

IDENTITY CRISIS: FROM IDENTITY CRISIS TO MENTAL DISORDERS AND THEIR CONNECTION TO AGE

Aivis Dombrovskis

Introduction

Identity or self awareness is an essential part of human mental health indicators and if these identity awareness processes are in disorder, unclear then one can speak about disorders in human mental health.

At first it should be noted that in the initial stage of identity research it is considered as subjective self feeling, on values based body of characteristic features. According to James, human character comes out in such mental or moral condition where he feels himself working or living most intensively and perfectly. During such moments a man hears some inner voice and it indicates that this is man's real essence (Ericson, 1998).

Ericson maintains that James by the word «character» meant identity awareness (Ericson, 1998). So we can assume that the first researcher of identity is James but the notion and content has been defined by Ericson. Ericson, as a follower of psychodynamic school, defined identity mainly as unconscious process that unites personality in the whole and makes connection between individual and social world (Ericson, 1998).

According to Ericsson, identity can be characterized by answer to the question: «Who am I?» He also points out that identity is not always positive, there are cases when the individual in order to save the feeling of wholeness can choose negative identity, for example, by identifying himself with an oppressor himself (Ericson, 1998).

Speaking about maintaining identity wholeness and identity changes, we should indicate the conclusions made by L.Putilova and A.Kazanska. L.Putilova examines the essence of identity from dialectic aspect and considers that identity diversity is determined by mutual determinism between subjective and objective reality; she distinguishes formal identity and real identity. She also points out that any thing or phenomenon has a tendency to change and develop but identity should stay static and fixed. It means that what you think should coincide with what you speak but if the person thinks one way but speaks another or if his action doesn't coincide with what he speaks but if the person thinks one way but speaks another or if his action doesn't coincide with his inner impulses then identity wholeness is hampered (Putilova, 1999). But A.Kazanska points out that person's identity should be simultaneously plastic, stable and steady, it should be submitted to comparisons but it can't «disintegrate» in them. It means that a person with weak identity can be identified with some other person or group up to such degree that he loses his own identity. People with strong identity are not afraid to approach other people or groups but at the same time they keep their essence (A.Kazanska, 1998).

A. Waterman indicates that identity is formed during period of identity crisis when reevaluation of various aims, values and beliefs takes place as well as looking for alternatives and new aims in life, new essence for life (Waterman, 1985). Such process is influenced by external social conditions but the impact on an individual is also individual (Raskin, 2002).

Ericson maintains that true awareness of inner identity appears at late teenage years when the individual has to be aware of self identity. But in case when circumstances don't allow to be aware of identity these individuals remain at psychological development level of teenagers or young people because only the ability to be versatile and exist in society's diversity is a sign of individual's integrity and «psychological wholeness» or perfection (Ericson, 1998) or a sign of person's completed identity. At the same time E.Ericson, S.Whitbourne and G.Breakwell consider that person's identity is forming throughout whole life and it is not a static but dynamic process (Ericson, 1998, Whitbourne, 1980, Breakwell, 2010).

The notion of identity crisis was introduced by E.Ericson (Ericson, 1998) indicating that insecurity and anxiety that appears when teenagers become young people create uncertainty and confusion about their present and future, about their role in further life. But A.Robbins and A.Wilner describe identity crisis experienced by college students when after studies they have a new life stage (Robbins and Wilner, 2001). In social psychology (Shaffer, 2009) identity crisis is described as insecurity and even fears about changes when, young persons are not children any more, and it creates uncertainty and confusion about their future roles in life.

Especially important is life after studies at school because as J.Arnett points out young people at the age from 18 to 25 face a lot of changes. They have to study new opportunities in the fields of relationships, work, political orientation and set goals (Arnett, 2000), start professional career (Rossi and Herbert, 2011).

Identity crisis is an integral part in forming identity (Ericson, 1998, Adams 2007). During transition period young people ask themselves about their future, as well as seek answers to the questions about career choice, about religious beliefs and moral values, political views, marriage and children, when and how much be involved in some social groups (Shaffer, 2009).

Identity crisis is not all-embracing but it can refer to some part of identity. According to D.Shaffer only 5% of respondents consider that such identity issues as professional choice, attitude to gender roles, religious affiliation and political ideology match the same identity status as classified by Marcia (Marcia, 1980) but for other 95% these categories are «scattered» on different status (Shaffer, 2009).

Identity crisis can happen also to people of middle age (Levinson, Darro, Klein, Levinson and McKee, 1978, Heckhausen, 2001). L.Hernandez with his colleagues has studied indicators of identity crisis using data from Identity Distress Survey (IDS) (Berman, Montgomery & Kurtines, 2004), data about different social groups (gender, race, ethnicity) and immigrant groups. Statistically important differences were determined by gender not race, ethnicity or immigrant group.

Analyzing IDS subcategory Identity Disorders (American Psychiatric Association, 1987) they stated that 23% of female respondents had identity disorders but male respondents didn't have at all. Using IDS subcategory Identity Problems (American Psychiatric Association, 1994) it was established that 35% of female respondents and 7,5% of male respondents had identity problems. The findings showed that women with identity disorders had also statistically significant indicators in antisocial behavior and stubbornness (Hernandez et al., 2006).

Identity crisis situation can arise also when a person gets into conflict situations with his self presentation, when at once you have to make a decision which self-image to

present before 2 different groups who earlier were presented with 2 essentially different self-images. E.g., a woman being with her girlfriends presents herself as a careless, unconcerned being but at that moment university professor joins the group. The young lady had presented herself to the professor as a quiet, hard-working, emotionally balanced and perfect student (Terry, Sweeny & Shepperd, 2007).

According to Shepperd, identity crisis is closely connected with female students families because they feel alienated from their families and often have diffusive identity (according to Marcia identity statuses) contrary to the females who have sincere and supportive relationships with their parents who support them in finding their identity; as a result these women establish their own identity (Shaffer, 2009).

Selection

The survey processes and analyses data of female respondents (N=501), first-year students from Latvian higher schools at the age from 18 to 27 years (M=20, 33; SD=1937).

Most of the selected respondents (44,7%) are at the age from 19 (N=199) to 20 (N=117) years. It corresponds to time when after school young people start studies at higher schools, usually at the age of 18 or 19.

Instruments

Table 1. Retest measurement data of Research Instrument - Identity Crisis Survey Test

Research instruments	Subcategories	Retest measurement	
		Mutual item correlation ratio (Rs)	Bilateral significance level
Identity crisis survey	ICs - Identity crisis survey	1	p < 0,01
	DxIIIR– Identifying crisis	1	p < 0,01
	DxIV– Identity problems	1	p < 0,01
	1. Long-term goals	1	p < 0,01
	2. Career choice	1	p < 0,01
	3. Friendship	1	p < 0,01
	4. Sexuality	1	p < 0,01
	5. Religion	1	p < 0,01
	6. Values	1	p < 0,01
7. Group loyalty	1	p < 0,01	

*Dombrovskis, 2014a

Identity crisis survey (Identity Distress Survey - IDS). (Berman, Montgomery, Kurtines, 2004) determines the level of identity crisis connected with unsolved/unfulfilled issues of identity. The survey is based on DSM-III-R (APA, 1987) identity crisis criteria but it can be used also to determine DSM-IV (APA, 1994) identity problem criteria

because as mentioned by ICS authors (Berman, Montgomery & Kurtines, 2004) not always identity problems can be defined as identity crisis.

Identity crisis survey helps to determine how young people cope with serious complications in identity development as well as allows to study the connection between identity problems and other fields of psychological functioning areas (Berman, Montgomery & Kurtines, 2004).

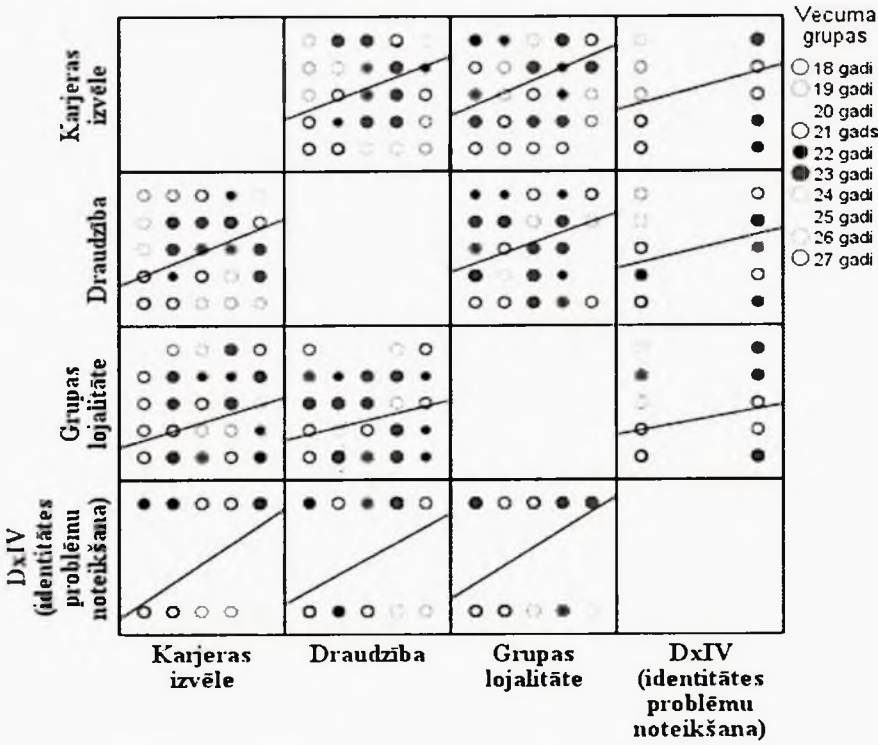
For this research ICS was chosen to find the answer of research issue: the connection between identity crisis and sociodemographic indicator of female students age. In the ICS respondents have to give answers to 10 questions: the first 9 questions according to Likert's scale - (1) not at all, (2) slightly, (3) average, (4) very much, (5) very, very much, indicating how much they have been disappointed worried about such identity issues: long-term goals, career choice, friendship, sexual orientation and behavior, religion, values or opinions as well as loyalty group. The last questions No.10 should be answered according to specific estimation scale with time, divided by months (Hernandez, Montgomery & Kurtines, 2006). This question allows to determine how long the respondent was worried about these issues and to what extent these symptoms hamper everyday activities. Inner coordination of the original survey version shows Kronbach's alpha 0.84 but retested Kronbach's alpha 0.82. Original survey shows convergent validity with other identity development measurements (Berman, Montgomery & Kurtines, 2004). The direct questions of identity crisis are in the first part of the survey (questions 1 - 7), their content is linked to career choice, friendship, sexual orientation and behavior, religion, values and opinions. The other 3 questions (8, 9, 10) do not refer to particular measurements of identity crisis but to DxIIIR (from DSMIII-R) (Identification of identity crisis) and DxIV from DSMIV (Identification of identity problems (Berman, Montgomery & Kurtines, 2004).

Question No.8: Please, assess your general level of discomfort (how undisposed did you feel) while answering the previous questions on the whole: question No.9: Please, assess the level of insecurity in these situations on the whole and how it has hampered you (for instance, how this insecurity prevented you from doing necessary things or being happy); question No.10: How long (if it happened) have you been disappointed, worried about these issues on the whole? (Hernandez, Montgomery & Kurtines, 2006; Dombrovskis, 2014a, Dombrovskis, 2014 b).

Findings of the survey and discussion.

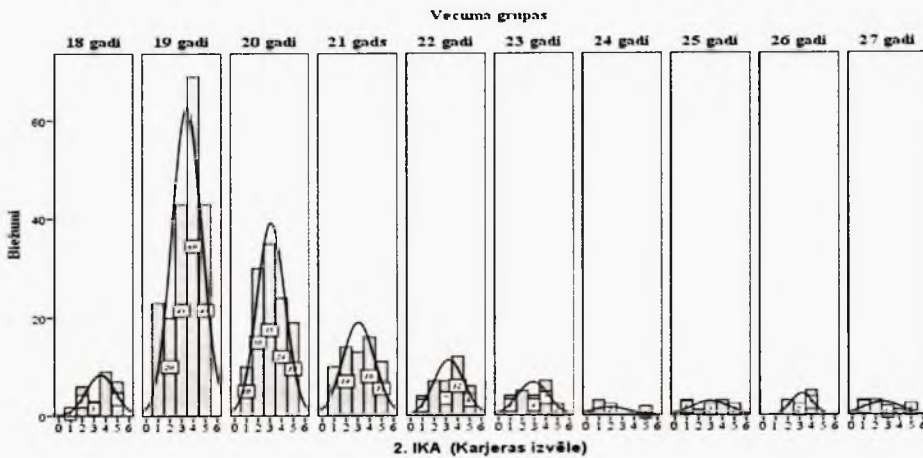
The age group of female respondents (see table 1) shows negative correlation to Career choice ($R_s = -0.162$; $p = 0.00$), Friendship ($R_s = 0.090$; $p = 0.44$); Group loyalty ($R_s = -0.116$; $p=0.09$, Dx IV(identifying problems of identity) ($R_s = -0.132$; $p = 0.132$).

Table 1. Connection of sociodemographic indicator Age/group with indicators of identity crisis.



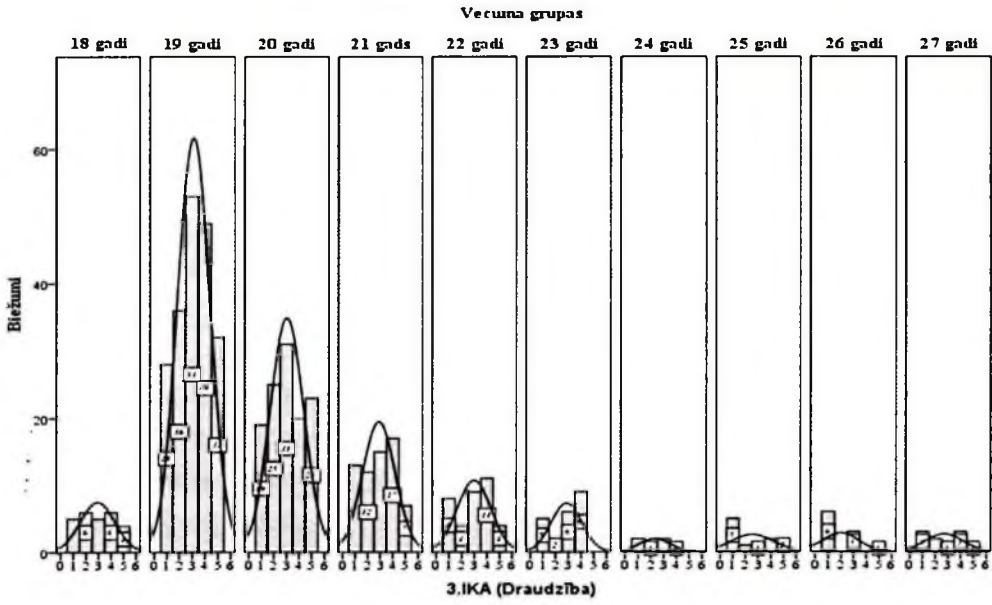
Career choice - karjeras izvēle
 Friendship - draudzība
 Group loyalty - grupās lojalitāte
 Determining identity problems - DxIV (identitātes problēmas noteikšana)
 Age groups - vecuma groups
 years - gadi

Table 2. Indicator of identity crisis - Career choice - its division by age groups.



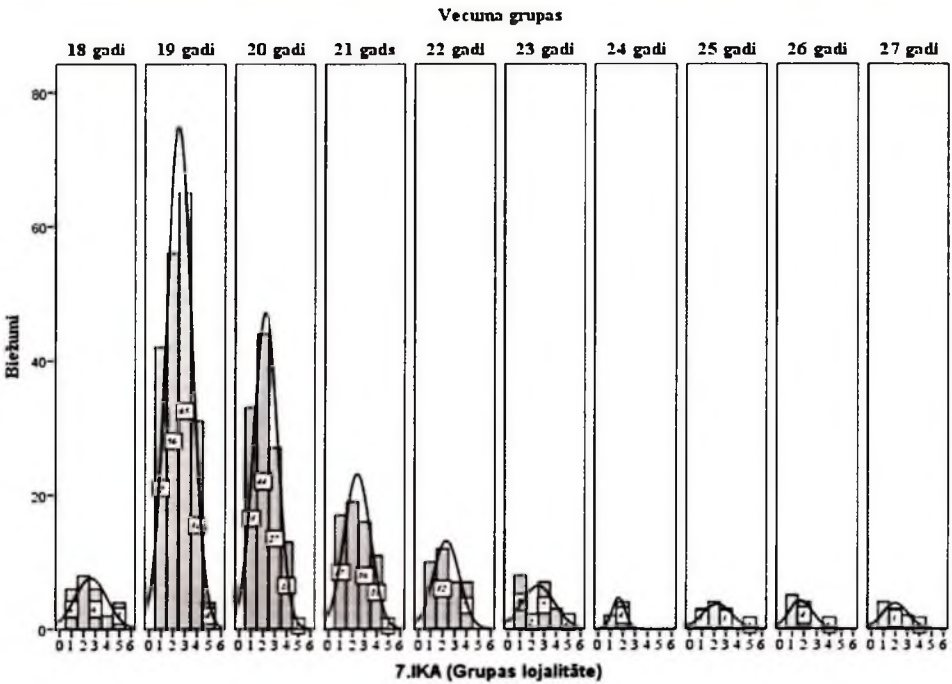
Age groups - vecuma grupas
 Years – gadi
 Frequency - biežumi
 2 ICS (career choice) - 2.IKA (karjeras izvēle)

Table 3. Indicator of identity crisis - Friendship - its division by age groups.



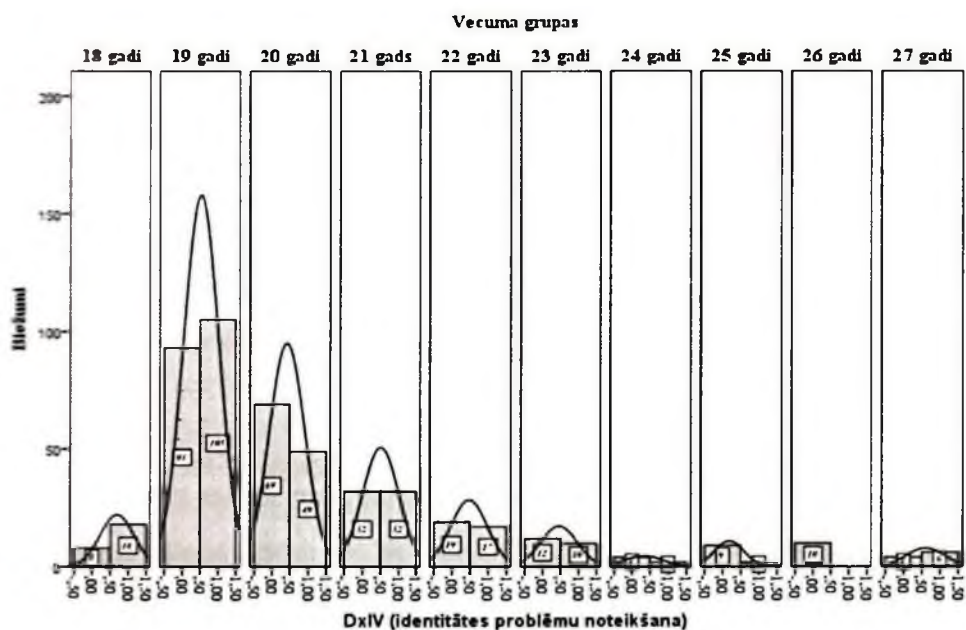
Age groups - vecuma grupas
 Frequency - biežumi
 3. ICS (Friendship) - 3.IKA (Draudzība)

Table 4. Indicator of Identity crisis - Group loyalty - its division by age groups.



Age groups - vecuma grupas
 Frequency - biežumi
 7 ICS (group loyalty) 1. IKA (Grupas lojalitāte)

Table 5. Indicator of identity crisis - Identity problem determination - its division by age groups.



Age groups - vecuma grupas

Years - gadi

Frequency - biežumi

DxIV (Determination of identity problems)

DxIV (identitātes problēmu noteikšana)

The findings (see tables 2, 3, 4, 5) show that identity crisis for female students is connected with their age and choice of future career, friendship, belonging to some social group. The most vivid indicators are for students at the age 19, when the age rise indicators decrease. It demonstrates that identity is a variable and dynamic process (Ericson, 1998, Whitbourne, 1986, Breakwell, 2010) and identity is formed during identity crisis period (Waterman, 1985).

Identity crisis indicators for female students: sexual orientation, behaviour, religion, values and opinions did not show any statistically significant connection with students' age, that was indicated by D.Shaffer (Shaffer, 2009) that identity crisis is not all-embracing but can be linked only with some parts of identity, in this case connected only with career, choice, friendship and group loyalty.

The fact that connection of identity crisis indicators is most vivid at the age 19 and then decreases because probably students are more aware of their goals. And it reduces uncertainty and confusion about their future career. Students get new friends and belong to some particular social group, as pointed out by Arnett (Arnett, 2000), Rosi and Hebert, 2011) uncertainty about future relationships, goals and professional career and choice of social group (Shaffer, 2009) make uncertainty and confusion about their future (Ericson, 1998) but with time when students get older these Identity crisis indicators change.

Conclusions

1. Age of Latvian higher school female students is connected with identity crisis when choosing career, friendship and social group.
2. When Latvian female students get older there are changes in identity crisis indicators in career choice, friendship, group loyalty and determination of general identity problems, the most vivid connection is at the age of 19.
3. Indicators of female students' identity crisis and mental health are not static, they are dynamic and variable.

Limitations

This survey includes only female students from first-year at the age from 18 to 27 years, but male students are not included therefore there is no information about indicators of identity crisis for male students and their connection with age.

Bibliography:

1. Adams, G. R. (2007). Identity status. *Encyclopedia of Social Psychology*. SAGE Publications.
2. Arnett, J. J. (2000). Emerging adulthood: A theory of development from the late teens through the twenties. *American Psychologist*, 55, 469–480.
3. American Psychiatric Association. (1987). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (3rd ed. rev.). Washington.
4. American Psychiatric Association (1994). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (4rd ed. rev.). Washington.
5. Berman, S. L., Montgomery M. J., & Kurtines W. M. (2004). The development and validation of a measure of identity distress. *Identity: An International Journal Of Theory and Research*, 4, 1–8.
6. Breakwell, G. M. (2010). Resising representations and identity processes. *Online Journal. Papers on Social Representations*, 19(6.1–6.11).
7. Dombrovskis A., (2014a). Latvijas sieviešu feministiskās identitātes dimensijas prognozējošie faktori., Daugavpils Universitāte., Npublicēta disertācija.
8. Dombrovskis A., (2014b). Identitātes krīzes aptaujas psihometriskie rādītāji Latvijas vidē. Sociālo Zinātņu Vēstnesis. DU Sociālo Zinātņu Fakultāte. Sociālo Pētījumu Institūts., Daugavpils Universitāte. 1 – (18), pp.60 -81.
9. Eriksons, E. H., (1998). *Identitāte: Jaunība un krīze*. Jumava.
10. Heckhausen, J. (2001). Adaptation and resilience in midlife. In M. E. Lachman (Ed.), *Handbook of midlife development* (pp. 345–394). New York: Wiley.
11. Hernandez, L., Montgomery, M. J., & Kurtines, W. M. (2006). Identity distress and adjustment problems in at-risk adolescents. *Identity: An International Journal of Theory and Research*, 6, 27–33.
12. Levinson, D. J., Darrow, C., Klein, E. B., Levinson, M. H., & McKee, B. (1978). *The seasons of a man's life*. New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf.
13. Raskin, P. (2002). Identity in adulthood: Reflections on recent theory and research. *Identity: An International Journal of Theory and Research*, 2(1), 101 – 108.
14. Robbins, A., & Wilner, A. (2001). *Quarterlife crisis: The unique challenges of life in your twenties*. NY: Penguin Putnam. New York.
15. Rossi, N. E., & Mebert, C. J. (2011). Does a quarterlife crisis exist? *The Journal of Genetic Psychology*, 172(2), 141 –161.
16. Shaffer, D. R. (2009). Identity crisis. *Encyclopedia of Social Psychology*. SAGE Publications.
17. Terry, M., Sweeny, K., & Shepperd, J. (2007). Self-presentation. *Encyclopedia of Social Psychology*. SAGE Publications.
18. Waterman, A. S. (1985). Identity in the context of adolescent psychology. In A.S. Waterman (Ed.), *Identity in adolescence: Progress and contents: (New directions for child development, No.30)*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
19. Whitbourne, S. K. (1986). *The me I know: A study of adult identity*. New York: Springer-Verlag.
20. Казанская, А. В. (1998). Поговорим о себе: к вопросу о проявлении в речи нарциссических видов переноса. *Московский психотерапевтический журнал*, № 2, 143–146.
21. Путилова, Л. М. (1999). *Сущность самопознания в опыте ментальной идентификации: в контексте философской антропологии*. Автореферат и Диссертация. Москва.