Conference Paper

The Characteristics of Hierarchy of Self-Image Components Depending on Social And Cultural Affiliation

Mikhail Yanitskiy, Andrei Seryy, and Olga Braun

Kemerovo State University (RUSSIA, Kemerovo)

Abstract

In accordance with the methodology of the constructivist approach, the personal identity manifested as a unique self-image is regarded as a dynamic hierarchical system. Under that approach, based on M. Kuhn and T. McPartland's test, we have developed and put into practice a special questionnaire, which allows ranking 16 categories in terms of their importance. These categories reflect social role components of self-image in the main spheres of life, thus presenting an individual or a group identity structure as an orderly hierarchy. Based on a sample of 1251 students of various sex, age, nationality, confession, residence and field of study, we have proved that affiliation to a certain social or cultural group influences the hierarchy of self-image components. The study has shown that of the highest impact on the significance of self-image components is gender and professional affiliation, and, albeit less substantial, belonging to a particular ethnoreligious group and being the resident of a certain region. Sociocultural affiliation in all instances was an important differentiating characteristic, which determined the disparities in significance of the respective basis of the identity in the hierarchy. At the same time, sociocultural affiliation in most cases had an effect on the importance of less than a half of the other self-image components, thus determining the general structure of the identity. In conclusion, gender, educational and professional, ethnic, confessional or regional sociocultural group is a significant social determinant of personal development in the formation of the self-image hierarchy, which underlies the characteristics and structure of one's identity.

Keywords: identity, self-image, sociocultural environment, youth, students.

1. Introduction

A.R. Luria in his works repeatedly pointed out that self-awareness and self-attitude are products of a socially determined development. Obviously, one's affiliation to a gender,

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age (generational), ethnic, confessional, professional or local group might be considered a social determinant of personal development. Social affiliation determines the features of the environment where personal development takes place, which results in formation of a unique self-image. In this regard, one cannot examine the identification process outside the social and cultural context of personal development.

In the classic definition, identity is an element of the concept of "self" that is responsible for the integrity and self-identity of a person. First emerged in E. Erikson's works, the idea of multiple "selves" became widely accepted, and, consequently, a question arose regarding the structure and components of an identity. E. Erikson defined two main components in the structure of identity: personal and social identity. This identity model has since been foundational for a great number of studies, in which identity can be examined from the perspective of personality psychology or social psychology.

In the second half of the 20th century, the most common object of psychological studies was separate types of social identity: gender, professional, religious, ethnic, etc. Currently, in accordance with the methodology of postnonclassical psychology, the focus has shifted towards a relatively broad context of formation and transformation of the identity and self-image. For instance, in their research, Oyserman, Destin and Novin (2014) identify a connection between the positive/negative social context and self-esteem. Jaspal and Cinnirella (2012) expand the context of factors that influence the identification processes, introducing the mental representations of the environment. Pointing to the significance of environmental factors in the identification processes, Muraveva, Litvina and Bogomaz (2015) define the environment as a mental space, the main dimensions of which are values, place and time, regarded as psychological characteristics. It is clear that studies on the influence of environmental factors individually and in their entirety on the identity and self-image make the case for developing a more complex multi-dimensional identity model.

Another current trend in the study of this phenomenon is shifting the focus on the problem of variability/stability of identity, on the importance of identity for the individual and society in a situation of uncertainty, and on the manifestations of the identity crisis in a situation of social change. Increased interest in the study of identification processes is due to a number of features of postmodern society, such as the intensification of migration, increased mobility of the population, globalization, the spread of anonymous Internet communication, which enables one to "try out" new social roles and identities, etc. [4]. Martsinkovskaia (2014) notes mainstreaming identity in the minds of both scientists and society in times of disturbance, crisis, uncertainty, at the time of mainstreaming norms, values and future ideals. Modern

society clearly calls for research into not simply the identity ontology, but rather crisis incidents in this area. According to Belinskaia (2015), the identity crisis has exceeded the boundaries of norms and age range and become part of modern society.

Nevertheless, we believe these challenges to be especially important for the forming personality that is at its identity formation stage, namely, college and university students. As is known, the period of higher education, which corresponds with the stages of "adolescence" and "youth" in E. Erikson's categorization, is key for identity formation. Alongside changes in social status, it is the period when many students start to live independently, engage in intimate and family relationships, labor activities and when they accustom themselves to their professional culture. This all leads to sudden exposure of the identity system to a variety of factors that define the youth's choice of basis for their identity in the context of its multiplicity and variability. In this regard, the purpose of current research was to study the influence of the social and cultural affiliation of students on the formation of their identity components hierarchy.

2. Methodology

The respondents' affiliation to a certain social and cultural environment was measured by means of a questionnaire that involved closed questions regarding their sex, age, nationality, confession, residence and field of study.

In order to study the identity structure and significance of its individual components we used a special questionnaire, developed by us based upon the many years' experience of application of the Twenty statements self-attitude Test by M. Kuhn, T. McPartland. Since the aim of the research was to identify group universals in self-descriptions (i.e. intermediate and superordinate levels of self-categorization), only one statement acted as an indicator of personal identity – "I am a unique individual", whilst the remaining items in the questionnaire concerned "Social self" and "Communicative self", in Rumiantseva's terminology (2006). As a result, we examined the following components of self-image: gender, educational and vocational role, family identity (manifested through declaring one's role in the family), ethnic and regional identity that involves ethic identity, citizenship and local identity, confessional identity (religious beliefs) and group identity. In addition to the above, the questionnaire contained "I am a Homo sapiens" item, which is equivalent to the "I am a human being" option that is commonly selected by the M. Kuhn and T. McPartland test-takers, allowing evaluating the superordinate level of self-categorization. The "Other" option

was also available for those types of self-categorization that we had not included in our list (in this case, the main definitions concerned personal qualities or hobbies)

Consequently, the respondents were presented with a list of 16 categories that reflected, most importantly, their social role components of self-image in the main spheres of life, as outlined by Rumiantseva (family, work, education, leisure, intimate-interpersonal relationships, free time activities):

- I am a professional (future professional);
- I am a student;
- I am a man/woman;
- I am a son/daughter;
- I am a husband/wife (future husband/wife);
- I am a unique individual;
- I am a representative of my people;
- I am a citizen of my country;
- I am a resident of this city;
- I am a father/mother (future father/mother);
- I am a young adult;
- I am a member of an informal group;
- I am a friend;
- I am a follower of my religion;
- I am a Homo sapiens;
- Other.

The following instruction was offered to the examinees: "Here are several elements that comprise each person's perception of themselves. Please rank them from 1 to 16 in order of importance to you at the moment. For example, the most important characteristic will be 1, and the least important - 16 ".

While evaluating the results, we assumed that the lower the rank (closer to 1), the higher subjective importance and degree of awareness of this category. Reliability of the differences between the identity components in the described groups was determined by means of the H-criterion of Kruskal–Wallis test; the average rank of identity components – with the help of descriptive statistics in the Statistica 10 program.

3. Results

The study analyzed individual hierarchies of identity components in 1251 students, differentiated by sex, age, nationality, religion, residence and professional orientation of their education.

3.1. The hierarchy of self-image components depending on gender identity

The study group consisted of 839 females and 462 males. As can be seen from the research results (Table 1), gender identity affects greatly the identity structure – reliable differences between the male and female groups were observed in the degree of importance of 12 out of 16 self-image components. For males, the main foundation for their identity was their sex itself. Professional, civic, ethnic and regional components of self-image were significant as well. On the contrary, the females' identities were based on family roles – the self-image of a daughter, a wife or a mother.

TABLE 1: The hierarchy of self-image components of males and females (average ranks).

Self-image components (total p; H value)	Gender group	
	Male (n=462)	Female (n=839)
I am a professional (p<0.0001; H=16.89)	5.31	6.17
I am a man/woman (p=0.0153; H=5.88)	4.85	5.24
I am a son/daughter (p<0.0001; H=24.46)	5.00	4.09
I am a husband/wife (p=0.0064; H=7.44)	7.21	6.64
I am a unique individual (p=0.0229; H=5.177)	5.70	5.15
I am a representative of my people (p=0.0085; H=6.92)	8.45	9.81
I am a citizen of my country (p=0.018; H=5.58)	8.31	8.85
I am a resident of this city (p=0.0349; H=4.44)	9.88	10.39
I am a father/mother (p=0.0068; H=7.33)	8.24	7.61
I am a member of an informal group (p=0.03; H=4.68)	12.46	13.03
I am a follower of my religion (p<0.000; H=18.54)	12.06	11.48
I am a Homo sapiens (p=0.0139; H=6.05)	9.75	10.56
Note. Here and elsewhere in the tables we present the statistically significant differences between the groups described.		

3.2. The hierarchy of self-image components depending on age group

In keeping with the objective of the study, university students aged between 16 and 35 were chosen as the respondents. Comparative analysis required common sampling to be broken down into age groups in accordance with I.Yu.Kulagina's periodization: early teens (16-17), youth (18-19), late youth (20-23) and adulthood (24 and older). The results show a certain dynamics of the hierarchy of self-image components during the university studies (Table 2). For instance, as they grow older, respondents attach less importance to perceiving themselves as a representative of the youth, as well as a Homo sapiens, and, simultaneously, gradually increases the importance of identifying oneself as a resident of their cities. The most specific is the youth aged 20-23. Here, the respondents find great significance in self-categorization as a man/woman and a husband/wife, which, obviously, is due to emerging steady intimate and family relationships.

TABLE 2: The hierarchy of self-image components depending on age group (average ranks).

Self-image components (total p; H value)	Reliability of differences between groups	Age (full years)			
		1	2	3	4
		16-17 (n=126)	18-19 (n=616)	20-23 (n=474)	≥ 24 (n=34)
I am a man/woman (p<0.0001; H=30.816)	1-3 (p<0.0001) 2-3 (p=0.0003)	6.24	5.33	4.56	5.06
I am a husband/wife (p=0.01; H=11.34)	1-3 (p=0.006)	7.83	6.89	6.48	6.73
I am a resident of this city (p=0.0064; H=12.3)	1-3 (p=0.023)	10.77	10.35	9.94	9.79
I am a young adult (p=0.015; H=10.448)	2-4 (p=0.014) 3-4 (p=0.03)	9.97	9.85	9.85	11.39
I am a Homo sapiens (p=0.0036; H=13.54)	1-2 (p=0.03) 1-3 (p=0.002)	8.65	10.25	10.78	10.15

3.3. The hierarchy of self-image components depending on ethnicity

By ethnicity, the study group was divided into Russians, Ukrainians, Buryats and representatives of other nationalities (mainly small indigenous peoples and migrants from the near abroad). In general, the self-image hierarchies of different ethnicities were quite similar: of the highest priority was the perception of self as a son/daughter, a man/woman and a unique individual; of least importance was "I am a member of an

informal group" (Table 3). At the same time, ethno-confessional features ranked higher in the self-image hierarchy of Buryats and representatives of other ethnic minorities. For Russians (the ethnic majority), said features were of least value. One peculiar feature of the Ukrainians' identity structure was higher (compared with the others) priority of family role basis of identity, alongside perceiving oneself as a unique individuality, which is probably due to greater orientation towards individualistic cultures.

TABLE 3: The hierarchy of self-image components of different ethnic groups (average ranks).

Self-image components (total p; H value)	Reliability of differences between groups	Ethnic group			
		1	2	3	4
		Russians (n=892)	Buryats (n=139)	Ukrainians (n=125)	Others (n=95)
I am a man/woman (p=0.0009; H=16.487)	1-2 (p=0.0005)	4.93	6.11	4.82	5.83
I am a son/daughter (p=0.0085; H=11.7)	1-3 (p=0.0074)	4.52	4.04	3.49	4.73
I am a unique individual (p=0.0063; H=12.339)	2-3 (p=0.0034)	5.32	5.84	4.62	5.61
I am a representative of my people (p<0.0001; H=28.85)	1-2 (p<0.0001) 2-3 (p=0.0002)	9.79	7.50	9.27	8.30
I am a father/mother (p=0.0069; H=12.135)	2-3 (p=0.01)	7.74	8.58	6.98	8.39
I am a young adult (p=0.012; H=10.87)	1-2 (p=0.024) 2-3 (p=0.05) 2-4 (p=0.04)	9.89	10.55	9.62	9.48
I am a member of an informal group (p<0.0001; H=33.63)	1-2 (p=0.001) 1-3 (p=0.003) 2-4 (p<0.0001) 3-4 (p=0.0002)	12.72	13.64	13.72	11.73
I am a follower of my religion (p<0.0001; H=81.31)	1-2 (p<0.0001) 1-3 (p=0.0003) 2-3 (p=0.02) 2-4 (p=0.0032)	12.21	9.45	10.98	10.64
I am a Homo sapiens (p=0.0031; H=13.84)	1-3 (p=0.013)	10.09	9.88	11.67	11.01

3.4. The hierarchy of self-image components depending on confession

The study group consisted of orthodox Christians, followers of other religions (primarily other Christian denominations, Muslims and Buddhists), persons who consider themselves believers, but do not affiliate to any denomination, as well as atheists. The analysis of the hierarchy of self-image components revealed features, similar to those of ethnic groups (Table 4). For instance, for the religious minorities their religious

and ethnic affiliation is of greater importance, while for the orthodox Christians and, especially, the "non-sectarian believers" and atheists these components were less significant. We also observe polarizing differences between the orthodox majority and atheists – while the first find gender and role characteristics more important, the latter attach more value to self-perception as a member of youth and a Homo sapiens.

TABLE 4: The hierarchy of self-image components of different confessions (average ranks).

Self-image components (total p; H value)	Reliability of differences between groups	Confessional group			
		1	2	3	4
		Orthodox (n=510)	Other (n=261)	Non-sectarian believers (n=244)	Atheists (n=233)
I am a man/woman (p=0.0001; H=21.234)	1-2 (p=0.0001) 2-3 (p=0.0014) 2-4 (p=0.013)	4.81	6.04	4.86	5.03
I am a husband/wife (p=0.0003; H=19.05)	1-4 (p=0.0003) 3-4 (p=0.009)	6.40	7.22	6.56	7.60
I am a representative of my people (p=0.0002; H=19.25)	1-2 (p=0.002) 2-3 (p=0.013) 2-4 (p=0.0004)	8.96	8.04	11.89	9.18
I am a father/mother (p<0.0001; H=23.86)	1-2 (p=0.0007) 1-4 (p=0.001) 2-3 (p=0.034) 3-4 (p=0.036)	7.31	8.54	7.45	8.50
I am a young adult (p=0.0063; H=12.35)	1-4 (p=0.017) 2-4 (p=0.019)	10.27	10.08	9.57	9.23
I am a member of an informal group (p=0.0082; H=11.771)	1-4 (p=0.025)	13.26	12.87	12.49	12.27
I am a follower of my religion (p<0.0001; H=163.35)	1-2 (p<0.0001) 1-3 (p=0.0034) 1-4 (p<0.0001) 2-3 (p<0.0001) 2-4 (p<0.0001) 3-4 (p<0.0001)	11.62	9.49	12.35	13.51
I am a Homo sapiens (p=0.031; H=8.902)	1-4 (p=0.018)	10.64	10.20	10.22	9.67

3.5. The hierarchy of self-image components depending on region of residence

Depending on the city of their residence, the respondents were allocated to the following regions: the Far East (Khabarovsk, Vladivostok, Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky), Siberia (Kemerovo, Chita, Ulan-Ude), Central Russia (mainly Moscow and Moscow

Region), Ukraine (Rovno, Ternopol). Residents of said regions demonstrated substantial differences in their identity structures (Table 5). The importance of self-perception as a member of youth and a resident of the respective city characterizes those from the Far East, which is likely due to specific sociocultural environment, as it is the case in, for instance, Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky. For the Ukrainians, a self-image of a resident of their city is of least significance. As we move further from the center to "the outback", the decreasing importance of perceiving oneself as a unique individual becomes more noticeable, providing us with a clearly defined picture of the mentality of metropolitan and provincial residents. Simultaneously, the Siberians are characterized by the highest degree of importance of the identity component that corresponds with the superordinate level of self-categorization, ranking the "I am a Homo sapiens" item the highest, i.e. the self-image of a Homo sapiens.

TABLE 5: The hierarchy of self-image components of residents of various regions (average ranks).

Self-image components (total p; H value)	Reliability of differences between groups	Region of residence			
		1	2	3	4
		Far East (n=462)	Siberia (n=515)	Central Russia (n=157)	Ukraine (n=117)
I am a student (p=0.030; H=8.93)	1-3 (p=0.04) 2-3 (p=0.027)	6.01	6.02	6.95	5.97
I am a man/woman (p=0.039; H=13.36)	1-2 (p=0.004)	4.80	5.42	5.33	4.81
I am a son/daughter (p=0.0022; H=14.63)	1-4 (p=0.025) 3-4 (p=0.0012)	4.57	4.34	4.72	3.43
I am a unique individual (p<0.0001; H=31.66)	1-3 (p=0.004) 2-3 (p<0.0001) 2-4 (p=0.0008)	5.40	5.76	4.31	4.50
I am a resident of this city (p=0.0004; H=18.20)	1-2 (p=0.011) 1-4 (p=0.001)	9.79	10.42	10.29	10.97
I am a young adult (p=0.0001; H=22.016)	1-2 (p<0.0001)	9.31	10.28	10.38	10.01
I am a member of an informal group (p=0.0003; H=18.827)	1-4 (p=0.003) 2-4 (p=0.007) 3-4 (p=0.0002)	12.58	12.74	13.13	13.94
I am a follower of my religion (p<0.000; H=84.55)	1-2 (p<0.0001) 1-3 (p=0.005) 1-4 (p<0.0001) 3-4 (p=0.029)	12.71	10.98	11.54	10.72
I am a Homo sapiens (p<0.0001; H=23.81)	1-2 (p=0.003) 2-4 (p=0.0001)	10.77	9.50	10.29	11.77

3.6. The hierarchy of self-image components depending on vocation

Depending on focus of their studies that reflects the choice of future professional group which students identify with while studying at university, the examinees were divided into two groups: socio-humanities and natural sciences and engineering. The study shows (Table 6) that natural sciences and engineering students preferred general, non-specific components of self-image, such as family and social roles. On the contrary, the socio-humanities students opted for their own educational and professional, as well as ethnic and civic identity basis, which is likely due to mainstreaming said characteristics in the course studying social and humanitarian disciplines.

TABLE 6: The hierarchy of self-image components of representatives of different educational and professional groups (average ranks).

Self-image components (total p; H value)	Educational and professional group	
	Socio-humanities (n=659)	Natural sciences and engineering (n=573)
I am a professional (p<0.0001; H=20.39)	5.42	6.30
I am a student(p=0.049; H=3.898)	5.94	6.27
I am a man/woman (p<0.0001; H=27.71)	5.64	4.68
I am a husband/wife (p=0.0197; H=5.44)	7.08	6.58
I am a unique individual (p<0.0001; H=30.155)	5.85	4.87
I am a representative of my people (p=0.0119; H=6.328)	8.52	10.09
I am a citizen of my country (p=0.0058; H=7.61)	8.38	8.94
I am a father/mother (p=0.0158; H=5.825)	8.11	7.54
I am a young adult (p=0.0038; H=8.393)	10.34	9.58
I am a friend (p=0.0009; H=11.01)	7.9	7.20
I am a follower of my religion (p=0.014; H=6.03)	11.42	11.90
I am a Homo sapiens (p=0.0031; H=8.777)	9.73	10.76

4. Discussion

While studying the phenomenon of identity we adhere to constructivist approach and take into account the multiplicity of self-images. The obtained results prove that personal identity is a multidimensional system, in which its primary structural components

that act as basis for identity exist in a hierarchy. We believe that personal identity is a system of interconnected self-perceptions, and various elements of the system have different subjective value. Simply put, there are central, nuclear elements, which closely relate to the value-semantic personality sphere, its direction. These elements are relatively constant and their function is maintaining the integrity of one's identity. Changes in these nuclear elements occurs during meaningful events, which in turn leads to transformation of self-image. The peripheral elements of the identity system are less stable. Their changes are evolutionary in nature and due to adapting one's personality to the current social environment. Consequently, we perceive identity as a hierarchical system with all its elements being in strong correlation with each other.

At the same time, the identity system is changeable and, expectedly, we regard it as dynamic. We suppose that the identity elements that are formed earlier are more stable, and the identity system dynamic generally develops in the direction of making the structure more complex, and its content – more detailed.

The identity characteristics as a hierarchical dynamic system are defined by belonging to a particular sociocultural environment, in which one accepts the norms and values of the corresponding group, whose members the individual identifies with. The study has shown that gender and professional affiliation, which influence 75% of self-image components, are the most important to young university students. Less influential are affiliation to a particular ethnoreligious group that affects the significance rank of 50% of the assessed parameters. Lastly, the age group affiliation determines only 25% of the differences in significance of self-image components. A possible explanation is homogeneity of the age groups (essentially, students) chosen for the research, who do not belong to different generations. Being part of a certain sociocultural group has been an important differentiating characteristic in all cases, determining the discrepancies in the most significant types of identity basis in the hierarchy. Professional affiliation determined significance of the professional component of self-image and so on. Simultaneously, sociocultural affiliation in most cases influenced priority ranking of no less than 50% of the other components of self-image, thus determining the general identity structure.

5. Conclusions

The study results prove and concretize the idea of the identity as a complex hierarchical and dynamic system, where primary structural elements are the self-image components, which reflect the outcome of concurrently identifying oneself to different social groups.

The questionnaire, devised by us based on the idea of multiplicity and variability of identity, has proved its applicability for studying individual and group self-image components hierarchy, as well as assessing the effect of different sociocultural factors on the identity structure.

The results obtained by means of this questionnaire demonstrate that belonging to a specific gender, educational, professional, ethnic, confessional or regional sociocultural environment is an important determinant of the formation of the hierarchy of self-images in the student age, determining the characteristics and structure of the identity of the developing personality.

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