

FAMILY AS A CULTURAL FACTOR OF PERSONALITY'S ACTUALIZATION AND EMPATHY DEVELOPMENT

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Summary. We study family as the main institution of personality socialization and a substantial factor in the development of individualistic or collectivist self-consciousness. We also investigate correlations between teenage empathy indicators and perceived parental attitudes.

Key words: empathy, types of parent' relations, adolescents

Introduction

Since birth, child's consciousness develops within a cultural context that embraces enormous universal experiences of social agency, mentality, communication and interaction.

Prior to subdivision into families, in primitive societies the whole community was in charge of child care and education, passing on the traditions, customs and norms to younger generations. After the subdivision, the acquisition of cultural experience, specifically in the early stages of ontogenesis, became mediated by a family, i.e. by the means of parental behavior, parental attitude to the environment, partners and offspring.

Two types of culture: individualistic and collectivist

The cultural and historical development resulted in the enrichment of civilization's "collective consciousness" that, in turn, transformed into the individual consciousness. The alternation of nations, epochs and states was followed by further differentiation of ethical norms, traditions and values of various ethnic groups, nations, states and races. However, despite the individual differences, cross-cultural psychologists, such as Harry Triandis, Richard Brislin, Harry Hui (Harry Triandis, Richard Brislin, C. Harry Hui, 1988; H. Triandis, 1994) [1, c. 250] distinguish two major types of cultures – individualistic and collectivist. Their research reveals the

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effects of individualism (or collectivism) on personality's self-concept, social bonds, child care, etc.

In fact, all existing cultures represent two groups. The first group consists of Asia, South America and the Third World countries, where collectivism is dominant and highly appreciated. Overriding priorities for people from these areas are in-group (i.e. family, clan, enterprise, state) shared aspirations and values. Japan perfectly exemplifies a highly developed country with collectivist values. Group cohesion is valued highly in collectivist cultures.

Social bonds determine people's behavior and facilitate the search of one's identity which might be called not "Ego-identity", but "We-identity" or, in other words, "interdependent self". In collectivist cultures, families and educational institutions nurture collectivist values, cooperativeness and respect for elder people.

The second group is represented by North America and Europe with their values of individualism. The individualistic cultures focus rather on self-dependence and private well-being than social identity. Western literature and mass media encourage self-confidence, determination, ability to comply with one's individual interests by all means and despite social expectations.

In contrast to collectivist cultures with their multi-generational family traditions, individualistic cultures promote families with just parents and their children. Such familial education contributes to the development of independent self with egocentric personality orientation.

Western psychologists suggest that gaining one's identity implies personal determination with all possible self-images and strong self-confidence. However, "unrestrained individualism" has been causing a dramatic increase in cases of depression in Western countries, when people go through "existential" vacuum or realize the absence of personal attachments.

Post-Soviet culture

Peculiarities of post-Soviet culture and cultural values must be examined separately. In Soviet times, collectivist ideology was intensely cultivated. The values of the state, party and workforce prevailed, and virtual communist values dominated over the personal ones. The words of a popular Soviet song "...first think of the Motherland, only then of yourself" eloquently illustrate such an approach. Individuality of a Soviet-era personality "dissolved" in the identification with the "Soviet people". The major task of education was to foster public spirit, sense of community, faith in a promising future and humanistic values. Such an upbringing had its advantages and drawbacks. The benefits were observed in the nurture of patriotism and humanism, willingness for mutual help, "common touch", amiability and optimism. The negative implications manifested themselves in the neglect of individuality, creativity, self-responsibility, etc.

After the breakup of the Soviet Union and its ideology, people lost the feeling of safety and their ideals. A so-called "lost generation" grew and evolved during the changing times, when the old values, ideals and convictions were eliminated, while the new ones were not yet formed. The current younger generation no longer

feels the confusion and instability to the extent their parents and predecessors did. However, society as a whole bombards them with the illusory values of the individualistic culture.

The features of Ukrainian society and families

Like never before, the contemporary Ukrainian society feels and experiences the controversial dichotomies of good and evil, stability and chaos, humanism and individualism. Only families with middle-aged parents or families comprising several subsequent generations, may be both the treasurers of the best old traditions, relationships, ideals, and representatives of the command-and-control methods of influence over the others. However, all Ukrainian families are subject to the negative impact of crisis phenomena in our country.

In this context, the study of a contemporary family as one of the key factors of child's personality socialization and development is highly *relevant*.

Being both the first link between people and society and the principal institution of personality socialization, family passes along to subsequent generations not only genetic code but also individualistic or collectivist social values. At the subjective level these values appear as value orientations of family members

Compared to other social institutions, the family has certain peculiarities, which significantly influence personal upbringing of a child, his/her familiarization and internalization of cultural achievements. These major peculiarities are:

- All forms of human activities are presented in a family. They all develop into family functions. As a result, a family creates its own lifestyle, its micro-culture, which is based on the values and cultural components of a society or its separate social strata and subcultures;
- A child belongs to a family since its birthday and his/her first concept of the world, relationship patterns and conceptions of good and evil are all formed in a family;
- Emotional bonds between the family members, which are based on the feelings of love and care, create a favorable basis for the activation of such unconscious social and psychological influence mechanisms as imitation, infusion, "psychic infection".

Interfamily relationship circle is the most important specific educational factor. However, in an educational sense, it is quite a vulnerable spot for the family if the emotional connections between its members are destructive or of an adverse character. In this case, a family not only loses its advantage of being a highly-developed group, but turns out to be a microenvironment that refracts, alters, distorts and delays positive impact of the culture on a personality.

Thus, a family and peculiarities of an interaction between a parent and a child greatly facilitate or undermine child's success at a later stage of his/her development.

Of the utmost importance for the personal becoming of a child are two pairs of factors, which determine parents' behavior: acceptance (warmth, love) or non-acceptance (hostility), which set the emotional tone of the relationships, as well as

tolerance (self-dependence, freedom) or inhibition (control), which determine what type of control prevails in a family [1; 9].

Provided that a child is accepted by his/her parents, the basic means of upbringing are care and encouragement. Parents are focused primarily on positive qualities of the child, are content with communication with the child, accept him/her as he/she is. In case of non-acceptance, the major means of upbringing are harshness and punishment. Parents do not accept their children, as they are, focus on children's negative qualities, do not take pleasure in communicating with them and sometimes display feelings of hostility.

Malevolence and carelessness, cruelty to children exercised by parents, evoke in the former an unconscious hostility, which exhibits outwardly (e.g. transforms into aggressive actions not only towards parents, but also towards strangers) or inwardly and is displayed in a sense of guilt, anxiety, low self-esteem, etc. [5, p. 106-109].

Although it is difficult to define clearly the connection between specific features of child's individuality and particular qualities of his/her parents or with their styles of upbringing, such a dependence nevertheless exists.

According to the available data, the influence of parental style on children psychosocial development is manifold. Scientists have collected compelling evidence suggesting that children who live in families with durable, warm relationships and respect for children are more predisposed to develop such qualities as sense of community, agreeableness, alertness, empathy, independence, initiative, ability to solve conflicts etc. They tend to have more adequate awareness of self-image, its integrity, and therefore a more developed sense of human dignity, as well as an ability to stand their ground. All this makes them sociable, resulting in a high prestige in the peer group [5].

In authoritarian families, the formation of aforementioned qualities is complicated, restrained, distorted, and in some cases becomes impossible. The peculiarities of parent-child relationships and bonds anchor in children's behavior and form a pattern for their further intercourse with other people.

The role of empathy

Empathy is one of the major developmental factors of pro-social, humanistic (collectivist) personality orientation, personality's constructive behavior [2]. Taking into consideration all above-mentioned we chose the peculiarities of interconnection between parental attitude and teens' empathy development as the *research subject*. We *hypothesize* that the peculiarities of children's empathy development depend on the styles of parental attitude towards them. Obviously, nurture of independent egocentric self is not conducive to actualization and development of personality's empathic traits. The individual is not capable of empathic relations in society. And conversely, the experience of cooperativeness promotes the process of empathy development, which is concomitant with the formation of interdependent self.

The study

Subjects

In the experiment, we studied 12-14 year old teenagers, considering that during adolescence the qualitative reorganization of self-consciousness takes place, and critical reappraisal of moral values, external and internal conflicts gets sharper in parent-child relationships, as the result of emergence and development of adult sense (the central teenage formation). Middle adolescence is chosen due to the fact, that all peculiarities and inconsistencies of this age are vividly manifested in this period. During this stage, we observe an intense development of the relationships with surrounding people, an approbation of methods and mechanisms of social interaction, communicative skills, with subsequent selection and internalization of the ones that ensure successful interpersonal relationships and social and psychological adaptation.

Tools

To conduct the research on the peculiarities of family relationships, we have used a modified O.Ya. Varga and V.V. Stolin questionnaire test of parental attitude [8]. Parental attitude is understood as a system of different feelings towards a child, behavioral patterns that are applied during interactions with him/her, special features of perception and comprehension of a character and child's personality, his/her actions [1].

Main problem and hypothesis

We suggest that:

the development of teenager's personality is mainly influenced not by the parents' subjective evaluation of their attitude towards him/her, but the perception and awareness of this attitude by the student himself/herself.

Assumption

Our assumption is justified by prior experimental findings, according to which child's comprehension of parental mindsets better explains the development of his/her personality, in particular child's self-esteem, than parents' evaluation of their own attitude [10].

M.I. Kozlov aptly described the weight and the importance of children's attitude towards parents in forming views: "All our feelings about the world are our feelings towards parents. And both the sad and the happy feelings towards people around us are basically the feelings towards those who were near your cradle, to mother, grandmother, father. To those dearest people with whom you inwardly hold an endless dialogue... Our understanding of the world is basically a reflection of our relations with the parents" [4, p. 16].

Due to our assumption, the questionnaire was offered not to parents but to teenagers to evaluate parental attitude towards them. The questionnaire consists of five scales: "acceptance-rejection", "cooperation", "symbiosis", "authoritarian hypersocialisation", "little failure".

The “acceptance – rejection” scale reflects parental emotional attitudes towards teens. The “cooperation” scale measures how much the teenager feels his/her parents are willing to help and to encourage his/her initiative and independence. The “symbiosis” scale reflects the teenager’s sense of the magnitude of interpersonal distance in communication with parents. The “authoritarian hypersocialisation” scale reflects the shape and direction of monitoring the child's behavior. The “little failure” scale reflects the teenager’s sense of how his/her parents perceive and understand the teenager’s personality.

The results

The results of the study of teenagers’ perceived parental attitudes, broken down by age, are shown in table 1.

Table 1. The indicators of teenage perceived parental attitudes towards them (%)

| Sample | Scales | | | | | | | | | |
|-------------------------|----------------------|-----------|-------------|--------------|-----------|----------|----------------------------------|-----------|----------------|---------------|
| | Acceptance-rejection | | Cooperation | | Symbiosis | | Authoritarian hypersocialisation | | Little failure | |
| | Acceptance | Rejection | Cooperation | Estrangement | Symbiosis | Distance | Authoritarianism | Democracy | Failure | High achiever |
| 7th grade (12-13 years) | | | | | | | | | | |
| B | 25.0 | 75.0 | 0.0 | 100.0 | 91.7 | 8.3 | 100.0 | 0.0 | 33.3 | 66.7 |
| G | 17.6 | 82.4 | 11.8 | 88.2 | 94.1 | 5.9 | 58.8 | 41.2 | 17.6 | 82.4 |
| Both | 20.7 | 79.3 | 6.9 | 93.1 | 93.1 | 6.9 | 75.9 | 24.1 | 24.1 | 75.9 |
| 8th grade (13-14years) | | | | | | | | | | |
| B | 0.0 | 100.0 | 10.0 | 90.0 | 100.0 | 0.0 | 80.0 | 20.0 | 30.0 | 70.0 |
| G | 15.0 | 85.0 | 10.0 | 90.0 | 100.0 | 0.0 | 95.0 | 5.0 | 30.0 | 70.0 |
| Both | 10.0 | 90.0 | 10.0 | 90.0 | 100.0 | 0.0 | 90.0 | 10.0 | 30.0 | 70.0 |
| Total sample | | | | | | | | | | |
| B | 13.6 | 86.4 | 4.5 | 95.5 | 95.5 | 4.5 | 90.9 | 9.1 | 31.8 | 68.2 |
| G | 16.2 | 83.8 | 10.8 | 89.2 | 97.3 | 2.7 | 78.4 | 21.6 | 24.3 | 75.7 |
| Both | 15.3 | 84.7 | 8.5 | 91.5 | 96.6 | 3.4 | 83.1 | 16.9 | 27.1 | 72.9 |

Note: G – girls, B – boys, Both – girls and boys together

The results of the study demonstrate the crisis in parent-child relations, the negative dynamics of which increases with age. It seems that parents inadequately react to the ongoing personal transformation of their children, manifested in the desire to be grown-up, self-reliant, independent, etc.

Since the vast majority of teenagers, especially the elder ones, feel the parental rejection of what they are, the estrangement, the parental aspiration for symbiotic relationships, their own infantilization, the satisfaction of all their needs, the solving of teenage problems instead of letting the teenagers solve them for themselves, they view their relationship as authoritarian.

Considering gender differences in the representation of the relations between parents and teenagers, we find that girls feel more comfortable in their relationships with parents compared with boys. More boys than girls experience parental *rejection* (sensing parents' negative emotions, devaluation), *authoritarianism* (demands of unquestioning obedience, strict discipline, imposition of parental will) and *estrangement* (lack of genuine interest and support for teenager's autonomy, low skills assessment).

An encouraging result regarding the positive resolution of a teenage crisis is that two-thirds of students (72.9%) think that their parents believe in their success in life. However, this is observed mostly among girls rather than boys (75.7% and 68.2% respectively).

The empathy of teenagers was determined by the method of A. Mehrabian and N. Epstein [7]. The authors suggest examining the phenomenon as 'an emotional experience of the Other's emotional state' process (in response to his/her emotional behavior). The results have shown that empathy of respondents in our sample is in line with the results for the general modern teenage population: 6.9% of respondents showed a high level of empathy, 48.3% – an average one, 41.4% – a low one and 3.4% showed a low-low level of empathy.

Correlational analysis of parental attitude features and teenage empathy suggest that the teenage sense of good parental attitude and their belief in the abilities of their own child affects the development of empathy in younger personalities. However, only a few connections were found at a statistically significant level. There is a reliable negative correlation between empathy of young male teenagers and indicators of parental authoritarianism ($r_p = -0.690$; $p \leq 0.05$) and a positive one between the empathy of young male teenagers with the indicators "little loser" ($r_p = 0.794$; $p \leq 0.05$).

Conclusions

The present results imply that the stronger the teenager feels parents impose their will and demand on formal social achievements, the higher their rejection of his/her views and opinions, the less empathy he/she has towards others. Inversely, the stronger the teen feels parental distrust and unbelief in his/her ability and capacity for social independence, the higher the level of empathy he/she has. It might be a good assumption that modern parents believe that the capacity for sympathy

and shared joy cannot be a prerequisite for their child's professional and life success.

The *central conclusion* to be drawn from the findings of the study is that there exists a tendency to display higher levels of empathy among teenagers who feel positive emotional attitude and acceptance of their individuality by their parents, in comparison with students who feel the deviation on their father's or mother's part.

Future research should address the interconnections between teenagers' subjective perception of parental attitude and their integral empathy with its forms (antipathy, indifference, compassion, inner (virtual) promotion, real assistance with no self-detriment (altruism)) [2] using an appropriate original diagnostic techniques [3].

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RODZINA JAKO KULTUROWY CZYNNIK AKTUALIZACJI OSOBOWOŚCI I ROZWOJU EMPATII

Streszczenie. Rozpatrujemy rodzinę jako podstawowe środowisko socjalizacyjne, w którym kształtuje się osobowość oraz czynnik znaczący dla rozwoju samoświadomości – indywidualnej i społecznej (na wymiarze indywidualnym i społecznym). W badaniach poszukiwano związków korelacyjnych pomiędzy wskaźnikami empatii u nastolatków i postrzeganymi przez nich postawami rodzicielskimi.
Słowa kluczowe: empatia, typy postaw rodzicielskich, adolescenci