V Congress of Russian Psychological Society

Social-psychological Peculiarities of Attitude to Self-image with Individuals Striving for Danger

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Abstract

Man cognizes the world on the basis of his ideas and security notions testing them daily. He builds up his behavior and alters the ways to interpret the environment by consulting his security notions. The study focuses on peculiarities of attitude to self-image with individuals striving for danger. 650 people participated in the study. The results obtained showed that people striving for danger look for the thrill, jeopardy attracts them. The marked distance of "safe Self"–image from the dyad “Self” – “endangered Self” indicates escape, security avoidance and existence of subjects own motives for seeking danger.

1. Introduction

The study into security issues, its interpretations in the course of social cognition is an essential task for Russia. First, the country is undergoing a radical transformation when most former effective social regulators have been destructed, which results in emerging risks of uncertain life goals and means to achieve them. Second, public mind has not adjusted to modern risks perception yet. The current dynamic of social sentiments reflects a growing level of expectations uncertainty. Third, “forms of social relations in schematic formats of contemporary social and economic evolution are reduced, social functional abilities are impoverished, mass society differentiation deepens, the pace of historic transformations accelerates, which predominates the necessity to tune personality structures modifications to the dynamics of social and psychological changeability”, [1].

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Security/insecurity of the surrounding reality facilitates the formation of everyone’s own sets of opinions, views and settings. Guided by his individual safety conception a person, trying to envisage events, builds up his behavior, assesses the outcome of his actions, and alters the ways to interpret the world around him. Everyday prerequisite to act under uncertainty (including information one), time deficit for decision making leads to risk’s being one of the important signifying elements in every man’s living space. “The need for safety determines a personality aspiration for being protected against destructive actions, thus providing interior resource of resistance; it is closely connected with the sense of psychological defensibleness, stability, certainty experienced by him in the situation occurred” [2].

The majority of objective risks conceptions proponents tie up two notions: risk and danger (M.S. Grinberg [3], B.N. Mezrin [4], M.Y. Shiminova [5]). They consider danger to be the fundamental element of the given dyad.

The model of “rise to risk” by V.F. Petrovsky [6], [7] greatly contributed to the study in question. The concept of non-adaptive activity under potential risk is based on the hypothesis that one of the probable activity forms which a situation of potential threat predisposes to is an activity directed to jeopardy, and it is a result of a subject’s free choice. In other words, it is assumed that a human being is capable of taking risk without benefiting anything from the situation; in this case the risk ought to be “altruistic”, or “spontaneous”. The author emphasizes specific manifestations of a person’s activity in taboo situations, i.e. socially programmed restrictions for personal choice realization. The “social taboo” situation as well as situation of a subject’s encounter with a natural object perceived as potentially threatening can cause intensification of pre-existing itch for action, or provoke forbidden actions.

Probably, by acting out imaginary outcomes of a dangerous or prohibited act reaction of fear (anxiety, restlessness) might be triggered. As things stand, a mental image of a risky act transforms into the actual reason for a real move up towards danger. Therefore, the author singles out the motives both pushing the person off danger (reaction of avoidance) and those driving him towards threat (striving for danger reaction).

Strive for jeopardy is believed to have a biological nature and can be explained by metabolic and hormone specifics of the organism. Thus, M. Tsukerman found [8] that adventurers demonstrate a much stronger reaction to new stimuli in particular brain systems with initially low noradrenalin. In his opinion, such people tend to feel bored more often and it makes them seek for dangerous and risky situations; as a result, noradrenalin production stirs up and risk-lovers condition improves. A number of scientists underline a link between the need for new sensations and such inborn properties of nervous system as power and dynamics. It was proved that respondents with a higher level of tolerance towards risk are, as a rule, older and better educated. People with low and middle income and those who inherited money tend to avoid risk.

So, the current stage of social development calls for study into the noted field of knowledge, and there is a great social demand for detecting psychological characteristics of the people striving for danger, in particular, attitude to self, readiness for taking chances, perception of threatening and risk-free situations, alertness to handle risks effectively.

2. Method

The task of the study is to explore peculiarities of attitude to self-image with individuals striving for danger. For respondents’ attitude to self-image estimate “semantic differential” method (modification of G. Peabody, A.G. Shmelev) was used. The interviewees had to evaluate (on the basis of similarity-contrast principle) the perception of their own subjective reality in terms of social and psychological security: psychological defensibleness, resilience, confidence, that the subjects either experience or not. Thirty two 5-to-0 bipolar scales were applied for data processing. The interpretation of the findings was carried out with the help of “Big Five” scale or B5: “Friendliness”, “Intellect”, “Activity”, “Self-control” and “Emotional Robustness”. The interpretive names of the factors correspond to the results of the Russian-language taxonomic study into personality
characteristics. The data processing employed Spearman rank correlation coefficient, factor and cluster analysis using primary components method, which made it possible to solve these tasks by means of “SPSS 11.0” package.

The sampling of the research (six hundred fifty respondents) was balanced according to age, sex, and education (48% males and 52% females in the age from 18 to 55).

3. Results

As a result of clustering (Ward's Distance Metric: Squared Euclidean) four blocks of clusters were defined. On their basis it was possible to single out four subgroups of test-subjects. In subgroup 1 there is a close correlation link between “now me” image and “safe me” image ($r=0.72$, where $p<0.01$), which allows one to state that representatives of this subgroup find themselves out of danger. The subgroup 2 respondents demonstrate high correlation between “now me” image, and “safe me” image plus “endangered me” ($r=0.912$ and $r=0.79$, where $p<0.01$), which indicates that this subgroup interviewees identify themselves with both situations. “Now me” image of subgroup 3 respondents is notable for its link with “safe me” image ($r=0.515$, where $p<0.01$) and a smaller correlation with “endangered me” image ($r=0.363$, where $p<0.05$), i.e. on the whole, they consider themselves to be out of danger although they expect some threat to appear. The final subgroup, first of all, is characterized by tight correlation coupling between “now me” image and “endangered me” image ($r=0.600$ where $p<0.01$), conditioned by the fact that their “self” – conception is associated with thrust for adventure and risk.

It was subgroup 4 that became the object for further empirical analysis. The given subgroup respondents see themselves as being in danger, in the situation pregnant of potential threat. Risk and adventure attract them. “Now me” image from their point of view is presented as intelligent (1.75 points), careful (1.34 points), flexible (1.25 points), tactful (1.09 points), which speaks for specific skepticism, critical thinking, tolerance to contradictions and ambiguity. The “endangered me” image embraces serious (1.03 points), sincere (1.27 points), calm (1.4 points), man of principle (1.08 points), mild (1.41 points) and industrious (1.64 points), which points to emotional maturity, sensation and temper control, ability to find adequate explanation and realistic expression. The “endangered me” image is as follows: critical (1.59 points), aggressive (-1.13 points), faultfinding (-0.97 points), concerned (-0.63 points), and intelligent (1.22 points).

![Graph showing respondents judgments of their attitudes to "self" in the security/insecurity situations](image-url)
Factor-analytical processing resulted in identifying two meaningful factors. The first powerful factor accounts for 71.5% of total dispersion and includes the following adjectives: peaceful .99, forgiving .99, exuberant .99, sincere .99, unfettered .98, brave .98, organized .98, credulous .97, pleasant .97, industrious .90, cheerful .88, tactful .87. The opposite pole of the first factor compiles the following features: gullible -.91, shifty -.82. The 1st factor content allows us to treat it as “Activity”. The positive pole hosts positively loaded “now me” image. High estimates testify to interviewees’ irresponsiveness to threats, brevity, determination, craving for risk and new sensations. “Endangered me” image follows “now me” image.

The second factor (28.4%) is represented by such characteristics as participating .99, confident .99, calm .96, intelligent .96, practical .94, generous .89, flexible .89, careful .79. The opposite pole involves these scales: dependent -.95, unscrupulous -.85, adjusted -.83, tough -.79, excited -.77, light-minded -.74, passive -.71. This factor’s content can be interpreted as “Independence”, which implies self-sufficiency, responsibility, emotional stability. The image of “safe me” has extreme points of the positive pole.

Fig. 2. Semantic field of respondents perception of “self” in situations of Security/insecurity
Semantic field analysis showed that an ideal world zone combining positive poles of “Activity” and “Independence” factors is relatively empty (see Fig. 2.). The images of “self” and “endangered me” are located in the zone of instability and potential changeability formed by the positive pole of “Activity” factor and the negative pole of “Independence” factor. The treatment of these positions in terms of “Activity” and “Independence” factors indicates the fact that the study subjects find it necessary to have wide and intensive interpersonal interactions. They are in want of exterior stimulation, the need for “joy of life”.

In this context jeopardy and appeal exist in agreement. A certain threat for subjects dominates. Interaction is connected with risk, and sense of self acquires attractiveness.

The “safe me” image is also situated in the conflict zone programmed by the negative pole of “Activity” factor and the positive pole of “Independence” factor. The image under analysis can be generally estimated as positive but passive and inert. The expressed alienation of “safe me” image from the dyad “self”-“endangered me” speaks for withdrawal, avoidance of nonthreatening situations, existence of an individual’s own reasons for seeking danger.

4. Discussion

Thus, respondents differ from others in perception of themselves in danger. However, instead of envisaged anxiety, dependence on helplessness we observe strive for danger, calculated withdrawal from security, craving for freedom and risk. They evidently seek for changes and freedom and are afraid of any restrictions, traditions, mechanisms and order. Their past belongs to the past and is of relative interest for them compared with spectacular and vivid present; the most important thing for them is “now”, a moment.

The study showed that security is an intricately structured psychological formation which depends on perceptive specifics of personal psychological defensiveness, resilience, self-confidence a subject can or cannot experience in the situation occurred, i.e. perception of his own subjective reality. “Security is a phenomenon that, on the one hand, is associated with relative personality sustainability and integrity and, on the other hand, with its remodeling and development in society and characteristics of its socialization” [9].

To sum up, security is a psychological formation that depends on perceptive specifics of individual’s own subjective reality. The results obtained indicate that in the semantic field there exist mechanisms of images tied to security in the semantic field: “now me”, “safe me” and “endangered me”. Semantic differential analysis data make it possible to have semantic field illustrating the model of “Alltagsbewuβtsein” which includes “secure” and “insecure” images of the world. The location of objects in the semantic field corresponds to values embodied in the respondents’ images of dangerous and nonthreatening world.

References
