

Assertiveness in the System of Behavioral Strategies of Modern Youth

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ABSTRACT

The results of an empirical study of the dominant behavioral strategies of Ukrainian modern youth, including early and mature adolescence are presented. The hierarchy of behavioral strategies of boys and girls is empirically determined as assertive, conformal, passive, altruistic, aggressive. Among the assertive strategies the following hierarchy is established: assertiveness as a representation of one's own autonomy, assertiveness as a manifestation of confidence in typical situations, assertiveness as a finding of compromise and as a real assistance not to the detriment of oneself in empathogenic situations. It has been shown that assertive strategies such as cooperation, compromise, and real self-help in empathogenic situations represent the most symmetrical / subject-subject interpersonal relationships. It was found that the indicators of behavioral assertive strategies have significant positive age dynamics during adolescence with a simultaneous increase in their egocentrism and asymmetry in interpersonal interaction. The existence of gender differentiation in assertiveness interactions is demonstrated.

Keywords: Assertiveness, Behavioral strategies, Assertive behavioral strategies, Symmetrical subject-subject relationships, Early adolescence, Mature adolescence

INTRODUCTION

Socio-economic and political processes that have taken place in recent decades in countries around the world have led to rethinking of the importance of many individual and social values, changes in social stereotypes and interpersonal interaction. Assertiveness as a person's willingness to defend his own position, even when it contradicts the position of the majority, gains special importance in the society, which has a significant arsenal of means of pressure, manipulation and submission to the will of the individual. In view of this, personal dignity, self-confidence, readiness and ability to defend one's position, act independently of the majority opinion and, at the same time, respect the rights of others, can be fatal, both for the individual and society as a whole. The use of assertive behavioral strategies by modern youth is especially important, because the future of our society depends on it.

A retrospective look at the problem of assertiveness (J. Volpe, A. Lazarus, E. Salter, G. Fensterheim), and an analysis of its current research (R. Alberti, F. Zimbardo, S. Riddle, M. J. Smith), showed that the study of this phenomenon began with extracting assertive type of behavior out of manipulative, aggressive, and passive ones. In assertive interaction, partners trust each other, behave calmly, confidently, boldly (Alberti and Emmons, 2001; Bishop, 2006; Lizzio et al. 2003). Due to such characteristics, assertiveness is significantly positively interrelated with psychological health (Pourjali and Zarnaghash, 2010), social competence (Ryan et al., 2008), academic performance (Moneva and Bolos, 2020), empathy (Luchkiv, 2016), self-esteem and successful interpersonal interaction (Rotheram-Borus et al. 2001), and negatively inter-related with emotional burnout (Suzuki et al, 2009).

Peculiarities of assertive behavior of employees in various spheres of activity such as medical (Mansour et al., 2020), pedagogical (Podoliak, 2013), managerial (Ellis and Abbott, 2013), journalistic (Synorub, 2012) are studied.

Studies of assertiveness and assertive behavior in the context of ontogenetic development, and in particular the features of relationships with various psychological and socio-psychological phenomena at senior preschool age (Shyltsova, 2012), adolescence (Rotheram-Borus et al. 2001; Popova, 2011), mature adolescence (Zhuravlova and Luchkiv, 2016) characterize assertive behavior as a necessary condition for positive adaptation, symmetric (subject-subject) productive interpersonal interaction, constructive conflict resolution, etc. In adolescence, assertiveness is a prerequisite for the formation of self-dignity and self-esteem (Herasina, 2010), as well as the components of meaning and self-determination (Azizi et al. 2020).

This paper is dedicated to the study of the manifestations of assertive behavioral strategies in adolescence.

The objectives of the study were as follows: to determine the hierarchy of behavioral strategies in adolescence, to determine the most constructive and symmetrical assertive behavioral strategies, as well as to analyze the age and gender characteristics of the latter.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The following methods were applied to achieve these objectives: test-questionnaire “Study of the assertiveness level”, modified by V. Capponi, T. Novak (1995); test of behavioral strategies by K. Thomas (Raihorodskyi, 2001); “Test to determine integral empathy in adolescents and young people” by L. Zhuravlova (Zhuravlova and Chebykin, 2021).

The V. Capponi and T. Novak questionnaire diagnoses the level of assertiveness rather than assertiveness as a quality of personality. The scale A (autonomy) and the scale B (confidence) diagnose high (7-8 points), medium (4-6 points) and low (0-3 points) levels of assertiveness. In terms of its content, a high level of independence (autonomy) is manifested in aggressive behavior in the form of self-confident insistency, medium - in the actual assertive behavior, low - in passive conformity. A high level of confidence is manifested in purposefulness, the ability to find compromise without the use of manipulation. Therefore, it is appropriate to call it a purposeful

Table 1. Features of behavioral strategies manifestation in adolescence (in %).

Behavioral strategies		Early adolescence			Mature adolescence			Adolescence		
		G.	B.	T.	G.	B.	T.	G.	B.	T.
A: autonomy	Conformity	41.9	28.9	35.3	31.1	40.4	35.7	35.6	35.6	35.6
	Assertiveness	45.9	59.2	52.7	64.2	57.7	61.0	56.7	58.3	57.5
	Self-confident insistency	12.2	11.8	12.0	4.7	1.9	3.3	7.8	6.1	6.9
B: confidence	Uncertainty	18.9	14.5	16.7	5.7	1.9	3.8	11.1	7.2	9.2
	Situational assertiveness	48.6	60.5	54.7	45.3	56.7	51.0	46.7	58.3	52.5
	Purposeful compromise	32.4	25.0	28.7	49.1	40.4	44.8	42.2	33.9	38.1
Rivalry		13.5	26.3	20.0	25.5	28.8	27.1	20.6	27.8	24.2
Adaptation		18.9	19.7	19.3	21.7	23.1	22.4	20.6	21.7	21.1
Compromise		20.3	23.7	22.0	27.4	26.0	26.7	24.4	25.0	24.7
Avoidance		16.2	14.5	15.3	13.2	8.7	11.0	14.4	11.1	12.8
Cooperation		31.1	15.8	23.3	12.3	14.4	13.3	20.0	15.0	17.5
Anti-empathy		10.8	15.8	13.3	12.3	17.3	14.8	11.7	16.7	14.2
Indifference		32.4	18.4	25.3	19.8	25.0	22.4	25.0	22.2	23.6
Compassion		18.9	2.6	10.8	8.5	4.8	6.7	12.8	3.9	8.3
Sympathy		2.7	1.3	2.0	12.3	1.9	7.1	8.3	1.7	5.0
Internal assistance		1.4	3.9	2.7	1.9	5.8	3.8	1.7	5.0	3.3
Real assistance		29.7	34.2	32.0	28.3	23.1	25.7	28.9	27.8	28.3
Altruism		4.1	23.7	14.0	17.0	26.0	21.4	11.7	25.0	18.3

Note: G. - girls, B. - boys, T. - total.

compromise. Average confidence indicators represent assertive behavior only in ordinary familiar situations. Therefore, it is called “situational assertiveness”. A low level of confidence is manifested in indecision, i.e., in passive behavior.

The K. Thomas’ test identifies five behavioral strategies: rivalry, adaptation, com-promise, avoidance, and cooperation. The motivation behind the observed behavior is described in G. Bedny and I. Bedny book (Bedny and Bedny).

“Test to determine the integral empathy in adolescents and young people” by L.P. Zhuravlova makes it possible to explore, in addition to integral empathy, its various forms (empathic behavioral strategies). We distinguish such forms of empathy as aggressive (anti-empathy), passive (indifference, compassion, sympathy internal as-sistance), assertive (real assistance not to the detriment of oneself) and altruistic according to their phenomenology.

The study was conducted in Ukrainian educational institutions (city of Zhytomyr and Zhytomyr region). The total sample included 362 people, 180 girls and 182 boys. Among them, 150 early adolescents (74 girls and 76 boys), and 212 mature adoles-cents (108 girls and 104 boys).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

According to the described phenomenological characteristics, the following adoles-cent behavioral strategies were studied (see Table 1): assertive (assertiveness as a representation of autonomy, situational assertiveness,

purposeful compromise, compromise, cooperation, real assistance but not to the detriment to oneself), aggressive (self-confident assertiveness, anti-empathy, rivalry), passive (insecurity, avoidance, indifference, compassion, sympathy, internal assistance), conformal (conformity, adaptation), altruistic (real assistance to the detriment of his own interests). In terms of their content, assertive behavioral strategies are referred to as symmetric, and aggressive, passive, conformal and altruistic as asymmetric behavioral strategies. When using symmetric behavioral strategies, the needs and interests of all inter-acting parties are maximally satisfied, their subject-subject interactions are realized. In general, about 60% of adolescent girls and boys demonstrate assertive behavior within the framework of autonomy. However, a third (35.6%) of them are conformal and 6.9% are aggressive. Within the framework of self-confidence, 52.5% of young people show situational assertiveness, i.e., they can be assertive only in typical situations. Slightly more than a third of them (38.1%) are extremely purposeful, clearly aware of their own goals, needs, interests, are able to declare them and meet them, finding, if necessary, compromise when interacting with other people. And only 9.2% of young people are extremely insecure, constantly doubting their own success. Thus, approximately the same number of young people show polar behavior: conformity and confident determination (slightly more than a third); aggression and insecurity (about 10%) and a little more than half are assertive or situationally assertive.

We obtained similar, but somewhat different, ratios in the indicators of dominant behavioral strategies in personally significant or conflict situations. Thus, again, such polar strategies as rivalry and adaptation are leading in approximately the same number of subjects (respectively, 24.2% and 21.1%). Slightly more than half of young people (52.2%) demonstrate compromise or cooperation (with the predominance of the first one) as the dominant strategy. The percentage of passive youth, who is avoiding solving problems, turn out to be almost the same as the percentage of the insecure ones (12.8% and 9.2%, respectively).

Anti-empathy, which is based on egoism, and hostility, is shown by twice as many people as aggressive tendencies (as a representation of autonomy) and almost twice less than those for whom rivalry and struggle are the dominant behavioral strategies. Anti-empathy and indifference as the dominant forms of empathy are shown by approximately the same part of the sample as rivalry and avoidance (37.8% and 37.0%, respectively). The same ratio is found between such passive behavioral strategies as sympathy, internal assistance and insecurity (8.3% and 9.2%, respectively).

Only 28.3% of young people show self-assistance and 18.3% manifest altruistic forms of empathy. The results of the study of the patterns of the ontogenetic dynamics of empathy generally correspond to the indicators discovered by L. Zhuravlova and O. Chebykin (2021). In general, there is a positive trend in the development of prosocial forms of empathy during adolescence. However, it should be noted that in recent years the number of young people who show real assistance that is not to the detriment of themselves and altruistic behavior has decreased by almost one and a half times. Young people have become more passive and infantile towards others.

According to the results of the analysis of empirical indicators the following features of age dynamics of behavioral strategies of early and mature adolescence are established:

- significant positive dynamics ($p \leq 0.05$) of egocentrism in assertive behavioral strategies: increase in the number of young people who assertively show their own autonomy, independence (by 8.3%) and learn purposeful compromise (by 16.1%). In mature adolescence, compared to early adolescence, the number of respondents who choose a compromise as a leading strategy increases slightly (by 4.7%), but the number of those in whom interpersonal relationships are dominated by real assistance not to the detriment of themselves decreases by 6.3% and cooperation decreases by 5.8% with $p \leq 0.01$. Thus, in general, we observe an increase in egocentrically confident compromise behavior of young people, which represents an increase in asymmetry in their interpersonal interaction;

- there is a tendency to increase hostility in aggressive behavioral strategies during adolescence: increase (by 7.1%) of the number of young people who choose the leading strategy of rivalry and a slight increase in anti-empathy (by 1.5%), decrease (by 8.7%) of the number of people who aggressively defend their own autonomy. Thus, young people learn to assertively defend their independence with age, however, in personally significant tense situations, they try to compete more often, strive for dominance against the slight increase in anti-empathy;

- humanization (humanistic direction) of the dynamics of passive forms of behavior ($p \leq 0.05$): decrease of the number of insecurity (by 12.9%), avoidance (by 4.3%), indifference (by 3.1%), empathetic (by 3.9%) behavioral strategies and increase in compassion (by 5.1%) and readiness for real internal assistance as the dominant form of empathy (by 1.1%);

- positive dynamics ($p \leq 0.05$) of altruistic behavior (increase in the number of altruists by 6.4%);

- stability of conformal forms of behavior. A third of the younger generation (35.6%) has a conformal strategy of behavior. Virtually, the part of young people (from 35.3% to 35.7%, respectively) remains unchanged in the process of growing up, they are extremely dependent on others, irresponsible, unable to solve their own problems and it increases slightly (by 3.1%) in mature adolescents compared to the younger ones who choose the dominant adaptation strategy.

Since behavior largely depends on gender stereotypes and gender peculiarities, we analyze the gender characteristics of different behavioral strategies during adolescence (see Table 1). A significant feature of age gender dynamics is a significantly higher ($p \leq 0.01$) intensity of the development of assertive confidence, autonomy and the frequency of dominance of compromise in girls compared to boys. Boys, on the other hand, have a significantly higher ($p \leq 0.01$) negative dynamics of real assistance not to the detriment of themselves. And the assertiveness of girls and boys, which represents their autonomy and confidence, has a positive age dynamic. However, the intensity of age development of symmetric strategies the former is higher in girls than in boys. And if in early adolescence boys more often than girls, assertively demonstrated their own autonomy and independence, in adulthood the latter

more often show independence assertively. Trends in the development of compromise and cooperation as the dominant symmetrical behavioral strategies are similar in girls and boys: an increase in the manifestations of compromise and a decrease in the frequency of cooperation. A particularly sharp decline is observed in girls during their transition from early adolescence to mature: the proportion of young women for whom cooperation was the dominant strategy decreases more than twice. In general, almost the same proportion of boys and girls (about a third) have a dominant behavioral strategy of real assistance not to the detriment of themselves in empathogenic situations. However, their age dynamics has different trends: with age, the number of girls who actually contribute to empathogenic situations decreases by only 1.4%, and for boys by 12.8% (9 times more).

Boys, compared to girls, more often choose aggressive asymmetric behavioral strategies, which are based on hostility toward the Other (rivalry, anti-empathy). However, during adolescence, the aggression of girls and boys, which manifests itself in self-confident insistence, is significantly reduced (by 7.5% and 9.9%, respectively), although girls more often (by 0.8%) than boys demonstrate their own autonomy. In general, boys are more prone to rivalry (by 3.6%), especially boys in mature adolescence, and in early adolescence much more girls (by 12.8%) than boys have a dominant strategy of rivalry. In empathogenic situations, girls, show less anti-empathy compared to boys (11.7% and 16.7% respectively), although there is a “positive” age dynamics of asymmetric behaviors such as rivalry and anti-empathy: with age the number of girls and boys who consider them to be the leading behavioral strategies increases.

Positive gender age dynamics of passive behavioral strategies have been identified: with age, boys and girls become more active and confident. Only indifference and compassion have polar development trends: for those who manifests indifference and compassion as their dominant behavioral strategies the number of young men increases with age (by 6.6% and 2.2%, respectively), while the number of young women decreases (by 7.1% and 8.1%, respectively). That is, among young men there are more indifferent ones, those who in empathogenic situations are concerned only with their own experiences.

We observe polar trends in the age dynamics of conformal behavioral strategies: with age, the infantilism of boys increases (by 11.5%), and girls become more independent (infantilism decreases by 10.8%). The age dynamics of the dominance of the adaptation strategy in both groups is similar and increases during adolescence (by 3.4% and 2.8%, respectively). However, boys are more prone to adaptation than girls (21.7% and 20.6%, respectively).

Summing up, we can state that in adolescence the hierarchy of behavioral strategies is as follows: assertive (36.43%), conformal (21.67%), passive (16.72%), altruistic (18.31%), aggressive (10.37%). Among the assertive strategies we observe the following hierarchy: assertiveness as a representation of one's own autonomy (57.5%), assertiveness as a manifestation of confidence in typical situations (52.5%), assertiveness as finding a compromise (38.1% and 24.7%), as assistance not to the detriment of oneself in

empathogenic situations (28.3%). Cooperation, as the maximum identification and satisfaction not only of their own rights and interests, but also of the interacting partner, in the process of which there is a representation of self-esteem, confidence, autonomy, focus on the Other, is the dominant strategy of behavior only for 17.5% of young people. Thus, most modern young Ukrainians are not ready for absolutely symmetrical subject-subject equal partnership. However, more than half of them use close to symmetrical assertive strategies in interpersonal interaction: assertiveness in order to find a compromise and to help others not to harm themselves in empathogenic situations.

Let us dwell in more detail on the analysis of the age dynamics of the most productive assertive behavioral strategies of compromise and cooperation, which represent the conative component of assertiveness as an integral property of personality (Luchkiv, 2016). Empirical study of the features of the ontogenetic development of compromise and cooperation revealed their contradictory age dynamics. On the one hand, during adolescence, young people, for whom cooperation and compromise are important, learn more often to find compromise ($t = 2.591$; $p \leq 0.01$) and to cooperate ($t = 2.956$; $p \leq 0.01$). However, with age the latter is becoming inherent in fewer and fewer young men and women as a dominant strategy of behavior compared to others.

In addition to age differentiation, we also observe gender discrepancy. So, girls, in comparison with boys, are more inclined to symmetrical strategies of behavior. This tendency of girls is manifested in their higher rates of cooperation and compromise, compared to boys. The only exceptions are compromise rates for early adolescents. At this age, they are less likely than boys to find compromise, although this difference is not statistically significant. At a statistically significant level, gender differentiation in adolescence is observed in the frequency of use of cooperation by girls ($t = 1.985$; $p \leq 0.05$). Girls are more willing to cooperate. Obviously, their assertiveness is restrained by a greater focus on other people, empathy for them, as well as social stereotypes in Ukraine that a woman should be more restrained and tolerant than men. Boys demonstrate a more active life position, the Other is perceived by them more often as an object that can be used to meet their own needs. That is, with age, young men and women form, masculine and feminine behavioral strategies of interaction with others.

Interesting significant gender differences are observed between different age groups. Thus, girls of mature adolescence use compromise strategies significantly more often ($t = 2.711$; $p \leq 0.05$), compared to young girls of early adolescence. Boys significantly increase the frequency of cooperation as a behavioral strategy with age ($t = 3.534$; $p \leq 0.001$). Girls of early adolescence are less able to compromise compared to boys of mature adolescence ($p \leq 0.05$), and younger boys, compared to older girls, are less able to cooperate ($p \leq 0.001$).

Thus, we have similar trends and patterns in the age gender dynamics: growing up, young people more often implement strategies of compromise and cooperation, but the number of young people who seek (need) to cooperate and find compromises decreases. In other words, with age, young people often learn to use symmetrical assertive strategies in interpersonal interaction.

However, the value of these strategies (compromise and cooperation) for them is declining compared to other strategies.

In order to confirm that cooperation represents the most productive, constructive, symmetrical, and assertive behavioral strategy, we analyze the results of finding cor-relation between different active forms of behavior.

Thus, the indicators of the factor “cooperation” are significantly positively correlate with the indicators of “real assistance” ($r = 0.12$, $p \leq 0.05$) and “confidence” ($r = 0.16$, $p \leq 0.01$), based on, such qualities as focus on the Other and self-confidence respectively, and inversely proportional to the strategies of “compromise” ($r = -0.11$, $p \leq 0.05$), which is based on unequal interaction of partners, attitudes to the Other as to the object, “avoidance” ($r = -0.15$, $p \leq 0.01$), which is based on deep self-doubt and “rivalry” ($r = -0.22$, $p \leq 0.001$), which is based on egocentrism and aggression.

Similar to the features of the general sample that is described above, but with some specifics, we observe correlation between the data collected for boys and girls. The young men and women have the following in common: positive correlation between indicators of cooperation and real assistance ($p \leq 0.05$); negative correlation between indicators of cooperation and rivalry ($p < 0.05$ and $p \leq 0.001$ respectively).

The indicators of cooperation in boys additionally have positive valid relationship with altruism ($p < 0.05$), confidence ($p \leq 0.01$) and negative correlation with in-dependence ($p \leq 0.05$). In girls it's negative with anti-empathy ($p \leq 0.01$) and avoidance ($p \leq 0.01$). Thus, the more often young people show confident and altruistic behavior when real support does not harm them, the less they demonstrate their own egocentric independence, rivalry, the more they tend to strive for symmetrical partnerships in cooperation. Girls are more inclined to cooperate, when there is less anti-empathy, avoidance and rivalry in their behavior, and they more often actually contribute to the Other, without forgetting about their own interests.

CONCLUSION

In adolescence, symmetrical strategies are more popular than asymmetric ones. During adolescence, indicators of behavioral symmetric assertive strategies have significant positive age dynamics. The hierarchy of behavioral strategies of young people is as follows: assertive, conformal, passive, altruistic, aggressive. Among the symmetric assertive strategies, we observe the following hierarchy: assertiveness as a representation of one's own autonomy, assertiveness as a manifestation of confidence in typical situations, assertiveness as a compromise, as a real assistance not to the detriment of oneself in empathogenic situations and cooperation.

Cooperation is the most constructive assertive behavioral strategy. This strategy provides symmetrical subject-subject relationships, maximum identification and satisfaction not only of their own rights, interests, but also for the interacting partner, in the process of which there is a representation of self-esteem, confidence, autonomy, focus on others, is the most constructive assertive behavioral strategy.

There is a gender differentiation of symmetric interactions: girls, in comparison with boys, are more inclined to symmetrical strategies of behavior. Throughout early and mature adolescence, boys and girls respectively, form masculine and feminine assertive behavioral strategies in situations of interpersonal interaction.

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