
Research article

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Correlations Among Young People's Life Orientations, Social Identity, and Social Activity

Rail M. Shamionov¹✉, Elena E. Bocharova², Egor V. Nevsky³

^{1, 2, 3} Saratov State University, Saratov, Russian Federation

✉ shamionov@mail.ru

Abstract

Introduction. Life orientations and social identity are important regulators of human social behavior. The study of their specific characteristics in relation to various forms of social activity may help elucidate the role of life orientations and identity in the preference of specific types of activity. This study aims to examine correlations among young people's life orientations, social identity, and social activity. **Methods.** The sample consisted of 500 residents of Russia aged 16 to 35 years ($M = 21.6$; $SD = 5.6$), 35.5 % of whom were men and 64.5 % of whom were women. To assess subject-object orientations, we used the Questionnaire of Life Orientations. Identification categories with direct scaling were used to determine the characteristics of social identity. Adherence to various forms of social activity was assessed on the basis of a questionnaire including 12 scales that describe the forms of social activity. **Results.** Young people's adherence to leisure and online social activity was most pronounced. We established the associations of civic, protest, and leisure social activities with the life orientation of a trans-situational mobility type. Activity in the real environment was positively associated with a trans-situational locus of control and mobility but negatively associated with a trans-situational exploration of the world. The categories of social identity explain from 12 % to 36 % of the variations in various types of social activity. **Discussion.** Indicators of life orientations and categories of social identity are most closely related to civic, protest, and leisure activity. Certain categories of social identity play the most significant role in adherence to certain types of social activity. Thus, 'patriots' adhere mostly to a civic form of social activity, 'oppositionists' – to a protest one, 'active ones' – to a leisure one, and 'youth' – to an Internet/network one. Civic and protest forms of activity differ in their associations with activity in real and virtual environments. Leisure and Internet/network forms are associated with activity in both virtual and real environments.

Keywords

personality, social activity, life orientations, social identity, real environment, virtual environment, civic activity, protest activity, network activity, leisure activity

Highlights

- ▶ Young people's desire for life changes is associated with adherence to civic, protest, and leisure activities.
 - ▶ Adherence to civic activity is associated with a tendency to manifest it in a real environment. Adherence to protest activity is associated with a tendency to manifest it in a virtual environment.
 - ▶ Various identification categories differ in their potential for explaining the degree of adherence to the types of social activity. The categories of 'patriots', 'young people', 'oppositionists', and 'active ones' are the most significant.
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Introduction

The key changes in modern social reality that have occurred over the past decades are characterized by an increase in multidirectional trends. The researchers note that along with globalization, glocalization takes place (Bauman, 2008; Lebedev, 2018, etc.); objective (economic, political, social, etc.) and subjective (psychological) polarization is accompanied by integration (Volovikova et al., 2009; Lebedev, 2018; Yurevich, 2014; Shepherd & Lane, 2019, etc.). At the same time, total informatization and digitalization, in general, set a new dialectic of the relationship between the social and the personal, including the perspective of self-determination (Akopov, 2014; etc.) and self-realization (Nestik & Zhuravlev, 2018; Nikolaeva, Akopov, & Abushik, 2021; Stornaiuolo, 2017; etc.). The challenges and risks of "fluid modernity" actualize the need to search for a "vital strategy for the development of society" (Bauman, 2008), which potential can provide prospects for its sustainable development.

In this context, the issue of correlations among Russian young people's social identity, life orientations, and social activity is of particular importance. Social identity and life orientations represent the two most important lines of socialization – inclusion in the community and the establishment of individual subjectivity. The analysis of these phenomena in the context of social activity may (a) clarify their role in adherence to its various forms and (b) determine to what extent identification with social groups (and which groups) contributes more to the actualization of a particular form of activity.

In the context of social activity, social identity as an individual's commitment to a social community or group is characterized by the presence of an explanatory potential that enables the subject of life to fix not only the 'history' of his/her development, but also his/her orientation in the "fluid modernity", and his/her involvement in its creative transformation. According to numerous studies undertaken by us and a number of other authors (Arendachuk, 2019; Bocharova, 2018; Stradze, 2017; Shamionov, 2018; etc.), the creative transformation of social reality realized in the initiative activity of the subject, which has a socially relevant orientation, is defined as social activity. At the same time, it is essential to clarify the measure of individuals' subjective involvement and their own creativity in the spheres of their social lives, which is determined not only by life circumstances, but also by the subject of life (Leont'ev, 2019).

The identification matrix of social identity can be represented by parameters reflecting identity according to stable (for example, ethnic, socio-cultural, family, religious identity, etc.) and transitive (for example, Internet/network, virtual, digital identity, COVID-nihilists, etc.) trends of social self-determination. We should note that adherence to certain groups, reflecting different options of social attribution, is defined as an action in the system of goals and motives of the subject of self-identification (Parsons & Shils, 1962; Spears, 2011; Carr, 2021).

The phenomenology of the identification grounds of social activity as a mechanism of social self-determination is extremely multidimensional. Therefore, it is an urgent problem which is considered in a variety of contexts. We should mention a number of studies dealing with cross-cultural parameters of social identification and their role in expanding/limiting the range of spheres of social activity application (Bocharova, 2012; Lebedeva & Tatarko, 2009; Akkuş, Postmes, Stroebe, & Baray, 2020; Ashrafi, Mohseni, & Shiri, 2020; etc.), the interrelation of various types of social identity and its actualization in specific socially relevant activities (Stradze, Kasyanov, Kumykov, & Kirik, 2016; Osborne, Jost, Becker, Badaan, & Sibley, 2019; etc.), socio-dynamic (Arendachuk, 2019; Shamionov et al., 2020; Braun-Lewensohn, 2016; Shamionov, 2020; etc.), gender/age (Arendachuk, 2018; D'yachenko, Kovalenko, Tikhonovskova, & Gribanov, 2019; Selezneva & Zinenko, 2020; Klenova, 2019, etc.), and level parameters (Gal'chenko, 2019; Murashenkova, 2013; etc.) of social identification with fixation of their expression in 'local' or combined forms of social activity, 'transitive' variables of the identification matrix (Internet/network, virtual, digital identity, COVID-nihilists, etc.), and effects of their manifestation in forms of Internet activity (Golubeva, 2020; Sharov, 2019; Korostelina, 2007; Shepherd & Lane, 2019; Stornaiuolo, 2017; Stornaiuolo & Thomas, 2017; Yusof, Kaur, Dalib, Ramli, & Awang-Hashim, 2021; etc.).

Along with the increased interest in the study of the identification grounds of social activity, attempts have been made to describe individuals' life orientations in the context of the transformation of social reality (Grachev, 2008; Zubok & Chuprov, 2020; Hitlin & Salisbury, 2013; Kruczek & Janicka, 2019; etc.). According to E. Yu. Korzhova (2006), life orientations should be understood as general subject-object orientations that characterize the direction of the realization of subjective potential in life situations or life events and reflect the measure of subjective involvement (or engagement) in life events.

The life orientations of an individual or a group play an important role in socially relevant activities, because any impact on the system of social ties and relationships requires a certain decision (Stradze, 2017; Zubok & Chuprov, 2020). Therefore, such an impact incorporates the processes of transformation and mobilization of the subject, and the construction of a certain strategy of activity based on the assimilation of social experience.

Meanwhile, several studies have reported the presence of a situational and trans-situational manifestations of life orientations in the actualization of various forms of social activity. Describing the specifics of the social activity of the Russian population, A. E. Stradze and his colleagues note its "situational reactivity by social interests" and a short-term mobilizing nature, which is explained by the lack of a stable "socio-value basis" (Stradze et al., 2016; Stradze, 2017).

Interesting data are presented in the study by Szafraniec (2019). Thus, the author undertook the study of life orientations and trends of their manifestation in forms of activity in a sample of young people from different countries (Germany, Poland, and Russia). The life orientations of young Russians are mainly characterized as "being to mean something" or, according to the author of the study – "ambitious, active, and successful people" whose activity is mainly realized

in economic and professional activities. We should note that representatives of Polish youth tend to demonstrate a consumer orientation ("to have" or "having orientation") or, as the researcher notes, to do nothing with their own aspirations, unlike German youth, whose life orientations are defined as "to be and to have". Summarizing the results of the study, Szafraniec (2019) concludes that today there is a considerable reorientation of youth from "us" towards "me", which may be explained by the processes of individualization transferred to the space of socialization by a wave of global influences, and also by distancing of the state from previous forms of guarantees and support.

The results of the study of life orientations conducted by Hitlin & Salisbury (2013) on a sample of American college students indicate a combination of orientations towards 'having' and 'being', which manifest itself in the form of political activity.

Considering the accumulated factual material, we may ascertain a certain 'asymmetry' of research interest, which is mainly observed in the field of social identity and social activity and, to a lesser extent, in the field of life orientations and social activity. Meanwhile, no previous studies have investigated the correlations among life orientations, social identity, and social activity. We believe that filling this gap can significantly expand our knowledge of the phenomenology of social activity and the forms of its manifestation among young people, who determine the prospects for the development of modern society.

This study *aims* to examine the correlations among young people's life orientations, social identity, and social activity.

Hypothesis: There is a specific relationship between the severity of certain types of social activity and life orientations and characteristics of social identity.

H1. Social activity is associated with young people's desire for life orientations towards change and event saturation without an unambiguous orientation towards cognition.

H2. Social activity in the physical environment continues in the Internet environment. However, in these environments the severity of various types of social activity is different.

H3. The combination of identifications with different groups makes a significant contribution to young people's adherence to certain types of social activity.

The *objectives* of this study are: (1) to analyze the relationship between life orientations and types of social activity in real and virtual environments; 2) to study the features of young people's identification with different groups in the context of the implementation of certain types of social activity; and 3) to identify the features of young people's identification with different groups in the context of the implementation of certain types of social activity in real and virtual environments.

Methods

The sample consisted of 500 residents of Russia aged 16 to 35 years ($M = 21.6$; $SD = 5.6$), 35.5 % of whom were men and 64.5 % of whom were women. The respondents were distributed as follows: 11.2 % residents in rural areas, 25.7 % residents in towns, 57.9 % residents in cities, and 5.2 % residents in megalopolises. The sample was sufficiently heterogeneous. However, its structure represented different age groups of young people. We should note that various authors consider youthful age within different age brackets. Thus, according to V. N. Quinn (2000), this is the period from 18 to 40 years. G. Craig (2000) attributes youthful age to early adulthood (20–40 years). Conditionally considering youthful age in the range from 16 to 35 years, we should bear in mind that 'youth' is not so much an age concept as a social and historical one.

The sample was formed by a simple randomized selection.

Table 1 Sample composition (n = 500)		
	Men (n = 177)	Women (n = 323)
Age		
Years	20.8 ± 4.1	22.1 ± 6.2
Residence		
Village	10.7	11.8
Town	27.0	25.1
City	55.1	59.1
Megalopolis	7.3	4.0
Education		
General secondary education	1.7	2.8
Full secondary education	75.7	55.9
Vocational secondary education	14.1	22.4
Bachelor's degree	6.2	11.2
Master's degree	2.8	7.8

The research is based on the methodological principles of the system-diachronic approach (Shamionov, 2019), according to which individuals' social activity is considered as a complex construct, as a system with a metasystem level of social reality, characterized by nonlinear dynamics due to the diachrony of its internal and external instances. In accordance with this approach, different forms and types of social activity may be conditioned by different socio-psychological characteristics and external conditions of their implementation. The identification of specific characteristics of such determination (using correlation and regression analyses) may contribute to the prediction of the direction of activity, as well as its psychological effects based on the principle of feedback.

To determine the characteristics of social identity, we have developed scales based on a pilot study on a sample of 30 full-time students of Saratov University and 3 psychology specialists with experience in social identity research. We asked the students an open question, "Which groups do you refer yourself?" Psychologists assessed the degree of proximity of the categories (the closest ones were combined into a single category). In result of the selection of the main identity categories, we obtained 12 groups (active ones, atheists, ideological ones, young people, informal

ones, normal ones, oppositionists, patriots, party activists, family, bored ones, and users), which we used for scaling (a 5-point scale). The evaluation of the psychometric characteristics of the scales was carried out using standard procedures. We assessed normal distribution using the Kholmogorov–Smirnov test. Internal consistency was measured with Cronbach's Alpha. We have used Pearson correlation analysis.

Adherence to various forms of social activity was assessed on the basis of a questionnaire including 12 scales that describe the forms of social activity (altruistic, leisure, social/political, Internet/network, civic, social/economic, educational/developmental, spiritual, religious, protest, radical/protest, and subcultural) (R. M. Shamionov, I. V. Arendachuk, E. E. Bocharova, M. V. Grigoryeva et al.) (Shamionov et al., 2020). The list of the forms of social activity was clarified and supplemented with 6 scales (sports/recreation, cultural/mass, family/household, environmental, Internet/searching, and professional). Respondents were asked to rate their activity in real and virtual environments using a 5-point Likert scale (1 referred to 'almost never' and 5 referred to 'constantly'). The psychometric analysis showed that the generalized activity scale is acceptably consistent with the removal of the item (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.82–0.84). We should note that this scale does not exhaust all types of activity that young people participate in. However, it covers the majority of the forms identified by young people in associative experiments (Shamionov et al., 2020).

The subsequent factorization of the data enabled us to identify 'new' variables – types of social activity, including civic, protest, Internet/network, and leisure ones. The average value of the severity of all the forms of social activity corresponded to the integral indicator of social activity (ISA). The new scales also showed an acceptable level of internal consistency (Cronbach's Alpha range = 0.70–0.79).

To assess the respondents' subject-object orientations, we used the Questionnaire of Life Orientations (Korzhova, 2006), which included the following scales: the general indicator of subject-object orientations (subject orientation/object orientation), trans-situational variability (striving for self-change/stability), trans-situational locus of control (internal/external), trans-situational exploration of the world (striving for inner growth, self-improvement/striving for self-fulfillment in the external world), trans-situational mobility (striving for novelty/familiar, inertia), trans-situational creativity (transformation/adaptation). The questionnaire consisted of 21 pairs of self-assessment statements; the respondents were asked to select the statement that best represented them.

The survey of respondents was conducted online using Google forms, without contact with the interviewer. The average time to complete the questionnaire was 30 minutes. The study was anonymous and voluntary.

The primary data of the study were processed using mathematical statistics procedures – descriptive statistics, correlation analysis (r-Pearson), and multiple regression analysis (step method). Statistical processing was carried out using the statistical software package IBM SPSS Statistics + PS IMAGO PRO.

Results

Table 2 presents the data on the average activity indicators, life orientations, and their correlations.

Table 2 shows that leisure and Internet/network activity are the most pronounced among young people. At the same time, the Student t test ($t = 0.064$, $p = 0.222$) indicated the similarity of the mean values. The scores of adherence to activity in the virtual and real environments were almost equal. However, there was a significant difference in average values ($t = 4.34$, $p = 0.004$).

Table 2
 Descriptive statistics and correlations of the types of activity and life orientations ($n = 500$)

<u>Activity/ Orientation</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>Civil</u>	<u>Protest</u>	<u>Leisure</u>	<u>Network</u>	<u>Integral</u>	<u>Real</u>	<u>Virtual</u>
Civic	2.39	0.81	1	0.50**	0.48**	0.21**	0.85**	0.17**	-0.06
Protest	1.66	0.81	0.50**	1	0.13**	0.17**	0.60**	-0.10*	0.10*
Leisure	3.47	0.78	0.48**	0.13**	1	0.31**	0.69**	0.35**	0.03
Internet/network	3.48	1.12	0.21**	0.17**	0.31**	1	0.51**	0.13**	0.47**
Integral indicator	2.73	0.61	0.85**	0.60**	0.69**	0.51**	1	0.31**	0.18**
In the real environment	3.76	1.15	0.22**	-0.02	0.41**	0.21**	0.32**	0.11*	0.31**
In the virtual environment	3.46	1.17	0.01	0.11*	0.11*	0.45**	0.20**	1	0.18**
Trans-situational variability	4.09	1.54	0.07	0.04	-0.03	0.03	0.06	0.00	0.03
Trans-situational locus of control	3.15	1.40	0.03	0.01	0.02	-0.05	0.03	0.13**	-0.03
Trans-situational exploration of the world	2.65	1.45	-0.02	0.03	-0.18**	-0.07	-0.07	-0.15**	0.04
Trans-situational mobility	2.96	1.42	0.15**	0.17**	0.16**	0.049	0.24**	0.12**	0.07
S-O orientations (overall index)	9.51	2.40	0.04	0.08	-0.03	-0.06	0.04	0.04	0.03

Note: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$. Column designations: *M* – mean, *SD* – standard deviation.

The correlation analysis identified weak positive associations of civic, protest, and leisure social activities with the life orientation of a trans-situational mobility type. Adherence to leisure activity is associated with a life orientation towards trans-situational exploration of the world (weak negative association). In addition, activity in the real environment is weakly positively associated with a trans-situational locus of control and mobility and weakly negatively associated with a trans-situational exploration of the world.

We observed moderately positive associations among the integral activity index, trans-situational mobility, and the preference for activity in the real environment.

Table 3 <i>Identity categories as predictors of young people's social activity (n = 500)</i>				
<u>Identity categories</u>	β	t	p	ΔR^2
Civic activity				
Patriots	0.28	7.11	0.00	0.20
Party activists	0.23	5.56	0.00	0.09
Active ones	0.17	4.48	0.00	0.04
Ideological ones	0.15	3.75	0.00	0.02
Atheists	-0.12	-2.95	0.00	0.01
Informal ones	0.09	2.22	0.03	0.004
$F = 46.90, p < 0.001; R^2 = 0.36$				
Protest activity				
Oppositionists	0.28	6.55	0.00	0.23
Party activists	0.26	6.23	0.00	0.09
Informal ones	0.14	3.28	0.00	0.02
Ideological ones	0.14	3.63	0.00	0.02
Bored ones	0.08	2.03	0.04	0.004
$F = 55.67, p < 0.001; R^2 = 0.36$				
Leisure activity				
Active ones	0.34	7.80	0.00	0.24
Family	0.12	2.83	0.01	0.02
Normal ones	0.10	2.59	0.01	0.01
Ideological ones	0.10	2.39	0.02	0.01
Young people	0.10	2.47	0.01	0.01
Patriots	0.10	2.30	0.02	0.004
$F = 34.28, p < 0.001; R^2 = 0.29$				

Table 3
Identity categories as predictors of young people's social activity (n = 500)

Identity categories	β	t	p	ΔR^2
Internet/network				
Young people	0.23	5.37	0.00	0.07
Users	0.14	3.21	0.00	0.03
Atheists	0.11	2.44	0.02	0.01
Normal ones	0.10	2.41	0.02	0.01
F = 17.33, p < 0.001; R ² = 0.12				

As can be seen from Table 3, such categories of social identity as patriots, party activists, active ones, ideological ones, informal ones (positive), and atheists (negative) are predictors of civic activity. These categories explain about 36 % of the variance for the dependent variable of civic identity (coefficient of determination $R^2 = 0.36$). Protest activity is explained by the categories of social identity that characterize a clear political orientation, including oppositionists, party activists, informal ones, ideological ones, and bored ones. About a third of adherence to leisure activity was explained by identification with active ones, normal ones, ideological ones, family, young people, and patriots. Finally, the Internet activity was the least determined by identity; 12 % of its variations were explained by referring to a group of young people, users, atheists, and normal ones.

Discussion

The analysis of absolute activity scores enabled us to assert the priority of its leisure and Internet/network types. Meanwhile, the protest type of activity is the least acceptable with a decreased dispersion in the scores. The preferred environment (real or virtual) of activity manifestations is at the level of scores that are close but differ according to the Student t test. Therefore, for the majority of respondents, activity in the virtual environment is a continuation of activity in physical reality. However, this may not correspond to all the types of activity.

The analysis of correlations between social activity and life orientations suggests that adherence to civic, protest, and leisure social activities is associated with the life orientation of a trans-situational mobility type. These data indicate that, in general, social activity is associated with young people's desire for life changes in the absence of direct associations with the desire for knowledge, self-knowledge, and subjective control over life situations. At the same time, adherence to leisure activity is associated with the desire for self-realization in the external world and for eventful life (according to E. Y. Korzhova, 2006), which provides individuals with a certain sense of control over their lives. In other words, the realization of leisure activity involves satisfying the need for self-realization in the absence of the desire for life planning.

The results of the correlation analysis indicate that activity in the real environment is associated with certain life orientations, including the desire for life changes, interaction with new situations, subjective control over life situations, and self-fulfillment in the external world. In other words, an individual's subjective position in relation to life situations is combined with his/her subjective evaluation of external forces as decisive in the life controlling process. The correlations between activity in the Internet environment and life orientations have not been found, which may indicate the diversity of life orientations among individuals who mainly live in virtual space.

We should also note that activities in both real and virtual environments contain a meaningful social orientation. At the same time, activity in the real environment is associated with adherence to civic, leisure, and Internet/network types, and in the virtual environment – with adherence to protest, leisure, and Internet/network types. In other words, young people's civic and protest activities are in exceptional isolation from one another and are mainly implemented in one of the environments. These findings are partly consistent with previous studies (Shamionov et al., 2020; Sharov, 2019; Klenova, 2019) suggesting that the protest activity of young people in Russia is actively brought into virtual space. Meanwhile, civic activity is mainly implemented in the real environment.

The regression analysis suggests that from 12 % to 36 % of the variance of different forms of social activity are explained by the characteristics of young people's social identity. The role of social identity, which is appropriate for a certain group of young people, is most significant for various forms of social activity. Thus, adherents to civic activism are characterized by high scores of identifications with patriots, adherents to protest activity – with oppositionists, adherents to leisure activity – with active ones, and adherents to Internet/network – with youth. We should note that, despite the repeated occurrence of identification categories as predictors of various forms of activity, different categories, when introduced together into the regression equation, form combinations that explain a significant proportion of the variance of the dependent variable – the form of activity. These findings are consistent with previous studies (Spears, 2011) suggesting that social identification creates a certain basis for the implementation of activity in accordance with the attitudes of reference groups. Our findings may indicate that both identification with a specific social group and a combination of identifications represent an important condition for adherence to certain forms of social activity. A small adjustment of identification groups may be associated with a change in dominant activity, which indicates the presence of risks even in civic participation.

Conclusions

1. Personal life orientations and social identity are the most important regulators of human behavior in social space. Meanwhile, the role of different life orientations and identification categories in social activity may be different. There is a shift of the studies towards the factors of social identity, compared to the factors of life (subject) orientations.

2. Young people's life orientations are partially associated with adherence to various types of social activity. We found a very close association with leisure activity characterized by adherence to sports/recreation, cultural/mass, family/household, and leisure activities. Civic and protest activity are associated only with trans-situational mobility, which characterizes a person's desire to interact with new life situations in the absence of direct associations with orientations towards the desire to understand and analyze situations and to accept responsibility.

3. Activity in real and virtual environments is significantly associated with the general multidirectional activity of young people. However, civic and protest types are differentiated depending on adherence to social activity in a certain environment (civic – in real environment and protest – in virtual environment).

4. Social identity is an important factor in young people's social activity. The cumulative contribution of combinations of social identity to variations of different types of social activity ranges from 12 % to 36 %. The most significant predictors are the categories of 'patriots' (20 % of the variance of adherence to civic activism), 'oppositionists' (23 % of the variance of adherence to protest activity), 'active ones' (24 % of the variance of adherence to leisure activity), and 'young people' (7 % of the variance of adherence to Internet/network activity).

The data obtained in this study can be used in organizing the activities of today's youth aimed at socially oriented activity, as well as activity in socially acceptable forms, taking into account their identification patterns and life orientation.

Limitations

The main limitation of the study is the lack of data on young people's attitudes regarding various identification groups. This could help us assess their emotional appeal. The motivational component of activity remains outside the scope of the study. However, it may help identify the main incentives for specific types of activity. Finally, although our sample included young people living in rural areas, cities, and megacities, it is generally possible to extend our findings to young people of Russian provinces.

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Author Details

Rail Munirovich Shamionov – Dr. Sci. (Psychology), Professor, Head of the Department of Social Psychology of Education and Development, Saratov State University, Saratov, Russian Federation; Scopus Author ID: 56528356700, ResearcherID: C-2869-2013, SPIN code: 9529-8906; e-mail: shamionov@mail.ru

Elena Evgen'evna Bocharova – Cand. Sci. (Psychology), Associate Professor, Department of Social Psychology of Education and Development, Saratov State University, Saratov, Russian Federation; ResearcherID: D-8562-2013, SPIN code: 8715-9400; e-mail: bocharova-e@mail.ru

Egor Vladimirovich Nevsky – Laboratory Research Assistant, Department of Social Psychology of Education and Development, Saratov State University, Saratov, Russian Federation; e-mail: nevskye00@gmail.com

Author Contributions

R. M. Shamionov made the main contribution to the theoretical framework and research design, supervised the study, analyzed and interpreted findings, prepared and edited the manuscript.

E. E. Bocharova worked with sources, wrote the literature overview, prepared and edited the manuscript.

E. V. Nevsky collected the empirical data and interpreted findings.

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