Family Self-Identification of Students: Search for Empirical Indicators

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Abstract—**The problem of constructing currently valid empirical indicators of family self-identification of the Russian university students is analyzed on the basis of the materials of sociological research.**

Keywords—family self-identification; values; university students.

I. INTRODUCTION

> *65% of students answer the question*
> *"If you need to give advice about marriage*
> *to your friend, what would you say?"*
> *with "Go for it, you'll have to do it someday anyway"*
> *The authors*

All Russian researchers of the family and marital life of student youth note the relevance of the family values propaganda among young people and emphasize geopolitical, demographic, socio-economic problems that justify it. Public inquiry generates numerous sociological, pedagogical and socio-psychological studies carried out on national, regional, and local levels.

The relevance of the qualitative measurement of the maturity of family values in the minds of students is worth noting, since it is a performance indicator of educational activities aimed at the formation of family values among university students [8].

Sociological studies of family self-identification of students are few, and the abstract review of all available research on this topic is not the purpose of this article. The authors selected several publications, the contents of which illustrate the authors' research message most clearly.

Without diminishing the substantive value of the studies referred to in this article, the authors note a number of methodological questions they raise:

- What caused the amplitude of the value status of family in different studies?

- What is the basis of the selection of empirical indicators of theoretical concepts, such as "family values", "family attitudes", "motivation for marriage", "social readiness of young people for family, marriage, conscious parenthood", and others?

According to the authors, the problem of the studies devoted to the family values of students is the obvious contradiction between the students' fairly high assessment of the significance of a family as a whole (officially registered marriage, life-long monogamy, large families) and objectively low rates of successful nuptiality and high divorce rates in the student environment.

The authors present an explanatory hypothesis, which suggests that creating empirical indicators in the pathos-declarative style without rooting them into the private, everyday reality of student life is a cause of the aforementioned problem. Based on the concept of N.O. Lossky, who considers values in absolute and relative terms depending on the degree of conjugation with the real world, the authors argue that modern studies of students' family values tend to formulate empirical indicators in an idealized way. As a result, the assessments often capture students' attitudes toward the ideal of a family [4].

II. ORGANIZATION AND METHODS OF RESEARCH

In order to identify empirical indicators of family self-identification of university students, the authors carried out a semantic reconstruction of the results of recent Russian sociological studies of the students' family values, as well as the results of the annual focus group studies conducted by the authors in 2010–2018 at the All-Russian Student Festivals in the field of "Organization of work with youth", held in the Ural Federal University named after the first President of Russia B.N. Yeltsin.

112 students of Russian universities have participated in focus group studies over 8 years (59 young women and 53

young men aged 18-19). The method of qualitative content analysis and the projective method of "unfinished sentences" were used in the study.

III. RESEARCH RESULTS

Modern concepts of sociology usually define "value" as any rational and conscious goal, the desire for which fills this goal with meaning [12]. Family as a value for students reveals its status in the process of selection from the list of value orientations (in the case of a questionnaire – a multivariate question with limited or unlimited options). As the research results show, these lists are not doctrinal, and almost none of their authors provide their justification.

Family is the number one value for all generations of Russians, but youth aged 18-30 value it less (57.4% of respondents) than the middle-aged (31-50 years old) population (67.4%) and the older (over 50 years old) generation (62.7%) [3].

In a large-scale monitoring study of students of the Middle Urals, students were asked to choose the value "family, children" from the following list: health; money, wealth, business; creativity, self-fulfillment; suitable job; independence, freedom; socializing with friends; education, professionalism; pleasure, intimate life; prestige, glory, power; beauty; communion with nature. The following percentages of the number of respondents have been observed over the years: 1999 – 65; 2003 – 60; 2007 – 67; 2009 – 68; 2012 – 48; 2016 – 70 [16].

In a 2011 study of the students of Trans-Baikal universities, the "family" value was chosen by 86% of respondents and took the first place among such terminal values as "financial well-being", "well-paid job", and "health" [13].

The comparison of two specific results ("family" value chosen by 48% of Ural students in 2012 and by 86% of Siberian students in 2011) raises the question of the reliability of research tools. In addition to the aforementioned examples, there is plenty of evidence that the "family" value status observed in a particular study is higher when the list of choices offered to the respondents is narrower.

Thus, based on the analysis of existing studies of family values in the student environment, the authors conclude that the assessment of the "family" value in a more or less detailed list of other values (value orientations) is not accurate and cannot be considered as a valid scientific result outside the context of a specific study.

A significant difference in the assessment of the "family" value among men and women is found in studies on the gender characteristics of the students' attitudes toward family and marriage. Thus, a 2016 survey of Kursk State University students asked the respondents to choose three most significant values for men and women from the following list: family and children; work and career; favorite pastime and hobby; feelings and relationship with a partner; housing; attractive appearance; financial security; communication and connections; freedom and independence; pleasure and enjoyment. According to the survey, 38.6% of students think the value of family and children

is important for men, while 78.6% of students think it is important for women [1].

According to the authors, the students' family values are a component of a more general conceptual construct - the family self-identification of students. "Family self-identification is a multi-stage, active and conscious process of constructing an image of a family in a time perspective ("my family", "my future family", "ideal family") depending on the specific cultural and historical situation. The process is based on structuring the system of value orientations, acquiring the meaning of parent-child and marital relationships, developing the ability for arbitrary regulation and reflection" [7].

A sufficiently developed concept of family self-identification for youth does not currently exist in sociology. Family and family values are interpreted in sociological practice as an institution of social self-identification. Therefore, family self-identification is considered as a derivative of the general social self-identification. Social self-identification is the definition of oneself relative to the criteria for belonging to a certain sphere of social relations and a certain social circle, which are developed in society and adopted by an individual [6]. Family self-identification of a young person is manifested in the choice of a life partner, the form of marriage, a style of communication with a spouse, in the decision to have a child, etc. Thus, family self- identification is the semantic component of the personality, which is aimed at the conscious awareness of parent-child, family, and marital relations and structured by cognitive, motivational, subject-activity, emotional-volitional and value-semantic components. Ideas about the family as a whole, the distribution of roles in the family and the motivations for marriage most often act as empirical indicators of family self-identification in sociological practice.

The question of defining the concept of family by young people was formulated in the All-Russian interuniversity study of 2014-2015. The origin of the options offered to the respondents was not clarified by the authors of the study, which, from the authors' point of view, demonstrates current traditional methodological voluntarism.

As a result, 51.6% of respondents view family as "a manifestation of love for the spouse", while 26.7% of respondents define it as "procreation". The option "shelter from stressful influences of the outside world" was chosen by 10.5% of respondents, "a place for self-realization, self-expression" - by 6.6% of respondents [9].

The authors suggest the use of microsociological, qualitative methods to identify students' subjective ideas about family. "Microanalysis is a convenient "scientific field", a territory for the study of everyday experience in terms of cultural discourse and communication and in terms of motivations and socio-psychological characteristics of the subjects' interaction. This area is convenient for interdisciplinary research of the practice of human interaction, in the process of which models and standards of social behavior of people are revealed" [14].

Qualitative content analysis of transcripts of focus group studies conducted by the authors in 2010–2018 revealed the

following generalized semantic constructs of family in the ideas of students aged 18-19 (Table 1).

TABLE I. GENERALIZED SEMANTIC CONSTRUCTS OF FAMILY IN THE IDEAS OF STUDENTS AGED 18-19

Name of a construct	Examples of content (the informants' style is preserved)
"A happy family is a prerequisite for a successful career"	*"Nowadays, the public service does not employ divorced people…"* *"…if a person does not have a family, is childless, he is less trusted…"* *"All successful and rich people today are parents of many children…"* *"Many people have children for prestige in society…"*
"Family is the natural habitat of a woman"	*"To become a wife and a mother is to fulfill your purpose…"* *"The task of a woman is to be the keeper of the hearth, a man should earn money…"* *'Today it is difficult for a woman to get a good job, it is easier to find a rich husband and have children with him…"* *"It is impossible to raise children without a husband…"*
"Student marriage is a way of economic survival and regular sex life in student years"	*"In student years, there is no money to start a normal family, but we still want to live well…"* *"Parents will help only if you get married, not when you just live with a guy…"* *"You marry, you divorce – but in the meantime, you're fed and have regular sex…"* *"It's more fun together, not so scary, you always have company …"*
"A young family is a condition of concentration of family capital on the starting arrangement of family life"	*"Student marriage gives you more chances to get free help from the state and the university …"* *"More chances to quickly raise money for a down payment on a mortgage, all the relatives will chip in and help…"* *"…You can live with your folks and save money for an apartment …"* *"…you need to get everything [family, children, house] while you are young, while you have someone who can help you…"*
"Family, registered marriage is a necessary and indispensable condition for having children"	*"Children must be born only in wedlock…"* *"If a girl gets pregnant, every self-respecting man should marry her, even if it's not a good time…"* *"To have a baby, I need a man who can provide for it… I need to get married successfully… I don't want to be a single mother"*

Identification and analysis of semantic constructs allows considering the family as an interpretative scheme, a typical everyday knowledge about the family, which not only characterizes the type of social interaction in the family, but also determines the social position of the individual in the main institutions of society. Embodying the ideas about family in action, individuals construct their family life and form social differences based on the family-marital status in society at the same time.

This approach allows formulating theoretical hypotheses on the basis of the current analysis of typical everyday ideas about the family, thereby ensuring the rapid response of sociology to social changes in the family sphere of society. In this sense, semantic constructs of a family are constructs of a typical intersubjective social representation in a sociological study. They are characterized by ordinariness, self-evident nature; traditionalism; the importance of the role and degree of socialization of the subject; representation in the language of everyday life. Thus, the semantic construct of a family is a typical, everyday intersubjective knowledge about the family, an interpretative scheme used by an individual as a guideline in their family life [5].

The distribution of roles in the family is another focus of the research interest, but its empirical tools are ambiguous. Questions like "Who is responsible for making decisions in the family (who is the head of the family)?", "The role of a woman in the family?", "The role of a man in the family?" are popular in the sociological practice of mass students questionnaires. Answers to the first question often use scales with reference to the style of leadership as used in political analysis, or scales identifying the arithmetic share of the influence of one of the spouses on certain segments of family life.

Attempts to identify family repertoires of wives and husbands via quantitative methods of collecting sociological information face the issue of reducing the diverse everyday experience of respondents to subjective research formulations. For example, the aforementioned 2016 study of the Kursk State University students offered to evaluate the significance of the roles of a woman in marriage on a 5-point scale (from 1 – "not at all significant" to 5 – "very significant") according to the following list: mother, childcare provider; housewife, keeper of the hearth; an educated, interesting conversationalist; fashionable, attractive woman; self-realized, successful person; independent woman; working mother; professional in her line of work. The results of the study showed that the "first place" was given to the answer "mother, childcare provider" (4.8 points).

Qualitative content analysis of transcripts of focus group studies conducted by the authors in 2010–2018 revealed the following semantic leitmotifs in the ideas of students aged 18-19 about the distribution of roles in the family (Table 2).

The last component of family self-identification of students is the motivation for marriage. This research aspect is presented by the questions "Why do students marry (start a family)?", "What are the reasons for marriage?" in the sociological practice of student mass questionnaires.

TABLE II. SEMANTIC LEITMOTIFS IN THE IDEAS OF STUDENTS AGED 18-19 ABOUT THE DISTRIBUTION OF ROLES IN THE FAMILY

Wording of the leitmotif	Examples of content (the informants' style is preserved)
"Man is the head of the family and home"	*"Broads are stupid, I'll be responsible for everything…"* *"All financial responsibilities are on a man, so a woman must obey him…"* *"A man must be obeyed…"* *"Whatever it is, it's up to me [the man]…"*
«Man is the head, woman is the neck (a woman is the head of the family and home, keeping and outwardly presenting visible authority of a man)»	«Let him say what he wants, it'll be up to me to decide …» «Not for him to decide, I'll have to deal with everything…» «…it'll be like I said …»
«Man is the head of the family, woman is the mistress of the house»	«Let the girl command the house, I don't stick my nose there….» «A woman should be able to dispose of my funds…» «I'll accept all the demands from my beloved to please her …»
«Husband and wife are equal in the family, and everything must be done together»	«All the housework and parenting should be equally divided…» «Today, men and women work equally, therefore domestic duties should equally be shared…»

Let us present the example. In the 2014-2015 All-Russian interuniversity study, the students provided the following answers to the question "Why do you think students marry, start a family?": to find a person who will support you in any life situation, will take care of you, and you will take care of them; to be near your loved one at all times; to procreate while you're young and healthy; to have regular sexual contacts; to have a comfortable life and comfort in the house; in marriage you learn a lot to achieve something new; not to be lonely; it is prestigious [10].

The answer "to find a person who will support you in any life situation, will take care of you, and you will take care of them" was chosen by 44.6% of respondents. The remaining options were chosen by an insignificant (in terms of validity) percentage of the respondents, which raises the question of the accuracy of used indicators.

The motivation for officially registered marriage is revealed indirectly through the identification of the students' attitude towards the so-called civil union.

At the end of the 19th century in Russia, there were only 4% of men and 5% of women who had not been married during their lifetime [2]. That is, marriage was normal for that period of time. The picture has changed significantly by the end of the twentieth century.

According to the French sociodemographer L. Roussel, who compiled statistics for 5 countries (Denmark, France, Holland, Sweden and USA), the massive spread of actual, but not formalized marriages began in the mid-1970s [11].

In post-Soviet Russia, people in unregistered marriages began to be officially recorded during the 1994 micro-census, which showed that 6.5% of men and 6.7% of women were in unregistered marriages in Russia [15]. According to the data of the All-Russian census of 2002, 9.78% of marriages were not legally registered. A survey of students of the Ural Federal University conducted by the authors in 2016 showed that young people associate "freedom of love" and "freedom of democracy", believing that the choice between an officially registered marriage and "civil union" is the choice of a life strategy (Table 3).

TABLE III. DISTRIBUTION OF STUDENTS' RESPONSES TO THE QUESTION ABOUT THE ATTITUDES TO CIVIL UNIONS

Wording of the answer	% of the number of answers
People have the right to live as they want	60
I don't care	31
I condemn it	9
Total:	100

Answering a direct question about the intention to enter into an official marriage, 63% of respondents expressed this intention unequivocally, and 27% leaned towards a positive response.

As can be seen, the comparison of answers to direct and indirect questions posed by researchers raises doubts about the actual attitudes of students to an officially registered marriage and questions the motivation for marriage. According to the authors, this indicates not only the contradictory nature of the students' family self-identification, but also the inaccuracy of research tools.

Qualitative content analysis of transcripts of focus group studies conducted by the authors in 2010–2018 revealed the following semantic leitmotifs in the ideas of students aged 18-19 about the motivations for marriage (Table 4).

TABLE IV. SEMANTIC LEITMOTIFS IN THE IDEAS OF STUDENTS AGED 18-19 ABOUT THE MOTIVATIONS FOR MARRIAGE

Wording of the leitmotif	Examples of content (the informants' style is preserved)
"Marriage based on love"	*"True love and affection can be found only in marriage…"* *"All life difficulties can be overcome with a loved one…"* *"Only love can let you build a strong family and have healthy children…"*
"Marriage of convenience"	*"I will not go back to my village…"* *"He has an apartment and a car…"* *"I want to be a part of a family that I liked…."*
"A shotgun wedding"	*"If I get pregnant, I will marry anyone who accepts the unborn child"* *"If a girl gets pregnant, every self-respecting man should marry her, even if it's not a good time…"*

As can be seen, the "romantic" motivations for marriage are revealed in the process of interviewing students. It is well known that the importance of love as a motivation for marriage is measured with great difficulty by a questionnaire method.

It is interesting to compare the data that the authors received after the questionnaire survey of UrFU students in 2016 (Table 5) and the study of ideas about the importance of love in marriage, which was conducted in the framework of a focus-group interview and used the method of unfinished sentences.

TABLE V. MEANINGS GIVEN TO THE CONCEPT OF "LOVE"

Answer options	% of the number of surveyed students
care, help, support of each other	34
the first – spiritual intimacy, the second – sexual attraction	28
fidelity to the spouse, child care	18
spiritual intimacy and sexual attraction, equally	15
peace of mind from the knowledge that you are needed, that there is someone to rely on	15
having common goals, dreams, desires	14
the need to take care of each other, to be always there and help each other	11
the first – sexual attraction, the second – spiritual intimacy	5
admiration of the partner	4

The students' answers in the questionnaire demonstrate the relative commitment to "pure" love, which is typical of young people aged 18-19. The authors believe that the research bias is obvious, which is reflected in the formulations of the answers offered to students.

Let us compare the aforementioned results with the results of the study that used the method of unfinished sentences. Love in marriage is: *"illusion"; "invention of romantics"; "a prerequisite for family life"; "a strong feeling at first, but it quickly passes"; "not important"*. Thus, there is not a single more or less authentic match of the results of two studies. The authors believe that this indicates a substantial inaccuracy of the research tools.

IV. CONCLUSION

Summarizing this article, the authors emphasize that they did not plan a comprehensive and diversified analysis of the whole range of empirical indicators of students' family self-identification.

The purpose of the article, which was pursued and, in the authors' opinion, completed, was to identify the relevance of the search for new and adequate to modern realities empirical indicators of family self-identification of students.

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