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THE QUESTION OF THE PSYCHOLOGICAL STRUCTURE OF AFFECTS

A b s t r a c t. The article examines the nature of affect development, its regression and implication in the theories of different psychological approaches of modern psychology. Benefits and comparative significance of affects for the whole psychobiological activity are presented and described. The mechanisms of affect influence on behaviour and personal reactions to external stimuli are defined. Affects become specific as their meanings and circumstances are associated with certain situations, reactions, feelings, bodily gestures, facial expressions and words. They are associated with certain objects and states of the Ego and can acquire protective functions. The affect psychological structure is such that the given emotional state influences the psyche in general, and in particular, the consciousness.

Key words: emotions; feelings; affects; affective reactions; integration; psychological structure of affect; mental health; personality.

1. INTRODUCTION

Affects can be attributed to the emotional sphere, because they are manifested through the same mechanisms as emotions. A person reacts to external stimuli and, depending on the internal attitude towards them, he/she experiences both positive and negative emotions. Making an attempt to gain a systematic view on emotions, scientists should take into account that every mental event includes an affective component.

However, in psychology, affects are often perceived not as a part of a person's inner Self, but as an external manifestation. Therefore it is very useful

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to discuss emotions in the language of their certain components (the cognitive element of affects), pay attention to meanings of certain affects, to examine messages developed during affect experiencing. Meanings of an affect often clarify certain aspects of a problem at hand, which a person could not note consciously.

Affects become specific as far as their meanings and circumstances are associated with certain situations, reactions, feelings, bodily gestures, facial expressions and words. They often become associated with certain objects and states of the Ego and acquire protective functions.¹ Affects can be a non-symbolic information processing system; some affective memories are deprived of verbal, symbolic or cognitive elements.

Numerous scientific studies show that the term “affect” in the modern psychological, psychoanalytic and psychiatric literature has different but rather narrow meanings, denoting either an expressed and short-term emotional state; or it is synonymous with emotions, feelings and moods; or it combines emotions having an external expression and subjective feelings.² It should be noted that we can see among the old Latin meanings the words “affect” such as “trend,” “disposition” and even “character,”³ reflecting the original basic understanding of the term.

According to psychological studies performed by R. Emde,⁴ E. Jacobson,⁵ D. Stern and others,⁶ mental structures consist of the basic blocks representing an internalized experience of early dyadic “I-Other” relations. Relations in this dyad are established through affects that colour subjectively each episode of interaction and determine leading drives at moments of these relation creation. Stable psychic representations are formed out of thousands of these emotionally integrated interactions. Therefore, a dominant pole (positive or negative) of affects arisen from these interactions, success or failure

¹ G. KRISTAL, D. KRISTAL, *Integratsiya i samoistseleniye. Affekt, travma i aleksitimiya* (Moskva: Institut obshchegumanitarnykh issledovaniy, 2017), 75.

² J. NEMIAH, H. FREIBERGER, P. SIFNEOS, “Alexithymia: a view of the psychosomatic process”, in *Modern trends in psychosomatic medicine*, ed. O. Hill (Butterworths, 1976), 430-440.

³ *Dictionary of the English language*. Fourth edition (Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000).

⁴ R. EMDE, *The prerepresentational self and its affective core. The Psychoanalytic Study of the Child* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 165-192.

⁵ E. JACOBSON, “The affects and their pleasureunpleasure qualities in relation to psychic discharge processes,” in *Drives, Affect, Behavior*, ed. R.M. Loewenstein (New York: International Universities Press, 1953), 38-66.

⁶ D. STERN, “Implications of infancy research for psychoanalytic theory and practice”, in *Psychiatry Update II*, ed. L. Grinspoon (Washington: American Psychiatric Association, 1983), 8-12.

in solving of developmental problems, empathy or its absence and feedback from carers, affective world complication and its understanding, integration of conflicting affects and shaping skills for their regulation are the determining factors for formation of a personality.⁷

2. STATEMENT OF BASIC MATERIALS

Affects began to be singled out as an independent group among the various “feelings” at the beginning of the twentieth century. Affects almost always arise in the form of a reaction on some tension.

Affects are known to every person. They are part of our experience, so familiar to us and widespread, that we speak of them as something that characteristic to people. But affects, with their inherent physiological form of expression, are responses characteristic to the entire animal kingdom⁸.

K. Jung believed that affects are a central organizing principle of mental life, because they connect different components of the mind (sensations, ideas, memories, judgments), giving each of these components a “sensual colour” common to all. Whenever life events are accompanied by a strong affect, all the mental components associated with this event as well as perceptive elements of this experience are accumulated around this affect, forming a sensuously coloured complex.⁹ V. Vitvitsky¹⁰ described affects as a certain sensual state that “acquires a very significant force and becomes a general vivid violation of mental life.” He attributed to affects such emotional reactions as fear, horror, and anger. According to A.N. Leontiev, affects occur when a person needs to do something, but cannot do anything, that is, the person falls into a desperate situation. He singled out important criteria for affect determination, namely: a disorder of consciousness; expresses changes in the vegetative system; impulsive behaviour, lack of planning; discrepancy of affective behaviour with the personality.¹¹

⁷ A. YEZHOV, [Elektronnyi resurs], http://psy4psy.ru/identichnost_i_affe_kty

⁸ G. KRISTAL, D. KRISTAL, *Integratsiya i samoistseleniye. Affekt, travma i aleksitimiya*, 7.

⁹ M.G. ARKHANGORODSKIY, *K voprosu o psikhologicheskoy strukture psikhicheskoy travmy s tochki zrieniya analiticheskoy psikhologii*, Penza, [Elektronnyi resurs] http://narkolog-penza.narod.ru/2_1_5.htm

¹⁰ W. WITWICKI (ed.), *Psychologia*, 3 rd (Krakow–Torun, 1, 1946).

¹¹ A.N. LEONTIEV, *Potrebnosti, motivy i emotsii. Psychology of emotions. Texts*, ed. V.K. Viliunas, Yu.B. Hipenreiter (Moskva, 1984), 168-170.

A number of modern psychoanalytic works by H. Kristal on trauma and affect, J. McDougall about psychosomatic disorders,¹² F. Tustin on autism give an idea that “a whole experience” consists of many factors and that integration of experiences is not always possible.¹³

B. Brown described four aspects of experiences, between which dissociation can take place: behaviour, affects, sensations and knowledge – this concept is known as the model of dissociation. At a dissociative disorder, either one of these aspects undergoes splitting, or normal links between them are disrupted. Normally integrated experiences include both physical and mental elements – affects and bodily sensations, thoughts, images, cognitive mechanisms, as well as a “semantic component” according to which an experience can be integrated as part of a personal identity.¹⁴

There are two understandings of the affect nature and essence: according to the first approach, affects, affective reactions are understood as reactions of a special type, and according to the second one, affects are understood as a certain quality characterizing, under certain conditions, reactions of the organism (Spinoza’s theories of affects). Spinoza’s doctrine of affect determined the most important psychological mechanisms and objective laws and anticipated a number of ideas put forward by the modern psychology. He believed that affects are the main force of behaviour; affects, according to him, include, first of all, drives associated with the body and with the soul.¹⁵ The discharge channel inside the body are determined biologically, they were described by Freud, but affects are formed with use of discharged inside energy and such formation belongs to individual development and occurs through a complex internal organization.

Considering the process of “increase of the number of affects,” R. Pine notes that certain sets of events influence affect transformation or formation: 1) affective states; 2) acquisition of new knowledge, which becomes a part of the mental life, possessing the properties of “a thing” or “an essence” (such as conscience, object constancy) and from which new affects emerge; 3) control / suspension / inhibition of processes, influencing current affects

¹² J. MCDUGALL, *Fheaters of the Body* (New York: W.W. Norton Co., 1989).

¹³ F. TASTIN, “Autistic objects”, *The International Review of Psycho–Analysis* 7(1980), 24: 27-39.

¹⁴ M.G. ARKHANGORODSKIY, *K voprosu o psikhologicheskoy strukturie psikhichieskoy travmy s tochki zrieniya analitichieskoy psikhologii*, Penza, [Elektronnyi resurs], http://narkologpenza.narod.ru/2_1_5.htm

¹⁵ A.D. TERESHCHUK, “Peculiarities of affects in personal psychological development,” *Science and Education a New Dimension. Humanities and Social Sciences* 5(2017), 24(146): 43-46.

(empirical accompaniments of bodily events), which also becomes models for later, mostly psychological experiences.¹⁶

The psychological structure of affects is such that this emotional state influences psyche in general, and in particular, a person's consciousness. The affect characteristics influencing on consciousness are very closely interrelated: narrowing of consciousness – the surrounding situation is perceived only through a prism of affectively coloured representations and experiences, there is a decrease in accuracy and completeness of the reflection over all events; fixation of consciousness – there is an infinite looping on one emotional stimulus, because the habitual behaviour of a person is changed.

An affect proceeds as a specific process in the human body, having its own stages: 1) the preparatory one (pre-affective) – at this stage, a certain understanding of what is happening remains, but it fades gradually. Situation understanding is gradually suppressed, but emotions become stronger; 2) the reactive stage (affective explosion) – the very state of an affect, when a person's will is suppressed, psychological processes become disorderly, and actions are chaotic, quick and uncontrollable. Here there are only two reactions: to escape and hide or to parry and attack; 3) the initial stage (post-affective, final) – depletion of physical and mental resources, so further acts cannot be continued.¹⁷

In psychology, affects are caused by situations when a person is in a stressful state and does not see any way out. An absence of a solution to the problem important to the person causes great fear in combination with inner excitement. Affects can be compared with loss of a sense of security and protection. When the person loses a basic sense of security, he/she falls into affect as a desire to eliminate the dangerous situation.

To date, affect is understood by the psychology as a special state, developed at specific unexpected critical moments. This state is biological, instinctive, since a person obeys only his/her animal nature, and not conscious thinking. This is a universal biological defence of oneself and one's interests. The whole organism is activated in order to drive out a discomforting source, to overcome or destroy it. The natural selection, as the most important mechanism of regulation and development of species, is realized through this reaction.

¹⁶ G. KRISTAL, D. KRISTAL, *Integratsiya i samoistseleniye. Affekt, travma i aleksitimiya*, 88.

¹⁷ *Affekt*, [Elektronnyy resurs], <http://psymedcare.ru/affekt#chto-takoe-affekt>.

It is important to understand and remember that any negative emotion appears when a person cannot satisfy his/her actual need. Emotion signals about it and pushes to actions to change the situation, encourages something to be done to satisfy the need. And the first reactions appearing at any not life-threatening discomfort (be other reactions appears in the event of a threat to life) are anger or aggression.

Aggression, manifested in a variety of aggressive affective states, surpasses each specific state, builds more complex object relations and new forms of more complex integrated affective states of a higher level – such as sadness, tenderness, guilt or a desire.

The anger meaning is that something bad has happened and responsibility is attributed to an external factor. Such constellation explains why an angry person feels his anger as justified and, therefore, is inclined to support it. The story behind the anger reveals the fact that a person guilty of this situation is perceived as a bad one, and an angry person feels entitled to hate and punish him/her.¹⁸

In many situations, under anger arisen, a person tries to do something, namely:¹⁹ to suppress (this harms health because a violent energy of destruction is left inside the body and it begins to destroy the body directly); to win back (to snap at others, weak ones unconsciously or to beat a sofa consciously); to transfer anger into physical activities safe for others (go in for sports or do frenzied cleaning and furniture relocation); to distract the body (unconsciously, with food, sex, alcohol, etc., or consciously, with deep breathing); to dissociate (to look at everything “from the side,” activating capabilities of the human brain and inhibiting its zones responsible for emotions).

All these methods are boiled down to the fact that a person needs somehow to get rid of the energy of emotions. After all, such energy is perceived as harmful, interfering (even if a person accepts the fact of its occurrence and does not blame him/herself for it). However, if we recall why and for what anger appears, so it is difficult not to consider reckless such a wastefulness of one’s own psychic energy.

There is a qualitatively different way, based on understanding the language of emotions and attentive attitude to their sayings. If there is a feeling that

¹⁸ G. KRISTAL, D. KRISTAL, *Integratsiya i samoistseleniye. Affekt, travma i aleksitimiya*, 20.

¹⁹ M.V. MALININA, *Energiyu gnieva – v konstruktivnoye ruslo* [Elektronnyj resurs], <https://www.b17.ru/article/87068/>

anger flashes inside, a person have to ask him/herself: what does he/she want to protect, what need cannot be satisfied?

Such a reflection implement the first important thing: it translates brain functioning to a higher level – the cortex of the frontal lobes are activated instead of the ancient, animal parts of the brain, so a person becomes reasonable. Due to this, psychic energy is redirected and emotions are subsided. In this case, the body feels that the emotion is not just “eliminated,” but its signal is accepted for processing. If a frustrated need is understood, support in this suffering part of the psyche can be given.

Different techniques can be used in this case. For example, silhouette of a person can be draw with depicting of his/her emotions by any figural material. And the following questions should be answered: where is the person located, what colour does the emotion has, why does it look like that, where is it felt in the body and how, how can it be expressed? Or else, special cards with names of the emotions can be written, the person chooses cards matching his/hers emotions. Then the chosen cards are discussed. It is important to make clear that there are neither bad nor good emotions.

It is very important to be aware of difficulties in feeling understanding and expressing as a problem to work with; how to focus on emotions and how to deal with them; to monitor closely the balance between verbal (cognitive) and somatic aspects of affects, to search for manifestations of bodily stresses, needs and to establish links between these phenomena and the current “here and now” dynamics.

We have defined some rules for dealing with emotions: it is normal to experience different emotions; there are no bad emotions; people cannot help but feel what they feel; emotions come from within; they are not connected with people who are near; emotions should be released in a permissible way; emotions need be released and experienced through the body. At a moment preceding an affect, it is recommended to distract oneself to something else not related to the object causing affect, to change the situation or activity, to calm down motor reactions.

3. CONCLUSIONS

Affects become specific as their meanings and circumstances are associated with certain situations, reactions, feelings, bodily gestures, facial expressions and words. They are associated with certain objects and states of the Ego and can acquire protective functions. Affects are a non-symbolic

information processing system. Some affective memories are deprived of verbal, symbolic or cognitive elements. By interpreting the contexts of affects emergence, a person can increase affect differentiation, verbalization and desomatization. Thus, an impact of emotions goes beyond activation of a certain autonomous system, emotions influence the entire psychobiological activity of a person.

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ZAGADNIENIE PSYCHOLOGICZNEJ STRUKTURY AFEKTÓW

S t r e s z c z e n i e

Artykuł analizuje naturę rozwoju afektów, ich regresje i implikacje w różnych psychologicznych teoriach i podejściach współczesnej psychologii. Omówiono i opisano korzyści oraz znaczenie afektów w całej aktywności psychobiologicznej człowieka. Określono mechanizmy wpływu afektów na zachowanie i indywidualne reakcje na bodźce zewnętrzne. Afekty stają się specyficzne, ponieważ ich znaczenie i okoliczności są powiązane z pewnymi sytuacjami, reakcjami, uczuciami, gestami ciała, mimiką i słowami. Są związane z pewnymi przedmiotami i stanami Ego i mogą pełnić funkcje ochronne organizmu. Struktura psychologiczna afektów sprawia, że dany stan emocjonalny ogólnie wpływa na psychikę, a w szczególności na świadomość.

Słowa kluczowe: emocje; uczucia; afekty; reakcje afektywne; integracja; struktura psychologiczna afektu; zdrowie psychiczne; osobowość.