

The Gender Specificity of the Images of Spouses in Views of Modern Russian Teenagers

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Received 7 May 2017 • Revised 19 August 2017 • Accepted 3 October 2017

ABSTRACT

Regular large-scale changes, the constant volatility and instability that take place in Russia at the beginning of the 21st century, and simultaneously the transition to post-industrial society, the emergence of new cultural values of the post-modern era, lead to the transformation of the family as an integrated system. The image of a future spouse acquires in this regard a special role. It begins to form in adolescents based on the model of conjugal relations in the parent family, examples from culture and art, stereotypes of behavior of men and women. Based on the foregoing, we have determined as the purpose of our study to analyze the images of spouses (a husband and a wife) in perceptions of girls and boys of the senior adolescence (14-15 years old). The revealed data testify the available gender specificity shown in the contradiction of mutual expectations from the future partner (spouse) and actualize the problem of providing the timely psychological assistance to adolescents for overcoming the existing dissonance of role expectations and preparing teenagers for the family life. The views of older teenagers on the role characteristics of spouses include both the traditional (gender-stereotyped) qualities and characteristics of the non-traditional masculinity and femininity. The type of the distribution of the role responsibilities for the spouses demonstrated by the participants in our study proves the availability of dissonance caused by traditional ideals and modern tendencies in the establishment of family relations.

Keywords: gender specificity, representations, family transformation, the image of spouses, adolescence, marital relations

INTRODUCTION

In the context of recent Russian researches many scientists stress some changes occurrent with a family which affect its functioning, role structure, the family relations, motives for its creation and maintenance, the sense of parenting, family values etc. [1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, etc.]. The fact of the sociocultural conditionality of the family is obviously ascertained and according to some modern specialists' assessments the family is an open, evolving system [3]. So, any changes in the spheres of public life are naturally reflected in the life of a family causing the transformation of the family as an integral system.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Based on the foregoing, we have determined as the purpose of our study to analyze the images of spouses (a husband and a wife) in perceptions of girls and boys of the senior adolescence (14-15 years old). We have used therein as a diagnostic tool a modified version of A. Volkova's questionnaire "Role Expectations and Claims in

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Table 1. Specificity of Role Expectations and Claims with Respect to Spouses in Perceptions of Older Male and Female Adolescents

Group	Scales ($\bar{x} \pm \sigma$ / Student's t-test)											
	1		2		3		4		5		7	
			E.	A.	O.	П.	O.	П.	O.	П.	O.	П.
Boys	4±	6±	7±	7±	6 ±	6±	6±	8±	6±	5±	7±	6±
	2.25	1.95	1.60	2.00	1.38	1.74	1.64	1.30	1.78	1.91	1.15	1.92
	-	-	0.2		1.6		6.1 (p≤0.001)		3.04 (p≤0.01)		3.6 (p≤0.01)	
Girls	3±	6±	7±	7±	5±	6±	6±	8±	6±	6±	8±	7±
	2.03	1.89	1.11	1.87	1.40	1.42	1.59	1.45	1.43	1.90	1.08	1.63
	-	-	1.9		1		5.3 (p≤0.001)		2.5 (p≤0.05)		4.8 (p≤0.001)	
E.	2.9	1.4	0.8		2,1 (p≤0.05)		0.4		0.9		2.6 (p≤0.05)	
A.	(p≤0.01)		1		0.5		0.7		1.6		1.8	
B'sE & G'sA	-	-	1		1.1		4.1 (p≤0.01)		0.9		1.8	
G'sE & B'sA	-	-	0.4		0.4		5.3 (p≤0.001)		3.8 (p≤0.01)		5.2 (p≤0.001)	

Note: 1 - intimate-sexual scale; 2 - scale of personal identification with the spouse; 3 - Parent-educational scale; 4 - household scale; 5 - social activity scale; 6 - scale of visual appeal; 7 - emotional-psychotherapeutic scale; E - expectations; P - claims.

Marriage" (REA). The processing of adolescents' responses suggested the determination of the mean values for each of the Questionnaire scales (\bar{x}) and standard deviations from the mean values (σ) as well as the reliability of the gender differences identified by the Student's t-test. Our research was conducted on the basis of a number of secondary schools of Nizhny Novgorod. 78 persons took part therein in total, including 44 girls and 34 boys.

RESULTS

Refer to the data in **Table 1** revealing the specifics of the spouse images in the context of role expectations and claims in perceptions of boys and girls of the senior adolescence.

So, from **Table 1** we can see that according to our results obtained, both the boys and the girls include in the image of spouses some qualities associated with the upbringing of children and possibilities to provide emotional support to a partner. However, the characteristic of social activities associated with the professional self-realization is also singled out herein. Yet, in our opinion, of special interest herein are appraisals formulated by teenagers, which reflect not only new tendencies in current (egalitarian-oriented) relations between spouses but also include the stereotyped perceptions about the qualities of a husband and a wife.

Note that boys and girls assess differently the role of sexual relations in marriage. While the girls consider it to be practically unimportant ($\pm = 3 \pm 2.03$), the boys find it quite the serious although not the leading condition for the family happiness. Taking into account the statistical significance of differences ($t = 2.9$ for $p \leq 0.01$) we note that 35.14% of the girls participating in our study almost completely deny this aspect of the family life (in the boys' group only 6.6% participants have such an assessment of the sexual aspect). In our opinion, such a reaction to the sphere of sexual relations is associated with the idealization of the emotional component of love by the girls and their orientation at the "spiritual affinity" with the partner, while the boys assign a big role thereto because of the rather frequent discussion of sexual themes in the group of peers of their sex. However, if, in general, this sphere of the family life is usually closed, "tabooed" for teenagers, then their involvement in the child-parent relations undoubtedly influences the increase of significance of the parent-educational scale in the image of the spouses.

So, according to the viewpoint of the both groups of testees, the love for children and the ability to find a common language with them are very important for spouses. We believe that mass media, in particular, media images created by advertising, serials, talk shows, etc., where the parenthood is determined as one of the principal values, which concentrate the life of a child-centered family, can play a certain role in such views [4, 6].

The expectations of the boys and girls on the scale of household economic functions have also statistically significant differences ($t = 2.1$ at $p \leq 0.05$): the girls rather than the boys expect from the partner the active solution of any household issues, the availability of their economic and everyday skills and habits. And the household structure of the family in the system of perceptions of both the boys and the girls has the medium degree of significance. This fact suggests that in the opinion of older adolescents the domesticity and readiness to manage a household shall not be obligatory features of today's spouses and in general it does not correspond to the

traditional image of the wife, the stereotype of a married woman responsible for the family comfort and domestic work but, most likely, it reflects new tendencies with respect to the family and marriage (at least for young people).

Another modern trend associated with the increasing social (out-of-family) activity of spouses and, first of all, women, is also reflected in perceptions of the subjects of our study, which is proved by a high level of significance for this characteristic both in the image of the husband and wife. Nevertheless, it should be noted that both the boys and the girls place higher demands to the professional activity, first of all, of the representative (spouse) of their sexual group (for boys - temp = 6.1 for $p \leq 0.001$, for girls - temp. = 5.3 for $p \leq 0.001$), whereas in the image of the partner, on the contrary, there are characteristics reflecting a weak desire for the professional self-realization and social passivity (for the boys with respect to the image of the wife temp = 4.1 for $p \leq 0.01$, for the girls with respect to the husband's image temp = 5.3 for $p \leq 0.001$). We suppose that such differences may be associated with the boys' orientation at the traditionally attributed role of the husband as a daily-breader and the girls' at new less stereotyped standards of femininity, thereunder they want to refuse from the role of the housewife attributed to the wife, implying the double burden on a family women related to the unfair distribution of household duties between spouses, which, in turn, indicates the departure of adolescent girls from the patriarchal type of family.

At the same time, both the boys and the girls note the importance of the appearance for the marriage partner. The testees of the both groups herewith present higher requirements to their chosen person, rather than to themselves (for the boys - temp = 3.04 for $p \leq 0.01$, for girls - temp = 2.5 for $p \leq 0.01$); although this tendency is more clearly traced in relation to the image of the husband described by the girls as a fashion-watching, neat and a good-looking man, which is not observed in the descriptions given to him by the boys (temp = 3.8 for $p \leq 0.01$).

The increasing significance of the psychotherapeutic function of the family ascertained by many modern researchers [4; 7, etc.] is also reflected in the adolescents' appraisals of emotional contacts in the family life. The testees of the both sex groups expect that the spouse (the wife for the boys and the husband for the girls) will assume the role of the emotional leader in creating a comfortable psychological atmosphere, in providing a moral and emotional support (for the boys, temp= 3.6 $p \leq 0.01$, for the girls - temp. = 4.8 for $p \leq 0.001$). It turns out that in this context the 14-15-year-old girls and boys are oriented differently at the traditional gender stereotypes in the distribution of family roles, namely: while the girls suppose that the both spouses should be "emotional donors", the boys giving the leading role in this sphere to their future wife are on the contrary guided by existing stereotypes. Furthermore, it should be specially emphasized that the girls' expectations do not comply with the boys' claims (temp = 3.8 for $p \leq 0.01$). So, there is a risk of the further dissatisfaction with marital relations. Notwithstanding, older teenagers highly appreciate the importance of the personal identification with the spouse and the expectation of an identity of interests, needs, value orientations and ways of pastime are equally important for both the boys and the girls.

Thus, in general, to sum up the above results, it can be said that in the perceptions of the boys and girls - older adolescents, the marriage is, first of all, an environment promoting the psychological relaxation and the stabilization of spouses.

DISCUSSION

In the conditions of regular large-scale changes, the continuous variability and instability occurring in Russia in the early 21st century and the simultaneous transition to the post-industrial society the emergence of new cultural values of the postmodern era, the involvement of our country in the global democratization and globalization processes some essential changes are also beginning in the family institute itself. In particular, it was reflected in a number of tendencies similar to those of Western countries, including, first of all, among others, the following [2, 3, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14]:

- the change in the family structure;
- birth-rate falling and ageing;
- raising of the age of marriage not only for men but also for women;
- the youth's insecurity in the future and, as a consequence, the rejection of the family obligations;
- the departure from the patriarchal role model of the marriage and the transition to a new partnership form of marriage relations based on the mutual affection and the equality of the spouses;
- the dynamics in the family institute functions, the full or partial transfer of many traditional functions to public institutions with the increasing significance of the psychotherapeutic function;
- the increasing number of the so-called "fragile families", i.e. cohabiting couples with children;
- the reducing value of "the marriage for life";
- the change in the ethnic composition of families.

A. Ya. Varga while supplementing and specifying the above-listed tendencies and peculiarities of the Russian family in the era of changes accentuates in her turn the attention at the socio-psychological dynamics observed in the current situation in the nature of intra-family relations [1].

So, in the context of marital relations she emphasizes the higher emotionality and personal orientation of marriage, which makes it less strong and stable. It is particularly proved by the current tendency to a significant increase in the number of divorces. Statistically, in the early 21st century 600 to 700 thousand marriages are annually dissolved in Russia, that is over 30% of the concluded marriages, i.e. about 1/3 of all families are going through a divorce [4]. In particular, in 2011 the number of divorces in our country was 4.7 per a thousand of persons and it significantly exceeded the world figures (for comparison in 2010 in the USA it was 3.6, 3.0 in Lithuania and 2.8 in Switzerland) [3]. At the same time the number of alternative forms of marriage and family relations is rapidly increasing such as a family-concubinage or an unregistered cohabitation (generally it is called erroneously by common people as a civil marriage), an open marriage, a group marriage, a guest marriage, a knowingly childless marriage (the "childfree" phenomenon), a deliberately incomplete family, loneliness, etc. And according to proficients it reflects the dissatisfaction of many women and men with the current state of the family and marriage as social institutions [4, 6, 15 and others].

Beyond any reasonable doubt, all the said new tendencies concerning the family and marriage will be reflected in the content of modern adolescents' perceptions about the family and its members, since they constantly receive such information both in their immediate social environment and out of any other cultural sources [16]. There are herewith all good reasons to believe that the whole social experience acquired by adolescents may be later transformed into real models of relations, which will be realized in their future families. Furthermore, it should be separately mentioned that the older adolescence age (14-15 years) is sensitive to the development of a value attitude towards the family due to such features of the said age as the appearance of a sense of "adulthood", the claims to the future, the need for the self-determination, the intense development of the reflection and the critical evaluation of others [17].

The image of a future spouse acquires in this regard a special role. It begins to form in adolescents based on the model of conjugal relations in the parent family, examples from culture and art, stereotypes of behavior of men and women, which prevail in society and is translated by different agents, and includes wherewith the experience of the interaction with peers of the opposite sex obtained through intimate personal communication. Based on the data of some researchers the following characteristic features in the images of a husband and a wife may be singled out, which are typical in perceptions of adolescents [18, 19, 20, 21, etc.]: a) the availability of some girls' association of the future husband's image with the image of their father and mother; b) the adolescent boys' orientation in the construction of images of spouses at rigidly differentiated stereotypes of masculinity and femininity, and their herdmates-girls' to a greater extent at the similarity of the husband and wife and the conformity of their images with a stereotype of femininity rather than masculinity; c) the predominance in the content of the spouse image descriptions suggested by the girls the qualitative characteristics of the husband and wife's behavior and personality, while the boys mostly use the characteristics of the appearance; d) the desired spouse is superior in his/her positive qualities than a real young man/real girl and it shows the excessive demands of adolescents for a partner and spouse.

However, we should note that all of the above findings were mostly obtained a few decades ago. So, there is a likelihood that teenagers of the 21st century may think otherwise. Moreover, as we have already accentuated, the family institute is now undergoing significant changes. In modern society along with the traditional gender stereotypes some new non-traditional orientations have emerged at the role of women and men, their possibilities and personal characteristics. Therefore, it is not improbable that the content of teenagers' perceptions on the family could also become different, include both the traditional (patriarchal) and alternative (egalitarian) characteristics, although, most likely, it still has a gender specificity.

CONCLUSION

To sum up the results of the study we have carried out, we may note the following:

- the views of older teenagers on the role characteristics of spouses include both the traditional (gender-stereotyped) qualities and characteristics of the non-traditional masculinity and femininity. In other words, at the age of 14-15 years there is an eclectic conceptualization of the images of the spouses, formed up to this age both under the influence of traditional different family relations, on the one hand, and under the influence of the modern infomedia propagating both traditional and nontraditional values in the relationship of spouses. The choice between these values and preferences has not yet been made by the majority of Russian teenagers at the age of 14-15;
- the revealed data testify the available gender specificity shown in the contradiction of mutual expectations from the future partner (spouse). In particular, the girls' desire to see an empathic, sensitive partner is not

consistent with the boys' expectations oriented at the more traditional distribution of family roles, where the role of the emotional donor is assigned to a woman;

- the decreasing importance of such a traditional role function of spouses as a household-domestic role and, on the contrary, the high importance of factors of the partner's visual appeal for teenagers is probably related first of all to the age characteristics of the testees, since in adolescence the external characteristics often prevail over the deeper content characteristics.

Thus, the type of the distribution of the role responsibilities for the spouses demonstrated by the participants in our study proves the availability of dissonance caused by traditional ideals and modern tendencies in the establishment of family relations. It points to the contradictory nature of their ideas about the image of the future spouse, ascertains the eclectic tendencies to which the teenager thinking on the future family is inclined. Therefore, the obtained data actualize the problem of providing the timely psychological assistance to adolescents for overcoming the existing dissonance of role expectations and preparing teenagers for the family life.

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