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FEATURES OF MEANINGFUL ORIENTATIONS IN FEMALE STUDENTS OF DIFFERENT AGES

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Abstract.
Student age is sensitive for the formation of a worldview and life goals, awareness of responsibility for one's life. The search for answers to these questions contributes to the formation of an adequate assessment of reality, understanding and awareness of the meaning of life. The purpose of the article is to determine the features of meaningful life orientations among female students of different ages. The study was conducted on a sample of female students (n=69) aged 18 to 24 years. Leontiev's SJO test was used as diagnostic tools. The primary data of the study were processed using the methods of mathematical statistics. The study showed that the structural components of meaningful life orientations in different age groups have different levels of severity. The research materials can be used in the work of the psychological service of an educational organization in order to develop the value-semantic sphere of modern youth.

Key words: student age, meaning life orientations, female students.

Introduction

The problem of studying life-meaning orientations is directly related to the formation and development of personality. Many foreign and domestic researchers consider the phenomenon of "meaningful orientations" in the context of such phenomena as authenticity (K. Rogers), mental health (Berant, Mikulincer, Florian), existential fulfillment (A. Lenglet), personal meaning and value-semantic sphere (Pochtareva E.Yu.), meaningfulness of life (Leontiev D.A.) and others [5]. The presence of the meaning of life is the leading criterion for the formation of a personality, an indicator of how much a person is ready to manage his life and is independent of external circumstances. According to Abulkhanova-Slavskaya K.A., Chudnovsky V.E., the meaning of life is both understood and experienced by a person as a value of an extremely high order, the loss of which is detrimental to human existence. This point of view is shared by Sukhonosov A.P., considering the meaning of life as a psychological formation, which is a system of various "meanings" [15]. These meanings are realized by a person in the process of choosing goals, ideas that acquire for him the character of the most important values of a higher order.

Modern foreign researchers [19; 21] also adhere to a systematic view of the meaning of life and argue that a meaningful life, expressed as the pursuit of personally meaningful goals, contributes to a positive experience and a positive life. In their research, they come to the conclusion that goals are a concrete expression of future orientation and act as a criterion for studying the vital elements of a positive life. The Meaning of Life is a network of connections, understandings and interpretations that help people make sense of their experience and formulate plans that direct their energy towards achieving their desired future.

According to John Cottingham [18], the highest human ability is the ability to see one's life from the point of view of meaning. An important component of life meaning is the human value system.

Cohn I.S. [7] argued that the meaning of life is the most important new formation of youth. The scientist believed that in this age period the question of the meaning of life becomes global. It is for this age that another important neoplasm is characteristic - the emergence of life plans, which

indicates a person's desire for a conscious construction of his life as a manifestation of the beginning of the search for its meaning.

It is in adolescence that a stable system of values and meanings is formed, which is the basis of personal autonomy and self-determination. At the age of 18-19, a person enters a new stage of semantic regulation based on a hierarchy of meaning-forming values. According to age periodization, adolescence falls on student years [17]. Modern student youth live in a state of dynamic renewal and enrichment of the system of life meanings. The search for the meaning of life is associated with the ability of young people to determine their goals, determine their place in life, which is an important indicator of the personal maturity of boys and girls. However, as practice shows, the majority of young men and women experience difficulties in determining the meaning of life.

In adolescence, the search for the meaning of life is the most important characteristic of development. During this period, young men and women are characterized by the following vital issues: professional and personal development, the formation of a worldview and moral guidelines, the expansion of the value-semantic sphere, etc.

Modern researchers often note that the problem of the development of the value-semantic sphere at different stages of ontogenesis has not been sufficiently developed. This also applies to adolescence. Moreover, studies on the formation of the semantic sphere of personality reflect all the problems that are characteristic of the study of this phenomenon as a whole, i.e. there is no terminological uniformity and understanding of the mechanisms of functioning of the semantic sphere of personality, there is an inconsistency of views on the stages and dynamics of its development, as well as on its main characteristics [6].

Methods

The purpose of the study is to determine the features of meaningful life orientations among female students of different ages.

We assumed that the structural components of meaningful life orientations in different age groups have different levels of severity, and the values of awareness of the life of female students are higher, the older the respondents are.

Based on the goal and hypothesis, the following tasks were set:

− to analyze and systematize the scientific literature on the problem of the development of the value-semantic sphere in student years;

− to study and determine the features of meaningful life orientations of female students of different ages.

The respondents of our empirical study were female students of the TSPU. L.N. Tolstoy (n=69) aged from 18 to 24, studying in different undergraduate and graduate courses. All subjects were divided into two age groups based on median age (Me=21). The first group consisted of subjects from 18 to 21 years old (<= 21), and the second - from 22 to 24 years old (22+). Based on the division of the subjects into two age groups, an analysis of meaningful life orientations was carried out.

D.A. Leontiev's SJO test [9], which includes 5 scales reflecting three specific life meaning orientations and two aspects of locus of control, was used to identify meaningful life orientations and a general index of life meaningfulness. The SJO test assesses the "source" of life meaning that can be found by a person either in the future (goals), or in the present (process), or in the past (outcome), or in all three constituent periods of life.

The parametric Student's t-criterion and Mann-Whitney U-criterion for independent samples were used as a method for comparing quantitative indicators. Data were presented as mean and standard deviation (Mean±SD), quartiles of the distribution (Me [Q1; Q3]).

An initial descriptive analysis of the study results was carried out to obtain comprehensive information on the empirical data, the distribution and homogeneity of the data, and the possibility of using parametric analysis methods (Table 1).

Table 1

Primary descriptive analysis of the study results obtained from the sample (n=69) without division into groups

Scales	Mean±SD	Me[Q1; Q3]	min; max	p-value t-criterion
Goals in life	29,6±9,4	32[26; 38]	9; 41	<0,001
Process of life	27,5±10,1	31[21; 34]	9; 41	<0,001
Life performance	21,3±9,3	25[14; 29]	3; 33	<0,001
Locus of control Self	20,5±7,9	22[14; 25]	5; 34	<0,001
Locus of control Life	29,8±7,9	32[23; 36]	13; 41	<0,001
Overall LS score	98,4±27,9	103[83; 118]	40; 136	<0,001

The analysis of the values of the mean and standard deviation indicates the stability of the values of the studied indicators. The close values of the mean and median indicate a symmetrical distribution.

Based on the data in Table 2, the analysis of the values of the scales of the "SJO" method according to the empirical data of the present study (n=69) and the data of Leontiev D.A. (n=200) was carried out. The comparative analysis of the values of the mean and standard deviation of the total score of VLE and five subscales suggests that there are no significant differences between the data of Leontiev's female sample and the sample of female students in our study, which confirms the objectivity of the results obtained.

Table 2

Average values of the "SJO" methodology scales according to
D.A. Leontiev (n=200) and empirical data
of the present study (n=69)

Scales	Mean±SD (according to D.A. Leontiev)		Mean±SD (by age group groups)		
Goals in life	M	F	F (n=69)	<= 21	22+
Process of life	32,90±5,92	29,38±6,24	29,6±9,4	27,3±9,8	33,4±7,4
Life performance	31,09±4,44	28,80±6,14	27,5±10,1	24,9±10,5	31,8±7,8
Locus of control Self	25,46±4,30	23,30±4,95	21,3±9,3	18,5±9,9	25,9±5,6
Locus of control Life	21,13±3,85	18,58±4,30	20,5±7,9	19,1±8,2	22,9±7,1
Overall LS score	30,14±5,80	28,70±6,10	29,8±7,9	28,0±8,2	32,8±6,5
	103,10±15,03	95,76±16,54	98,4±27,9	90,7±29,2	111,2±20,2

Further comparative analysis of the values of the scales of the "LEO" method within the experimental sample of the present study makes it possible to highlight the peculiarities of the meaning and life orientations of female students of different ages. Thus, the first three scales of the method - goals in life, process of life, and results of life - characterize the semantic-life orientations in three time coordinates - future, present, and past.

All three scales showed differences in mean and standard deviation between the two age groups. In the group (22+), subjects demonstrated a greater focus on goals and perspectives for their future. The subjects in this age group are both undergraduate and graduate students, which determines their life goal at this stage - to complete their studies and obtain a professional education. For the examinees in the group (<=21) there is still little awareness of life goals, they mainly rely on the meaningfulness of the present period of life. This is confirmed by the small differential range of values on the two scales - life goals and life process. Assessment of life performance, i.e. past productivity, also differs in the two age groups. Students in the group (<=21)

rate their past performance much lower than students in the group (22+). These differences can be explained by the fact that for the period of adolescence, to which the subjects (<=21) belong, the most important is the awareness of their present, the change towards their present and the formation of an image of the future. The most important acquisition of temporal awareness in adolescence is the change in attitude towards the present and the future, whereas for students in the group (22+) the events of the past are significantly more important, acting as an indicator of the realisation of past plans when assessing their present.

Quite high scores in both age groups were obtained on the "locus of control Self" and "locus of control Life" scales. Students perceive themselves as strong personalities with enough freedom of choice to control their own lives, freely make meaningful decisions and plan for the future.

The overall life meaningfulness index (LSI) in the group (<=21) was lower than the values obtained earlier by Leontiev D.A. and much lower than the value in the group (22+). We applied regression analysis and obtained a curve of life meaningfulness depending on age, where a non-linear change in the life meaningfulness index is observed. We found that the period from age 18 to 21 is characterised by a fairly steep rise in the meaningfulness of life indicator. From the age of 22 and upwards, there is a further smooth increase in the indicator. Thus, the higher the values of life awareness of female students are, the older the respondents are.

The study showed that the sense-life orientations as a person's understanding of the content and direction of his/her life are manifested in a meaningful assessment of the effectiveness of the lived life, the presence of goals for the future, the understanding of readiness to make vital decisions. We agree with the authors [10; 12; 14] that sense orientations are the most important characteristic of a person and are sustainable regulators of human behavior.

The data we have obtained on the peculiarities of meaning and life orientations in female students of different ages agree with the opinion of the authors [1; 2; 12] that the process of forming a value and meaningful system is quite lengthy. First, a person needs to understand the meaning and significance of the values themselves. Then there is the formation of value perceptions, on the basis of which value and meaning orientations are formed.

We share the view of the authors [4; 13; 16; 20] that each age period contains a certain correlation of age specifics and the formation of value and meaning orientations. At any age the value orientations must be adequate to the circumstances, realities and situations in which a person finds himself/herself, and the meaning of life is realized when a person faces certain life difficulties.

In our study, all of the subjects are students between the ages of 18 and 24, thus covering two age periods - adolescence and early adolescence. The age range of adolescence (17-21 years) is determined by the stages of human physiological development and puberty. According to Ananyev B.G., adolescence is a sensitive period in the development of a person's main sociogenic potential [3]. The main psychological newformations of a person at this stage of formation are the acquisition of independence and the achievement of social maturity. The period of adolescence is an active stage of searching for the most optimal meaning of life. But this period is complicated by the fact that the choice of a life path and the basic meaning of life is made without knowledge and insufficient experience in problem solving.

Early adulthood refers to the period of a person's life between the ages of 20 and 30. However, modern age psychology increasingly adheres to the point of view of G. Craig that it is quite difficult to determine the boundaries of the stages of development of adults, because the main feature of development in adulthood – is minimal dependence on chronological age, while the changes in thinking, behavior and personality are determined by living conditions – its goals, attitudes, experience and kind of activity [8]. It follows that the most significant meaningful life orientations in early adulthood are life performance, life process, and life meaningfulness.

Conclusion

The data we obtained on the differences in the expression of sense- and life-orientations of female students at different age stages confirm our hypothesis that the structural components of sense- and life-orientations in different age groups have different levels of expression, and the values of life awareness of female students are the higher the older the respondents are.

A person's ability to look at the period of their life in the past and to evaluate their contribution to the events that have occurred in their life affects their perception of their future. Respondents in the age group (22+) were more satisfied with their self-actualisation and appreciated the productivity and meaningfulness of their life period. The ability to see one's own current life and evaluate one's own contribution to specific events affects the understanding of personal capacity for self-regulation and contributes to a clear understanding and perception of oneself as a strong person with sufficient freedom of choice, ready to shape one's life according to one's goals and vision of the future, to make one's life emotionally rich and full of meaning. The ability to plan for future events is related to predicting possible outcomes of future activities. Subjects are much more aware of their life goals, meaning orientations, and time horizons.

Thus, the study of the meaning-oriented life orientations of today's students is of particular relevance because it contributes to the formation of an adequate assessment of reality, the development of the ability to analyze one's past to build a promising future.

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The article contains two tables: Table 1. Primary descriptive analysis of the research results obtained on the sample (n=69) without division into groups; Table 2. Average values of the indicators of the scales of the "SJO" method according to D.A. Leontiev (n=200) and the empirical data of the present study (n=69).