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### THE DEVELOPMENTAL DYNAMICS OF PROFESSIONAL SELF-AWARENESS IN FUTURE PSYCHOLOGISTS DURING HIGHER EDUCATION

**Анотація.** Мета. Мета статті — дослідити формування та динаміку професійної самосвідомості майбутніх психологів під час навчання у вищих навчальних закладах, приділивши особливу увагу її ключовим структурним компонентам: самоідентифікації, професійній самооцінці та ставленню до професії.

**Методологія.** В емпіричному дослідженні взяли участь 112 студентів спеціальності «Психологія» з першого по четвертий курси. Було застосовано комплекс діагностичних методів, зокрема опитування цінностей Рокеаха, кольоровий тест Лушера, техніку Куна та МакПартланда «Хто я?» та метод самооцінки Дембо-Рубінштейна. Статистичний аналіз проводився за допомогою *t*-критерію Стьюдента та *f*-критерію Фішера, що дозволило виявити динаміку когнітивних, афективних та поведінкових компонентів професійної самосвідомості на різних етапах професійної підготовки. **Результати.** Отримані дані свідчать про нелінійний, поетапний розвиток професійної самосвідомості. Зокрема, було зафіксовано зниження рівня професійних намірів з 79,1 % серед студентів першого курсу до 15,8 % серед студентів четвертого курсу, що відображає переоцінку професійних очікувань. Водночас професійна самоідентифікація еволюціонує від абстрактних та ідеалізованих уявлень до більш внутрішньо засвоєної та реалістичної ідентичності. На проміжних етапах навчання, особливо серед студентів другого курсу, було виявлено кризову фазу, що характеризувалася зниженням самооцінки, суперечностями між самосприйняттям та професійними вимогами, а також посиленням диференціації критеріїв професіоналізму. На пізніших етапах спостерігається стабілізація та інтеграція професійної ідентичності.

**Наукова новизна.** Дослідження обґрунтовує динамічний та суперечливий характер розвитку професійної самосвідомості, виявляючи закономірності переходу від ідеалізованих уявлень про професію до більш диференційованого та реалістичного її розуміння. Теоретично та емпірично обґрунтовано роль кризи як необхідного етапу професійного розвитку. **Висновки.** Встановлено, що професійна самосвідомість не формується повністю до моменту закінчення навчання і продовжує розвиватися на наступних етапах професіоналізації. Водночас вирішальне значення має період здобуття вищої освіти, оскільки саме на цьому етапі відбуваються фундаментальні перетворення у мотиваційній, ціннісній та когнітивній сферах особистості. Найбільш гнучкими компонентами професійної самосвідомості є самоідентифікація, самооцінка та професійні установки. Ключовою умовою її ефективного розвитку є систематичне та цілеспрямоване залучення студентів до практичної діяльності, пов'язаної з вирішенням професійних завдань.

**Ключові слова:** самосвідомість, професійна самосвідомість, когнітивний компонент, емоційний компонент, поведінковий компонент, професійна ідентичність, самоідентифікація, самооцінка, професійні установки.

**Abstract.** Objective. The aim of the article is to examine the formation and dynamics of professional self-awareness of future psychologists during their training in higher education institutions, with particular attention to its key structural components: self-identification, professional self-esteem, and attitudes toward the profession.

**Methodology.** The empirical study involved 112 students majoring in Psychology from the first to the fourth year of study. A set of diagnostic methods was applied, including the Rokeach Value Survey, the Lusher Color Test, the Kuhn and McPartland "Who am I?" technique, and the Dembo-Rubinstein self-assessment method. Statistical analysis was conducted using Student's *t*-test and Fisher's *f*-criterion, which made it possible to identify the dynamics of the cognitive, affective, and behavioral components of professional self-awareness across different stages of professional training.

**Results.** The findings demonstrate a non-linear, stage-based development of professional self-awareness. In particular, a decline in professional intentions was observed from 79.1% among first-year students to 15.8% among fourth-year students, reflecting a reassessment of professional expectations. At the same time, professional self-identification evolves from abstract and idealized representations toward a more internalized and realistic identity. A crisis phase was identified at the intermediate stages of training, especially among second-year students, and was characterized by decreased self-esteem, contradictions between self-perception and professional requirements, and increased differentiation of professionalism criteria. At later stages, stabilization and integration of professional identity are observed.

**Scientific novelty.** The study substantiates the dynamic and contradictory nature of the development of professional self-awareness, revealing regular patterns in the transition from idealized perceptions of the profession to a more differentiated and realistic understanding of it. The role of crisis as a necessary stage of professional development is theoretically and empirically justified.

**Conclusions.** It has been established that professional self-awareness is not fully formed by the time of graduation and continues to develop at subsequent stages of professionalization. At the same time, the period of higher education is decisive, since it is during this stage that fundamental transformations occur in the motivational, value, and cognitive spheres of the individual. The most flexible components of professional self-awareness are self-identification, self-esteem, and professional attitudes. A key condition for its effective development is the systematic and purposeful involvement of students in practical activities related to solving professional tasks.

**Keywords:** self-awareness, professional self-awareness, cognitive component, emotional component, behavioral component, professional identity, self-identification, self-esteem, professional attitudes.

### **Introduction**

The problem of professional development and career formation has long been a central focus of attention in various scientific disciplines due to its importance both for the individual and for society as a whole. Entering a profession can be interpreted as a process of integration into a “super-role,” which largely determines a person’s lifestyle, value orientations, and overall life satisfaction.

The extent to which professional activity fulfills an individual’s needs for self-actualization, creativity, and personal growth directly influences their general well-being.

In the context of rapid socio-economic transformations, the issue of the quality of professional training in higher education institutions becomes particularly relevant. The diversification of psychological education significantly intensifies the need for a comprehensive study of the professional self-awareness of psychology students.

However, despite the growing interest in this issue in recent years [1; 2; 3; 5], the phenomenon of professional self-awareness remains insufficiently explored, especially in its dynamic aspect.

### **Analysis of the Problem**

The initial stage of professionalization is considered a key phase, as it often determines the trajectory of an individual’s further professional and personal development. An important component of this stage is the period of higher education, during which future specialists acquire the necessary knowledge and skills, interact with experienced professionals, and refine their initial understanding of the chosen field.

The student period is typically complex both in terms of academic demands and personal development. At the transition between late adolescence and early adulthood, individuals face the necessity of defining their life priorities, setting short-term and long-term goals, and testing themselves in various situations.

Thus, professional training represents not only a process of acquiring competencies but also a stage of significant transformation in the sphere of self-awareness.

### **Theoretical Foundations**

Professional self-awareness is one of the key factors determining the effectiveness and productivity of professional activity. It includes awareness of oneself as a subject of professional activity, understanding one’s correspondence to professional requirements, as well as processes of professional self-knowledge, self-evaluation, and self-development.

Thus, professional self-awareness can be interpreted as a projection of general self-awareness onto the sphere of professional activity.

It represents an integrative characteristic of personality that combines a system of representations about oneself as a professional. The development of professional self-awareness involves not only the

acquisition of new knowledge but also the transformation of cognitive structures and the formation of a new worldview corresponding to professional activity.

Structurally, professional self-awareness consists of three interrelated components:

- **cognitive component:** awareness and understanding of oneself within the system of professional activity and personal development;
- **affective component:** emotional attitude toward oneself as a professional;
- **behavioral component:** readiness for professional activity and practical implementation of professional functions.

These components are closely interconnected and form a holistic “professional self-image.” An adequate understanding and evaluation of one’s “self” ensures stability, consistency, and effectiveness in professional functioning [1].

According to V. V. Shakhov [2], professional self-awareness can be analyzed through three key components: the motivational–need sphere, self-esteem, and professionally significant qualities. The educational component of professional self-awareness serves as the core of an individual’s professional and personal development. Upon completion of formal training, professional self-awareness may be conceptualized as an idealized model of a person’s attitude toward their profession.

Ukrainian researchers consider the structure of professional self-awareness as a complex and dynamic construct that includes awareness of:

- professional and ethical norms of behavior;
- oneself as a subject of professional activity;
- professionally significant qualities and their evaluation;
- social and labor relations;
- one’s own development over time [3; 5].

The formation of professional self-awareness during the period of adaptation to professional activity can be understood as a process of resolving contradictions within the “individual–profession” system. This process involves overcoming situations of uncertainty and difficulty through reflective mechanisms that activate the structures of the “self.” In particular, it includes the exhaustion of previously formed behavioral stereotypes, their reconsideration, and subsequent transformation in accordance with newly recognized contradictions.

As a result of this process, specific developmental outcomes emerge:

- **in the cognitive sphere:** awareness of professional values, motives, goals, as well as understanding of the subject, methods, and means of professional activity; integration into the role structure of a professional group;
  - **in the affective sphere:** transformation of self-attitude as a representative of a professional community;
  - **in the behavioral sphere:** satisfaction with oneself and one’s professional activity [2].
- Thus, professional self-awareness is a dynamic formation that both develops and manifests itself in practical activity. Accordingly, each of its components should be considered from two perspectives:
- **processual** (development and unfolding),
  - **resultative (the presence of a fully formed outcome).**

Within the cognitive component, it is important to distinguish between the process of self-knowledge and its result a structured system of knowledge about oneself, integrated into the “self-image,” including representations of oneself as both a professional and a person.

The affective–evaluative component is characterized by various forms of attitudes, including attitudes toward oneself as a professional and as an individual, as well as attitudes toward the profession itself.

The regulatory (behavioral) component reflects the degree of readiness to perform professional actions in relation to the object of professional activity.

Modeling the process of professional self-awareness formation, N. Shevchenko [5] emphasizes the existence of different phases in its development and functioning. Empirical observations suggest that the initial phase plays a particularly important role. From the moment the relationship “individual – profession” is established at the emotional–value level, the process of professional self-awareness formation begins.

During the period of professional education, operational, motivational, and meaning-related components of professional activity are actively formed. At the same time, an emotionally saturated image

of the profession emerges, along with normative professional requirements that may impose certain limitations on the individual [1].

By the end of formal education, professional self-awareness can be considered as an idealized model of an individual's attitude toward their profession.

The process of professional personality formation is complex and multi-stage. It includes the following stages:

1. **Initial stage:** the emergence and formation of professional intentions influenced by general personal development; initial orientation and involvement in various forms of activity during school education;
2. **Training stage:** purposeful preparation for professional activity, during which motivation aligned with the profession is actively formed;
3. **Entry stage:** active mastery of the profession and integration into a professional environment;
4. **Realization stage:** full implementation of the individual in independent professional activity.

It is evident that by the time of graduation from a higher education institution, professional self-awareness is not fully formed and continues to develop at subsequent stages of professionalization. However, the period of professional training remains decisive, as it is during this stage that fundamental transformations occur in the motivational and value sphere of the individual. In particular, professional values, attitudes, and all structural components of self-awareness are actively formed in accordance with the nature and content of future professional activity.

The formation of professional self-awareness requires specific psychological and pedagogical conditions that facilitate the advancement of the individual beyond their current level of development. The key condition for this process is the systematically organized and purposeful involvement of students in practical activities related to solving professional tasks.

The purpose of the empirical study was to examine the dynamics of structural components of professional self-awareness among psychology students during their training in higher education institutions.

The empirical study involved 112 undergraduate Psychology students (Years 1–4) enrolled at the Faculty of Pedagogy, Psychology, and Professional Education of Mariupol State University. The research employed the following diagnostic instruments: the Rokeach Value Survey to assess value orientations, the Luscher Color Test to examine the emotional component of self-awareness, the Kuhn and McPartland "Who am I?" technique to analyze its cognitive component, and the Dembo-Rubinstein method to assess students' professional self-esteem.

The analysis revealed a clear dynamic in value orientations. For students of the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd years, educational values remain dominant, whereas for 4th-year students, values related to professional life take the leading position, followed by educational values. Thus, by the final stage of training, professional values acquire the highest significance ( $p \leq 0.5$ ).

A significant transformation was observed in professional attitudes. Specifically, **79.1% (n=89)** of first-year students expressed the intention to work as psychologists in the future. However, this indicator decreases markedly during training: to **32.7% (n=37)** in the third year and to **15.8% (n=18)** in the fourth year.

This trend suggests a gradual reassessment of professional expectations and indicates the transition from an idealized perception of the profession to a more realistic understanding of its demands.

An important aspect of the study was the analysis of preferred areas of future professional activity. The results showed the following distribution:

- **1st year:** educational psychology (28.0%), psychology teaching (17.0%), clinical psychology (17.0%), business psychology (15.5%);
- **3rd year:** legal psychology (23.5%), business psychology (22.2%), clinical psychology (15.0%);
- **4th year:** educational psychology (18.2%), legal psychology (18.2%), family psychology (15.6%), psychology teaching (15.6%).

It should be noted that there is a relative stability in the choice of professional activity within the educational sphere, which can be explained by the high demand for psychologists in educational institutions. At the same time, a consistently high interest in business psychology is observed. In addition, there is a gradual increase in students' orientation toward family psychology by the fourth year ( $p \leq 0.5$ ).

Particular attention was given to the process of professional self-identification.

The analysis revealed a contradictory dynamic. Identification as a “future psychologist” demonstrates a downward trend:

- **1st year — 45.8% (n=51)**
- **3rd year — 39.3% (n=44)**
- **4th year — 34.8% (n=39)**

At the same time, identification as a “psychologist” increase:

- **1st year — 10.2% (n=11)**
- **3rd year — 18.7% (n=21)**
- **4th year — 50.9% (n=57)**

This pattern indicates a shift from abstract and prospective identification toward a more internalized and realistic professional identity.

The results also show that first-year students demonstrate a high level of professional identification and acceptance of the professional role. However, this identification is largely based on generalized and idealized representations.

The objects of professional identification for first-year students are typically successful professionals who have achieved recognition in their field and possess socially valued qualities such as intelligence, openness, empathy, attentiveness, strong character, and deep knowledge.

At the same time, **55.2% (n=62)** of first-year students report the absence of a real identification model. When completing statements such as “In the professional sphere, I would like to resemble...”, students often provided responses such as “no one,” “I don’t know,” or “there is no ideal.”

The combination of a high level of professional identification with the absence of a real identification model suggests that first-year students perceive the profession primarily through abstract idealized constructs and socially formed stereotypes.

Thus, as students begin to receive more objective and detailed information about the nature of professional activity, the professional role, and its requirements, their self-awareness may enter a state of contradiction. On the one hand, students tend to overestimate their professional abilities; on the other hand, they are only at the beginning of their professional development and therefore lack an adequate understanding of the profession and its demands.

This discrepancy leads to an overestimated and insufficiently differentiated self-assessment. When this contradiction becomes consciously recognized by the students themselves, it marks the emergence of a crisis of professional identity. This state is most clearly manifested among second-year and partially third-year students.

The emotional attitude of first-year students toward the profession is predominantly positive. In particular, approximately **81.7% (n=92)** demonstrate a clearly positive attitude toward psychology, while no cases of ambivalent attitudes were identified.

At the initial stage of professional training, students generally do not experience significant discomfort. Most respondents characterize the first year as emotionally neutral, not associated with negative experiences or dissatisfaction.

During the second year, students develop a more detailed understanding of the profession. However, this development is primarily quantitative rather than qualitative. The professional image becomes enriched with numerous characteristics, but essential features are not yet clearly differentiated.

Nevertheless, progress in this direction can be observed through changes in the system of professional criteria.

At this stage, there is a significant increase in the differentiation and awareness of professionalism criteria. The average level of awareness among second-year students reaches **9.5 points**, which is approximately 1.5 times higher than that of first-year students.

However, despite this increase, the qualitative structure of these criteria remains largely unchanged. Second-year students continue to rely on abstract representations similar to those of first-year students, although they begin to express them using professional psychological terminology (e.g., empathy, intelligence, communication skills).

In the professional self-image of second-year students, dominant characteristics are those directly related to their current primary activity — academic and quasi-professional learning.

Since diligence and accuracy are key determinants of success in the educational process, these qualities begin to occupy a central position both in students’ self-evaluation and in their representation of the “ideal psychologist.” Significant transformations are observed in the professional self-esteem of second-year students.

First, there is a noticeable decrease in emotional acceptance of oneself as a future professional. Second, the attractiveness of the ideal professional image is reduced.

As a result, second-year students demonstrate the **lowest level of professional self-esteem** within the entire sample.

The decline in overall professional self-esteem is accompanied by a decrease in the evaluation of such components as:

- professional practical skills,
- professional abilities and predispositions.

This may be explained by the fact that these components play a decisive role in the formation of a generalized self-assessment.

At the second-year stage, the hierarchy of professional self-evaluation indicators is structured as follows:

- professional abilities and predispositions — **62.1%**,
- overall professionalism — **47.5%**,
- professional skills — **46.9%**,
- theoretical knowledge — **42.9%**.

Thus, theoretical preparedness is evaluated significantly lower than other components.

As a result, a pronounced contradiction emerges within the professional self-awareness of second-year students.

On the one hand, they develop a more realistic understanding of professional requirements and the image of an ideal psychologist, which leads to a decrease in self-esteem. On the other hand, they retain a high level of professional aspirations and a strong motivation for professional growth.

In our view, the crisis of professional self-awareness at this stage can be explained by several factors:

1. **Overestimation of general and professional self-esteem** following successful admission to higher education;
2. **Increased awareness of the profession** after the first year of study;
3. **Insufficient adaptation** to the academic and professional training environment;
4. **Recognition of the openness of professional choice**, including the possibility of reconsidering or changing it.

The consequences of the crisis in professional self-awareness include a decline in confidence in oneself as a future psychologist, changes in the emotional attitude toward both professional activity and professional training, and a decrease in the level of professional identity.

At the third year of study, students' understanding of the profession continues to deepen, becoming more differentiated and structured. The image of the profession begins to incorporate features that reflect the operational and technical aspects of a psychologist's work.

Significant changes are observed in the system of professionalism criteria among third-year students compared to second-year students. In particular, the level of awareness of these criteria increases substantially. While second-year students demonstrated an average awareness level of **9.5 points**, third-year students reach **13.1 points**.

Moreover, the scientific quality of the criteria improves. Students begin to use more conceptually grounded notions such as *reflection*, *job satisfaction*, and other professionally relevant constructs.

It is also important to note a change in the practical application of these criteria: approximately **88.6% (n≈99)** of third-year students reported that awareness of these criteria influences their educational and quasi-professional behavior.

At the same time, third-year students demonstrate a discrepancy between their self-image as psychologists and their representation of the ideal professional.

In self-assessment, they emphasize personal qualities such as:

- internal locus of control,
  - friendliness,
  - communicative competence,
  - patience,
  - empathy.
- However, in the image of the ideal psychologist, the dominant factors shift toward:
- professional competence,

- productivity,
- observational skills.

A particularly important finding is that, for the first time, **competence** becomes the leading characteristic in the structure of the ideal professional image. In earlier stages (1st and 2nd years), this factor occupied a significantly lower position.

Compared to second-year students, third-year students provide a higher overall evaluation of their professional level. However, a tendency toward underestimation remains on several self-assessment scales. The increase in overall professional self-esteem is largely driven by a relatively high evaluation of personal abilities and predispositions.

Specifically, students assess their professional abilities and predispositions at approximately **68.5%**, while other components of professional self-assessment remain somewhat lower.

Overall, third-year students tend to perceive themselves as having achieved approximately **50% of their professional competence**, reflecting a transitional stage in professional development.

Among fourth-year students, the professional self-image acquires qualitatively new characteristics. In particular, communicative abilities are no longer perceived as isolated personal traits but are understood in direct relation to professional activity. Thus, qualities such as sociability and benevolence become integrated with professional competence, forming a unified construct.

At the same time, a significant convergence is observed between the leading factors in the self-image and the ideal professional image, which indicates a relatively high level of professional self-esteem.

According to the results of the professional self-assessment diagnostics, fourth-year students generally evaluate their professional potential at a high level, while simultaneously assessing their actual professional achievements as relatively low.

Compared to other stages, fourth-year students demonstrate the **highest level of professional self-esteem**. The hierarchy of self-assessment indicators is as follows:

- professional abilities and predispositions — **69.0%**,
- theoretical knowledge — **69.0%**,
- overall professionalism — **63.8%**,
- professional skills — **60.9%**.

Thus, lower evaluations of practical skills significantly affect the overall assessment of professionalism.

However, a notable contradiction emerges: high professional self-esteem coexists with a low level of perceived professional self-realization.

Fourth-year students demonstrate an awareness that their actual level of professional competence is lower than their potential. This often leads to a decrease in academic engagement and motivation for further professional development.

In our view, this phenomenon reflects a more realistic self-assessment of one's capabilities and a deeper understanding of the complexity of professional psychological practice.

This conclusion is further supported by an increase in the realism of professional aspirations among fourth-year students.

Among fourth-year students, the highest levels of professional identity are observed. At this stage, the most favorable situation is formed in comparison with earlier phases of professional training.

This can be explained by several interrelated factors:

1. a higher level of awareness regarding the profession;
  2. a high degree of adaptation to the educational process;
  3. an understanding that the period of professional training is approaching completion, which contributes to a more positive evaluation of the chosen profession. At this stage, doubts about the correctness of professional choice are significantly reduced, and students tend to seek and confirm arguments supporting their decision;
  4. a deeper awareness and more positive evaluation of their professional capabilities (knowledge, skills, and competencies);
  5. acceptance of the social status associated with belonging to a professional group;
1. the absence of immediate pressure related to employment decisions, combined with the availability of time for choosing a future workplace.

Thus, during the process of higher education, students' identification with the professional group of psychologists undergoes significant transformation. An increasing number of students begin to define themselves as psychologists and to internalize this professional identity.

Consequently, the educational process contributes to the development of students' awareness of themselves as future professionals.

The results of the statistical analysis using Student's *t*-test and Fisher's *f*-criterion indicate that the development of all examined components of professional self-awareness is intensive ( $p \leq 0.5$ ).

At the same time, the most flexible and dynamic components are:

- self-identification,
- self-esteem,
- professional attitudes.

### **Conclusions**

The conducted study made it possible to identify the dynamic nature of the development of key structural components of professional self-awareness — self-identification, self-esteem, and professional attitudes during the process of higher education.

The results demonstrate that professional self-awareness develops unevenly and is characterized by the presence of a crisis phase at intermediate stages of training, followed by stabilization and integration at later stages.

At the same time, it should be emphasized that the content of professional self-awareness is not limited to the components examined in this study (value orientations, professional attitudes, professional self-awareness, self-esteem, and self-identification). However, these characteristics can be considered fundamental for understanding the process of professional personality formation.

Based on the generalization of contemporary scientific approaches, a structural and processual model of the development of professional self-awareness of future psychologists was substantiated, which integrates socio-psychological factors and directly influences the cognitive, emotional, and conative components of personality.

Furthermore, the findings are consistent with contemporary approaches that conceptualize professional self-awareness as an integral and dynamic psychological construct, the development of which is influenced by a system of interconnected socio-psychological factors and can be purposefully enhanced through targeted educational and developmental interventions [6].

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