

Anxiety, Depression, and Sense of Purpose in Life – an Empirical Interpretation*

In the area of clinical and social psychology of the last two decades one could easily observe a tendency to deal with experimentally oriented and conceptualised researches. It is obvious that this kind of social and individual problems analysis is connected with the dominating methodological trend observed and applied in social sciences, especially in psychology. Needless to say, this way of scientific research is easy to verify and control. It makes the experimental procedure repeatable and makes it possible to compare the effects of experiments carried out in various contexts. There remains, however, the question of usefulness of such experiment methods and procedures. Experimental methodology gives at times unessential results. Such interpretations are undertaken in such disciplines as etnomethodology, phenomenological psychology and sociolinguistics. In this paper one of the most essential problems is the preliminary analysis of phenomenological data. The title of this article refers to a problem which is still in the phase of conceptualisation. It is necessary to define what should be done to work on it thoroughly (Czajkowski, 1988).

In the research, the author will be exploring the possibility of depression and anxiety in students' personal relationships. It is known that in the beginning of studies at a university students have some difficulties connected with the process of learning. However, another kind of difficulties is related to personal development. In this phase of personal possibilities' development, it is easy to meet many barriers and aversive circumstances. In such case anxiety and depression may appear. The author presumes that the mentioned disorders are related to personal and existential problems rather than study-related ones. Analysing the initial requirements of establishing personal contact, author considered papers of existentially and phenomenologically oriented authors such as Schutz (1962) and Buber (1966). These authors conceptualised, described and interpreted ontological, epistemological and axiological frames of human relationships. The

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most essential area is the phenomenological investigation of intersubjectivity. Analyses made by Buber and Schutz provide philosophical background for psychological conceptualisation. For this paper Buber's interpretation of interhuman relationship in term "I-Thou" and "dialogue" might be very useful. Buber interpreted a phenomenon taking place between two persons. He asserts that "interhuman relationship" requires a few essential conditions. They are as follows:

- Perception of oneself and perception of another person in personal perspective (not-as-an-object).

- The dialogue without a mask.

- Perceiving another person as the person, a unique individual (uniqueness).

Lack of one of these conditions in a dialogue is probably an essential barrier in communication between young people. It may result from changes of personality and little stability. It also relates to contacts between a doctor and a patient, a psychotherapist and a patient, a teacher and a student, an expert and a client.

Six general factors were identified in the author's analysis conducted on a set of interpersonal communication predictors. One of them is strictly connected with a phenomenological construct known as we-relationship (Czajkowski, 1989; Kando, 1977).

In the phenomenologically-oriented psychology it is assumed that personality has several fundamental characteristics (attributes). They are as follows:

- Overcomplexity – it is possible to learn a long list of personality traits, but it is impossible to learn just one individual's personality totally, if an unknown part is excluded.

- Individuality – as a consequence of complexity; each personality is unmatched; it is unique.

- Processuality – as it was said, personality is in changing, it is in the process of becoming.

- Concreteness – personality of an individual is a concrete structure, so it is difficult to describe it in general terms and it is impossible to do it adequately (Adamic, 1988).

Buber stressed the negative role of untruthfulness in the process of dialogue. That way of realising human relationships is considered as fundamental in Goffman's dramaturgical theory of human behaviour. It is expected that presenting oneself inadequately, intentionally misleading may be the cause of personal discomfort. Social pressure determines people to behave in certain, socially arranged and accepted ways. If individuals do not conform to them, they are punished by a group of persons significant to them.

The axiological level of analysis is necessary to constitute an interpersonal relationship. Incoherence between the hierarchy of values and behaviour may cause essential disturbances in an individual's ways of coping. In such circumstances

we may expect states of depression and anxiety. Such incoherence is treated by the author as one of the obstacles and aversive circumstances, and is related to personal and existential problems of an individual. Therefore the area of individuals' existential reality and hierarchy of fundamental values needs further investigation.

It has to be said that there is a dichotomy between personal structure (personal integrity) and the ability to show socially adequate reactions. If truth is denied in a contact, participants do not fulfil Buber's conditions of interhuman relationship. The other person becomes an object and is treated as a thing; he or she takes part in the contact when their inner traits and abilities are negated.

Buber's works belong to phenomenological – existential approach. In such research relevant conceptualisations refer to I-Thou relation. It refers to ontological level of human relations. Epistemological and axiological levels belong to a different level of interpretation of human relations. Epistemological interpretation describes and explains an individual's cognitive abilities to make contact with another person. In the axiological analysis human relationships are described and defined in relation to universal values.

It is impossible to analyse these topics in extension now but the author is aware of their relevance. The author's assumptions may be summarised as follows:

- this study contains preliminary theoretical assumptions for conceptualisation and organisation of empirical research on anxiety and depression,
- basing on Buber, Schutz and other phenomenologists it is possible to introduce some practical implications resulting from interhuman encounter,
- phenomenological conceptualisation of human relation is useful as a theoretical background but it requires further analyses and investigations.

In the area of clinical psychology the tendency to deal with experimentally oriented and conceptualised researches may be easily observed. Needless to say, this way of scientific research is easy to verify and control. There remains, however, a question about usefulness of such experiments, methods and procedures. It is especially relevant in the area of clinical psychology where the patient or subject is the core of investigation. One of purposes of this presentation is to discuss the framework for analysis of the methodological assumptions of clinical psychology. In this study we also present results of research which has been conducted on a group of students of Pedagogical University in Cracow. We have been trying to identify relations between personality variables and values, and especially sense of purpose in life. Nowadays this problem is obviously connected with the process of transition to another system and has its psychological consequences for individuals. Problems of mental health and the problem of quality of life have a new variable, which requires new life strategies. These strategies are essential for creating adequate forms of coping with common and existential difficulties. This new situation is a challenge for psychologists and psychological services. The

process of analysis of these new demands of social and economical reality consists of the following terms: individuality, communication, interpersonal skills, coping with others (getting in contact), psychological coherence of inner psychological states. Investigation of relations between universal values and personality variables is theoretically justified when one interprets personality as a system of behaviour. In that case sense of purpose in life must be involved in the process of an individual's coping. I am interested in clinical interpretations of mood. In the case of depression or depressive tendencies mood is usually characterised by negative emotions such as: sorrow, grief, emotional breakdown, and despair. A person with such emotional states will likely present a set of difficulties with organisation of their activity. These difficulties are determined by slower thinking and remembering. It is also connected with lack of energy and the feeling of exhaustion. Disturbances are also present in biological rhythms, especially in sleeping disorders. Depressive patients usually complain of somatic disorders such as headache and stomach disturbances. In depressive syndromes anxiety is one of the main manifestations. It is usually connected with the feeling of tension and threat. Remembering about Kępiński's categorisation of anxiety (biological, social, moral disintegration anxiety), I use Spielberger's categorisation. Anxiety is interpreted as a personality trait – it determines an individual's differences in disposition to experience anxiety states in a threatening situation. Anxiety as a psychological state is connected with experiencing tension and fear involved in increased activity of autonomous nervous system.

It is assumed that coping strategies are determined not only by external context but also by subjective process of self-evaluation and evaluation of subjects' role. In this case it is relevant to examine sense of purpose in life. According to Erickson (1980), developmental crises appearing in the period of becoming mature are mainly connected with a conflict between the subjects' sense of identity and loss of his role as well as with a conflict between tendency to intimate relationships and tendency to isolation. In our research we had two different aims:

- to diagnose specific aspects of subject's activity,
- to construct a frame for prevention programme.

Preventive actions are connected with the model that has descriptive and normative meaning. It is known that in the beginning of studies at a university students have some difficulties connected with the process of learning. However, another kind of difficulties is related to personal development. In this phase of personal possibilities' development, it is easy to meet many barriers and aversive circumstances. In such case anxiety and depression may appear. The author presumes that the mentioned disorders are related to personal and existential problems rather than study-related ones. The level of anxiety and depressive tendencies in students may be diagnosed with objective measures. These measures ought to be placed in a wider context, which determines students' adaptation.

Axiological determination is especially relevant; it defines an individual's abilities and range of contact with others. Limited ability to make personal contact with another person may cause adaptation difficulties. These difficulties are usually connected with lack of safety and level of mood. State of balance in mood could be seen as a continuum – interest-apathy, excitement-decreasing level of activity, being invasive in contact – being withdrawn in contact.

- In presented study I distinguish three fundamental directions of exploration:
- sense of purpose in life and anxiety,
- sense of purpose in life and appearance of depressive tendencies,
- sense of purpose in life and social (interpersonal) activity.

Sense of purpose in life is interpreted as an essential factor in pointing out an individual's activity. In general I assumed that there is a positive correlation between axiological dimension and certain personality characteristics.

Method

Research was conducted on a group of 203 students in their first year of studying. The group consisted of 158 women and 45 men; subject's average age was about 20; the group was randomised. In this project I used a Polish adaptation of State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (C.D. Spielberger's, R.L. Gorsuch's, R.E. Lushene's), a Polish adaptation of MMPI (S.R. Hathaway's, J. McKinley's) and a Polish adaptation of Purpose in Life Test (PLT- J.C.Crumbaugh's, L.T.Maholick's). MMPI was applied as a tool for identification of the main personality traits, STAI was used as a measure of anxiety level: anxiety as a relatively stable trait of personality influencing an individual's disposition to react with anxiety; and anxiety as a psychological state interpreted as a feeling of fear and tension. The Purpose in Life Test was the third method used in our study. This method provided us with data describing individuals' acceptance of their life and their attitudes to themselves and to the reality. These data are relevant as a measure of coping in life in existential sense of this term. Statistical calculations were performed with use of Kwikstat 2.0 – Statistical Data Analysis for IBM Computers.

Results

Results of our research confirmed our hypothesis of relation between anxiety, depressive tendencies and disorders in sense of purpose in life (relative lack of sense of purpose in life). There is no evidence of correlation between interpersonal

attitudes and sense of purpose in life but gathered data showed a relation between anxiety, depressive tendencies and social introversion. In general, depressive tendencies were located on average level (about 50 T).

The results of C.D. Spielberger's et. al. STAI were on the average level too (between 3 and 4 sten point in anxiety as a trait and between 4 and 5 sten point in anxiety as a state). A relation between anxiety as a trait and sense of purpose in life has been proved. The higher anxiety as a trait, the higher disturbances in sense of purpose in life. (Pearson's coefficient of correlation $r=0,87$; $t=24,9$; $p<0,001$). Analogous relation exists between anxiety as a state and sense of purpose in life. The higher anxiety, the higher disturbances in sense of purpose in life. (Pearson's coefficient of correlation $r=0,84$; $t=22,1$; $p<0,001$).

Analysis of correlation between depression and sense of purpose in life has brought the following results: the higher depression in MMPI, the higher disturbances in sense of purpose in life (Pearson's coefficient $r=0,20$; $t=2,9$; $p<0,04$); the higher subjective sense of depression (subscale of depression in scale of depression in MMPI), the higher disturbances in sense of purpose in life: increased lack of energy, lack of self-confidence and avoiding social contacts is connected with disorders in sense of purpose in life (Pearson's coefficient $r=0,17$; $t=2,4$; $p<0,001$). The next controlled characteristic of individual's behaviour are depressive reactions (added scale of MMPI). This variable also correlates with the sense of purpose in life (Pearson's coefficient $r=0,14$; $t=2,0$; $p<0,03$). We have also observed an interesting correlation between steeping in melancholy reflection (subscale of scale of depression in MMPI) and appearance of anxiety as a personality trait. The higher tendency to steep in melancholy reflection, the higher level of anxiety as a trait (Pearson's coefficient $r=0,18$; $t=2,4$; $p<0,008$).

In the analysis of interpersonal attitudes we wanted to identify a relation between social introversion, (clinical scale of MMPI) and a set of chosen variables. The first correlation appeared between social introversion, and anxiety as a trait. Increasing tendency to avoid social contact was related to increasing anxiety as a trait (Pearson's coefficient $r=0,14$; $t=2,0$; $p<0,04$). Analogous relation exists between social introversion and anxiety as a state (Pearson's coefficient $r=0,22$; $t=3,2$ $p<0,002$).

Introvertive attitudes were strongly connected with appearing depressive tendencies. The higher social introversion, the higher depressive tendencies (Pearson's coefficient $r=0,53$; $t=8,9$; $p<0,001$). Welsh's scale of anxiety (added scale of MMPI) also strongly correlates with introvertive attitudes. The higher social introversion, the higher level of pessimism, emotional discomfort, strong fear and inhibition (Pearson's coefficient $r=0,52$; $t=6,0$; $p<0,001$). There is also correlation between external symptoms of anxiety (perspiration, tension and tremor) and social introversion (Pearson's coefficient $r=0,47$; $t=9,0$; $p<0,001$).

Discussion

In the presented study we have confirmed the general hypothesis about relation between anxiety, depression and axiological level of students' activity operationalised by sense of purpose in life. Dealing with sense of purpose in life in scientific psychology has been interpreted as breaking a fundamental methodological rule. Nowadays this concept is treated as an interesting dimension of individuals' life. It is theoretically relevant that we found inter-correlation between anxiety as a trait, anxiety as a state and sense of purpose in life. This issue is coherent with theoretical assumptions accepted in psychology of personality: difficulties in sense of purpose in life may cause disintegration of personality structure and therefore anxiety and depression. The level of depression was medium, which does not imply a good level of adaptation. It is essential to take it into account when we construct programmes of educational, integrational and therapeutical influence. It is especially relevant because many authors consider dimension of sense of purpose in life as an autonomous level of human life. So it would be useful to interpret axiological problems as strictly related to personality problems. The process of description and explanation of those relations would require a new model of human activity, where it would be possible to compare and interpret dimensions of "values", "sense" and other individual dimensions. Summing up our study we ought to stress that we have identified correlations between personality characteristics and existential dimension of an individual's activity. Anxiety and depression turned out to be strongly connected with existential dimension of subjects. Results of our research have proved that anxiety, depression, and sense of purpose in life turned out to be useful and intercorrelated measures of an individual's adaptation to environment. Eventually, we ought to state that our results may be the first step to formulation of a preventive programme for adolescents that would enhance changes appearing in existential experience of young people. In such programme it would be useful and necessary to construct a model describing a subject's crises and fundamental crises and to include psychological mechanisms of coping with difficulties (which is especially relevant and unique in this period of life).

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