New Instrument of Adolescents' Peer Interaction Research

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For decades, it has been well based on the fundamental theories, we know that peer inter-action it is a key factor for identity formation in young people. However, does this mean that the content of adolescent interactions has stayed the same for the past half a century ago and today are the same? Studies of adolescent peer interaction often struggle to access the subjects' own meaning-making. Without such informational background, developmental theory lacks the nu-anced understanding of the subjective component of adolescent experiences across various cul-tural and socio-economic contexts. Teenagers sometimes struggle articulating what is important and unimportant within peer interactions, and what are the rules of the interactions are. Any method based on self-reporting to an adult researcher involves potential bias related to the social expectations of the surveyor or interviewer. The purpose of the research presented here is to de-velop a new instrument, a projective method of indirect access to adolescent perceptions of peer culture on terms identified by adolescents themselves. In this study, a group of 14 teenagers aged 13 to 16 were presented a 1960-s film on adolescence. They were asked to select any scenes from the film and remake them in the contemporary context. The resulting script and videos show that the content of adolescent interactions revolves around the relational boundaries, with sex, violence, and interaction with adults serving as background. Conclusions from the the study reflect sensitivity of the fundamental theories describing maturation, but at the same time the ar-ticle describes the changes in the material through which adolescents development occurs.

Keywords: adolescent, peer interaction, projective method, research instrument.

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Research area: psychology.

Introduction

The investigation of adolescents' interactions and relationships in contemporary situation compared to that decades ago comes across two fundamental difficulties. Firstly, the lack of reliable data which show the situation of interaction hidden from an adult's perspective decades ago. Secondly, there is inadequacy of research methods in the investigation of the intimate inner content of interaction and sensation. Deontological issues should also be mentioned: if it is permissible to invade into one's privacy exploring it as something objective and existing apart from the very situation of interaction.

Furthermore, it is important to understand the sensitivity of the fundamental theories describing

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adolescence for the reality of contemporary teens' life, the adoption of these theories in the new reality characterized by many taboos removed, by the emergence of possibilities of interaction in social networks, the growing relativity in ideological and moral sphere.

Two interrelated objectives of the present research to be reported are the following: 1. to develop an instrument that would be sensitive to intimate aspects of adolescents' relationship and interaction 2. to reveal a new present-day characteristics of adolescent peer interaction.

Theoretical background

Different characteristics of adolescence were depicted by researchers since Stanley Hall first called this period *Sturm und Drang* (Storm and Stress). In Russian (Soviet) psychology the main attention was paid to the activity theory and intimate-personal relationship was proclaimed to be the "leading activity" of adolescence. The list of "key words" describing adolescence is very long: *emerging maturity* by D. Elkonin and T. Dragunova (1967), *changes of the type of reflection* by J.Piaget (1999), *the change in the relationship between the real and the possible* by M. Klee (1991), and *the project activity* by K.Polivanova (1996) among others.

Peer interaction is considered to be one of the major trends in adolescents' development. The notion had been developed inside the theory of identity in two aspects: as a domain ensuring the development of identity (as an adolescence developmental task, developmental psychology) and as that ensuring identification with others (social psychology).

Inside developmental psychology the main question that should be discussed is that of the mechanisms of development. How does it happen that a child's self turns into a mature one? The general answer is as follows: the mechanism is described as that of a trial. Teens explore new types of behavior and then get an answer from people surrounding them. They are sensitive to the answer they get. As it was shown in my previous papers (Polivanova, 1996, Polivanova et al, 2013) the trial of new behavior can be described through the notion of authorship: teens put forward words or deeds (as "authors") and search for "readers" - those who can return them another version or another understanding.

Thus, the main research question is whether we can describe the present-day teens' interaction as such an exchange, what sort of problems are being discussed, and what the essence of the interaction is. If anything has changed during the last 40-50 years when the main theoretical frames had been elaborated.

Methodological background

To answer the research questions one should compare the characteristics of teens' interaction now and before. However, we immediately come against an insurmountable difficulty. Firstly, a comparison of contemporary realities and those taking place a few decades ago inevitably encounters distortion: adult carriers of knowledge about childhood can describe it from today's adult perspective. Secondly, a comparison on the basis of empirical techniques of repetition of the onetime research reveals a significant change in the requirements for reliability, the volume and composition of the sample, etc. Thus, the methodology (see below) may be subject to reasonable, in our opinion, criticism.

The development of research instruments in psychology and social sciences is always (except for projective methods) constructed (logically) as follows:

- a normative image of the phenomenon under study is constructed;
- it is operationalized and further becomes an operational representation of the phenomenon under study;

- criteria are being elaborated;
- conformity of the logically elaborated and empirically obtained data is estimated.

In other words, psychological reality is laid down *before* an experiment, and this is extremely important in the context of our research. Then, one analyzes the way of positing norms, theoretical or empirical, but the logic remains unchanged.

And further: the simplier the model of the phenomenon under study (its normative image) is, the more accurate data can be obtained and described. However, the possibilities of interpretation are thus reduced. Thus, psychology and the science of education always set their own, adult, vision of the reality. Then the adult's vision becomes the basis of interpretation. That means, a researcher's (adult) model creates some universal vision and further defines to what extent a child matches this model. But the questions posed can simply be out of the child's picture of the world; it gives socially desirable answers or comes-off.

Nevertheless, there is another way of "asking". Along with the development of psychoanalysis and other psychological practices, projective methods appeared. Projective research methods allow to reconstruct and to make explicit important psychological variables by non-verbal means. Using this means of research could be quite heuristic because of a lower level of control and criticism to the respondents' answers. The peculiarity of the projective method is that it creates an experimental situation, involving many interpretations. These interpretations may be unexpected for both, the researcher and the respondent, and this is extremely important in the study of personality, cultural features, and other value-laden variables. Thus, projective techniques help researchers to solve the problem of bias.

In the study of adolescents there is another problem – the censoring of answers to sensitive questions, despite the fact that such censorship may not be aware of them. Once the study touches a really important domain, there is a great danger that he/she would avoid providing answers.

The limitations mentioned force us to look for creative ways of study. For example, it is possible to study the interaction of student with classic and contemporary cultural products (novels, films) by creative projective methods (K. Polivanova et al., 2013). A wide spread of visual tools offers technical facilities that make it possible to avoid or minimize verbal forms of experimenting.

Photo and video tools have long been used by researchers (psychologists, sociologists, anthropologists, historians) to document particular behavioral patterns. Previously photo and video means were used mainly for observation and fixation the data. For example in education video registration has become a powerful tool for analyzing the effectiveness of teachers, identifying the most successful ways of learning and the evaluation of teachers [Goldman et al., 2014; Jacobs et al., 2007; Jacobs et al., 1999]. The literature discusses the methodological and ethical principles of analysis of video recordings [Arafeh and McLaughlin, 2002; Erickson, 2006].

Currently, photo and video equipment has become widely available: each student can take and retouch photos, shoot and edit short films. Therefore, photos and videos have become the means for conducting creative projective techniques in the study.

The market and media research responded to the emergence of new research opportunities quite quickly. Trying to identify the underlying patterns of behavior, values and drivers, researchers ask participants to make photo collages, keep video diaries, record small video films, etc. Such creative methods allow researchers to analyze collaborative and individual production and to

interpret the data obtained by non-verbal means [Buckingham, 2009; Gauntlett, 2007].

In this project, video techniques were used for the study of modern teenagers. It was very important to minimize the influence of researchers and to try to identify the most important issues, conflicts, interests and values that really excite teenagers.

Instrument «Remake»

The projective models thus used in the present research related to the age norm, began to be applied in the broader context of research (e g, "drawing of a human being", "school readiness test"). Thus the development of these features make the objective to seek innovative ways of research, in particular, to study the interaction of children with modern / classical cultural products, and thereby indirectly attempt to recreate (in this case, it is appropriate to say, reconstruct) the psychological characteristics we are interested in (K. Polivanova et al. 2013).

It was assumed that the classical projective techniques offer interesting possibilities but still require substantial transformation. We put forward a new principle of experiment. Our hypothesis is that a long-term production of the artistic product (artistic modeling) can become a "mirror" of the sphere of inner experiences of adolescents. Artistic object modeling can be a text, based on real events and experiences related to the actual interactions (communication) of the students.

Because there is no reliable data regarding the interaction of adolescents from the past, we cannot compare it to today's teens relationships. So we have chosen a movie that demonstrates adolescent interactions 45 years ago.

The selection criteria for the movie for remake were:

1. The movie presents teenagers and their problems.

2. The movie includes three main types of relations: peer; teen and family; student and teacher.

3. The main conflict in the story should not necessarily have moral stresses, ethical aspect or concern national conflicts.

4. The movie belongs to the Soviet period of 1960s – 1980s (in order to see the differences between Russian adolescents nowadays and those 50 years ago)

The film "Tomorrow, April 3rd" has been chosen as the base for a remake. The principal reason for the choice was the following: it laid down different small episodes/scenes possible for remaking. Such a diversity is seldom today, it is almost always the case that one film presents one story. The second reason is connected with our principal decision to avoid strict moral or ethical dilemmas or political issues that were rather common in Soviet filmography. The movie was shot during the period of "Ottepel" ("thaw"), so it focuses on daily events and routines.

Movie introduction

Name: Tomorrow, April 3rd.

Director: Igor Maslennikov

Written by: Vladimir Valutskiy

Genre: film adaptation, comedy, adventure, family movie.

Year of production: 1969

Running time: 70 minutes

Brief content

April 1st is the International Day of fun, the Fool's Day, literally meaning the Day of Laughter. In Russia this day is usually celebrated with friends and colleagues, they make jokes, cheats and have fun. The film shows the story of one school group. On April 1st, students make a lot of jokes that turn to be offensive and cause some conflicts. Later the students decide and swear that on the next day all of them would tell only

the truth. At first glance, it seems to be a good decision. In fact, it turns out that the truth could offend and injure a person.

The film's title is associated with these events and poses a question if on the next day April 3rd, one could lie back. This question torments heroes of the film and remains unanswered.

The most important feature of the movie is that along with this main plot it presents many small-scale episodes mostly concerning everyday usual life of teenagers and their communication and interaction. The scenario is based upon several novelettes by Ilia Zverev, published in his book "The Second of April". All the novelettes unite around events that take place in one school group. Thus, the film presents several stories depicted in detail or briefly. The stories present all the three types of interaction: peer-to-peer, teens with parents and students with teachers.

Results

The experiment was organized as a part of the program of a Summer school for teenagers and high school students. Summer School is an annual interdisciplinary event which has been held since 2004 in the format of an educational camp for Russian students. Students from almost all Russian regions come to the school for 2-4 weeks to study what they are interested in. Normally, they attend lectures in the morning and fulfill group projects in the afternoon. One of the groups, "a psychology workshop", was offered a task: to remake an old Russian movie. It was openly told that the main goal was to reveal the differences between the former and today's teenagers.

There were 14 students aged from 13 to 18. The whole process lasted for 3 weeks in July-August 2014. The teens watched the movie several times, discussed it, tried to choose episodes that could better reflect the differences.

1. Three iterations of the story were elaborated.

The first one turned to be very decent, it can be defined as a decorous one. All the events of the original version were preserved only some exterior details changed – cloths, phones, some vocabulary. This version was rejected. No filming was done.

The second version was the opposite. Homosexual relations were discussed, all the main characters were in love with each other. Very soon, the attempt was also abandoned. Also no filming was done.

The third version (see below) was elaborated, accepted and filmed. Due to time shortage the montage went on later on-line when the students already returned home.

2. The following episode was chosen and presented (in comparison with .the original one).

The original movie. Orlov (a talented boy who paints very well) unexpectedly meets his classmates Masha and Yura, he paints their double portrait. It is clear that they are dating. Unexpectedly the drawing is exposed and the whole class begins to discuss the relations of Yura and Masha. They both feel somewhat confusedly and quarrel. Later they put up.

The teens' movie. Orlov borrows Yura's phone and finds Masha's (nude) selfie there. He is shocked and interested, others notice his interest and snatch the phone, see the selfie, discuss it, point to Masha. Yura receives a slap in the face from Masha, and she runs away. Masha goes crying to the river, another boy calms her down, and they go together, pointedly hugging.

Yura is upset and offended, does not know what to do, but later they put up. Happy end.

3. As far as all the three types of interactions are presented it made it possible to trace teens' sensitivity to interactions with teachers, parents and peers. The first were fully neglected, even not mentioned in discussions, the second slightly

mentioned the third discussed thoroughly and used for the scenario.

Discussion

In the course of the study we focused on the routine of daily life of students: what they talked about, what that they cared about, and, most importantly how the problems were recognized and recreated in the modern situation.

It is supposed that, because of the unique conditions of the experiment we were able to identify really "hot" topics of the modern teenagers' emotional experiences. In this regard, there are two points to be mentioned: choice of the topic (episode) from the original and the final version (remake).

As we have mentioned there were three types of episodes presented in the original movie: version including three types of situations: adolescent peer relationships; teen and family relationships; student and teacher interactions – differently reflected in the final text (remake). Accordingly, selection/ignoring important parts of the process. According to Lotman [Lotman, 1977], not only meaningful elements of the story but also omitted constitute a secondary modeling system. The meaning of the message is decoded through extra-textual relations – the context, additional meanings, omissions.

Episodes associated with the lesson have been ignored generally in spite of the fact that the content of these episodes was interesting, ambiguous and could suggest some ways for reconstructing. They have never been discussed by adolescent as potentially suitable for the script.

The respondents discussed the episode of the heroine's conflict with her parents, but then it was rejected as not worthy of attention (it was judged as uninteresting).

Students discussed the episodes containing different situations of communication between teenagers themselves. As it was already indicated, they selected a fairly complex episode with unintentional publication of an intimate selfie, quarrel, and reconciliation.

How can we discuss the obtained results? It seems to us it was possible to fix two facts – a vivid interest in issues related to the relationship such as love / sex and betrayal, and ignoring the themes that show relationships with adults. It is quite an expected result.

However, there are two more lines that, in fact, are of high importance for us: the instrument has made it possible to reveal a keen interest in the topic of corporeality (the scene with body contact, slap, rehearsed 18 times, and the parties to the rehearsals were almost all the students involved in the production of the remake). And the second, the theme of the boundary between belonging to me and to others, i.e. private and public. The conflict takes place not in connection with the discovery of close relationship between the movie's hero and heroine (which was considered quite normal and not worthy of shooting in the discussion in the group) but in connection with the *publication* of these relations. Paradoxically, a long and detailed discussion of the episode has revealed an intrigue as perceived by the responders: it is not the fact that intimate relationships became known, but that the hero failed to hold a personal information that had been entrusted to him. There was a trespass of a boundary between private and public, and that caused the conflict.

The final episode chosen reveals the theme of personal boundaries and their violation and further conflict. This result is in good agreement with recently published research concerning the essence of teenagers' interest in the books about Harry Potter (Sazonova, 2014). It was shown that the substance of interest is the *possibility of action on the boundary of the semantic fields*. The interest lies in the detection of limitations and thus possibilities to act (we understand

action as crossing boundaries of semantic fields). Selected and rewritten episode centers round the admissibility/inadmissibility, round boundaries of "mine" and "other's/foreign". We assign the profound interest in the body and corporeality to the same line. The body is perceived as mine, not only as physical but firstly as having a boundary.

Just a boundary, if it is laid out explicitly (as in the books about H. Potter), is being tested and experienced. And this experiment and trial (in our case on the material permissibility-forbiddenness) apparently remains a universal characteristic of adolescence. But the material is significantly expanded, acquiring previously taboo signs.

Conclusion

The instrument presented has made it possible to detect the content and the material of relationship of teenagers. This result we consider to be a principal one. However, in our opinion, it should be considered not only as testifying to the new realities of the discussion among teenagers, but, more importantly, as an evidence of intensive emotional tension of the situations of communication. Unfortunately, Russian classical psychological theories, in fact, ignored this aspect. Seriously discussing intimate-personal communication, these theories never considered emotional life as the main line of this age period.

The detection of the themes of physicality in adolescence is not surprising. However, more interesting is that the very fact of sexual experience did not provoke intense interest. The conflict that constitutes the final scenario is not sex itself. It can be considered as the *material* of the conflict, not its *essence*. The essence, in our opinion, is the very fact of boundary violation – breach of trust, bullying, trolling and physical aggression.

Thus, we come to the discrepancy in a teens' and adults' view: when we manage to detect and hear the teen's voice we find out that the emotional tension centers around the uncertainty of border no matter physical or psychological. Sexuality and intimacy are possible material. Sharp, in the eyes of a teenager, but not adults, it makes the situation detection, disclosure, albeit unwittingly and unintentionally. That is why the theme of intimacy we are considering here is not the content, but only as a material of real emotional experiences of adolescents.

Let us ask ourselves to what extent could similar experiences be caused by a different situation, related to the violation of the border, but not in connection with the theme of corporeality? We can only guess. But if we turn to the second scenario (only discussed but not finished), we, again, find out intimate relationships hotly debated. It means that sex is an important material of new experiences. Thus, this study allows us to put forward a reasonable hypothesis about the material and content of the experiences of adolescents. These experiences tend to be the subject of intimacy, but not in relation to itself, and in conjunction with other subjects in the first place – the boundaries of privacy, publicity, or in other words, the self-determination of "I" as that protecting and marking the boundaries.

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Новый инструмент исследования взаимоотношений подростков

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Десятилетиями, и это хорошо обосновано фундаментальными теориями, взаимодействие со сверстниками считается ключевым фактором формирования идентичности у молодых людей. Однако означает ли это, что содержание взаимодействий подростков полвека назад и сегодня – одно и то же? Исследования взаимодействий подростков часто испытывают трудности в получении данных о субъектной сфере конструирования смыслов. Вне этих оснований теории развития не хватает точного понимания субъективного компонента подросткового опыта в различных культурных и социоэкономических контекстах. Подростки иногда затрудняются сформулировать, что важно и что не важно во взаимодействиях со сверстниками, и каковы правила этих взаимодействий. Любой метод, основанный на самоотчете взрослому исследователю, включает потенциальную ошибку, связанную с социальными ожиданиями анкетера или интервьюера. Цель исследования, представленного в статье, – разработать новый инструмент, проективный метод косвенного доступа к восприятию подростками культуры на условиях, определенных самими подростками. В этом исследовании группе из 14 подростков в возрасте от 13 до 16 лет был представлен фильм 1960-х годов о юности. Им было предложено выбрать любые сцены из фильма и переделать их в современном контексте. Итоговые сценарии и видео показывают, что содержание подростковых взаимодействий вращается в рамках относительных границ в контексе секса, насилия и взаимодействия со взрослыми. Выводы исследования отражают чувствительность основных теорий, описывающих взросление, но в то же время статья описывает изменения в материале, через который происходит развитие подростков.

Ключевые слова: взаимодействие со сверстниками; проективный метод; исследовательский инструмент.

Научная специальность: 19.00.00 – психологические науки.