, which children can use in play and in the productive activities that help develop their personalities. As this development continues, the relevance of relation to “self” increases, which finds the expression in a greater interest in bodily changes, an ability to identify one’s emotions and a greater capacity for evaluating oneself. The “adult” category fades out, because the child is less emotionally dependent on the adults and more in the need of socializing with peers to adapt the norms and rules of behavior to different interaction situations, as an important field for the claim to recognition, as a condition for a personal growth. In the middle age subgroup, the “friends” foundation is very important, because so are peers.

For preschoolers self-presentation is dominated by an inadequate loyal behavior when the child makes excuses, agrees or apologizes. Boys’ inadequate reactions are aggressive, perhaps due to their gender and demonstration of appropriate behavior patterns and masculinity. There is a tendency for a greater adequate loyal and frustration-overcoming behavior as children mature (especially in girls). This behavior presents the child’s individuality to the social milieu.

Boys and girls develop in the similar ways, except for feminine and masculine patterns in the content of their presentations. Boys show off their strength, mastery, skill and smarts, girls – their obedience and achievement as well as beauty.

Self-representation at various stages changes, and different foundations become prominent when dealing with strangers and familiar people.

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