PERSONAL REPRESENTATIONS OF "I – OTHER" INTERACTION: SOCIO-PSYCHOLOGICAL ANALYSIS AND EMPIRICAL STUDY

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Abstract

The author makes the case for categorization of the construct "personal representations "I – other" interaction". It helps studying the subject which is included into the system of interpersonal and intergroup relations, interactions with Others - through personal identity construction with the help of mechanisms of finding similarities / differences between self and Other, self-identification via dialogue / polylogue with the Different, complication and differentiation of Self, understanding stranger's motive. The article contains the main points of the author's concept "personal representations of "I – other" interaction", and also the description of empirical research project. There is the detailed description of one of the technologies of operationalization of inter-subjective interaction "I – other" experience, which is based on the qualitative phenomenological approach and is aimed at the reconstruction of inter-subjective space of personality with the help of analyzing the meanings, relations and feelings. The results verify the main points of the concept and justify the relevance and predictive value of the established research technique.

Practical aspect of the studied problem can be used in diagnostic programs, in reaching practical aims for optimization of real interpersonal and intergroup interactions and interrelations, and also for developing balanced personal identity.

Keywords: social psychology of the personality, representations "I – Other" interaction, inter-subjective space, a technique of reflexive self-report "I – Other".

Introduction

The diversity of psychology paradigms and often change of research discourses, which one could observe over the last decades, have shown the urgent need for reassessment of many traditional psychological issues and theories – from the new methodological point of view, – and their adaptation to the modern understanding of person's character and his/her relations with other people [1-7].

From our point of view, the psychological interest should be focused not only on a person as a knower, actor, subject of communication and emotional experience. It should be focused on a person as a subject who understands the self and individuality, who, basing on the inner experience, constructs the intra-psychic space which, in fact, is a special dimension of existence authentic for every personality. In this case, if a person wants to get real identity, he/she must be open to Others and to the world, must have the opportunity to communicate with it and gain meanings or bring them into it, thus enriching himself/herself and the world.

The whole period of psychology development has observed the great academic attention to the problem of social personality development linked with co-existence with Others through interaction with various Others. And it has been the part of a fundamental problem: adaptation and effective personality development in society. Special emphasis is made by social, economic and political transformations, connected with the processes of globalization and glocalization, informatization and virtualization, expansion of communication relations, extension of intercultural contacts of a person, and heterogeneous multicultural space.

By living together with Others and interacting with them at different levels and in different spheres, a personality constructs subjective representations of "I – other" interaction, which influence and shape the character of real interactions and interrelations. Hence, it is important to find out the factors and mechanisms of how a personality constructs representations of interactions with Others; to describe their main idea and peculiar features; to determine the character and conditions for their transformation. All this is necessary for a personality as it helps to work out the ways to reach internal consistency and to build efficient interaction with Other as subject of activity, communication and emotional experience.

The aim of this research is to justify and verify the theoretical background of socio-psychological concept of personal representations of "I – Other" interaction.

The main issues of the concept
"Personal representations of "I – Other" interaction"

The space of real interactions of a person with Other – represented subject of activity, communication and relations –differs in some ways from the space of personal representations of "I – Other" interaction. The differences are connected, first of all, with the time and space localization: real interactions take place in certain situational context and happen in "then-and-there" regime, whereas personal representations of interaction can become actual in any time chronotope. Secondly, the differences are determined by different level of social due process: real interactions are determined by social roles, norms and conventions of group or culture which a person belongs to; while personal representations are characterized by the lower social taboo. Thirdly, the differences are connected with the levels of generality and mediation through social experience: personal representations are more precise and less generalized in comparison with real interactions.

Personal representations of "I – Other" interaction are ideas about interaction with Other, constructed by a personality; they include highly-organized system of verbal and image meanings which are predictors of the following interactions, interpersonal relations and social personality development. They appear as a result of socio-psychological interaction of a person with different Others and they make the essence of inter-subjective space of personality. Due to socio-psychological integration of inner, personal and reflected external, group and individual presentations, there are formed personal representations of "I – Other" interaction; and that makes the basis for regulation of social behavior of a person as a certain social group (community) representative.

Localization of personal representations of "I – Other" interaction in inter-subjective space is determined by value-meaning orientations of personality and conditions of its socialization. And their cross-transitions are determined by socio-psychological characteristics of personality, peculiarities of its interactions and interrelations with other subjects and groups; and by the specific nature of situational context. Personal representations of "I –Other" interaction appear as the condition and inner factor of social personality development, personality's self-improvement, and self-activity. They also influence the formation process of personality's attitude; and stipulate the strategies of its interactions with other subjects and the characteristics of interpersonal relations.

Socio-psychological analysis of personal representations of "I – Other" interaction is concentrated not only on the external situational context which is connected with inbound information and not only on the inner context which is given by the personality's system of knowledge, values and meanings. But also it is concentrated on the wider socio-cultural context.

The variety of personal representations of "I – Other" interaction is differentiated with respect to the following interrelated contexts: culture, society and personality, representing the result of socio-psychological interaction of personality with real Other, symbolical Other, and personalized Other. The process of constructing representations of interaction in various contexts (culture, society, personality) promotes the process when spheres of inter-subjective space of personality get emergent properties, interpenetrating, enriching each other, defining new contexts and, in this way, changing real interactions of personality with the others.

The following theoretical model of inter-subjective space is provided for socio-psychological analysis of personal representations of "I – Other" interaction: the axes are "I – Other in society (real Other)", "I – Other in culture (symbolical Other)" and "I – Other as my part (personalized Other)". The model con-

sists of three spheres of inter-subjective space: socio-cultural, socio-existential and existential-cultural.

Inter-subjective space is limited by the borders of two types which determine its configuration: intra-subjective borders are identified by the scale "I – not-I" and they detach the set of self-images, inter-subjective borders detach various cooperating subjects and are represented by the scale "I – Other". Redefinition of borders of inter-subjective space leads to its narrowing or widening. And changing of borders' characteristics (length, permeability, strength, mobility and tension) is determined by socio-psychological factors and peculiarities of interaction's situational context.

One can derive two major inter-connected types of personal representations of "I – Other" interaction in inter-subjective space of personality: "I – in-group Other" and "I – out-group Other". Their peculiar features are described depending on localization in this or that sphere of inter-subjective space of personality. Regardless of localization in inter-subjective space, all personal representations of "I – Other" interaction are constructed with the help of personal mechanisms of experience reorganization as well as socio-psychological mechanisms of representations formation. Time history of personal representations of "I – Other" interaction is governed by the transition from single representations – which are constructed by personality on the basis of interactions with certain Others in special interaction situations, – to particular and invariant representations. It is linked with the appearance of stable connections and constellations between different representations, formed by personality in different contexts. Also it is linked with the appearance of new representations and their integration into the system given.

Socio-psychological factors (personal involvement into socio-cultural context, socio-psychological peculiarities of personality, integratedness of personality into group) determine distinguishing features of representations of personal interaction with Others [8].

Methods of empirical research

The empirical researches were built on correlation between ideographic and nomothetic methods and studying the experience of socio-psychological interactions. Nomothetic approach includes the complex of methods which are aimed at tracing tolerance level (methods of V.V. Boiko), ways of resolving conflict (methods of K. Thomas), peculiarities of personality's self-attitude (methods of researching self-attitude by V.V. Stolin and S.R. Pantileev), manifestation of personality (R. Cattell's 16PF Questionnaire, CPI Questionnaire), traumatic stress questionnaire, defensive mechanisms test-questionnaire by Kellerman-Plutchik, characteristics of interpersonal relations (modification of T.Leary's methods).

The range of ideographic techniques was used and among them were famous projective methods (Rosenzweig Frustration Study, methods of R. Gille, methods "Personal Differential", modified variant of TST by M. Kuhn and T. McPartland), assessment program, content analysis of proverbs' texts, the author's questionnaires, and the author's methods of reflexive self-report "I – Other".

For the purpose of studying personal representations of "I – Other" interaction, the technique of reflexive self-report was worked out; it involves systemized description and registration of personal representations of "I – Other" interaction characteristics, qualities and properties in verbal and image character form. It encourages subject's dialogue and openness to the world and Others in this world; stimulates feelings initiated by the interaction experience; and helps to discover new ways of self-being. And it presupposes reflection not only and not so much of the essential personal characteristics and peculiarities of Other, but rather than self-perception through Other and constructing image of Other as part of self.

The technique of reflexive self-report "I – Other" is aimed at the reconstruction of inter-subjective world (the world of I and Other) with the help of analysis of meanings, relations and feelings. It consists of two description va-

riants. The first one deals with verbalization of subjective ideas, personal meanings, articulation of feelings and ways of relating with the world and Others – in the form of value judgments, which together make the text with the structure given by the researcher. According to the modern conceptions, all the manifestations of linguistic realization may be seen as text, discourse, narration. Therefore, the combination of verbalized judgments and subjective opinions, experienced in regard to self and Other (about the ways of forming and changing identity, subjective positions, behavioral patterns, nature of social interactions), acts as one whole text available for further interpretation. The configuration of text in the technique of reflexive self-report is the result of cooperation between researcher and object of the research. On the one hand, researcher purposely actualizes inter-subjective experience, and feelings and meanings connected with it. The text structure, its dominant symbolic figures (for example, in-group and out-group Other, I, Hero,Friend, Enemy, Stranger), character basis for assessment (for example, register of significant qualities of Other, associative and metaphoric arrays, level of similarity and/or difference, assessment of Other's positive and negative qualities) is outlined by researcher either by open or closed questions – which are aimed at a certain item and which state thematic and time framework of research, – or by incomplete sentences which show personal meanings and subjective senses, and which clarify the implicit content of the suggested notion. It should be noted that the key points in assessment, determined by research tasks and age peculiarities of the test group, must adequately reflect the subjective reality which is in the focus of analysis.

On the other hand, substantive content of text, its multiple meaning and polysemy are determined not only by personal activity, motivation, independence and responsibility which help to get "inner" description of intra-psychic space and life experience of subject. But also they are determined by inter-subjectiveness as specific dimension of I and Other. Beyond any doubts, the obtained texts are the reports written by the terms of everyday language, at the lev-

el of naïve judgments; individual style and original lexicon are saved unchanged. It is known that in phenomenological descriptions the everyday, ordinary for test subjects, individualized language can detect and show the presence of subtle differences in inter-subjective world of experience and barely noticeable nuances which are determined by cultural, religious, age, professional, group and other discourses [9]. It is important for us that subjective verbal representations act as key markers of subjects' inter-subjective space and in a greater degree reflect authenticity and reliability of person's psychic reality. Speech becomes the tool for structuring inter-subjective experience. Moreover, taking into consideration the descriptive reports of test audience, we focus our attention on the individual part of the language and reflected meanings, which are actualized by test audience. In this way, it is emphasized that every person is not only a subject of his/her own life, its only author and responsible actor, but also a demanding expert.

The second variant of descriptions in the technique of reflexive self-report "I – Other" deals with comparative graphic representations and also made according to researcher's topic which is connected with the experience of social interactions of I and Other (for example, I and Other included into my group", "I and mentally ill person"; "I and patient", "I – real" and "I – ideal"; "I and my friend"). We consider pictures as text, considering that texts is understood as semantically coherent whole which can be describes either by the instruments of natural language, or by any sign system used by people. Consequently, a picture is a message, coded with the help of images. It is important to say that in the context of technique of reflexive self-report "I – Other", we use pictures not to answer the questions *why* a test person arranges the picture on paper in this particular way, *why* he/she meaningfully chooses this or that object with these particular elements using hatching, weight and decoration – as it is accepted in traditional interpretations of picture tests. We draw attention to the questions "*What* is represented?" and "*How* is it reflected and experienced?" Using the

expressive language of visual representations, we specify, add and widen verbalized information about feelings and meanings, because graphic images are determined not only by conscious intentions, feelings and reflected meanings, but also by unconscious impulses and unaware feelings. Moreover, we take into consideration the fact that sometimes it is difficult for a person to express this or that judgment in verbal form, articulate it clearly and formulate the idea accurately. While graphic image is characterized by the absence of evident denotative meanings and may act as universal sign which is comprehensible by all people, though specified by many connotations. We should note that ill-formed drawing skills and motor awkwardness are considered as restrictions for any picture techniques. They foremost influence the quality and external character of expression, i.e. signifying, and to a lesser degree they touch meaning content of images which are determined by attitudes and feelings, i.e. signified.

Consequently, in the developed technique of reflexive self-report, two systems of attribution of meanings and feelings (conceptual and sensory-perceptive) are used; their intermediaries are verbal and image representations. In fact, as a result of implementing this technique, there goes a decoding and interpretation of one and the same message, which was obtained from a test person with the help of different sign systems. Semantic meanings are fixed and established via doubling sign information, its supplement, completion and specification. The signified – reflected meaning or feeling is reconstructed and signified as indicator of interpersonal interaction experience.

Research project

The research project was prepared for the purpose of studying personal representations of "I – Other" interaction. It included six independent researches; each of them was aimed at completing several certain tasks and was tested on separate test group using different methods and approaches. The exception was made for the author's method of reflexive self-report "I – Other"; it was applied

to each research and was described above. The total sample size was 1000 people.

In the framework of the first research, personal representations with the representative of in-group and their connection with tolerance level and behavior strategies were studied. The research confirmed the assumption that personal representations of "I – Other" interaction, being of socio-psychological nature, influence the formation of personal social attitudes, define the strategies of its interaction with other subjects and peculiarities of interpersonal relations. Personal representation of "I – Other" interaction stipulates the type of interpersonal relations, modality of forming social attitude in relation to Other, and elaboration of certain behavior strategies.

The second research was aimed at studying relations which are built with out-group Other and at defining the range of relations strategies. There was chosen a group; relations with this group are connected for most people with the experience of social exclusion and are based on socio-psychological stereotypes, aggressive attitudes and hostile attitudes. The out-group was represented by the group of mentally ill people who are stigmatized by society as others, strangers, different from other people. The research was made in 2 subgroups: the first subgroup included people who did not experience interaction with mentally ill persons; the second subgroup embraced the staff of mental hospital with different status and work experience, who had experience of professional communication with mentally ill people. I.e. the differentiating criterion of subgroup division was the experience of interpersonal communication. The assumption was verified that personal representation of "I – out-group Other" interaction determines personal behavior strategies in case of interaction with out-group representative: from avoiding interaction to understanding, governing and suppression in the context of interaction; and transforms being influenced by the experience of interpersonal communications.

In the framework of the third research the connection between the specific nature of subjective assessment of I-image (own visual image seen at photos) and personal characteristics and peculiarities of self-attitude was being explored. The assumption was validated that "I"-image, constructed on intra-subjective border of inter-subjective space, is meant for social presentation of personality. Personal self-presentation ("I – real", "I – ideal") and also subjective assessment of own visual image are the results of inter-subjective "I – Other" interaction. They are determined by personal characteristics, connected with self-attitude peculiarities and determined by the norms, rules and conventions, acquired during socialization process.

The fourth research was aimed at studying the influence of personal representations of "I – Other as the enemy" interaction on manifestation of traumatic stress symptoms and configuration of psychological defenses of personality. The hypothesis was supported that transformation of personal representations of "I – Other" interaction and narrowing of inter-subjective space borders are determined by socio-psychological characteristics of personality, nature of its interactions and interrelations with other subjects and groups, and also by the specific nature of situational context.

In the framework of the fifth research socio-cultural determination of personal representations of "I – Other" interaction (by the example of friendly relations) was being studied. It was revealed that socio-cultural determination of personal representations is connected with transmission of meanings and value standards of interpersonal relations which are fixed in culture. It determines the formation of stable personal attitudes, internalization of moral-ethical values of interpersonal interactions and realization of explicit, traditional patterns of behavior. The invariant characteristics of friendly interactions on the basis of personal representations of "I – significant Other" were revealed: mutual trust, mutual reciprocal altruism, empathic resonance and absolute acceptance as acknowledgement of Other's authenticity and value. The hypothesis was verified in general

that personal representations of "I – Other" interaction have both invariant characteristics, formed under the influence of socio-psychological and socio-cultural determinants, and specific characteristics which depend on the experience of interpersonal relations and individual psychological peculiarities of personality.

The sixth research was aimed at studying the multifunctional and polysemic nature of personal representations of "I – Other" interaction in relation to present-day youngsters who socialize under different conditions. The results show functional difference of personal representations of "I – Other" interaction (by the example of significant Hero image) for youngsters, who socialize in families and foster homes, and also it was detected that conditions and effects of socialization influence personal representations of "I – Other" interaction. Their diversity allows typifying Other's images on different classification grounds.

Conclusions

The worked out concept of personal representations of "I – Other" interaction helps to develop scientific foundations for defining the ways of reaching person's internal consistency and building effective interaction with others, basing on socio-psychological knowledge about content, kinds, mechanisms, factors and peculiarities of personal representations. The results of empirical researches support the validity of the assumptions which were put forward. And also they justify the relevance and predictive value of the developed technique of reflexive self-report "I – Other".

The following research areas can be called promising directions. First of all, it is studying personal reputation as a combination of cognitive constructs and reflexive assessments of real, symbolic and personalized Others of this or that personality. Secondly, it is finding religious, moral-ethical, aesthetic and linguistic aspects of personal representations of "I – Other" interaction. Thirdly, it is the description of ethnic, gender and professional specific nature of interac-

tion representations, and also the analysis of time base for personal representations of interaction (past, present and future).

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