Teenagers' personal identity as a problem of the socialisation process in modern society

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Abstract

The urgency of the present research paper is suggested by the existence of several problematic tendencies in the development of modern society and the complicated social situation in Latvia. There is an intimate relation between the crisis of personality and the wider social and economic crisis. A teenager, who is forced to reappraise his/her values and beliefs, comes into collision with the problem of the crisis of his/her own identity and has to look for the self in the unstable situation of life in contemporary Latvian society. In order to solve this urgent problem, we have to analyse the conditions in which teenagers form their own personal identities, as this is the optimal period in which identity and personal self-determination are formed

Keywords: identity, teenager, crisis, self, personality, adaptation, recognition, society

1. Personal identity as the interpersonal phenomenon

Increasing attention has been paid by educators, psychologists and sociologists to the problems of teenage personality formation, to the process of socialisation by which teenagers form their own unique lifestyle, and in which the recognition of their own personal identity in contemporary society plays the most significant role.

Modern society offers a wide range of alternatives for the young, but it is too complicated for teenagers to put them into practice nowadays. Years of social, political and economic crisis in Latvia have led to washing out the valuable grasp which is necessary for the formation and development of successful personal self-identity. When scientists in almost all spheres of modern life speak about the crisis of identity in Latvian society on the whole, and the mass-media write about the change and instability of eternal spiritual values, and their "usefulness" in the modern Latvian society, the major problem facing teenagers is that of finding and developing a feeling of personal identity. This is why it is necessary to examine the problem of personal identity, first, in its theoretical aspect - analysing opinions of scientists about identity-formation as an interpersonal phenomenon - and, second, to conduct an empirical analysis of the degrees of teenage identity-formation in Latvia.

There are many definitions of personal identity in the different psychological schools and in the scientific literature. The idea that people should have freedom of will influenced world events in Europe from the very beginning of the sixteenth century. Humanism, the Renaissance, and Cartesian dualism all glorified the strength of personality, consciousness, human personal responsibility. In the philosophy of the

seventeenth century, the essence of the concept of personal identity was defined as "the process of realizing the continuity, identity in the time of own personality" (Locke, 1985; Leibniz, 2007).

Two centuries later, at the end of the nineteenth century, the American philosopher William James expressed the essence of personal identity as "the continuity and non-discrepancy of personality". He described personality using the word "character," as the state when a person feels their own activity and vitalities in the most intensive and deep form, it is when the inner voice says: "This is the real Me" (James, 1991).

James distinguishes four forms of the existing "Me":

- Material Me (the body, the property of a person);
- Social Me (friendship, evaluation by others, prestige);
- Spiritual, inner Me (processes of consciousness, mental abilities);
- Pure Me (feeling of identity).

James believes that the human personality is not the same in many respects because of many differences expressed in the state of a person, if he/she is hungry, or nourished, tired or relaxed, if he/she is young or old, poor or rich, etc. But there are also more stable and significant components of the human personal identity:

- beliefs;
- living goals;
- the attitude to the Self, and to the society;
- the system of values, regulating own behaviour, etc.

Besides that, changes of personality occur gradually and never touch the whole of an individual's inner essence at once, thus ensuring the continuity of the development of personality. James claims that the term "personal identity" should not be understood in the sense of the absolute metaphysical unity where all distinctions are absent, because personality is always identical in the past and in the present as the personal identity really always exists.

In Charles Horton Cooley's opinion (1994), the problem of personal identity can be tackled from the point of view of the Theory of Self-concept. This structure of "The Idea of the Self" includes three components:

- the idea about how another person perceives Me;
- the idea about how this other person evaluates Me;
- the level of self-evaluation related to the evaluation by this person – it may be the feeling of pride or humiliation.

"The Idea of the Self" starts to form early in the age of a person during interaction with groups of "significant others": these could be friends, members of the family, peers, for example.

A numbers of scientists (e.g. Brakewell, Habermas, 1992) believe that the first psychosocial conception of identity was the conception of the self that was developed by George Herbert Mead (1988). Developing James' and Cooley's ideas, Mead distinguishes the following components of personality:

- the impulsive Me, that is the source of personal development, changes, creativity;
- the normative Me, acceptance of the group's norms by the personality;
- the Self as the personal Me, as the result of interaction between the Me and the Self.

Mead believes that identity is connected with a personality's ability to perceive the self reflectively. It is possible, because the interactive subject anticipates the set of a partner and can perceive the self from the partner's point of view (the phenomenon of "taking of the role of the other").

The term "identity" for the first time implemented by Freud (1996), became the central element of the original conception of identity offered by the famous American psychologist Erikson, considered as the founder of Ego-psychology. Erikson supposes that there are psychological stages of the self's development, each stage involving certain developmental tasks that are psychosocial in nature, and the individual sets the major reference points with respect to the self and his/her social environment. He claims that each stage of development has its own parameters, and the various tasks are referred to by two terms – positive and negative – and development of personality continues for the whole life-time. Erikson believes that the individual should solve the central task, which becomes the dominant one at each stage of the development (Erikson, 1996).

This finding of personal identity is important as it suggests that an individual can choose to achieve the negative rather than to stay without any identity. The individual faces a crisis which is expressed in the choice the teenager should make combined with the self and the possibilities provided by the society in which he or she lives. The teenager should clarify his/her own role as a member of this society.

This conception was prolonged by Havighurst (1989), who distinguishes the following tasks of development of the teenager's age:

- Achieving new and more mature relations with peers of both genders;
- Achieving a masculine or feminine social role;
- Accepting one's physique and using the body effectively;
- Achieving emotional independence of parents and other adults;
- Preparing for marriage and family life;
- Preparing for a professional career;
- Acquiring a set of values and an ethical system as a guide to behaviour; developing an ideology;

- Desiring and achieving socially responsible behaviour.

Thus we can see that the main tasks of the teenager's age include cardinal changes that happen almost in all spheres of life.

The problem of division of teenager's age into periods and the determination of objectives was also put forward by Vygotsky, who saw the internal changes in development as a sound basis for division into periods (Vygotsky, 1984). Vygotsky believed that criteria for determination of specific periods in a person's development were the mental and social changes emerging for the first time on the given stage of the given age period. The teenager's personality changes as a single whole in its inner structure and movement of its every part is determined by laws of changes of this whole. Thus for Vygotsky the central moment of development is change.

The aspects mentioned above allow us to conclude that promotion of development is promotion of change, which is different at every specific age. On the one hand, the change happens on the basis of what has been already formed and achieved, but on the other hand, it is directed to still absent things.

Teenager's problems appear, when:

- he/she lacks resources for realisation of the necessary change (either the things that must be developed have not been formed yet, or there is lack of what is called "image of the expected future");
- these resources are not used for some reason.

For successful realisation of the age, it is necessary to activate the resourceful mechanisms of the given age, which consist in using the available possibilities and their orientation on the aspects that must be developed. The current paper considers the two of the most widespread lines of theoretical interpretation and empirical research on personal identity. The first can be related to the modern psychoanalytical movement, since the authors working in the given paradigm, base themselves on Erikson's theory of identity and his conception of psychosocial identity (Erikson, 1967, 1982) and Marcia's empirical approach with the statuses model of the identity. The second line of the research is based on Mead's conception of "Me" and unites representatives of the cognitive approach.

On a basis of the above-mentioned theories, the concept of the *personality's identity* (or personal identity) is defined as a set of features or other individual qualities, characterised by a definite stability or continuity in time and space, allowing to differentiate the given individual from other people. In other words, we understand the personal identity as a set of qualities that makes a person equal to himself and different from other people.

2. Empirical research

The aim of the research is:

- to define the statuses of the teenager's personal identity in Latvia;
- to define the scale of self-actualisation of teenagers in Latvia.

The participants of the empirical research: pupils of the 7th -12th forms (in total 368 respondents) of various institutions of general education in Latvia.

The methodological part of the empirical research includes:

I. Defining the statuses of personal identity at the teenager's age [Marcia J. (1966, 1980, 1994)], based on E. Erikson's (1996) conception of psychosocial identity;
II. Self-actualisation test (SAT), theoretically based on Maslow's conception of the self-realising personality.

In Marcia's statuses model there are four states (statuses) of identity:

- Identity diffusion;
- Foreclosure;
- Moratorium;
- Identity achievement.

For construction of the model two parameters are used:

1. Presence or absence of the crisis – the state of searching for identity;
2. Presence or absence of units of the identity – personally significant objectives, values and beliefs.

Table 1. States (statuses) of identity according to J. Marcia

Units of identity	Before crisis	Crisis	After crisis
Developed	Early identity	-	Identity achievement
Not developed	Identity diffusion	Moratorium	Identity diffusion

Identity diffusion. Such a state of identity is typical for people, who do not have stable objectives, values and beliefs, and who do not attempt to develop them. They either have never been in the state of crisis or were not able to solve problems they had faced.

The states of diffusion, foreclosure and moratorium are topical for teenager's age. The most progressive of them is the level of moratorium, and Marcia believes that it is a vital

and necessary precondition for finding the personal identity (Marcia, 1988).

Early identity (foreclosure). This state is referred to the person, who has never gone through the crisis of identity, but possesses a definite set of aims, values and beliefs. These elements are developed relatively early in life, not as a result of independent search and choice, but owing to identification with parents or other meaningful people. Aims, values and beliefs, which were accepted in such a way can be similar to those of parents and reflect parents' expectations.

Moratorium. Marcia uses this concept in relation to the person, who is in the state of personality's crisis and is actively attempting to solve it, trying various variants. Such a person is in the state of searching for information that would be useful for solving the crisis (reading of literature about various possibilities, talks to friends, parents, real experiments with lifestyles).

Identity achievement. This state of identity is reached by the person, who has gone through the period of crisis and has developed a definite scope of personally significant objectives, values and beliefs. Such a person is aware of what he/she wants and accordingly structures his/her life. He/she experiences his/her aims, values and beliefs as personally important and providing him/her a feeling of purposefulness and comprehension of life.

Illustration 1. States of personal identity of teenagers in the 7th-12th forms of schools of general education in Latvia (Marchenoka, 2012)
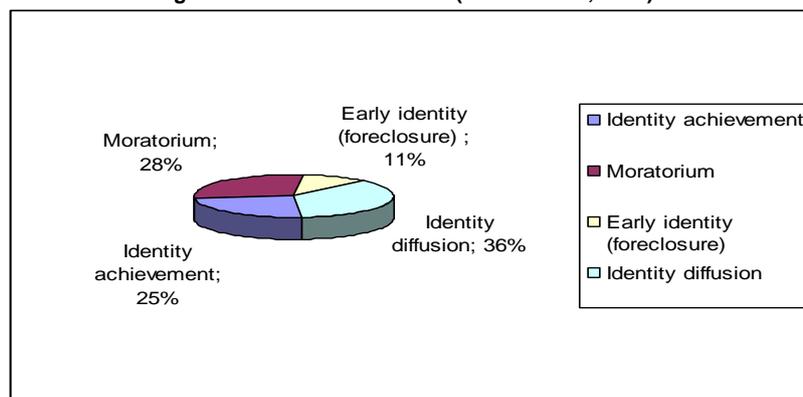
The next stage of the research is determination of teenagers' self-actualisation. SAT measures self-actualisation according *two basic* and *a range of additional scales*.

Basic scales:

- Scale of time competence (Tc), comprising 17 points;
- Scale of support (I), comprising 91 points.

Additional scales:

Unlike the basic scales measuring global qualities of self-actualisation, the additional scales are oriented to marking its separate aspects.

- Scale of values orientation (SAV) (20 points);
- Scale of flexibility of behaviour (Ex) (24 points);
- Scale of spontaneity (S) (14 points);
- Scale of self-respect (Sr) (15 points);
- Scale of self-accept (Sa) (21 points);
- Scale of concepts of human nature (Nc) (10 points);
- Scale of synergy (Sy) (7 points);
- Scale of accepting aggression (A) (16 points);
- Scale of contacting (C) (20 points);
- Scale of cognitive abilities (Cog) (11 points);
- Scale of creativity (Cr) (14 points).

Table 2. Determination of teenagers' self-actualisation in Latvia (Marchenoka, 2012)

Scales of self-actualisation	7th form	8th form	9th form	10th form	11th form	12th form
Time competence (Tc) (17)	5	7	8	12	14	11
Support (I) (91)	46	51	54	70	59	63
Values orientation (SAV) (20)	11	9	16	10	13	15
Flexibility of behaviour (Ex) (24)	12	8	10	16	14	19
Spontaneity (S) (14)	10	10	13	12	11	13
Self-respect (Sr) (15)	13	10	9	12	14	14
Self-accepting (Sa) (21)	18	21	17	20	19	20
Concepts of human nature (Nc) (10)	9	4	7	8	5	6
Synergy (Sy) (7)	3	4	3	4	6	5
Accepting aggression (A) (16)	8	11	10	9	12	14
Contacting (C) (20)	14	9	11	13	12	15
Cognitive abilities (Cog) (11)	10	7	9	9	10	11
Creativity (Cr) (14)	6	8	7	10	11	9

Illustration 2. Determination of teenagers' self-actualisation in Latvia (Marchenoka, 2012)

Determination of teenagers` self-actualisation in Latvia
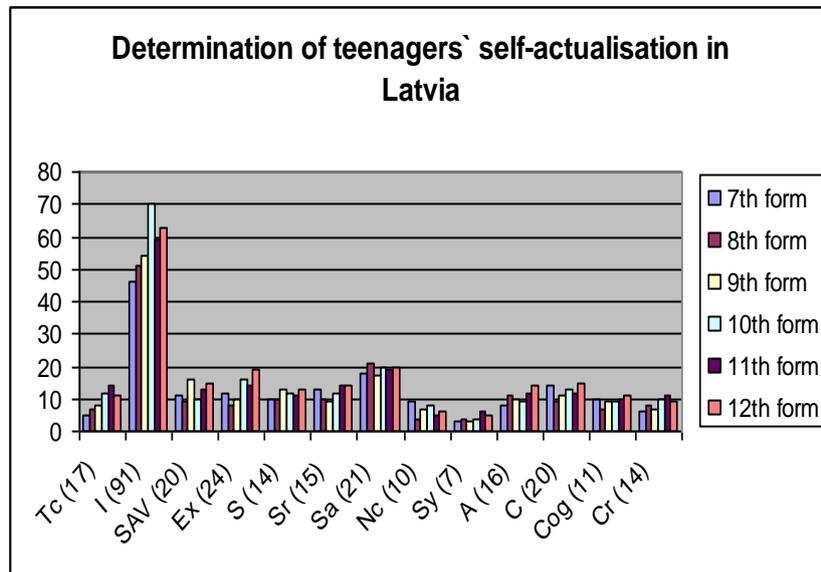
Conclusion

- The Conception of Formation of Personal Identity offered by Erikson, further developed by Marcia, and his followers reflects the process of the development of personality occurring in the interaction with social environment as well as in her internal psychic world. Identity is the phenomenon located at the border of personality and surrounded world in this aspect.

- The status of a teenager's personal identity is closely connected with his/her ability to recognise people interacting with him/her, and who are personally very significant for them.

- The higher definiteness of a teenager with the interaction with the outer world observed in the status of identity reached and predetermined is connected in the whole with a teenager's deeper understanding the people who are significant for them.

- The reached identity resulted in the total of the activity of a teenager and his/her personal perception of values. It could be further resulted in the own experience of enduring the crisis of identity that ensures more precise understanding of peers.

- The ¼ part of the whole quantity of Latvian teenagers is characterized of achievement identity, more than ¼ part of the whole quantity of Latvian teenagers is characterized by the status of identity - moratorium and almost a half of them are characterized by diffusion and early identity (foreclosure) identity.

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