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Personality in Norm and in Pathology**COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY OF  
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**Abstract**

The results of the study of the age-specific features of the formation of professional identity in modern boys and girls, graduates of general education schools and college students were presented. Against the backdrop of the rapidly changing landscape of the world economy and the content of professions, new data are needed on the factors influencing the development of the professional identity of young people. Working life in today's world is characterized by the global mobility of jobs and the high mobility of the world of professions. It has been found that half of the young students have a moratorium on taking a decision on professional self-determination. It is emphasized that entry into college after the ninth grade of secondary school is considered by adolescents only as a further educational route and not as a real professional choice. A comparison of the data obtained with the results of studies of the second half of the 20th century showed that modern school leavers showed less certainty in their professional choices than their Soviet counterparts. Today, however, this choice is less dependent on the influence of other adults, which distinguishes modern boys from their Soviet counterparts, one third of whom were guided by parental advice in choosing their future profession. Differences have been found in the level of readiness for professional choice depending on the region of residence: a smaller range of educational institutions in the Urals region helps high school and college students to decide on their future profession.

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## 1. Introduction

The Russian literature on the subject of professional identity mostly includes studies conducted on student samples or professional groups. There are considerably fewer works devoted to the development of professional identity among older and younger adolescents (Azbel, 2004; Chesnokova et al., 2019; Jackson, 2016; Joynes, 2018; Khaimovskaya & Bocharova, 2016; Kulakova, 2018; Kovalevskaya, 2017; Konshina, et al., 2018; Molchanov & Kirsanov, 2018; Teryushkova, 2017).

The theoretical aspects of the problem of self-determination are studied in the works of L.I. Bozhovich, E.A. Klimov, and S.L. Rubinstein (Bozhovich, 2008). In the works of S.L. Rubinstein, the problem of self-determination was studied in relation to the study of a person's life path (Bozhovich, 2008). According to Bozhovich (2008), who characterized the social situation of the development of high school students, the choice of further life path and self-determination is the affective center of the life situation of high school adolescents. The need for self-determination is considered as a need for the development of a certain semantic system in which ideas about the world and about oneself, and about the meaning of one's existence are combined together. Self-determination implies the choice of a profession, but it is not limited to it. These points remain as the key ones when considering the concept of self-determination, but the mechanisms of self-determination remain unexplored.

In foreign and Russian psychology, there is a common understanding of the psychological phenomenon of identity. Identity has a structure, the main dimensions of which are purposeful, meaningful, and evaluative constructs. Modern theoretical studies consider identity as a changing structure that evolves throughout life, goes through overcoming crises, and can be both successful and unsuccessful (Azbel, 2004).

Marcia (1980) recognized four identity statuses (four states of identity): "diffusion, foreclosure, moratorium, and achievement. The distinctions between the statuses are based on two parameters: 1. Presence or absence of crisis; 2. Taking responsibility in two main spheres of functioning: profession and ideology" (pp. 161-162). The term "crisis" refers to a period of great effort in a person's life when he/she reflects on which professional path (career) to choose and which goals, values, beliefs to pursue in life. Taking responsibility involves making firm decisions about one's choice of profession and ideology, as well as developing goal-oriented strategies for implementing the decisions made.

Professional identity is understood in contemporary research as a form of social identity, including belonging to a particular occupational group and interaction within a professional group. Professional identity is a dynamic and evolving process, can be represented as a "subjective self-conceptualization" related to the taking of professional role. Research by foreign authors links successful development of professional identity to factors such as teamwork and cognitive flexibility, which relates to an individual's ability to structure knowledge in response to changing situational requirements.

## 2. Problem Statement

Against the backdrop of the swiftly changing landscape of the global economy and professions, the relevance of expanding ideas about the factors that influence the development of professional identity is unquestionable. The work environment in today's world is characterized not by fixed tasks with graduates

following a predictable, linear, and vertical career path, but by horizontal organizational structures, global job mobility, and a rapidly developing work environment. This requires young people to be prepared for the instability of professional requirements, to be able to work at various jobs and to understand the need for constant learning and adaptation to changes (Bentley et al., 2019; Golovey et al., 2019; Konstantinovsky, 2019; Puchkova et al., 2019).

The problem of professional self-determination of a person is one of the actively studied psychological and educational problems. In the discussions of experts in organizational psychology and labor psychology over the last years, questions about the multidimensionality of the notion of "profession" and other related notions have been frequently addressed. In his works, Pryazhnikov (2018), pays attention to the search for new approaches to the problem of professional and personal self-determination, and to the reconsideration of these notions that reflect the new realities. Pryazhnikov (2018), who criticizes the concepts of "profession" and "vocational guidance", considers the term "professional self-determination" as a terminological compromise, believing that in "self-determination" a person attempts to try on the chosen labour activity (p. 5).

The social situation of children and adolescents growing up in the conditions of post-industrial society, which is characterized by transitivity, has a multidirectional influence on their personal and psychological development. Global transformations of economic foundations and socio-cultural conditions of a society substantially complicate the process of self-determination of the younger generations and lead to the phenomenon of "slow maturation" among young people.

### **3. Research Questions**

When setting up our study, we proceeded from the following assumptions:

- The readiness of students of early and older adolescence age for professional self-determination can be considered as an attitude towards the existing situation of choosing an educational route?
- Psychological characteristics of professional self-determination are conditioned by specific socio-economic features of the region of residence?
- The level of professional identity development is a measure of the well-being of the social development situation of early adolescents?

### **4. Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of our study was to compare the age and socio-cultural characteristics of the development of professional identity among students of older and early adolescence age.

### **5. Research Methods**

The main factor of readiness for professional self-determination was the level of development of professional identity status. In order to obtain the corresponding empirical data, we used Azbel's (2004) method of studying the statuses of professional identity. The method is a questionnaire, which helps to identify the respondent's perspective on their future, the role of external factors in defining this

perspective, as well as the presence or absence of a crisis attitude on these matters. There are 4 statuses of professional identity: diffusion, foreclosure, moratorium, and achievement.

The obtained data were processed by methods of descriptive and mathematical statistics (Student's t-test).

The research was conducted in the 2018-2020 academic years at the general secondary schools of Moscow and Moscow Region (Dolgoprudny, Khimki, Odintsovo, Pushkino), "Stolichniy Professional College", Pedagogical College No. 18 "Mitino". Educational institutions of the Ural Economic Region (general secondary schools of Orsk, Orenburg region; Educational Center of Chelyabinsk, Orsk Oil Technical College named after Hero of the Soviet Union V.A. Sorokin, and College of Chelyabinsk State University) also took part in the research.

The research involved 265 ninth-graders, 59 tenth-graders, 65 eleventh-graders from schools of the Moscow Region, and 102 first and second-year college students from Moscow, as well as 88 tenth-graders, 82 school graduates, and 153 college students from the Ural Region.

The total sample size was 814 people.

We considered the sample of respondents residing in the Moscow Region as an aggregate sample belonging to the Moscow agglomeration. Territorial proximity to the metropolitan area has a significant impact on the economy of the cities closest to Moscow and the employment of the population, thus expanding opportunities for education and further employment of young people. A considerable part of local residents work in Moscow, and this is related not so much to the shortage of jobs, as to the active purchase of apartments in new buildings located in the Moscow region.

The sample of respondents residing in Chelyabinsk and Orsk was also considered as an aggregate sample belonging to the Ural Economic Region, which is characterized by a considerable distance from Moscow and a high level of industrial production development.

## 6. Findings

Throughout the entire period of studying in middle and high school, students have to choose their future educational route twice in the context of professional self-determination. Moreover, if 9th graders have an actual opportunity to "take a break", i.e. to impose a moratorium on making a final decision, then in 11th grade there is no such an opportunity. How does this objective situation influence the entire social situation of the development of students of "borderline" classes? We suggest that readiness to make a decision can be considered as an attitude towards the existing situation of choosing an educational route.

Azbel (2004) described the stage-by-stage development of professional identity in his research. The first level is a diffused state of professional identity. The next stage is defined as a foreclosed professional identity. Another version of qualitative development is the transition to the state of the moratorium of professional identity. All these stressful processes lead to the narrowing of interests to a few professional spheres or even one. The next stage in the development of professional identity in youth age - achieving the status of "formed professional identity". The results of our study indicate that there are significant age differences in the development of professional identity statuses. Table 1 presents the data on the development of professional identity among high school students of 9th-11th grades and college students of the 1-2<sup>nd</sup> year.

**Table 01.** Age dynamics of development of professional identity statuses (in percentage)

Professional identity status	Students 9th grade	Students 10th grade	Students 11th grade	College students (as compared to 9 grade)
uncertain	16	9*	6	5**
imposed by moratorium	10	2**	2	1**
formed	43*	56*	49	44
	31	33	43*	50*

\* -  $p \leq 0, 05$ ;

\*\* -  $p \leq 0, 01$

The table shows that the level of development of professional identity increases from 9th to 11th grade (from 31% to 43%), but there is still a high moratorium on making a decision: 43% of ninth-graders, 56% of tenth-graders, and 49% of high school graduates are not ready to make a crucial decision. For college students, the level of development of professional identity reaches 50%, while 44% of students remain at the level of the moratorium.

The highest level of moratorium can be found among tenth-graders, who made a decision to continue their education in school after completing incomplete secondary education. As a result, the task of choosing a professional education is delayed for two more years. However, the level of moratorium decreases slightly in 11th grade, and the status of achieved identity can be found in 43% of the respondents (the differences are statistically significant). The statuses of diffused and foreclosed identity were revealed only in 6% and 2% of graduates, respectively. In other words, school graduates have two dominating professional identity statuses – achieved and moratorium. The low level of professional identity development among present-day school graduates should be considered as an indicator of their unpreparedness to make a responsible decision about their adult future. They significantly differ in this respect from their Soviet contemporaries, for whom, according to research by Bozhovich (2008), it is indeed a choice for which they were consciously or unconsciously preparing throughout their high school years. At the same time, when choosing a profession, they usually begin to take into account the real content of the activity they will have to carry out and the difficulties they will have to face. Therefore, in the senior years we have (obviously, as a typical and not general phenomenon) the actual act of self-determination. This decision made by the school student regulates and brings all his various motivational tendencies, coming both from his personal interests and inclinations and from other diverse motivations, generated by the whole situation of choice, into a system of co-subordination. But even very strong personal aspirations and inclinations may not have a definitive influence on the choice of a profession: students may be in a subordinate position to the intention that they have consciously chosen. (p. 278).

Let us consider the data on the influence of socio-economic conditions of the region of residence on the specifics of professional self-determination among young people. When analyzing the obtained data, we relied on the interpretation of the social situation as a system of objective and subjective aspects of individual development that is common in Russian psychology. The objective component of the social situation of development is manifested in the peculiarities of the social environment, as well as in the socio-economic conditions of the region of residence, in the development of educational and industrial

infrastructure, which, in general, has a considerable impact on the process of professional self-determination of older adolescents (Aron, 2013, as cited in Bozhovich, 2001);

The subjective aspect is the child's internal position reflecting his/her attitude towards the objective position represented by the system of his/her needs and motivations. The presence of an internal position to the impact of the social environment demonstrates the child's active attitude towards this influence (Aron, 2013, p. 55).

We have revealed a substantial difference in the level of development of the professional identity of high-school students in Moscow and the Ural regions. For instance, compared to their Moscow counterparts, 10th graders from the Ural have a significantly higher level of professional identity development and a lower level of the moratorium. However, by 11th grade, this difference disappears, but the students from Ural Region continue to demonstrate a higher level of readiness for professional choice compared to students from Moscow (Table 2).

**Table 02.** Expression of professional identity status among high school students(in percentage terms)

professional identity status	Students 10th grade		Students 11th grade	
	Urals region	Moscow region	Urals region	Moscow region
uncertain	8	12	3	7
imposed by moratorium	2	2	2	3
formed	49	71**	46	50
	41	15**	49	40

\* -  $p \leq 0,05$ ;

\*\* -  $p \leq 0,01$

Similarly to high school students, college students from Ural Region show a higher level of professional identity than students from the Moscow Region: 38% of college students from the Ural hold a moratorium, but 52% have a developed identity, while 53% of students from Moscow hold a moratorium, and 43% of students have a developed identity (Table 3).

**Table 03.** Expression of statuses of professional identity statuses of college students from Moscow and Ural Regions (in percentage terms)

professional identity status	Moscow region	Urals region	by the Criterion of t-Student Test
uncertain	3	7	-
imposed by moratorium	1	1	-
formed	53	38	$p \leq 0,01$
	43	52	-

Therefore, we suggest that the social situation of school graduates and first-year college students in the Ural region has a greater influence on the process of professional self-determination in comparison with their counterparts from the Moscow Region. Apparently, a smaller range of choice of educational institutions makes it easier for young people to make a decision about their professional future and further educational path.

At the same time, we should not forget that the choice of 9th graders to continue their education is not a full-fledged choice in terms of professional self-determination. 41% of ninth-grade graduates who displayed some degree of developed (including foreclosed) professional identity were ready to determine a future path of professional education, while 59% were still indecisive (differences are significant at  $p \leq 0.01$ , Table 3). It is not surprising that only 52% of college students from the Ural Region and 43% of college students from Moscow demonstrated an achieved professional identity. Socio-economic conditions of the region of residence, the development of educational and industrial infrastructure have a significant impact on the process of professional self-determination of young people. In regions with a high standard of living and a wide choice of forms of education, professional self-determination is much slower compared to regions with more limited educational and production spheres.

It is worth noting that a foreclosed identity was revealed only in 1 to 3% of high school and college students, which testifies to their relative independence in making a decision about their near future. Studies from the 1980s suggest that 22% to 29% of high school graduates followed their parents' advice when choosing a profession, or made their choice under the influence of random circumstances (Atutov & Klimov, 1984; Prygin et al., 1987). We explain this shift not so much in terms of greater personal maturity and independence of contemporary high school students, but rather in terms of our society entering an era of prefigurative culture, which is characterized by rapid and multiple changes in all spheres of life and devaluation of the experience of previous generations. Appropriate understanding of the volatility of the content and demand of modern professions, the rapid change of priorities in the labour market, the need to master new professional skills and directions throughout the working life become an additional incentive for independent decision-making in terms of self-determination.

In this respect, today's youth differs from their peers of the 1980s, who were guided in their choice of the profession not only by their own inclinations and desires but also by the advice of their parents and other adults (Atutov & Klimov, 1984; Bozhovich, 2008; Prygin et al., 1987). To some extent, this desire to rely on the experience of previous generations, to follow the well-trodden path was conditioned by low mobility of the professional sphere, slow stability of the content and requirements of established professions, and slow introduction of new ones. The choice of a profession was seen as the determination of a lifelong task, and the need to change professions was regarded as a failure of life.

## 7. Conclusion

The data obtained in our research allow us to draw the following conclusions.

1. Modern school graduates demonstrate less certainty concerning their professional choice than their contemporaries who lived in the middle of the last century: by the time of graduation, 60% of today's graduates and 84% of their Soviet contemporaries identify their future occupation. The professional choice of high school students is highly personalized and is made on the basis of their own desires, interests, and inclinations.
2. Achieved professional identity is found among 43% percent of high school graduates and half of the college students. A significant part of students of early adolescent age maintains a moratorium on making a decision on professional self-determination. At the same time, school graduates and first-year college students from the Ural Region display a higher level of readiness for professional choice

than those from Moscow: a smaller range of educational institutions makes it easier for young people to decide on their professional future and further educational path.

3. Foreclosed identity was demonstrated by 1 to 3% of high school and college students, which indicates their relative independence in making a decision about their near future. This independence of choice, which is characteristic of the society of prefigurative culture, significantly distinguishes modern young men from their Soviet peers, a third of whom were guided by the advice of their parents when choosing their future profession.

The choice of college as a further educational path after completing the 9th grade has little to do with the actual professional self-determination of adolescents. The main advantage of 1-2 year college students over their peers who stayed in school is a deeper and less distinct temporal perspective due to the acquisition of a life route plan, albeit not final, but sufficiently definite.

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