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Forming a Teenager's Personal Identity: A Necessary Condition for Further Developing a Tolerant Civil Society in Latvia

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Abstract

This research examines discrepant tendencies in the development of modern society in the complicated social situation in Latvia. The crisis of personality is against a background of social and economical crisis. Teenagers are being forced to reappraise their values and beliefs, which are in collision with the crisis of identity. The aim of the research is to analyse teenager's personal identity in Latvia. Data obtained, and the theoretical analysis of the scientific psychological and sociological literature on the problem, with the principles of development, allow us to determine major ways of optimising the process of teenage adaptation to the community.

Personal Identity as the Interpersonal Phenomenon

The urgency of this research arises from increasing attention of educators, psychologists and sociologists on problems of teenage personality, and to socialization and the formation of a unique life style in which personal identity is recognised in contemporary society. Modern society offers a wide range of alternatives for the young, but it is too complicated for teenagers to put into practice. Years of social, political and economic crises in Latvia led to a loss of the ability necessary for successfully forming and developing personal Self-identity.

When scientists from every discipline now discuss the crisis of identity in Latvian society, and the mass media write of the change and instability of spiritual values and their utility in modern Latvian society, the problem of searching and finding a feeling of personal identity is the major problem of the teenager's age. This is why it is necessary to examine the problem of personal identity, first, in the theoretical aspect analyzing the opinions of scientists about the formation of identity as an interpersonal phenomenon and, secondly, to empirically analyse the degree of teenage identity formation in Latvia.

There are many definitions of personal identity from different psychological schools in the scientific literature. The idea that people have free will influenced world events in Europe from the very beginning of the sixteenth century. Humanism, the Renaissance and Cartesian dualism glorified the strength of personality, consciousness and human personal responsibility. The essential concept of personal identity was determined as "the process of realizing the continuity, identity in the time of own personality" in the philosophy of the seventeenth (Locke, 1985; Leibniz, 2007).

The American philosopher Walter James expressed personal identity as "the continuity and non-discrepancy of personality" two centuries later, at the end of the nineteenth

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century. He described personality, using the word “character”, as the state when a person feels their own activity and vitality in the most intensive and deep form: when an inner voice says: “This is the real Me” (James, 1991).

James distinguished four forms of the existence of 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 believed that human personalities are not the same in many respects, because of differences 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 also there are always some stable and significant clarified 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.

Changes of personality also occur, gradually and never touching the whole inner essence at once, thus ensuring the continuity of the development of the 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.

Charles Horton Cooley (1994) approached the problem of personal identity from the viewpoint of the Theory of Self-concept, as a set of human conceptions about the Self formed by the influence of people’s opinions around us. This structure of “the Idea of the Self” includes three components:

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

This conception “the Idea of the Self” starts to form from an early age during interaction with groups of “significant others”, who could be friends, members of the family or peers. Other writers (Brakewell, Habermas, 1992) believe that the first psychosocial conception of identity was the conception of the Self proposed by Mead (1988). Working from James and Cooley's ideas, Mead distinguished 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 believed that identity is connected to the 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" was first implemented by Freud (1996) and became the central element of the original conception of identity offered by the famous American psychologist Erikson, who is considered as the founder of Ego-psychology. Erikson supposes that there are psychological stages in the development of the Self, each 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. Each stage of development has its own parameters, and the various tasks are referred to by two terms – positive and negative; the 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 development (Erikson, 1996).

This finding of personal identity is so important that the individual can choose to achieve the negative than to stay without any identity. The individual faces the crisis, expressed in the choice a teenager should do in combining the Self with the possibilities provided by contemporary society. The teenager should clarify his/her own role as a member of this society.

This conception was elaborated by Havighurst (1989), who distinguishes the following developmental tasks for the teenager:

- 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 include significant changes in almost all spheres of life.

The problem of dividing the teenage phase into periods and determining objectives was also identified by Lev Vygotsky, who saw the internal change of development as a sound basis for division into periods (Vygotsky, 1984). He believed that the criteria for determining specific periods in development were the mental and social changes emerging in this period. The teenager's personality changes as a single whole in its inner structure, and movement of every part is determined by laws of changes. For Vygotsky the central moment of development is *change*.

These aspects allow us to conclude that promotion of development is a promotion of change, which is different at each specific age. But change happens on the basis of what has been already formed and achieved, although it is directed toward still absent things.

Teenager's problems appear when:

- he/she lacks the resources to realise these changes (either things have yet to developed, or there is lack of what is called an "image of the expected future");
- these resources are not used for some reason.

To successfully realise this age change it is necessary to activate resources, using available possibilities and their orientation on aspects to be developed. This paper considers the two most widespread lines of theoretical interpretation and empirical research of the personal identity.

The first of these can be related to the modern psychoanalytical movement, as those working in the paradigm base their work 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 is based on Mead's conception of "Me", and brings together representatives of the cognitive approach. On the basis of these theories, the concept of personality identity (or personal identity) is defined as a set of features or individual qualities, characterised by stability or continuity in time and space, that allow the differentiation of the individual from others. In other words, we understand personal identity as a set of qualities that makes a person equal to himself and different from other people.

Empirical Research

The aim of this research is:

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

The participants in the research were pupils of the 7th-12th forms (368 respondents), from various institutions of general education in Latvia. The methodological part of the empirical research included firstly defining the statuses of personal identity of the teenager [Marcia (1966, 1980, 1994)], based on Erikson's (1996) conception of psychosocial identity, and secondly a self-actualisation test (SAT), which was theoretically based on Maslow's conception of the self-realising personality.

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

1. Identity diffusion;
2. Foreclosure;
3. Moratorium;
4. Identity achievement.

To construct the model, two parameters are used:

- 1) the presence or absence of crisis – the state of searching for the identity;
- 2) the 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 life styles).

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.

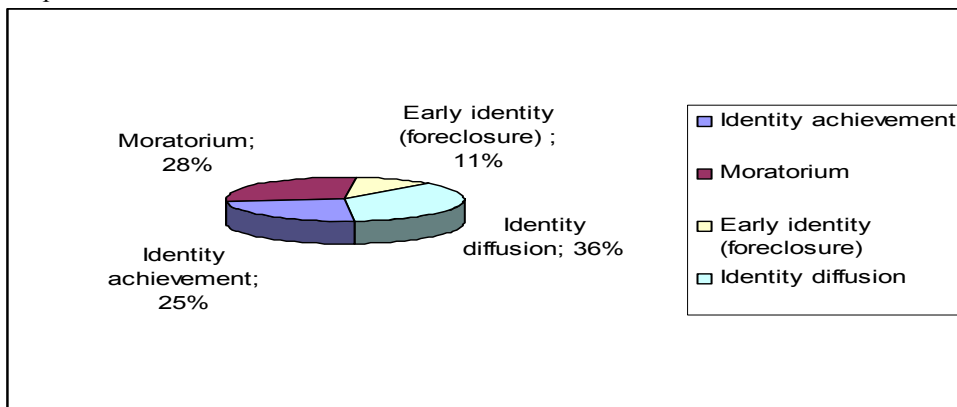


Figure 1. States of personal identity of teenagers in the 7th-12th forms of schools of general education in Latvia

The next stage of the research was the determination of teenagers' self-actualisation. SAT measures self-actualisation according two basic and a range of additional scales.

The Basic scales are:

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

The Additional scales, unlike the basic scales that measure global qualities of self-actualisation, are oriented to mark separate aspects:

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

Table 2. Determination of teenagers' self-actualisation in Latvia

Scales of self-actualisation	7 th form	8 th form	9 th form	10 th form	11 th form	12 th 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

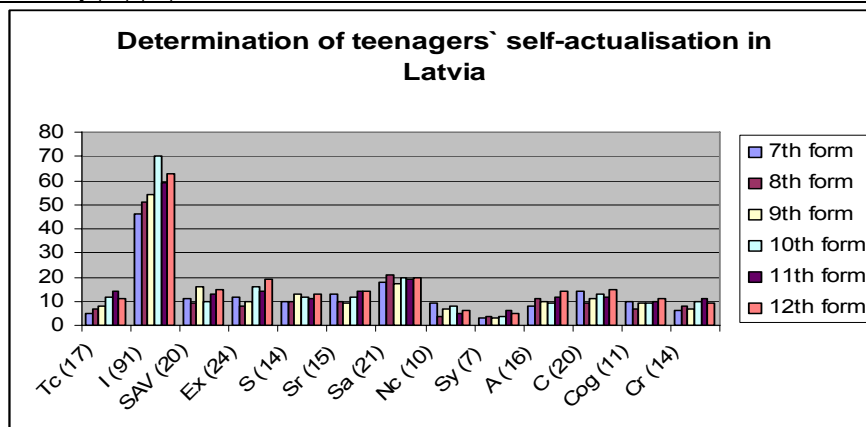


Figure 2. Determination of teenagers' self-actualisation in Latvia

Conclusion

- The Conception of Formation of Personal Identity offered by Erikson and 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 recognize 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 identity reached 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.
 - A quarter of all Latvian teenagers are characterized by *achievement identity*, and more than a quarter are characterized by the status of identity – *moratorium*; while almost a half of them are characterized by *diffusion and early identity (foreclosure) identity*.

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