The Correlation between Gender Identity and Communication Focus in Adults

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Abstract. The article discusses the characteristics of the communication focus in adults, identifying themselves with different types of gender identity. The study involved 75 people, 45 men and 30 women aged from 18 to 57. Two psychodiagnostic techniques were used: Bem Sex-Role Inventory (adaptation by M. Burakova) and “Personality Focus in Communication” by S. L. Bratchenko. The results of the study showed the specificity of the hierarchy of communication focus depending on gender, described significant differences between some types of communication focus in masculine, feminine, androgynous and undifferentiated types. A significant positive interrelation between authoritarian communication focus and masculine type of gender identity and negative interrelation with feminine type of gender identity was found. The data obtained can be applied in individual and group counseling, as well as with the aim of developing training programs in order to optimize communication focus in connection with gender identity, as well as to predict the behavior of people with different gender identities.

1. Introduction

The issues of gender identity, in recent years, have been given great attention, especially in connection with the characteristics of communication efficiency.

At present, the validity of a strict separation of people into only two opposite sexes, not matching their natural characteristics, is being called into question by researchers.

Gender is a construct that is formed in children in the process of their socialization. Thus, as the child grows up, he/she learns which specific forms of behavior and activities are acceptable and which are unacceptable to people of his gender, and either accepts or rejects the corresponding gender roles. Sex and gender are not complementary categories. The definition of “sex” emphasizes the biological foundations of psychological differences and reduces all the existing variety to one or another genital structure, while the definition of “gender” emphasizes the sociocultural origin of psychological differences [1].

The concept of “identity” was first introduced in detail by E. Erickson, who defined identity as the process of organizing life experience into individual “Self”, the main function of which is adaptation [2]. E.A. Zdravomyslova and A.A. Temkina [3] speak about a socio-psychological phenomenon, a product and a process of constructing by a subject of oneself and social reality through constructs of masculinity and femininity.

The definition of “gender”—social sex, sex as a product of culture, socio-biological characteristics, indicate the social status and socio-psychological characteristics of the personality, which are connected with sex and sexuality, but arise in interaction with other people. This is a set of social and cultural norms that society requires people to fulfill, depending on their biological sex [4].

At the end of the 20th century, the bipolar model of gender identity was revised in the concept of S. Bem. She suggested that men and women do not have to conform to traditional gender-role models and...
can combine masculine and feminine characteristics in their behavior. The author believed that the androgynous model of gender identity, which incorporates the best of both sex roles, is currently relevant. An analysis of the definitions of gender identity and approaches to the study of this phenomenon allows us to identify its main components: biological sex and its psychological characteristics such as masculinity, femininity, and androgyne. S. Bem developed "Bem Sex-Role Inventory." The starting point of the assessment in Bem’s inventory is the sociocultural representations about masculinity and femininity in this society at this time. These representations are variable [5, 6].

E.P. Ilyin writes that gender in socio-psychological terms is considered as a system of social relations that emerges around the biological sex and sexuality, and these relations always have two dimensions: knowledge and its assessment [7].

There is also a multipolar model of gender identity, which allows for the existence of several options of gender identity within the same sex. This typology is represented by six options: androgynous female; androgynous male; masculine female; masculine male; feminine female; feminine male [8].

The masculine version is considered as a combination of “instrumental” personality traits and is characterized by the greatest severity of such characteristics as independence, assertiveness, authority, tendency to defend one’s views, ambition, leadership ability, risk appetite, self-confidence, self-sufficiency. In everyday consciousness, these qualities are associated with men.

“Expressive” personality characteristics are associated with feminine traits: modesty, diligence, conformity, devotion, compassion, flexibility, empathy, tendency to cooperate and compromise.

The androgyne version of gender identity is approximately equally characteristic of masculine and feminine qualities. L.P. Velikanova notes that representatives of this personality type could be brought up in a situation of less rigid regulatory requirements associated with sex-specific behavior [8].

Thus, the currently established classification of gender identity types distinguishes masculine, feminine, androgyne and undifferentiated types, each having a certain ratio of traditionally “male” and traditionally “female” qualities.

S.L. Bratchenko [9, 10] developed a typology of interpersonal communication, which served as the basis for the development of diagnostic tools for the level of development of communicative competence. The basis for building a typology of communication was the concept of dialogue by M.M. Bakhtin, subsequently developed by A.U. Kharash, E.A. Rodionova, G.M. Kuchinsky, A.M. Matyushkin. Based on this concept, the author in a special study identified six main types of communication focus (PFC): dialogical communicative focus (D-PFC), authoritarian (A-PFC), manipulative (M-PFC), alterocentric (AL-PFC), conforming (C-PFC), indifferent (I-PFC). These types of communicative focus are characterized by the following features.

Dialogical focus implies equal communication based on mutual respect and trust, focus on mutual understanding, openness and cooperation, desire for mutual self-expression, development, and co-creation.

Authoritarian focus is manifested in the dominance in communication, the desire to suppress the interlocutor’s personality, to subject him, this is “communicative aggression”, cognitive egocentrism, “demand” to be understood, but unwillingness to understand the interlocutor, disrespect for someone else’s point of view, focus towards stereotyped “communication-functioning”, communicative rigidity.

Manipulative focus is the use of the interlocutor and all communication for one’s own purposes in order to gain profit, the attitude to the interlocutor as means, object of one’s manipulations, the desire to understand the interlocutor in order to obtain the necessary information. It goes together with one’s own secrecy, insincerity, focus on development and "creativity" (cunningness) in communication.

Alterocentric focus is a voluntary “centering” on the interlocutor, focus on his goals, needs, etc. and selfless sacrifice of one’s interests, the desire to understand the needs of the other for their fullest satisfaction, but indifference to understanding oneself from the interlocutor’s part, the desire to promote the development of the interlocutor even to the detriment of one’s own development and well-being.
Conforming focus is a renunciation of equal rights in communication in favor of the interlocutor, focus on the submission to the power of authority, on an “objective” position towards oneself, focus on uncritical “consent” (avoiding opposition), lack of desire for real understanding and desire to be understood, orientation to imitation, reactive communication, willingness to “adapt” to the interlocutor.

Indifferent focus implies an attitude towards communication, where it is ignored with all its problems, the dominance of focus on "purely business" issues, "withdrawal" from communication as such. S.L. Bratchenko, describing the nature of communication focus, emphasizes the value-semantic content of communication focus by defining all the characterizing personal manifestations inherent in each of them [9].

In social psychology, a large number of studies have proven the relationship between the gender identity type and the processes of organization and regulation of interpersonal communication. This issue remains relevant in connection with sociocultural changes in the world.

2. Methods

The aim of this work was to study the characteristics of communication focus of adults with different gender identities, as well as the interrelation of gender specificity with communication focus.

The main research questions were formulated:
1) What are the differences in the preference of communication focus among adults with different gender identities?
2) How is gender identity interrelated with different types of communication focus?

The study used the following psychodiagnostic methods:
1) Bem Sex-Role Inventory (BSRI) adapted by M. Burakova [11];
2) “Personality focus in communication”, “PFC-3” by S.L. Bratchenko [10].

Let us consider the diagnostic methods in more detail.

1. Bem Sex-Role Inventory (BSRI) adapted by M. Burakova (see Appendix 2). The inventory is used to determine the degree of masculine and feminine personality characteristics and the degree of conformity with respect to gender norms of behavior. M.V. Burakova validated the American version of the inventory in accordance with the cultural realities in Russia. The inventory contains 30 questions, requires a minimum time to complete [11].

2. "Personality focus in communication - PFC-3" by S.L. Bratchenko. The methodology is intended to study the personality focus in communication, understood as a combination of more or less conscious personal semantic attitudes and value orientations in the field of interpersonal communication, as an individual “communicative paradigm”, including representations about the meaning of communication, its goals, means, desirable and acceptable ways of behavior during communication, etc. The “PFC” methodology is projective, based on the method of unfinished sentences.

The theoretical basis of the “PFC” methodology is the concept of dialogue (M.M. Bakhtin, M. Buber, A.U. Kharash and others), based on which the author identified six main types of PFCs in a special study: dialogical communicative focus (D-PFC), authoritarian (AU-PFC), manipulative (M-PFC), alterocentric (AL-PFC), conforming (C-PFC), indifferent (I-PFC). This methodology is aimed at identifying the severity of each of these six PFC types for the respondent.

The “stimulus material” of the “PFC-3” methodology is represented by 31 unfinished sentences, which the subject is encouraged to continue in such a way as to produce a complete phrase, considered as the respondent’s answer (projective material). The total time for conducting the PFC-3 methodology (together with the briefing) is about 30 minutes.

The study involved employees of various organizations of the Southern region of Russia in the amount of 75 people. Among them, 45 men and 30 women aged 18 to 57.

We used Spearman correlation coefficient, Mann-Whitney U-test for statistical analysis. We also used computer programs Microsoft Office Excel, SPSS.
3. Findings

Let us consider how the types of communication focus of adults with different types of gender identity differ (Table 1).

Table 1. Average Indicators of Communication Focus of Adults with Different Gender Identities.

| Gender identity type | Communication focus type | D | AU | M | AL | C | I |
|----------------------|--------------------------|---|----|---|----|---|---|
| Masculine            |                          | 37| 31 | 6 | 7  | 6 | 13|
| Feminine             |                          | 43| 22 | 6 | 12 | 8 | 8 |
| Androgynous          |                          | 46| 28 | 7 | 10 | 8 | 4 |
| Undifferentiated     |                          | 36| 28 | 8 | 9  | 11| 8 |

For adults with masculine type of gender identity, such types of communication focus as dialogical and authoritarian prevailed, indifferent focus was expressed at an average level and manipulative, alterocentric, conforming were represented to a lesser extent.

Adults with feminine type of gender identity most often used dialogical and authoritarian focus, at an average level—alterocentric, and less often they inhered manipulative, conforming and indifferent focus.

For adults with androgynous type of gender identity, such types of communication orientation as dialogical and authoritarian dominated, whereas manipulative, alterocentric, conforming and indifferent were represented to a lesser extent.

Adults with undifferentiated gender identity were primarily prone to dialogical and authoritarian focus in communication, then to a conforming one. To a lesser extent, they were focused on manipulative, alterocentric and indifferent communication.

Authoritarian and indifferent communication focuses were more represented among adults with masculine gender identity. Alterocentric communication focus was most represented among adults with feminine type of gender identity, then with androgynous, undifferentiated and least of all with a masculine one. We should note that dialogical communication focus was primarily characteristic for the androgynous type. Indicators of manipulative and conforming communication focuses prevailed among adults with undifferentiated type of gender identity.

We used Mann-Whitney U-test to identify the significant differences between representatives of different gender groups. Comparison of the communication focus types was carried out according to the following scheme—groups with gender identity types were compared: masculine with feminine; masculine with androgynous; masculine with undifferentiated; feminine with androgynous; feminine with undifferentiated.

Significant differences were found between the indicators of alterocentric type of communication focus in groups with masculine and feminine type of gender identity ($Z = -2.150$, with $p = 0.032$). Adults with pronounced female characteristics were more inclined to “focus” on the interlocutor, his needs, to understand the needs of the other with the goal of their fullest satisfaction, but often indifferent to understanding themselves, sometimes to the detriment of their development and well-being.

Indicators of alterocentric ($Z = -1.985$, with $p = 0.047$) and conforming ($Z = -2.285$, with $p = 0.022$) types of communication focus in groups with masculine and androgynous types of gender identity were significantly different.

Adults who showed high scores for female and male characteristics were more inclined to voluntarily “center” on the interlocutor, focus on his goals, selflessly sacrifice their interests and goals, strive to contribute to the development of the interlocutor to the detriment of themselves, and also to waive equality in communication in favor of the interlocutor, focus on non-critical “consent”, evade opposition, “adapt” to the interlocutor.
Significant differences were identified between the indicators of the conforming type of communication focus in groups with masculine and undifferentiated type of gender identity (Z = -2.454, with p = 0.014). This suggests that among adults with undifferentiated type of gender identity, the indicator of the conforming type of communication focus was significantly higher than among adults with a masculine type.

When comparing types of communication focus in groups with feminine and androgynous, with feminine and undifferentiated, as well as in groups with androgynous and undifferentiated types of gender identity, we found no significant differences according to Mann-Whitney U-test.

As a result of the correlation analysis, only two significant interrelations between gender identity and communication focus were identified.

A significant positive interrelation was found between the indicator of masculine type of gender identity and authoritarian type of communication focus (r = 0.593, with p <0.05). That is, the more male traits were expressed in an adult, the more the tendency to dominate in communication and suppression of the interlocutor was manifested.

A significant negative interrelation was also found between the indicator of feminine type of gender identity and authoritarian type of communication focus (r = -0.717, with p <0.05). In other words, the higher the feminine traits were expressed, the fewer adults showed a tendency to dominate in communication and suppress the interlocutor.

A significant positive interrelation was found between authoritarian communication focus and masculine type of gender identity and negative interrelation with feminine type of gender identity.

4. Conclusions

It was shown that the higher the authoritarian communication focus is expressed, the higher the degree of the masculine type of gender identity and the lower the feminine type. That is, the more adults have a tendency to dominate communication and suppress the interlocutor, the more masculine traits are expressed and the less feminine.

A number of significant differences were identified in groups with different types of gender identity. In particular, between indicators of alterocentric type of communication focus in groups with masculine and feminine type; between indicators of alterocentric and conforming types of communication focus in groups with masculine and androgynous type of identity. In addition, in groups with masculine and undifferentiated type of gender identity, the indicators of conforming type of communication focus significantly differed. That is, adults with pronounced female characteristics were inclined to “center” on the interlocutor, his needs, sometimes to the detriment of their development. The androgynous type was characterized by “centering” on the interlocutor, focusing on his goals, sacrificing one’s own interests and goals for the development of the interlocutor, avoiding opposition, “adjusting” to the interlocutor. For the indifferent type, focus towards reactive communication and a willingness to “adapt” to the interlocutor were inherent.

The results of the study can be used to analyze the communication focus in connection with gender identity, to predict the behavior in communications of men and women with different gender identities.

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