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METHODOLOGICAL BASIS FOR USING NEW TECHNOLOGY IN INVESTIGATION OF LEARNED HELPLESSNESS BY MEANS OF TRANSSPECTIVE ANALYSIS

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Abstract

Close interrelation between the concept of learned helplessness proposed by M. Seligman (the USA) and the ideas of L.S. Vygotsky’s cultural-historical theory (Russia) has been proved in the present study. The importance of V.E. Klochko’s transspective analysis theory application in innovative technology development aimed at investigation and correction of learned helplessness is emphasized. The described innovative technology has a major purpose of increase of psychological wellbeing and personal life resources among patients with weakened somatic health. Implementation of the presented technology will make it possible to carry out deep analysis not so much of the background which, by some means, exert influence upon the process of generalization of a person’s helplessness in the course of personality formation, but that is more significant in the scope of modern post-non-classical psychology, to allocate and designate subjectively significant factors and mechanisms for further work. Being critical for the personality, these factors ensure the disclosure of clearer prospects to assimilation of new experience in the context of psychological consultation and non-drug therapy directed towards supported self-actualization, personality development, psychological wellbeing and, as a result, appearance of new life resources and the personal potential fulfillment.

Keywords: learned helplessness, ontogenesis, transspective analysis, new technologies, complex research model

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Relevance

The possibility of being successful in the course of development and facing reality, self-realization prospects and life self-implementation depend not so much on the level of basic intellectual potential as on the person’s individual attributes combining motivation to transformation of the surrounding reality, sufficient level of willful aspiration for overcoming difficulties, proactive attitude to life associated with continuous self-development and self-education. The framework of such informative and active approach to formation of a person’s future prospects is established in the person’s family, under the influence of the closest people (Maier, & Seligman, 2016; Filippello, Sorrenti, Buzzai, & Costa, 2015; Sorrenti, Filippello, Costa, & Buzzai, 2015; Gomez, Ryan, Norton, Jones, & Galán-Cisneros, 2015).

In attempts to solve similar issues two essentially opposite methodological approaches in studying human nature have been developed in science: the “biological” one and the “ideal” one.

From the perspective of the “ideal” approach, people have divine origin. According to this point of view, the purpose of human life is to “answer a higher calling”, to express a part of the “objective spirit”. Within the scope of the “biological” approach, people have natural origin and they are a part of wildlife. Therefore, human mental life can be described using the same concepts; its essence can be understood through the use of the notion that are known to describe animals’ mental life.

Studying the problem of learned helplessness as an ontogenetic phenomenon, formed under the influence of both external and internal initiating causes of development such as social environment and human physical condition, it is important to consider conceptual provisions of the cultural and historical concept of person’s mentality origin in which an attempt to solve the issue of human consciousness origin and development is made.

A number of studies describe this concept as the theory of socio-historical origin of human higher mental functions.

State of the problem

Studying development mechanisms and correction ways of the “learned helplessness” phenomenon requires taking into account the environmental factor, acquisition of
behavioral patterns by means of interaction with the environment, mechanisms of fixing and maintenance of these patterns, and also their combinations to a specific physiological state caused by somatic factors. The purpose of this research is to study the influence of a unique complex combining the specified structural elements as the model forming learned helplessness in ontogenesis since the period of preschool childhood to adulthood (Moreland, Ewoldsen, Albert, Kosicki, & Clayton, 2015; Taylor, Neitzke, Khouri, Borckardt, Acierno, Tuerk, George, 2014; Chambers, & Hammonds, 2014).

Martin Seligman (1975, 1993), the founder of positive psychology and the learned helplessness theory, assumes that optimistic or pessimistic attitude to reality pertains directly to peoples’ adoption of their parents’ behavior models. Dr. M. Seligman specifies that this style is not only adopted as a behavior model, it is “enhanced” and becomes stronger in children’s consciousness resulting from criticism from parents, teachers and other representatives of the community. Deriving from pessimistic perception of life already formed in the child, learned helplessness progresses in situations of life crises, stress provoked by death in the family, divorce, recurrent episodes of communal violence, illness of relatives, low level of the child’s own health, etc.

Anything occurring in life of a child in their closest intrafamily and external social environment affects directly the child’s experience accumulation, providing certain integrity of the whole worldview. It is important that there cannot be a neutral emotional response in the child. Cases of frequent, systematic negative experience steadily form pessimism characterized by generalization. And, if the support in overcoming the negative attitude to a series of situations is not rendered in due time, negative attitude, expectation of negative result, feeling of futility of any efforts to receive significant, good, valuable, desirable result (that is the group of learned helplessness markers) predetermines all reactions of the child to situations in the future. Such attitude is rather steadily fixed, including the education process which is a serious problem of the educational system and learning at all stages of ontogenesis (M. Seligman, 1975, 1993).

According to the main concept of L.S. Vygotsky’s cultural-historical activity theory, the development of a person is based on interiorization, or the transformation of
inter-psychological relations into intra-psychological ones. In the ontogenesis, at first, the adult affects the child with the word, inducing the child to do something. Then the child adopts a way of communication and learns to influence the adult with the word. After that the child starts influencing the word himself. In families with a child with weak somatic health, the psychological system is disturbed: deficiency of relationship is reflected in problems of communication with the mother, removal of the father from psychological life of the family, recognition of the child as weak and unable, which results in violation of normal child identity formation. Compiling the ideas of positive psychology and cultural-historical approach, it is possible to claim that children with weak health “learn” helplessness gradually, not under the influence of a somatic state, but of the factor of social response to features of the child’s somatic health (Volkova, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016).

Materials and methods

Theoretical and empirical analysis of contemporary psychology confirms the importance of integrated system approach in diagnostics of learned helplessness formation mechanisms in the course of personality development. Creation of specific unique tools oriented not only to research of the factors which have negative impact in the course of ontogenesis and act as the catalyst for the helpless identity development but also to aim points for psychological correction within psychological consultations and non-drug therapy for the purpose of achievement of psychological wellbeing of the person appears extremely important. Psychological wellbeing in itself as a conscious state cannot be followed by the feeling of helplessness priori, but, on the contrary, is a resource condition, essential in the course of self-actualization of a personality (Volkova, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016).

In development of a complex research technology aimed at revealing the process of learned helplessness development in the course of human life the transspective analysis is one of significant tools, “performed through the analysis of human activity products which are kept in the culture” and enabling the researcher to reconstruct “the view on life of a person and the way of a human life in historical transspection” (Klochko, 2014). Considering that
everything is unpredictable and nothing repeats in the history, that it is obviously impossible to estimate and predict the future of the person by his or her past, as well as the future of the society relying on its historical facts, transspective analysis offers certain opportunities in this respect.

A number of contradictions arising during consideration of psychological phenomena, characterizing a person in a broad sense of their space and time existence continuity are eliminated when “it is only about the present which, however, determines any tendencies”. Both the past and the future are “in contact” with the present through setting a perspective (context) for the analysis. However, the pairs of “past-present” and “future-present” are not complete within the scope of the space-time concept, designating a completed or predicted continuity segment, in the first case, or a segment that is not completed yet (and it is unknown whether it will be completed or not), in the second.

The question is not about self-implementation of the person and life itself, this processes “existing separately”, but about the person’s involvement in both ontogenetic and phylogenetic evolutionary processes, characterized by increasing extrication of the person “from the dictatorship of determination according to the personal need normalizing his or her life” and increasing submission of “extra normative opportunity determination by nature” (V. Klochko, 2010; Loginova, 2009, 2012), opening in this inclusiveness the opportunity for own personal formation. It is impossible to ignore the fact that a person (in onto-and phylogeny) constantly changes, changing one’s own ideas about the world and personality at the same time, reinterpreting and reevaluating the past, keeping thereby both his or her own historicity, and historicity of the phenomena studied by him in a certain logic – the transspective logic.

As it has been stressed by V. E. Klochko, transspective is “a specific view thanks to which each point on the path of humanity development (steady and progressive formation of humanity in the person) is understood as a place of coexistence of times, their interpenetration and mutual transition in which the tendency of person complexity as the system organization realizes itself” (V. Klochko, 2007, 2010, 2014). This coexistence of
the person and his or her world as life spaces in unity of times, inseparably linked, forms a continuum of the person’s self-fulfilment that can be compared with a reel of thread and is known to reflect a certain tendency of personal development. In this regard, possibilities of the transspective analysis are much wider, than it might seem at first sight. It is the analysis not only of trends, but also of “chronotopos” constituting “an intra-system event of time and space” (V. Klochkov, 2007). “Transspective” in this context is defined as “opening perspective, revealing the tendencies and the orientation of development hidden in the process from one who only fixes the facts of new growths emergence, understanding them as development manifestation” (ibid.).

**Results and their discussion**

The technology of complex analysis of learned helplessness development was elaborated as the result of studying of unique ways of learned helplessness development and identification of its place in life of a specific person.

A questionnaire was used that represented the sequence of life states and somatic statuses on different stages of ontogenesis. The combined form of different parts of the questionnaire is presented in Table 1.

The instruction for filling the questionnaire was is as follows.

“Please, write your full name, age, major activity. To fill the questionnaire in, briefly describe and estimate the degree and the nature of intensity of the indicators listed in the table in the form of free response. Please, match each of age stages to a condition of your own somatic health / illness. Comment on what factors of your life could exert influence on those or other indicators”.

For the last part of the questionnaire concerning the future and its subjective estimation the instruction was as follows: “Please, try to predict the contents and characteristics of the above-stated parameters, having imagined what they will be in your future, with the indication of the temporary period (every other day, week, month, several months, year, years). Answer the question “What will I be? How will I be?” and specify “When?” The choice of a temporal interval is to your own discretion.”
Table 1.

Questionnaire design for the Technology of learned helplessness development complex analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advanced preschool age (5-7 years)</th>
<th>Senior primary school age (7-11 years)</th>
<th>Adolescence (12-16 years)</th>
<th>Youth (16-19 years)</th>
<th>Current actual state</th>
<th>“I will be… in… (days, months, years)”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Objective physical status (What diseases have you suffered from and how often?)</td>
<td>Objective physical status (What diseases have you suffered from and how often?)</td>
<td>Objective physical status (What diseases have you suffered from and how often?)</td>
<td>Objective physical status (What diseases do you suffer and how often do you feel ill?)</td>
<td>Objective physical status (What diseases will you suffer and how often will you feel ill?)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Subjective perception of physical status (How healthy did you feel?)</td>
<td>Subjective perception of physical status (How healthy did you feel?)</td>
<td>Subjective perception of physical status (How healthy did you feel?)</td>
<td>Subjective perception of physical status (How healthy do you feel?)</td>
<td>Subjective perception of physical status (How healthy will you feel in the future?)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Most specific emotional experiences related to the age interval</td>
<td>Most specific emotional experiences related to the age interval</td>
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<td>Subjective assessment of the motivational sphere (Was there a desire for activity? Did you feel any interest in life?)</td>
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<td>Subjective assessment of willpower at the age interval (Could you overcome obstacles by effort of will, patience, or did you try to obtain the desired object?)</td>
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<td>Subjective assessment of locus of control (who controlled your life and made decisions: you or people around?)</td>
<td>Subjective assessment of locus of control (who controlled your life and made decisions: you or people around?)</td>
<td>Subjective assessment of locus of control (who controlled your life and made decisions: you or people around?)</td>
<td>Subjective assessment of locus of control (who will control your life and makes decisions: you or people around?)</td>
<td>Subjective assessment of locus of control (who will control your life and makes decisions: you or people around?)</td>
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<td>Subjective assessment of the cognitive sphere at the age interval (Were you clever and dexterous?)</td>
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<td>The child-parent relations at the age interval</td>
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<td>Relationship with the society at the age interval</td>
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Conclusion

Implementation of the presented technology will make it possible to carry out deep analysis not so much of the background which, by some means, exert influence upon the process of generalization of a person’s helplessness in the course of personality formation, but that is more significant in the scope of modern post-non-classical psychology, to allocate and designate subjectively significant factors and mechanisms for further work. Being critical for the personality, these factors ensure the disclosure of clearer prospects to assimilation of new experience in the context of psychological consultation and non-drug therapy directed towards supported self-actualization, personality development, psychological wellbeing and, as a result, appearance of new life resources and the personal potential fulfillment.

Reference


