

Social Identification of Students as the Problem of Choosing an Ideal of Life Style

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Abstract: This paper studies the problems of social identification of students under the conditions of formational changes in contemporary Russian society. Students' views on ideal of life style were chosen as the principal feature of self-identification. Can we talk today about "A hero of our time" as a social phenomenon, describing the character of institutional processes which reflect the historical and social time. Social study, performed on the basis of Perm National Research Polytechnic University, allowed us to determine the tendencies in formation of student's person, characteristic for the contemporary Russia. The study showed that the modern society does not favor the formation of "A hero of our time"; and that official mo of a hero is in contradiction with the model of students' behavior, formed at the level of everyday consciousness, socio-class membership, general culture and moral of students; ethical and intellectual qualities act as main criteria of a "hero" for students, while social model implies the presence of external socio-status characteristics of an individual; family (parents) and friends act as main social institutions that form "ideal of life" for young men; the Internet becomes an active factor of influence on mind and behavior of students; socio-class groups reproduce their model of life's ideal; new type of woman is formed in Russia today, representing a combination of intellectual culture with businesswoman; and young men still preserve and play the role, ascribed to them by traditional Russian gender culture.

Key words: Students % Person % Life style % Social model % Life's ideal % "A hero of our time" % Youth subculture % Life values % Gender

INTRODUCTION

Certain norms and rules of behavior, which create some ideal and standard of life style, are the characteristic features of any society and social group. As a consequence, there appears such a social phenomenon as "the hero of our time". This ideal includes, on the one hand, everything best that reflects a given social time, culture, moral, ideology; and, on the other hand, this ideal characterizes the level of maturity of the society, social group in a given interval of historical time. An ideal, like a mirror, reflects the entire range of social life, its social essence, social increase or social crisis, social rise or social strain. It is young people who act as "acid test", with the help of which we can record the "temperature" of the society, determine the level of its development.

Sociologists constantly turn to the study of social problems of an individual. Every sociological school possesses its own methodological approach [1-3]. Special attention is paid to gender factors, thus allowing the school to identify the specific features of formation of

personal culture of men and women in rapidly changing social world [4, 5]. Moreover, an important role in the research is assigned to the analysis of structure of personal needs, most often taking the theory by A. Maslow as a basis [6]. At the same time, such an approach in the sociological literature is now considered in a new interpretation [7, 8].

Our sociological studies make it possible to analyze the characteristic features of the social "hero" of the present time, which are developed under the conditions of social transformation of Russia as a result of change in social paradigm [9].

A half of interviewed students (49.7%) stated that, personally for them, there was no "hero of our time"; however 40% of students found it difficult to say so about youth as a whole. Only every fifth student (20%) thinks that he has his "own hero" (Table 1).

This research discredits "the aureole of romanticism", which was traditionally ascribed to the Russian woman. There are no more Turgenev maidens and Pushkin's Larina Tatanas.

Table 1: Students' opinion regarding the presence of "the hero of our time" in the modern youth subculture (in percent of the number of questioned students)

Presence of "the hero of our time"	Total sample	PNRPU	PHTI	Guys	Girls
Youth					
There is "a hero"	35.2	33.9	36.9	41.9	37.4
No "hero"	15.5	17.0	17.9	19.5	15.7
Difficult to answer	39.3	43.1	45.2	38.6	46.9
Personally for a student					
There is "a hero"	19.9	22.2	21.7	29.7	17.7
No "hero"	49.7	54.4	57.7	47.2	60.2
Difficult to answer	20.3	23.3	20.6	23.1	22.1

Table 2: The influence of the social environment on the development of "the hero of our time" in modern youth (in percent of the number of respondents)

Presence of "the hero of our time"	Social status of parents*					
	P	W	In	TSP	MEB	PS
In Youth						
There is "a hero"	56.3	33.6	42.3	40.3	37.0	37.2
No "hero"	6.3	21.0	15.9	19.4	16.0	17.7
Difficult to answer	37.5	45.4	41.8	40.3	46.9	45.1
Personally in student audience						
There is "a hero"	20.0	20.2	24.1	25.7	18.5	18.6
No "hero"	40.0	58.0	52.2	52.7	60.5	58.4
Difficult to answer	40.0	21.8	23.6	21.6	21.0	23.0

*Note: P stands for peasants, W for workers, In for intellectuals, TSP for trade and service personnel, MEB for merchants, entrepreneurs, businessmen and PS for public servants.

Table 3: Student's views on the qualities of "the hero of our time" (in percent of the number of respondents)

Qualities of "a hero"	Total sample	Typical for	
		Guys	Girls
Appearance as a "Hollywood star"	37.5	15.3	11.9
Good physical health and athletic shape	43.1	30.7	18.8
Creative approach to solving life problems	36.3	57.4	51.5
Literature communication language	24.8	28.4	26.4
Modern language slang	20.8	34.7	23.4
Business "acumen"	42.7	30.1	21.8
Rational intellection	36.6	55.7	45.2
Sociability, openness	40.4	52.3	75.2
Kindness, altruism, devotion	28.5	44.3	61.1
Cunning, impudence, cruelty	18.7	17.6	9.6
The upper social class membership	32.3	9.7	7.9
The criminal group membership	9.7	7.4	1.7
Membership of so-called "middle class"	11.4	39.8	39.3

Interestingly, 60% of girls have no "heroine", who could become a prototype of their life. Guys, on the contrary, continue to preserve the traditional Russian culture, characteristic for Russian man. Men consider themselves as strong, reliable person, ready for "self-sacrifice" for the sake of a woman, mother and beloved human.

Students from different universities think identically about the matter, suggesting that this social phenomenon has typical character, characteristic for contemporary Russian youth subculture.

If we consider the socio-class structure as a factor of influence on the process of formation of "the ideal life style" of a specific social group, we can single out the specific character of the primary socialization. It is the conditions of the primary socialization that create socio-value space of an individual, which determines the social choice of a young man in future [10].

Among students, who were grown in families of intellectuals or peasants, those, thinking that youngsters do have "the hero of our time", prevail (Table 2).

Children of workers feel more pessimistic. In this group, only every third (33.6%) student thinks that his generation has “its own hero”. More students without answer are both in this social group and in the group of children of merchants and public servants. Precisely these young people, belonging to these socio-class groups, include more students who have no “ideal”.

Students borne in families of merchants, entrepreneurs, businessmen regard themselves as the “hero of our time”. All the above-mentioned qualities, except “negative” ones, are most pronounced in this group. Children from families of intellectuals have more “intellectual” qualities. The qualities of a “hero” are poorly defined in students from families of peasants. Children of workers are more self-critical. Children of public servants and trade personnel have similar views on the “hero”, close to ensemble-average. At the same time, we should turn attention to one important point: children of salespersons are more conservative at identifying themselves as a middle class.

Qualities of “the hero of our time”, to be chosen by students, on the whole, have reflected the student’s thoughts about this social phenomenon. With respect to a number of qualities, there are strong differences between how students think about ideal of a hero and how they estimate themselves (Table 3).

Main differences are observed in such features of a “hero of our time” as:

- C “Good physical health” (43.1% of respondents, while only 15.6% of students identified themselves with this category, with both guys and girls having no good health).
- C “Business acumen” (42.7% versus 16.8% of students, for which this quality is characteristic, with girls showing less of this quality than guys).
- C “Appearance as a Hollywood star” (37.5% versus 8.9% of students, which intrinsically have this quality, with girls showing less of this quality than guys).
- C “Upper class membership” (32.3% versus 5.8% of students, who identified themselves with this group, with every tenth student (10%) of a non-state institute identified himself with this group).
- C “Cunning, impudence, cruelty” (18.7% versus 8.5% of students, who found these qualities in themselves, with this quality more developed in guys and most developed among students of non-state institute).

- C “Literature communication language” (24.8 % versus 18.3% of students, with guys and girls found this quality in themselves in equal amounts, but with this quality possessed more often by students of state institute).

Students think that they are more characterized by such qualities as:

- C “Sociability, openness” (45.1% versus 40.4% for a “hero”, with more girls having such qualities),
- C “Kindness, altruism, devotion” (45.1% versus 28.5% for a “hero”, with girls mostly possessing these qualities),
- C “Middle class membership” (26.6% versus 28.5% for a “hero”, with students of state institute, guys and girls equally identifying themselves with this class).

A number of qualities, mentioned by students as characteristic features of a “hero”, turned out to be characteristic of them in the same proportions. The students think they are:

- C “Creative approach to solving life problems” (36.3% versus 36.3% respectively in groups, with students of state institute possessing this quality to a greater extent),
- C “Rational intellection” (33.2% versus 36.6% for a “hero”, students of the state institute and guys identifying themselves with this group in a greater degree),
- C “Modern language slang” (18.6% versus 20.8% for a “hero”, with guys possessing this quality to a greater extent).

Influence of modern “criminal” culture had the consequence that every tenth student identified “criminal group membership” as a characteristic of a “hero of our time” (9.7%); such students are also present in the student environment, but they account only for 2.5%. Guys and students of non-state institute identify themselves with this group more often than girls and students of state institute.

Thus, views about the qualities of “a hero of our time”, formed in youth environment and those, possessed by students, differ, with these differences being both psycho-morpho-physiological and social (social group membership) in character.

Social qualities and external features, identified by students in the structure of qualities of a “hero”, the creation of which was actively favored by conditions of life, toward which the mass media in 1990s usually oriented, gave their results.

Majority of students as representatives of modern youth do not accept a “hero of our time” as an ideal of life. Specifically, 45% of students think that “a human is unique and, as such, chooses the style of life and the type of behavior, which is closer to him with respect to culture, moral, ideals”; 15% of students see themselves through the prism of mass media, from which they get “such a great volume of information about very diverse forms of human life that it allows them to create their own life ideal”. This opinion is mostly expressed by students of state institute (25.4% versus 12.9% of students from PNRPU) and by guys (25.1% versus 20.1% of girls). At the same time, every tenth student (10%) indicates the damaging effect of mass media on “ideal of life”. Representatives of all groups of young people (with respect to type of institute and gender) agree with this.

On the whole, guys turned out to be more socially adaptive to their social group and to their environment than girls. It is just guys for which an “ideal” is the group to which they belong (14.6% versus 8.8% of girls).

Parents have the greatest influence on the formation of “ideal of a life style”. The style of life of friends is perceived by every third student (30.3%), with the influence of friends being more strongly felt by guys (34.7% versus 29.6% of girls). Not unreasonably, there is a folk expression: “Tell me who is your friend and I will tell who you are”. Friends since childhood, friends from institute and friends according to occupations (82.5, 86.3 and 48.9% respectively) are generally among friends of our students. Therefore, they are their peers, people of the same age, a common culture and the same socio-status group.

Every fifth student is influenced by “movie heroes” (21.0%), with this influence being equally felt both by guys and girls (22.6 and 21.5% respectively). Approximately the same influence is exerted by heroes of art works. However, those virtual heroes do not influence the lives of students from non-state institute. There are more students among them, for whom an “ideal” is they themselves (29.3% versus 24.4% of students from state institute).

Every tenth student indicates the influence of a life style of movie actors and stars from show business on their life style (9.3%).

As was already noted above, the influence of parents bears positive character especially for those who has well-defined ideal of life. That is why students first of all hope that parents will assist in various life situations. Just for those students who have a “hero of our time”, parents, relatives, friends, nearest and beloved act as a factor of protection and help. For these students political situation in their country is also important.

At the same time, most students realize that, in their lives, they will have to rely upon themselves and whether they have an “ideal” is immaterial in this case.

Main information sources, from which students can obtain the necessary knowledge about life, are the knowledge and experience of parents, friends.

As was already mentioned above, students actively use Internet; therefore, Internet is now both the channel and the source providing life information for young men, which they need so much today (40%).

Television, though being an information means, which seems to provide much information, is seriously considered only by every fifth student (19.2%).

Traditional printed material, such as books, newspapers, magazines, is not as important as before in gaining knowledge; students use this source only from time to time (40%).

It is necessary to single out social information objects, which proved to be “unpopular” among students in that they seem to be suspect for them.

Their school teachers (61.8%), politicians (67.3%), persons with extrasensory perception (69.4%), program official documents of the government, parties and other public organizations (48.7%) have no authority for students. Also, teachers of higher educational schools have little confidence for students. Girls and guys from non-state institute predominate among these students. These same groups of students think negatively about advertisement as “the culture driver” (47.6%).

Stable nihilism with respect to books as “the source of knowledge” was manifested in every third student, i.e. guys and students from non-state institute.

On the whole, we can state that students from non-state institute more negatively think about different information sources as the channels of transfer of vitally important knowledge (Table 5).

Our studies recorded an ambiguous influence of parents on the choice of a life style by their kids.

More than one third of students state that parents orient them toward traditional life style, i.e. family, children, carrier (34.9%), with the percentage of girls being slightly higher.

Table 4: Factors influencing the formation of "ideal of life style" in youth (in percent of the number of respondents)

Name of factor	Total sample	PNRPU	PHTI	Boys	Girls
Parents' life style	55.9	60.2	52.9	55.2	59.6
Friends' life style	30.3	33.3	26.7	34.7	29.6
Movie heroes' life style	21.0	25.0	13.6	22.6	21.5
Art work heroes' life style	17.6	20.9	11.5	17.3	18.7
Political and economical elite's life style	7.2	7.7	6.8	9.3	6.5
Thematic TV shows	6.9	7.1	7.3	6.0	7.9
Communication via Internet (forums, sites, etc.)	8.7	8.9	9.4	10.5	8.3
Life style of movie actors and stars of show business	9.3	10.0	8.9	7.7	10.9
You have no ideal	16.3	16.1	18.8	16.9	16.9
You are an ideal for yourself	25.2	24.4	29.3	27.0	24.9

Table 5: Information sources, which students *do not use* to obtain information about vitally important issues (in percent of the number of respondents)

	Total sample	PNRPU	PHTI	Guys	Girls
Parents	3.7	3.4	5.6	4.4	3.9
Relatives	33.8	41.6	42.9	38.8	43.7
Friends	3.4	3.1	5.9	6.2	2.5
School teachers	61.8	80.9	80.9	76.3	83.5
Institute teachers	48.7	58.0	72.0	54.2	65.7
Specialists	39.4	47.1	60.0	50.2	50.6
Politicians	67.3	88.4	88.7	85.6	90.1
Extrasensory individuals, clairvoyants	69.4	91.3	90.1	89.7	91.7
Television	28.3	32.4	39.6	34.0	34.6
Internet	12.5	11.7	21.6	11.4	16.1
Books	20.7	22.5	31.6	33.3	20.2
Newspapers	29.2	34.3	39.2	43.0	31.3
Magazines	27.9	33.2	37.0	43.3	29.1
Advertisement	47.6	58.9	66.7	70.4	55.4
Program official documents of the government, parties and public organizations	51.4	67.1	67.1	64.3	68.7
Use their personal experience, own thoughts, observations of how other people live	5.5	4.4	12.7	6.5	6.7

Table 6: The character of orientations of parents regarding their children life style (in percent of the number of respondents)

	Total sample*			Students have "ideal of life"				
	1994	2000	2008	PNRPU	PHTI	Yes	No	Difficult to answer
Life style								
Honest, decent	23.1	18.9	24.1	26.9	18.9	30.0	20.4	28.8
"Think by yourself"	30.0	36.9	36.1	35.7	39.8	37.1	35.1	37.4
Life style of adventurous person	17.3	24.3	35.6	38.6	31.1	35.7	35.9	38.8
Family, kids, carrier	36.5	24.3	34.9	35.1	37.2	37.9	37.4	33.8
Life style of an "intelligent" human	11.5	13.5	22.0	24.7	16.8	30.0	20.4	21.6

*Note: 367 students were interviewed in 1994, 342 students interviewed in 2000 and 709 students interviewed in 2008.

Parents of students from state institutes are stronger adherent to life style of adventurous and wealthy person (38.6% versus 31.1% of parents of students from non-state institute). In this aspect, parents of guys and girls expressed a consensus (34.0% of guys versus 37.6% of girls).

Moral side of a life style is important for every fifth parent (24.1%), with parents of guys drawing more attention to it (28.1% of guys indicated this aspect versus 22.6% of girls). Ethic side of life is more pronounced in students who had formed "ideal of life" (30% versus 20.0% respectively in groups).

A divergence of views on the subject is clearly seen among parents of students of different educational forms as well. For instance, only 18.9% of parents, whose children study in non-state institute, orient them toward honest, decent, modest type of behavior (versus 26.9% of parents, whose children study in state institute).

Life style of "intelligent" person is respectable in every fifth family (22.0%), with this being considered as a "privilege" by students of state institute (24.7% versus 16.8% of students from non-state institute). No special gender-related differences were expressed by the parents in this regard.

Rather large group of students (36.1%) indicated that parents are passive at defining the life style for their children. “Think by yourself”, state the parents of the questioned students, for 45.8% of guys versus 31.7% of girls, for 39.8% of students from non-state institute versus 35.7% of students from state institute (Table 6).

Given rather strong influence of parents on students’ choice of an “ideal of life”, the study detected some instability in parents’ views on the character of a life style of their children. Political and economical situation in Russia in the “newest period” influences this. We can talk about renaissance of cultural and moral traditions, as well as about formation of a new type of a life style of modern youth. In the latter case, there are signs for the tendency toward vanishing the gender-related differences in the life style of youngsters. Requirements that parents start to impose on their daughters mostly stem from demands of market relations and not from “woman’s destination”. There is the process of lifting “bans” by parents when children choose their life style; “the freedom of choice” for children becomes a norm; and precisely this reflects the process of formation of business (western) culture in our society in the frameworks of general personal culture. That is why, in answering the rhetorical question “Today everything depends on...”, only one third of students indicated the influence of “parents” (29.9%) (Table 7).

Girls rely on parents least of all, which is quite clear considering the positions of parents that they demonstrated in this research (27.8% versus 34.1% of guys, relying upon parents). As a consequence of such views on parents’ role in their fate, girls firmer rely upon themselves (79.9% versus 74.0 % of guys). Even such a factor as “profitable marriage” is not a guarantee for successful life for most girls; only every fifth girl accepts such a variant of her life (20.6%), while 15.7% of guys expressed this desire.

Thoughts of many students are dominated by the view that “good acquaintances” are the “panacea of success” (71.1%). This factor had been so rooted at the level of ordinary mind that it became widespread and could not be replaced by some other factors of social life. At the same time, students are clearly aware of the role and significance of knowledge in their future independent life (48.9%); and both students of state institute and students of non-state institute realize this. This factor is some what more important for guys than for girls (51.7% of guys versus 47.5% of girls). Strange as it may seem, in the period of the “newest history of Russia”, at our pragmatic time, illusive view on the role of “random factors” in their lives has increased in young men. From 40% to 50% of students hope for “luck” and “chance”. And this is despite the fact that they believe neither in extrasensory abilities nor clairvoyance, i.e. they estimate themselves pragmatically. Students of non-state institute hope less for “luck”, but believe more in “chance”. This is quite clear, since “success” is a phenomenon, which is influenced by personal qualities; while “chance” always depends on external factors. Therefore, having more low self-esteem, these students hope for favorable coincidence, i.e. their lives depend on many factors. There are more “pragmatists” among students of non-state institutes and girls. Awareness of influence of economical factors on life success somewhat dominates in this institute; while the dependence between life success and political situation in the society is higher ranked by guys. However, on the whole, this interrelation is weak and became even weaker for the last eight years, because of negative views of students on the political institutions of power.

Religion is one of the most important social institutions today, the main value for which is “the soul” of a human; therefore, it is intended to impact life style of

Table 7: Factors, influencing life success of students (in percent of the number of respondents)

	Total sample						
	1994	2000	2008	PNRPU	PHTI	Guys	
Today everything depends on:							
Success	25.0	38.7	48.2	50.8	43.3	49.0	48.4
Good acquaintances	42.3	57.7	71.1	72.6	70.1	69.0	73.3
Political situation in the country	5.8	21.6	13.7	14.0	13.4	18.4	10.0
Profitable marriage	9.6	17.1	18.6	18.7	19.1	15.7	20.6
Chance	23.1	19.8	38.6	40.4	35.6	41.4	37.3
Yourself	50.0	56.8	77.3	78.3	77.8	74.3	79.9
Parents	19.2	22.5	29.9	30.1	30.4	34.1	27.8
Many factors	26.9	35.1	39.9	42.7	34.0	40.6	40.0
Knowledge	36.5	40.5	48.9	49.8	48.5	51.7	47.5
Availability of capital	26.9	48.6	49.7	48.7	52.4	46.4	52.3
Nothing		2.4	0.8	0.8	1.0	2.3	

Table 8: The influence of legal culture and moral on the choice of a model of “a hero of our time” (in percent of the number of respondents)

Qualities of a “Hero of our time”	Views on law and moral		
	Can be broken	Can hardly be broken	Cannot be broken
Appearance as a “Hollywood star”	23.1	14.0	9.6
Good physical health and athletic shape	38.5	24.0	19.5
Creative approach to solving life problems	57.7	48.0	56.2
Literature language of communication	25.0	23.4	29.5
Modern language slang	38.5	29.8	23.9
Business “acumen”	25.0	27.5	23.1
Rational intellection	51.9	48.0	49.4
Sociability, openness	53.8	67.3	69.3
Kindness, altruism, devotion	53.8	45.6	61.0
Cunning, impudence, cruelty	25.0	14.6	8.4
The upper social class membership	13.5	11.1	6.0
The criminal groups membership	9.6	3.5	2.8
Membership in the so-called “middle class”	42.3	41.5	38.2

a young man through his spiritual essence. However, precisely students, who consider themselves genuinely religious (28.9%), found it difficult to answer the question “if they have an ideal in life”. The church as a formal social organization was left “outboard” of the spiritual life of modern youth.

Students, who think that they have a “hero of our time”, fill “spiritual” gap with the help of literature about sports (26.5% versus 16.0% of students, having no “hero”), about economics and business (22.1% versus 14.5% respectively in groups), about sex (18.4% versus 11.9% respectively), about unusual, unknown phenomena (25.0% versus 15.1% respectively).

Highly estimating personal moral and cultural qualities with respect to the model of “the hero of our time”, students in a natural way come to a conclusion that the moral of the contemporary society is in contradiction with their morality. That is why students’ answers to the question “Is it possible to succeed in life without breaking the laws and moral norms?” correspond to their “ideals of life”.

Most students, who still cannot choose the ideal or have no ideal, compose the group of “persons, having doubts” during moral choice (42.7 and 37.2% versus 30.4% among students, having an ideal). Many students have stable moral choice; however, among those, who have “no ideal”, this group is larger (58.0% versus 53.0% of students, who have no ideal and 46.2% of students, who found it difficult to answer).

Students, who have no legal and moral barriers, put external attributes, negative moral, status factors into the qualities of a “hero”. Students, distinctly having positive views on the law and moral, give preference to culture and

moral qualities of a human. Students, which still have no decision, consider “the hero” from the viewpoint of business qualities (Table 8).

Thus, the performed analysis allows us to make several conclusions about the character of life self-actualization for young people of contemporary Russia:

“A hero of our time” is not an urgent problem for modern youth.

Official model of a hero is in contradiction with the model of students’ behavior, formed at the level of everyday conscience, socio-class membership, general culture and moral of students.

The main criteria of a hero, personally for students, are moral and intellectual qualities; whereas the social model suggests the presence of external socio-status characteristics of a person.

Family (parents) and friends are the key social institutions that form “an ideal of life” of young men.

Modern education as a social institution turned out to be unready for reproduction and creation of “a hero of our time”.

Internet becomes an active factor of influence on mind and behavior of students.

Socio-class groups reproduce their model of an ideal of life.

Market as a society, based on the principle of struggle for survival, has changed views of parents on their children from the viewpoint of gender characteristics. New type of a woman, i.e. a combination of intellectual culture with business lady, is formed in Russia today. Guys continue to preserve and play the role, ascribed to them by traditional Russian gender culture.

Students are aware of destination of political culture in the process of formation and creation of the model of “the hero of our time”. However, political institutions fail to take this part.

Religion as a social institution, like political institutions, fail to take its part of “a guiding light” in spiritual world of youth; family, friends, mass media and Internet firmly replaced them.

A new type of culture of a young man’s personality has formed in Russia. It includes the type of intelligent human, oriented toward moral values, in combination with business **entrepreneurial** (westernized) culture.

Socio-class groups have clearly pronounced social and cultural boundaries in correspondence with laws of class society.

Despite the seeming infantilism, modern youth realizes “itself” as the principal “engine” of its life.

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