Abstract

The most widespread professional opinion holds that an individual’s value-sense orientations, by determining his or her predominant viewpoint, influence the direction and content of the individual’s participation in society, general attitude towards the world and one’s self, give meaning and direction to a person’s actions, and shape behavior throughout his or her entire life. This article examines the formation of life-sense orientations in ontogenesis, as well as their content and transformation from adolescence to early adulthood. We gave special consideration to the peculiarities of the individual’s life-sense orientations with regard to the gender factor.

Keywords: Life purpose, Life-sense orientations, Adolescence, Early adulthood.

1. Introduction

1.1 Life-sense orientations as a complex dynamic system

Life-sense orientations, like life purpose, constitute a complex system, which has its own hierarchy and is subject to change. This system is comprised of both minor, “peripheral” meanings and the main, “core” life purpose, which determines an individual’s position when he or she is faced with a choice [1]. Core life purpose is expressed in different circumstances, helps an individual to maintain integrity and allows to build his or her...
personal hierarchical system. This system does not only include minor meanings, but also the main, central life purpose, the very core that helps a person evaluate different periods and situations from his or her past life [2].

The view of life-sense orientations as a complex dynamic system is based on the fact that an individual’s ontogenesis implies moving from one age benchmark to the next, as opposed to staying stagnant. As a result, a person’s ideas of self, others, and the world as a whole change, and his/her life-sense orientations and worldview change accordingly [3].

1.2 Adolescence as the first stage of life when life-sense orientations begin to form

Adolescence is one of the first stages in the life of an individual when it becomes possible to talk about the formation of a hierarchy of life-sense orientations. In early adulthood, following adolescence, the process of establishing a person’s life-sense sphere is finalized. The importance of these two life stages in forming an individual’s life-sense sphere is the subject of our study.

1.3 Individual identity development goals in adolescence and early adulthood

For the purposes of our empirical research into life-sense orientations of individuals, we established the following relevant age groups: adolescence, 12-17 years old, and early adulthood, 18-23 years old. Isolating these exact age groups was based on the different development goals associated with these ages.

Prof. H. Remschmidt separates the following individual development goals in adolescence: accepting one’s physical appearance, adopting either female or male role and specific features of gender behavior; establishing new (as they relate to the previous period of time) relationships with the reference group; gaining emotional independence from one’s parents and other important adults; developing vocational direction; establishing first relationships with the opposite sex; forming socially responsible behavior; developing a system of values and ethical awareness as a reference point for one’s behavior [4]. Prof. Remschmidt opines that for an individual, it is critically analyzing values of his/her surroundings that leads to forming an independent value system.

O.V. Khukhlaeva distinguishes other, substantively different goals of individual development in early adulthood: establishing personal identity (social, professional, ethical, family, religious, cultural, etc.); achieving social maturity, which is characterized by desire and ability to take responsibility for one’s life [5]. Erik Erikson examined personality development at each life stage as a possibility to achieve one of the two opposites; for adolescence, he identifies these two opposites as identity vs. confusion, and for early adulthood as intimacy vs. isolation – thus, he emphasizes the difference in development goals that a person strives to achieve at different ages [6].

1.3.1 Desire to form personal identity as a goal of personality development during adolescence

However, an individual starts forming his or her own personal identity as early as in adolescence. As L.I. Bozhovich points out, the need for identity is an important new formation for high school students. This need includes establishing a sense system, which incorporates an individual’s understanding of the world and of one’s self, as well as the search for one’s life purpose [7].

I.V. Dubrovina, while agreeing with L.I. Bozhovich, emphasizes that in adolescence it is not identity that emerges, but rather psychological readiness for it. She defines “psychological readiness” as forming stable, consciously developed understanding of one’s own rights and obligations, responsibility, ethical norms and convictions – i.e., defined psychological mechanisms and models that in the future would allow the individual to lead a responsible, active life [8]. Consequently, we may state that the need for identity appears in adolescence and should fully take shape in young adulthood.

1.3.2 Value-sense nature of self-identity
When discussing self-identity, it is important to note that M.R. Ginzburg has developed his approach to self-identity based on the notion of the value-sense nature of self-identity. “Self-identity” is defined as actively developing one’s own position as it relates to social norms, and defining one’s own life purpose based on that. According to Ginzburg, the process of forming self-identity is not finished in early adulthood; later in life, an individual is often confronted with the need to self-identify, and young adulthood is the starting point in this process [9].

1.4 Life purpose as a new formation of adolescence

G.A. Vaizer distinguishes yet another new formation of adolescence – in her opinion, it is the concept of life purpose, which develops based on the main motif, that of a life goal, of separating and formulating one’s main long-term goal [10].

1.4.1 The need to be cognizant of one’s life as one of orientational needs of an individual

As specified by K. Obukhovsky, the need to be aware of one’s life as a comprehensive process with a specific direction and meaning constitutes one of the most important orientational needs of a human being; this need is especially strong in young adulthood [11]. A person first starts to think about the purpose and meaning of his or her life in adolescence; however, it would not be possible to say that in young adulthood one’s life purpose is fully formed – it is possible that it is transformed and becomes more complex. At the same time, we cannot say that life purpose is formed once and for life – indeed, life purpose and life-sense orientations associated with it form a dynamic structure, and may change throughout a person’s life. [12].

An important task of personality development at the times of life we have singled out for the purposes of this research is the task of forming value orientations. Thus, according to I.V. Dubrovina’s research, most people just begin to form their value orientations in adolescence. However, it is her opinion that an individual’s value orientations should be determined at the beginning of young adulthood, so that they may become the prerequisite for the next new formation, that of generating mature life plans [8].

1.5 The problem of choosing life values in young adulthood

V.S. Mukhina identifies young adulthood as a separate important stage of development and notes that at this time of life a person is confronted with the need to choose his or her life values [13]. An individual seeks to form an internal attitude towards him- or herself, to others and to moral values, meaning that a young person absorbs, interprets and appropriates certain values of the socio-cultural surroundings, and develops his or her own attitude to these values, as well as an individual hierarchy.

1.6 The role of self-reflection in personality development

V.S. Mukhina also emphasizes the singular role that self-reflection plays in personality development, both in adolescence and in young adulthood [13]. In adolescence, a person uses self-reflection to understand him- or herself, to identify with the self. In young adulthood, a person is already consciously developing his/her self-reflecting abilities.

On the whole, having analyzed possible approaches to the forming and developing of a person’s value-sense sphere in adolescence and young adulthood, we believe it is possible, based on comparisons of these two ages, to speak about the presence of developmental dynamics in regard to life-sense orientations. The substantive content of life-sense orientations during adolescence and young adulthood and the influence of the gender factor on these orientations constitute the subject of our research.
2. Method

2.1 Empirical research sample group

140 participants took part in our study. Of them, 70 were adolescents (12-17 years old), and 70 were young adults (18-23 years old.) Of the 70 adolescents, 35 were male and 35 were female; as for the young adults, there were 30 males and 40 females. The average age of the adolescent participants was 14.5 yours, young adults – 19.7.

In keeping with the hypothesis of this study, which is that life-sense orientations in adolescence and young adulthood differ both in content and according to gender, we used the reflexive self-evaluation test “Who am I?” [14]; by V.S. Mukhina; “Life-sense Orientations” technique by D.A. Leontiev [15]; “Value Orientations” technique by M. Rokich [16], as well as Student’s statistical data analysis – criterion t [17].

3. Results and discussion

3.1. Analysis of data resulting from empirical research

As a result of our empirical research, we came to the following conclusions. Life-sense orientations in adolescence and young adulthood do not present significant differences in the “life purpose” markers (there are no verifiable differences between life purpose consciousness in adolescence vs. young adulthood (sig.=0.13; (p>0.05); the same is true for the gender factor (sig.=0.76; (p>0.05). We surmise that these results may be explained by the fact that in adolescence a person begins to contemplate the purpose of his or her life and construct value orientations; by early adulthood these sense constructs shape into a personality and form a foundation for further life plans and strategies. It is possible to say that life-sense orientations begin to form in adolescence and continue their development in young adulthood.

The use of M. Rokich’s technique “Value Orientations” [15]. revealed differences in the groups in the study. Thus, in adolescence the value of communications, personal interactions turned out to be paramount, while in young adulthood the value of professional identity and development became the most important one – we believe this is the result of relevant age-related factors.

For the two age groups in the study, self-reflection development is easily traced through the fulfillment of the elements of identity structure (according to V.S. Mukhina): seeking acceptance and individual psychological space as an expression of the most important and personality-valuable aspects of life and personal abilities [12]. Our study showed that these two elements prevail over others, both in adolescence and young adulthood. It is, however, worth noting that for both adolescents and young adults, the study revealed no significant gender differences: the above referenced elements prevailed over others for both males and females.

Personalities of adolescents and young adults are focused on the future (further education, career, family.) However, it is only young adults, both male and female, that point not only to those goals and senses that are centered around them personally, but also to being part of society, to their desire to create, to the need for self-realization in society.

To summarize empirical data from our study and the specifics of personality development in adolescence and young adulthood, let us observe the dynamics and substance of life-sense orientations in these age groups.

3.2. Life-sense orientations characteristic of adolescence

The concept of life purpose begins to take shape by adolescence, since it is the most sensitive period for developing innermost personality structures. It is exactly at this time of growing up that the adolescent is faced with questions of finding himself, his place in the world, and accepting his new, grown-up identity. All these developmental directions, along with a high level of self-reflection, set the path for searching for perspective and
life purpose. The dominant life-sense orientation in adolescence is orientation to the process of living. It means that the marked feeling of being an adult compels adolescents to behave and act to demonstrate it as much as possible. However, since adolescence is also the time when the concept of “life perspective” is born, goal orientation becomes important as well. One should not forget though that the adolescent lives in the present, is focused on instant gratification and interested in the significant events of “here and now”. Consequently, at this age the least important orientation is that towards the result, which stems from specific age-related features of psychological development of the adolescent.

As it takes shape by adolescence, the value-sense sphere of the personality develops its content and direction, and absorbs those values that determine life purpose.

3.3 Life-sense orientations characteristic of young adulthood

The problem of looking for one’s life purpose remains as relevant in young adulthood. As a whole, this is the age when the issues of personal identity come to the forefront. For a young adult, questions of life purpose become the most frequent and vital ones. A person starts viewing his or her life as a comprehensive process, with its own direction, continuity and meaning, not just a succession of haphazard, unrelated events. The need for life purpose in young adulthood is expressed in becoming conscious of one’s own life. One of the goals of personality development at this age, which influences the value-sense structure of the personality, is accepting responsibility for one’s own life. Contemplating the purpose of his or her life, a young adult is thinking both about societal development as a whole and the specific goal of his or her life. Young adults create their own independent value systems, value orientations, and long-term plans. The person is focused on finding purpose in life that is associated with plans and goals for the future. Unlike in adolescence, when a growing individual seems to be discovering the diversity of existing senses and “trying them on”, a young adult is now building a hierarchy of senses, distinguishing between the principal and secondary ones. At this age, the issue of finding purpose in life often looks as a plan of necessary action that needs to be implemented in the nearest future. For young adults, life-sense concepts (which constitute a very individual category, while also being subject to societal influence, as all other individual categories are) remain in the realm of education and hobbies.

4. Conclusion

The results of our empirical study allow us to define adolescence as the age when the process of forming a person’s value-sense sphere begins, while in young adulthood this sphere takes shape and develops further.

Transition from adolescence to young adulthood, along with refining and sharpening the hierarchy of the value-sense sphere, is typically accompanied by defining the most important, “core”, principal sense from a multitude of existing senses [1].

This comparative analysis of life-sense orientations in adolescence and young adulthood has allowed us to merely start mapping out existing tendencies in this field; it does not claim to be a finalized study of the value-sense sphere of personality at these life stages.

References

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