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ПСИХОЛОГИЯ РАЗВИТИЯ

Coping Strategies in Emerging Adulthood Among Russian Students

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As people grow up, coping strategies shift towards more adaptive styles, but little is known about coping processes in relation to psychological attributes of the new transitional period of “emerging adulthood” (ages 18–25). Applying the cultural-historical theory developed by L.S. Vygotsky and the ideas of J. Arnett’s neo-Eriksonian cultural theory of development, we have investigated the parameters of emerging adulthood (identity exploration and self-focus; negativity and instability; personal freedom; experimentation and possibilities; feeling in-between; and other-focus) as peculiar features of social situation of development related to coping strategies among Russian students. The sample consisted of data obtained from 510 students, aged 18 to 25 (40,1% male), studying at universities in cities of Moscow and Tula, Russia. The study presents the measurements of emerging adulthood (IDEA-R) and coping strategies (WCQ) using methods adapted to the Russian research pool. The findings suggest that prolongation of the transitional period to adulthood is associated with an increase in avoidant and emotion-focused coping strategies. We have found that the degree of anxiety caused by transitional instability and self-focus of young adults could work as predictors of attempts to overcome difficulties. Among them are problem denial, inflated expectations, suppression of emotions and self-blaming. The degree of openness to experimenting with life, optimism about the future, identity exploration, and other-focus worked as predictors of problem-solving, positive rethinking of the challenging situation, and seeking social support. We noticed that age and gender factors reduce the degree of dependence of coping strategies on psychological attributes of emerging adulthood. The study materials contribute to the understanding of the processes the age-related psychological development of modern youth deals with.

Keywords: age, social situation of development, age period, transitional period, emerging adulthood, youth, adulting, students, coping.

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Копинг-стратегии в период формирующейся взрослости у российских студентов

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По мере взросления копинги изменяются в сторону более адаптивных стилей, но мало известно о процессах совладания в связи с психологическими особенностями нового переходного периода — формирующейся взрослости (18–25 лет). Через призму интеграции положений культурно-исторической теории Л.С. Выготского и идей неозриксоновской культурной теории развития Дж. Арнета мы исследовали параметры формирующейся взрослости (исследование идентичности и сосредоточенность на себе, негативность и нестабильность, личная свобода, эксперименты и возможности, чувство «между», ориентация на других) как особенности социальной ситуации развития в связи с копингами среди российских студентов. Выборку составили данные, полученные от 510 студентов в возрасте от 18 до 25 лет (40,1% — мужчины), обучающихся в университетах Москвы и Тулы. В исследовании измерялись показатели формирующейся взрослости (IDEA-R) и копингов (WCQ) с использованием адаптированных к российской выборке методик. Полученные результаты дают возможность говорить о том, что удлинение переходного периода взросления ассоциировано с повышением избегающих и эмоционально фокусированных копингов. Мы обнаружили, что степень тревоги от нестабильности переходного периода и сосредоточенность на себе у формирующихся взрослых являются предикторами попыток преодолеть трудности за счет отрицания проблемы, неоправданных ожиданий, подавления эмоций и самообвинения, а степень их открытости для экспериментов с жизнью, оптимизма в отношении будущего, исследования идентичности и ориентации на другого — предикторами планирования решения и положительного переосмысления проблемной ситуации, поиска социальной поддержки. Наблюдался эффект влияния возраста и пола на снижение меры зависимости копингов от психологических особенностей формирующейся взрослости. Материалы исследования помогают понять процессы, лежащие в основе возрастано-психологического развития современной молодежи.

Ключевые слова: возраст, социальная ситуация развития, возрастной период, переходный период, формирующаяся взрослость, молодежь, взросление, студенты, копинг.

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Introduction

In the 21st century, post-industrial society provides young people with more choices and poses challenges with high educational requirements, it modifies the process of growing up. Modern people increasingly delay social transitions (graduation and starting a career, marriage and parenthood) and remain financially dependent on their parents until the age of 25–29. The beginning of adulthood — ages 18–25 — is a time of increased opportunities and developmental risks [20], the acuteness of which is evident in the context of current problems and challenges — COVID pandemic, cybersocialization, transformation of education and labor market, global crises: young people are exposed to academic, social, and

professional stresses, they learn new roles and resources, become involved in new contexts and learn to cope with problems [2; 30]. In an attempt to understand the dynamics of adulting, researchers currently describe the period between the ages of 18–25 as a *transitional period of emerging adulthood*, involving social, mental, and personality changes [5; 31], as well as ongoing processes of neurobiological and physiological maturation [12], and as a period of “delayed adulthood” — a time of delayed transition from adolescence to adulthood [21; 30].

We contribute to the discussion of the *scientific status* of the issue of emerging adulthood by providing insight into the age-specific psychological features of the period through the lens of the cultural-historical theory [1]. In our opinion, the tenets of L.S. Vygotsky’s cultur-

al-historical theory of development relating to age can be applied to interpret the features of emerging adulthood [21] different from the development of adults [22] and adolescents [16]:

1) *identity exploration* (search of identity, choosing among alternatives for the development of one's Self in the domain of career, interpersonal relations, ideology, etc.);

2) *experimentation* (biographical experimentation with different roles and directions in life) and *possibilities* (personal freedom and awareness of the unprecedented opportunity to build a life according to one's own plan; optimism about one's goals, potential interpersonal relationships, and career);

3) *negativity and instability* (excitement in exploring life's possibilities is combined with anxiety from the uncertainty of choosing a strategy in love, work, residency, etc.);

4) *self-focus* (refusal to commit to others, self-centeredness, desire to protect one's longer path to adulthood than that of the previous generation); and

5) *feeling in-between* (a liminal state of transition, when adolescence ends and preconditions for adulthood emerge).

Taking into account the theoretical and methodological differences in the theories (L.S. Vygotsky's cultural-historical theory and J. Arnett's cultural theory of development), we tried to integrate the ideas into a consistent unity, preserving their strengths.

L.S. Vygotsky noted "...the exclusion of the period of development, usually called youth, covering the ages after 17–18 and up to the onset of final maturity" [1, p. 19] from the pattern of child development. However, in the socio-cultural practices and institutions of socialization that have undergone changes in recent decades, a new adulthood is formed. The current understanding of emerging adulthood as a transitional period reflects L.S. Vygotsky's idea of *environment as a source of development*. Cultural and social determinants that define the content of emerging adulthood are noted by J. Arnett, who emphasizes the social expectations of society regarding the moratorium on the adoption of adult responsibilities by twenty-year-olds: modern society allows young people to gradually settle down into the roles of adult life [30].

The key to understanding the specificity of age, according to L.S. Vygotsky, is the social situation of development: "...by the beginning of each age period a completely peculiar, age-specific, exceptional, unique and unparalleled relationship between the child and the surrounding reality, primarily social, is developed" [1, p. 24]. Modern Russian psychology [7] substantiates the use of the explanatory potential of the construct of "social situation of development" in determining the content and direction of human development at all stages of ontogenesis, including adulthood. But among the pe-

culiar features of the social situation of development of young people aged 18–25 modern researchers outline a rather wide range of parameters.

We make an attempt to analyze the features of emerging adulthood L.S. Vygotsky's ideas which express the young people's subjective assessments of their relations with the social environment, as *characteristics of the social situation of development*.

The arguments in favor of our assumption can be supported by cross-cultural data obtained using the IDEA (Inventory of the Dimensions of Emerging Adulthood) scale [21]. The structural variations of emerging adulthood factors over the last 16 years reveal: 1) their consistent decline from the beginning to the end of age [22; 30]; 2) imprecise replication of the structure in samples of more than 20 countries — America, Europe, Asia and Africa, etc. [16; 24], but dependence on socialization conditions [8]. Similar psychological characteristics are observed by Russian researchers [3]. The authors [31] prove the necessity of socio-economic and psychological support from adults for the positive trajectory of personal development (in respect of education, profession, interpersonal relations, and health) during the period of emerging adulthood.

The features of emerging adulthood reflect the culturally mediated relations of young people with the social world, rooted in established conditions and traditions. *The contradiction of the social situation of development* occurs in the space of "delayed adulthood": with the full range of opportunities and rights to be an adult, feeling the need to rely on their resources when making decisions in an uncertain environment, young people do not see themselves as adults, experimenting with increased opportunities and experiencing anxiety and worry.

Understanding the features of emerging adulthood as the peculiar features of the social situation of development of 18–25-year-olds in the context of cultural-historical theory allows us to present a scientifically-based view of the complex modern adulting processes, which can become a significant contribution to the cross-cultural study of Russian youth.

Let us illustrate the assumption of understanding the emerging adulthood as characteristics of the social situation of development of 18–25-year-olds *by the example of the links between the features of emerging adulthood and coping strategies*.

Modern psychologists proceed from the understanding of coping in the context of transactional, contextual, and process-oriented approaches [29] — as "constantly changing cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person" [14, p. 141]. Many psychological works devoted to the study of coping among college students emphasize social and situational factors, as well as biological and personality predictors. A complete review is beyond the scope of

the current study, so we will focus on those that provide age-specific characteristics of coping in emerging adults.

Most comparative studies that included a group of 18–25-year-olds among their participants *ignore the age-specific psychological characteristics* of the group. Only a few works provide data on the role of age in coping shifts. The mediating function of coping between perfectionism and academic adaptation [6], anxiety and executive functions [18] in students was revealed. The age determination of coping from the perspective of identity status [20; 25] and developing spirituality [27] was substantiated. The dependence of coping on gender has been demonstrated: young women more often seek social support and are more emotional [10; 13; 17], and young men use humor [10] and rational styles [17], but by the end of emerging adulthood there are no differences. With age, there is a tendency for problem-focused coping to increase and escape-avoidance coping to decline [13]. Problem-focused and meaning-focused coping increase at the age of 17-24, while emotion-focused coping declines [9; 15]. Self-concept dynamics do not bias coping choices after age 18 [23], but variability in the trajectory of ego development [28] and the degree of identity cohesion/diffusion in 18–25-year-olds influence the coping choices [23; 26]. Emerging adults are less resilient to coping with mental health problems and more prone to maladaptive coping than older generations [11]; and although, like adolescents, they often resort to problem solving and support seeking, they predominantly turn to cognitive strategies [19; 29]. As in adolescence, mothers' closeness and care mediates the use of problem-focused coping strategies by emerging adults [27; 30]. In general, emerging adults' coping behaviors change toward more adaptive strategies [19]. But no studies of *the links between the features of emerging adulthood and coping strategies* are available.

With the present study, we clarify the age-specific features of coping at the age of 18 to 25, providing our answers to the questions why and how the features of emerging adulthood as characteristics of the social situation of development affect the choice of coping.

Research agenda

Hypothesis of empirical study – the factors of emerging adulthood act as predictors of the choice of maladaptive and adaptive coping strategies at the age of 18-25.

Purpose of empirical study is to examine the coping strategies associated with the factors of emerging adulthood.

Sample. The study involved 510 people aged 18–25 studying at universities in Moscow (n = 300) and Tula (n = 210). The median age was 19 years. Of these, 59,9% (n = 305) were women and 40,1% (n = 206) were men; 70,8% (n = 361) were not employed; 78,5% (n = 400) were financially dependent on their parents; 50% (n = 255) lived with their parents; 98% (n = 499) were not married and had no children.

Procedure. The survey was conducted online (2023).

Instruments. The IDEA-R [3] and the WCQ [4] assessment tools adapted to the Russian research pool were applied.

Data processing was carried out applying the correlation analysis (*r*-test), stepwise multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA), *t*-test, and multiple linear regression (least squares method – LSM).

Results

Descriptive statistics and correlations between factors are listed in Table 1.

Negativity and instability are associated with maladaptive coping, whereas identity exploration/self-focus, personal freedom, experimentation/possibilities, and other-focus are associated with adaptive coping.

Table 2 presents the data from the analysis of variance. Only variables with statistically significant results are presented. Age groups are formed on the basis of chronological age.

The data given in Table 2 demonstrate the links between age, coping strategies (problem-focused coping, seeking so-

Table 1

Descriptive statistics and correlations between emerging adulthood factors and coping strategies (N=510)

Variables of emerging adulthood	M(SD)	Variables of coping strategies							
		C	D	S	SSS	AR	E	PPS	PP
Aggregate	101,39(11,60)	,22**	,11**	,17**	,12**	,16**	,20**	,11**	,22**
Identity exploration / self-focus	35,46(4,60)	,14**	–,01	,13**	,21**	,06	,03	,22**	,23**
Negativity/instability	22,45(4,96)	,21**	,25**	,20**	,00	,25**	,39**	–,17**	,00
Personal freedom	13,56(2,40)	,04	–,06	,05	,08*	–,04	–,07	,19**	,18**
Experimentation/possibilities	14,26(1,96)	,19**	–,02	,06	,17**	,04	,00	,22**	,27**
Feeling in-between	7,00(1,30)	,10*	,10*	,08	,03	,10*	,17**	,00	,14**
Other-focus	8,66(2,09)	,05	–,02	,03	,03	,02	–,05	,13**	,16**

Note: C – confrontive coping; D – distancing; S – self-controlling; SSS – seeking social support; AR – accepting responsibility; E – escape-avoidance; PPS – planful problem-solving; PP – positive reappraisal; M (SD) – arithmetic mean (standard deviation); “*” – two-tailed significance test $p \leq ,05$; “**” – two-tailed significance test $p \leq ,01$.

cial support) and features of emerging adulthood (experimentation/possibilities, feeling in-between and other-focus). We found the following age and gender differences: *feeling in-between* (mean values range from 6.8 (18 years) to 4.0 (25 years) for men and from 7.5 (18 years) to 4.1 (25 years) for women) and *seeking social support* (mean values range from 9.4 (18 years) to 8.4 (25 years) for men and from

11.5 (18 years) to 8.5 (25 years) for women) *decline more dynamically with age in women than in men.*

The results of regression analysis are shown in Table 3. Only significant factors data are given.

Although regression indexes are low, the contributions of emerging adulthood factors to the variability of copings are observed.

Table 2

Analysis of variance (MANOVA) of emerging adulthood factors and coping strategies with age and gender (N=510)

Variables	Model significance tests		Note
	F	p	
<i>Age</i>			
Experimentation/possibilities	1,82	,02	Declines with age
Feeling in-between	3,69	,000	
Coping – seeking social support	1,68	,03	
Other-focus	1,70	,03	Increases with age
Coping – planful problem-solving	2,08	,02	
<i>Gender/Age</i>			
Coping – seeking social support	1,70	,04	-
Feeling in-between	1,80	,03	-

Table 3

Results of regression analysis of emerging adulthood factors and coping strategies (N=510)

Predictors	F-test	Model significance tests		
		β-coefficient (standardized)	t-test	R-squared
<i>Response variable – confrontive coping</i>				
Negativity/instability	F = 7,26 (p = ,000)	,20	t = 4,39 (p = ,000)	,09
Experimentation/possibilities		,17	t = 3,28 (p = ,001)	
<i>Response variable – distancing coping</i>				
Negativity/instability	F = 6,09 (p = ,000)	,26	t = 5,51 (p = ,000)	,06
<i>Response variable – self-controlling coping</i>				
Negativity/instability	F = 5,04 (p = ,000)	,21	t = 4,46 (p = ,000)	,05
<i>Response variable – seeking social support coping</i>				
Identity exploration/self-focus	F = 5,23 (p = ,000)	,22	t = 3,76 (p = ,000)	,06
Experimentation/possibilities		,12	t = 2,28 (p = ,02)	
<i>Response variable – accepting responsibility coping</i>				
Negativity/instability	F = 6,33 (p = ,000)	,25	t = 5,23 (p = ,000)	,07
<i>Response variable – escape-avoidance coping</i>				
Negativity/instability	F = 18,15 (p = ,000)	,40	t = 9,15 (p = ,000)	,19
Other-focus		-,16	t = - 3,58 (p = ,000)	
<i>Response variable – planful problem-solving coping</i>				
Identity exploration/self-focus	F = 10,20 (p = ,000)	,15	t = 2,60 (p = ,01)	,11
Negativity/instability		-,20	t = -4,33 (p = ,000)	

Predictors	F-test	Model significance tests		
		β -coefficient (standardized)	t-test	R-squared
Experimentation/possibilities		,14	t = 2,72 (ρ = ,01)	
Other-focus		,10	t = 2,31 (ρ = ,02)	
<i>Response variable – positive reappraisal coping</i>				
Experimentation/possibilities	F = 8,66 (ρ = ,000)	,20	t = 3,90 (ρ = ,000)	,09

Discussion

This study expands the scope of previous research in the psychology of adulting and adulthood, offering a new perspective on the features of emerging adulthood, investigated in foreign developmental psychology as measurable parameters of the social situation of development of young people aged 18-25, in line with L.S. Vygotsky's cultural-historical theory. We see the heuristic possibilities of the proposed research paradigm in describing the age patterns of adulting of modern youth.

The study confirmed the assumption of a change in coping strategies associated with the age-specific psychological features of emerging adulthood: not only the chronological age, but also the peculiar perception of the age period of 18-25 years as the time of “delayed adulthood” determine the transition of growing up youth to more adaptive coping strategies and the rejection of maladaptive ones. The results are consistent with the findings of the previous studies [15; 18; 25; 28] and support our hypothesis about the social situation of development. In the system of links between the individual features of the relationship between young people and social reality, embodied in the parameters of emerging adulthood, a resource for coping with the challenges of this transition – overcoming the contradiction of the social situation of development – is revealed.

Chronological age seems to be a conditional factor of change, since coping dynamics may differ in specific situations and in different individuals. A possible explanation for the role of age may be that over time, inclusion in adult life requires more initiative, responsibility, independence, autonomy, when coping development becomes arbitrarily controlled.

The age and gender differences in coping found by us are consistent with the results of the previous studies [9; 13; 15], demonstrating a greater tendency of women to focus on social support and to more quickly

overcome the feeling in-between, which is probably due to the greater sociopsychological adaptation of women and their earlier psychological maturation compared to men.

The limitation is related to the selected strategy of the empirical study. We proposed an explanation of coping on the basis of the peculiarities of the social situation of development in the period of emerging adulthood. But some issues remain unresolved. First, the results do not allow conclusions about age or situational changes over time. Second, the study did not address all coping processes. Third, the limited study sampling does not allow for broad generalization of the results. This requires further empirical research into the social situation of development of emerging adulthood.

Conclusion

1. The features of the transitional period of emerging adulthood (identity exploration and self-focus; negativity and instability; personal freedom; experimentation and possibilities; feeling in-between; and other-focus) as measurable parameters of the social situation of development of young people ages 18-25 in the context of L.S. Vygotsky's cultural-historical theory were substantiated, which allowed us to present a scientifically grounded view of the complex modern adulting processes in Russian youth, with account taken of the sociocultural context, contributing to the cross-cultural research on age development.

2. Age-specific psychological features of coping related to the perception of emerging adulthood as parameters of the social situation of development of college students ages 18-25 were empirically substantiated. Identity exploration, experimentation and possibilities, and other-focus were shown to be the predictors of adaptive coping strategies, while negativity/instability was a predictor of maladaptive coping strategies.

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