BELARUSIAN NATIONAL CHARACTER PSYCHOLOGICAL FEATURES
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The article concerns main theoretical approaches to the national character studies, as well as it analyses historical, social and cultural factors, which influenced the forming of Belarusian national character. The results of Belarusian character psychological features researches are represented after analyzing the ethnic identity valence and certainty and on the basis of auto- and hetero-stereotypes of Belarusians.

Key words: national self-actualization, national character, Belarusian character, ethnic identity valence/certainty, auto- and hetero-stereotypes of Belarusians.

The question about groups and nations’ mental structure is the main one in their subject matter. The most widespread conception used for their mental aspect description is going to be the “national character”. The problem in itself about national character definition and study has long history, being revealed in works of many psychologists (G. Le Bon, G. Tarde, W. Wundt, C.G. Jung, E. Fromm, etc.), historians (V.O. Kluchevsky, A. Toynbee, O. Spengler, etc.), sociologists (E. Durkheim, M. Weber, T. Veblen, P. Sorokîn, etc.), philosophers (N. Berdyaev, G. Hegel, N. Lossky, etc.), ethnologist (M. Mead, R. Benedict, L.N. Gumilev, A. Kardiner, etc.).[1]

In dictionaries the national character is defined as the structured unity of the steadiest features of psychology and behavior, which is appropriate to most representatives of the nation. It is expressed in their individual and group behavior specific features, as well as their moods, world discovery means, observing traditional norms of existence, interrelations and communication. The unity of historic, socio-cultural and biological factors, which influence nation generations life and succession, is implemented in the national character.

The approaches to the national character study could be grouped into three main tendencies: culture-centered, personality-centered and value-centered.

The ethno-psychological researches, which examine the Belarusian national character peculiarity, started carrying out as early as at the beginning of the 21st century. Their results let us affirm that the present stage of Belarusian society development is characterized by low level of national self-esteem, weak feeling of national dignity, and indistinct interest in historic and cultural identity of one’s own nation.

Several historic and geographic factors have influenced on the forming of Belarusian modern national character:
- belonging to the Russian Empire for several centuries, which lets us lead the conversation about a definite resemblance of Belarusian character intelligence the Russian one under generality of territory, religion and history, etc.;
- Belarus being a member of the Soviet Union for 70 years, the Soviet period influenced the forming of Belarusian national character, which has been observed till nowadays in traits of so called “Soviet character”;  
- Belarus specific position as the western part of the Russian Empire, then the USSR, bordered on Poland and Baltic republics, which has to some extent influenced the forming of Belarusian national character, since a part of Belarus used to affiliate to the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and Rzeczpospolita.  
- particular natural and climatic conditions of Belarus, which are characterized by kilometers of long forests, marshlands, settlements isolation, etc.

**Sample description.** We have made a careful complex study of Belarusian national self-consciousness psychological features. The sample has been compiled from 511 persons (241 male and 270 female). The sampled population is equally weighted on the basis of age, its respondents belong to different age groups, from 18 up to 70 y/o. 69.9% of respondents are town dwellers, 30.1% are rural inhabitants. 93.15% of respondents, speaking about their ethnicity, classed themselves as Belarusians, 5.68% as Russians, 0.78% as Ukrainians. It is curious that the major part of the respondents from blended families class themselves as Belarusians (thus, among the respondents’ parents 13.7% of fathers and 11.15% of mothers Russians, 4.1 % of fathers and 4.7% of mothers are Ukrainians, 0.78% of fathers are Poles). 23.68% of respondents have got high education, 33.86% have got secondary education, 42.46% have got higher education. 3.9% of the interviewed have European experience longer than 4 months in, e.g., Italy, Germany, Poland, Spain, the Netherlands, Ireland, Latvia, for the purpose of health improvement, work and study.

**Research methods:** the questionnaire for valence revelation of ethnic identity by N.M. Lebedeva, A.N. Tatarko; the scale for measurement of uncertainty in ethnic identity by A.N. Tatarko; modified methodology of ethnic stereotypes by D. Katz and K. Brelly for valuation of ethnic stereotypes valence; modified semantic differential for valuation of the categorical structure of ethnic consciousness, which helps to reveal a definite set of features, concerning oneself, one’s ethnic group and neighboring ethnic groups; the modified test by M. Kun and T. McPartland; analysis of respondents’ demographic data; methods of interpretation; analysis of work in focus-groups. The empiric data were processed with the help of content-analysis and expert evaluation, as well as the statistic pack of STATISTICA 7.

**The research results.** The analysis of data received on the scale for measurement of positivity in ethnic identity lets us ascertain that 77.64% of respondents are proud and sure about their national identity, which indicates in general a rather high level of positive valence of Belarusian ethnic identity. However the fact that 15% of respondents note lack of private ethnic feelings causes anxiety, as well as the fact that 7% of respondents feel humility, hurting and offence about their own national identity.
More detailed analysis of Belarusians’ ethnic identity features confirms the dominance of positive attitude towards their ethnicity, of experienced positive feelings. More than 2/3 of respondents (72.8%) express their joy and satisfaction towards their ethnicity. However, virtually one in nine respondents considers to some extent that “Belarusians have nothing to be proud of”, therefore, does not feel the sense of pride about his or her national identity (12.81%). 10.71% of respondents, being ethnic Belarusians, “would like to belong to another nationality”, 9.66% are sure that they “would not like to continue living in Belarus”, and 18.91% doubt to some extent that they “would like to continue living in Belarus”. Most of those who would like to depart for sure are mainly youth respondents (6.51% of 9.66% of respondents are aged under 30 y/o) and more than a half of those who “hesitate” whether to build their future in Belarus or not are young respondents (10.92% of 18.91%). It is all the evidence that young Belarusians are obviously in a state of ethnic uncertainty; besides, it can be concluded that as a result of unfavourable intergroup comparison one in fourteen respondents is oriented to the strategy of individual mobility, which supposes the group change to be possible. And quite a quarter of respondents are aiming at living abroad. Speaking about their realization in the field of business, the young respondents are mostly oriented to the West and especially the USA, and most of them assert that their patriotic feelings depend on economic, political and environmental situation in the country.

To reveal the place of ethnic identity in person’s self-confidence structure, it is important to clarify, how often the respondents speak about their ethnic identity (“I am a Belarusian”) or their civil one (“I am a citizen of the Republic of Belarus”), as well as what the rank place of ethnicity is among other self-confidence forms. The following findings tell us about ethnic identity significance: one in three respondents (34%), answering on the question “Who am I?” from Kun-McPartlend test, indicated his or her belonging to Belarusians (“I am a Belarusian”); one in five (20.55%) marked out his civil identity (“I am a citizen of the Republic of Belarus”); moreover, half of respondents do not mention neither their ethnic nor civil belonging.

It can be explained to a large extent by complicacy of the historical moment, which is conditioned by not long duration of history of the Republic of Belarus as a sovereign and independent state, as well as by its economic and social development complications.

Also the ethnic auto-stereotypes positivity or negativity can act as an empiric indicator of the ethnic identity valence. The ethnic stereotypes perform an important function, describing a person’s behavior in different social situations, being an indispensable attribute of ethnic and culture socialization, affecting his or her ethnic sympathies or antipathies, national aims, which define people’s interethnic cooperation. The investigation of all that allows us to research the traits of Belarusian character on basis of qualitative analysis of Belarusian character free description and with the help of semantic differential (modified by V.F. Petrenko).
Estimating certain traits of Belarusian character by according to the number of their mentioning by the respondents, who were freely describing this national character, we have singled out the following traits as the positive ones:

- kindness and diligence, which was appraised by the respondents as the most impressive positive trait of Belarusian national character;
- hospitality and tolerance, which is on the second position;
- patriotism, intelligence, honesty and punctuality; the third position;
- responsiveness, openness and tranquility; the fourth position.

Among the negative traits of the national character the respondents have singled out to a considerable degree:

- disposition to hard drinking, passiveness; the first position in mentioning frequency;
- cowardice and laziness; the second position;
- naivety, submissiveness, credulity, uncertainty; the third position.

Estimating the ethnic stereotypes relating to Belarusian national character, with the help of semantic differential, we were detecting the degree of certain features among the representatives of the own ethnic group, the neighboring ethnic groups, on the scale from 0 to 5 points (0 means the lack of feature, 5 means its highest degree). Apart from real ethnic groups, the respondents were also offered to estimate such hypothetic groups as: “the people I admire”, “the people I get annoyed”, “Me” (rating of certain features degree by the respondents himself/herself as an ethnic group representative).
On basis of the auto-stereotypes analysis we have built a Belarusian national character profile according to the following features: 1 – strong, 2 – diligent, 3 – aggressive, 4 – intelligent, 5 – religious, 6 – freedom-loving, 7 – faithful to traditions, 8 – careful, 9 – individualist, 10 – strong team spirit, 11 – patriotic, 12 – obliging, 13 – enterprising, 14 – spiritual, 15 – warm-hearted. The data are represented on the picture 1.

Moreover, in the Belarusians’ opinion, the degree of such features in their own national character, as kindness, cordiality, diligence, team spirit, carefulness is higher than in an ideal character “to be admired” (these differences are statistically significant). Thereby, this allows us to make a conclusion that the Belarusians estimate their character as positive.

Among the features of Belarusian national character, which, in respondents’ opinion, virtually coincide those of an ideal national character, one can mark out: strength, love of freedom, intelligence.

*Picture 1 – The Belarusian national character profile according to auto-stereotypes*
The Belarusians’ view on their spirituality is also of interest: it is not represented so impressively as the above mentioned features, but its degree is higher than in an “ideal character”.

The Belarusians, as they assess, are religious in reasonable limits, and this factor corresponds to their ideal conception.

The Belarusians consider themselves to be traditionalistic, i.e. inclined to respect and support traditions, accept and recognize traditional values. The degree of traditionalism is close to the ideal conception.

Upon the respondents’ estimation, the spirit of enterprise is pretty expressed in Belarusian national character, however it does not reach the ideal (the differences are statistically significant).

Under the high degree of Belarusians’ team spirit, their individualism is correspondingly represented in the national character quite moderately, its degree is lower than “ideal” (the differences are also statistically significant).

Upon their own estimation, the Belarusians are not aggressive. The degree of such a feature in the national character is the lowest, it is also lower than the ideal one (the differences are statistically significant).

We have accomplished a comparison of Belarusians’ auto-stereotypes with their hetero-stereotypes, i.e. the Belarusians’ estimation of certain features in the national characters of their neighbors (Russians, Ukrainians, Lithuanians, and Poles). We were also interested in the hetero-stereotypes of Belarusians, compared with those of Italians, the choice of which is conditioned by the intensively developing relations during last twenty years for the reason that the children from our polluted regions, suffered from Chernobyl disaster, come to them for health improvement. It is interesting that, under Belarusians’ estimation, a number of features are expressed stronger in Belarusian national character than in that of their neighbors (Russians, Ukrainians, Lithuanians, and Poles), along with that of Italians. Such features are diligence, carefulness, team spirit, obligingness, spirituality, kindness and cordiality. At the same time, the degree of aggression and individualism is the lowest in Belarusian national character in comparison with the mentioned nations.

In Belarusian national character, under the estimations of Belarusians, the degree of diligence, goodness and cordiality, spirituality, obligingness, team spirit, carefulness, religiousness is higher than in Russian national character. Strength, intelligence, love of freedom, patriotism, spirit of enterprise, traditionalism, individualism, aggression, under the estimation of Belarusians, are more expressed in the national character of Russians. Under all these criteria the differences are statistically significant. Those data are also confirmed by the results of a content analysis of Belarusian and Russian national characters resemblances and differences.
Under the estimation of Belarusians, the degree of such national features as spirituality, obligingness, team spirit, carefulness, religiousness, intelligence, diligence, strength, goodness and cordiality is higher than those of Ukrainians. Spirit of enterprise, individualism, love of freedom and aggression are more expressed in Ukrainian national character, in Belarusians’ opinion. The differences are also statistically significant. This is confirmed by the results of a content analysis of the differences between Belarusian and Ukrainian national characters, freely described by respondents. The respondents have also noted that Belarusians are to the higher degree notable for their generosity, sincerity and simplicity.

In comparison with Poles and Lithuanians, such features of Belarusians as strength, diligence, intelligence, love of freedom, carefulness are of higher degree. What is concerning such features as strength, diligence, intelligence, love of freedom, and carefulness, the data appear statistically reliable; what is concerning patriotism, traditions loyalty, team spirit, and obligingness, those differences are not statistically reliable. Concerning such a feature as carefulness the difference reliability exists only regarding Poles. However, under Belarusians’ estimation, Poles and Lithuanians are more religious, enterprising, aggressive and individualistic (the differences are statistically significant).

In comparison with Italians, in the respondents’ opinion, such feature are better expressed in Belarusian national character as diligence, intelligence, strength, carefulness, team spirit, obligingness, spirituality, goodness and cordiality. Concerning such criteria as diligence, intelligence, strength and spirituality, the differences are statistically significant. However, in Italian character, statistically reliable, such features are of higher degree as love of freedom, religiousness, traditions loyalty, individualism, and aggression. Those findings are confirmed by the content analysis data. Moreover, the respondents, in free description, add to the differences between Belarusian and Italian national characters such features as calmness, restraint, tolerance, and constraint.

Analyzing the free description of ethnic groups’ national characters by respondents, we are able to ascertain that Belarusians are disposed to attribute positive features to Russians, Ukrainians, Italians and themselves. The preference of Russians and Ukrainians is explained, first of all, by common East-Slavonic roots, history, and by the fact that a part of the respondents are ethnic Russians and Ukrainians, and another part have Russians and Ukrainians among their relatives. The positive attitude of Belarusians towards Italians can be explained by high position of this ethnic group (under the fact that Italy is one of high-developed countries), also by the positive experience of interactions with Italians (many respondents or their children or relatives had been to Italy for health improvement, studies or work).

So the research of Belarusian national character features and peculiarities allows us to affirm that they are formed under the influence of cultural and historical, religious, geographic and climatic factors.
The research becomes important because of complicacy of present historical moment, due to, first, still not long period of Belarus sovereignty and independency, and second, continue of active political, economic and social changes, involving Belarusians national self-confidence, therefore national character features.

Actually there is a positive valence dominance observed in the structure of Belarusians’ self-confidence, which is expressed by a positive attitude towards their ethnic identity, together with predominance of positive feelings about that. The ethnic identity is mostly characterized by a certainty, which becomes apparent in awareness of most Belarusians as an ethnic and cultural community; such awareness is expressed by their desire to broaden their knowledge and ideas about cultural and psychological peculiarities of their own group. However, there is an anxiety caused by enough uncertainty of the young part of respondents about their ethnic identity; one in ten respondents would like to belong to another ethnic group or even live outside Belarus.

The research allows us to make a conclusion that Belarusians evaluate their character positively. Positive auto-stereotypes dominance is observed, they are linked to the national character features. The auto-stereotypes analysis allows us to assert that Belarusians consider themselves to be kind, warm-hearted, diligent, strong, intelligent, careful, obliging, patriotic, freedom-loving, and collectivistic. And in Belarusians’ opinion, the degree of the most features in their own national character is higher than in “ideal character” or like in “ideal character”.

The hetero-stereotypes analysis of Belarusians allows us to speak about their positive attitudes towards their neighbors (Russians, Ukrainians, Poles, and Lithuanians) as well as towards Italians, with whom the relations have been actively developing for last twenty years. And that contributes to development of optimal intercultural cooperation.

The practical importance of this research is that the findings can be used to help create lectures on ethnic and psychological problems for different groups of population, as well as for work with the youth directed on development and strengthening of national feelings and national self-confidence.

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