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## THE UNDERLYING MECHANISMS OF FUNCTIONING OF THE SELF-IMAGE OF SOCIALLY DISADVANTAGED MINORS

*Hrys, A.M. The underlying mechanisms of functioning of the self-image of socially disadvantaged minors. The article reveals the deep psychological mechanisms of functioning of the self-image of socially disadvantaged minors, which can be directly applied in the psychological practice of dealing with the specified category of children.*

*A fragment of work with the application of the author's model has been demonstrated, which simultaneously gives directions to psychologists and other specialists involved in the process of re-socialization of persons with deviant behavior.*

*The proposed variant of work with socially disadvantaged minors makes it possible to both identify a psycho-diagnostic tool in accordance with the type of the deviants' personality disorders and to select psychological techniques and methods of working with them.*

*The content of certain theoretical concepts has been revealed that form the basis of the creation of the author's model, in particular, those dealing with disorders of the self-image and other structures.*

*In each particular case of working with a deviant adolescent or a group of persons with deviant behavior, there will be revealed a unique system of interconnections and interdependencies between the self-image and a psychological trauma; the self-image and a system of relations; the self-image and emotions; the self-image and values and attitudes; the self-image and the psyche's protective mechanisms; the self-image and character; the self-image and behavior.*

*At the same time, it is also noticed that interactions can be found in practice, for example, between relationships and character, between a trauma and emotions, feelings and experiences. And one can do it not only in the sequence that is proposed but can also approach it creatively adding new components to the model.*

**Key words:** *psychological mechanisms, self-image, false self, true self, socially maladapted minors, trauma, anxiety, encapsulation.*

**The relevance of the research.** The emergence and spread of various types of maladaptation among minors is due to both objective and subjective factors, which is at present aggravated by the situation

of social, political, and economic instability, as well as the armed conflict in the East of Ukraine. That's why determining the causes and adequate ways of overcoming maladaptation is a key task of modern psychological theory and practice. At the same time, as our previous studies in this area have shown, just a small percentage of psychologists have a desire and willingness to work with a designated category of children. Undoubtedly, overcoming the maladaptive behavior of minors requires the involvement of specialists from different fields in solving this problem, but the role of the psychologist in this process is leading. This is due to the fact that behind the seemingly similar manifestations of minors' maladaptive behavior there lurk a variety of in-depth psychological causes that give rise to it. One of them is the self-image of socially disadvantaged minors, which has different types of interconnections with other personal formations, the search and restoration of which in the process of re-socialization is the main task of the psychologist.

In the process of providing psychological care, we first work with a separate target of psychotherapeutic influence: self-image, emotions, settings, values, behavior. And then we establish interrelationships between them, which act as effective psychological mechanisms of self-transformation and self-development, which promotes the activation of the adaptive capacity of a growing personality. In practice, the problem is that maladjusted minors often do not know how to write and read (street children, correctional facility juveniles, etc.).

**The purpose of the article** is to highlight a fragment from the experience of practical work of a psychologist, which demonstrates the sequence of disclosure of the underlying mechanisms of functioning of the self-image of socially disadvantaged minors, which reveals an element of the author's model that can be applied to the psychological practice of working with the specified category of children.

**Theoretical foundations of the study.** In our studies, we rely on works that cover the theories of socio-psychological adaptation of

personality: N.Y. Maksymova, V.D. Mendelevych, A.A. Nalchadzhian, Y.A. Kleiberh, M.V. Romm, S.I. Yakovenko, and others.

Accomplishments of prominent domestic and foreign authors, in which<sup>1</sup> the material on the content of the self-image and its structure has been accumulated (Robert B. Burns, L.A. Venher, I.S. Kon, E.A. Klymov, Charles H. Cooley, George H. Mead, S. R. Pantilieiev, M. B. Rosenberg, E.T. Sokolova, T. Shibusani, S. Epstein, P. Lecky, W. Stern, etc.). Proceedings revealing the age-related peculiarities of the perception of one's self-concept (L.I. Bozhovych, H.E. Zaleskyi, Grace J. Craig, I.I. Chesnokova, W. John Livesley, D. Bromley, etc.). Studies on the levels of the self-image development (I. S. Kon, R. Meili, V. S. Merlin, M. B. Rosenberg, etc.) at different age stages, which can mean not only the knowledge of one's self but also the willingness to realize it in one's own behavior.

The theoretical concepts that explain the underlying mechanisms of self-functioning in the process of personality development and those complex mechanisms of disorders (emotional, characterological, etc.) that are causing minors' social maladaptation should be integrated into a particular model that will become a benchmark in practice, especially for a novice psychologist, when dealing with the above-mentioned contingent.

If a child develops in favorable conditions, then his/her defenses do not become rigid and strong, the child acquires the ability to flexibly reprocess the experience of reality; he/she gradually learns that human life is multidimensional and changing. But the more threatening the intrapsychic and interpersonal reality is, the more often the child applies

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<sup>1</sup>McWilliams N. Psihoanaliticheskaya diagnostika: Ponimanie struktury lichnosti v klinicheskom processe / Transl. from English.—M.: Nezavisimaya firma "Class," 2007.—480 p.

inflexible and rigid early protections. That's what Nancy McWilliams writes about. In her opinion, defenses initially exist only as forms of healthy creative adaptation, which, in case of repeated and inflexible application in the situation of an insurmountable threat, turn into what is actually called "defense."

If a child does not have the experience of good enough relationships, the prospects of his/her living through authentic relationships look rather pessimistic. According to D. Winnicott, when a child experiences a repeated threat directed at his/her *self-perception*, *his/her vulnerable true self is regressing to the unconscious, and in order to protect it, the masked false self is created, which, having taken the place of the true self, interacts with the world.*

In our previous studies, we have revealed some functioning peculiarities of the self-image of traumatized persons, of individuals with different types of character and mechanisms of psychological defense. However, a deeper penetration into the essence of the studied problem will enable us not only to learn the deep-seated components of the self from all angles but also to find out the corresponding tools of psychological assistance to socially disadvantaged minors.

The self-image, as already mentioned above, is considered by us as a target of psychotherapeutic influence in the entire completeness of its structure and mechanisms of its functioning. After identifying the target of psychotherapeutic influence (the self-image and a psychological trauma, or the self-image and the mechanisms of defense), psychologists have the opportunity to build out their own benchmark for choosing the appropriate directions, methods, and techniques of dealing with socially disadvantaged minors, having taken the following model as a basis, developed by us and tested in practice, which includes the connections of the self-image with a psychological trauma, emotions, mechanisms of psychological defense, values and attitudes, character, and behavior.

The algorithm of the psychologist's work is as follows: first, we can observe some maladaptive manifestations in the behavior of the juvenile, then put forward the appropriate hypotheses as to what it may be related to, diagnose certain characterological disorders or pathogenic beliefs, values, and attitudes. But the most important thing is how they are presented in the structure of the self-image of a socially disadvantaged minor.

Moreover, the search for interactions between the self-image and other targets—emotions or behavior—is not always gradual and consistent in practice, as is shown in the framework of the model we propose.<sup>2</sup>

It is just the initial benchmark for the psychologist so that he can timely identify and understand the internal psychological picture of deviations and choose appropriate methods and techniques for providing psychological assistance.

**Methodology of the research and sampling.** An *empirical study* was conducted on the basis of Sviatoshynska secondary school no. 83 in Kyiv. The study covered 8th and 9th grade schoolchildren. The total number was 37 teens. The children were being raised by foster parents in family-type homes.

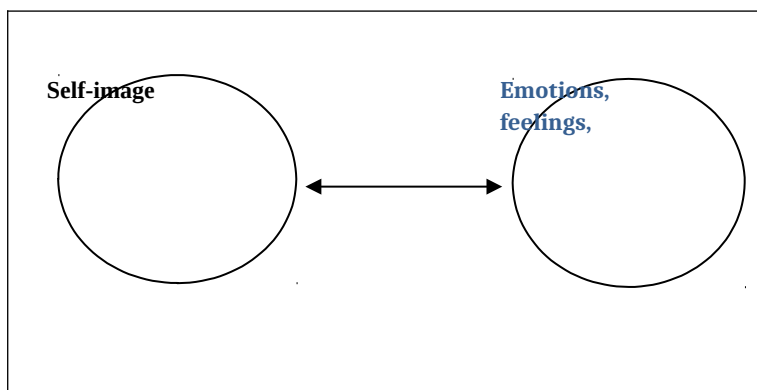
Traditionally, we apply the “Who am I?” test by M. Kuhn and T. McPartland for the diagnosis of disorders of the self-image of disadvantaged minors. Other methods are chosen according to the specific target (emotions, trauma, character, etc.) as well. Within the

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<sup>22</sup>Hrys A. M. Teoriia i praktyka pidhotovky psykholohiv do roboty z sotsialno dezadaptovanyimi nepovnlitnymi: monohrafiia / A. M. Hrys. —K.: Georprint, 2013.—280 p.

framework of this article, we will provide an example of diagnosing such target as Emotions, feelings, and experiences.

For example, we take a fragment from the general scheme model with deviant adolescents:



**Figure 1. Analysis of the system of interconnections in the “Self-image–Emotions” system**

In order to present a fragment of our work in practice using the proposed model, we will provide a variant of the diagnosis of the emotional sphere, in particular, the level of anxiety as a factor of social maladaptation of children who are being raised in family-type homes.

The Spielberger–Hanin anxiety test was applied.

The Spielberger–Hanin scale determines the level of anxiety, based on a self-esteem scale (high, medium, low anxiety).

Situational anxiety (SA) occurs as a reaction to stress, often of socio-psychological character (waiting for an aggressive reaction, the threat of self-esteem, etc.). The personal anxiety (PA) gives an idea of the individual's compliance to the influence of certain stressors associated with individual characteristics.

The Spielberger–Hanin method allows differentiated measurement of anxiety both as a personal property and a condition associated with the current situation. With its help, one can determine the manifestation of anxiety in the structure of personality.

Anxiety as a personality trait means a motive or an acquired behavioral pattern that forces a person to perceive a wide range of objectively safe circumstances as threatening, thus prompting the person to react to them by anxiety states, the intensity of which does not correspond to the magnitude of the real danger.<sup>3</sup>

### **Research results.**

Here is a brief summary of the data obtained. According to the results of the Spielberger–Hanin questionnaire, it was found out that 71% of the 9th grade students had a high reactive anxiety level, while 29% had a medium one. A low level was not typical of any student.

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<sup>33</sup>Ehnciklopediya psihodiagnostiki. Psihodiagnostika detej. Redaktor-sostavitel' ehnciklopedii D. Y. Rajgorodskij. —Samara: Izdatel'skij Dom "Bakhrakh-M," 2008.—624 p.

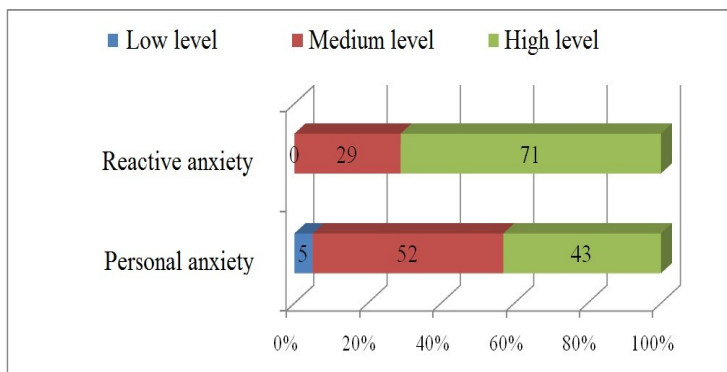


Figure 2. Level of anxiety of the 9th grade schoolchildren

The level of personal anxiety: high—43%, medium—52%, and low—5%.

Let's turn now to the results obtained by the same method in the 8th grade. -

19% of students had a high level of reactive anxiety, while 81% had a medium one. Low levels were not found in any of the students.

The level of personal anxiety was high in 19% of the students, medium—in 69%, and low—in 12% of them (see Figure 2).

These indicators demonstrate that students have a prevailing high level of reactive anxiety, i.e. the state that characterizes the degree of anxiety, worry, emotional stress, and develops under a particular stressful situation, may be sufficiently dynamic in both time and degree of severity.



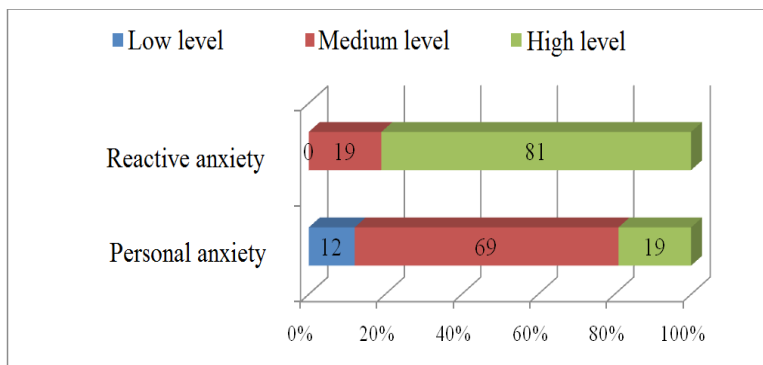


Figure 3. The level of anxiety of the 8th grade students

As we can see, the results of testing the level of reactive anxiety of the 8th and 9th grade students do not *statistically significantly* differ from each other (*by the criterion of Fisher's angle transformation,  $\varphi^*$* ), as compared to the results of distribution of levels of personal anxiety. Among the 9th grade students (in comparison with the 8th grade ones), there are more those with a high level of personal anxiety ( $\varphi^* = 1.60$  at  $p \leq 0.05$ ).

A rather high level of anxiety among schoolchildren is an indicator of children's emotional well-being disorder. As noted above, the studied kids came from disadvantaged families assigned to be raised by biologically alien parents (inmates of family-type homes).

**Discussion of the study results and the possibility of their application in the practice of providing psychological assistance to socially disadvantaged minors.**

Our results are consistent with the results of Basiuk O. (2008) on the dependence of the self-image from the significant other as a component of neuroticity in adolescence and young adulthood, with the study of Holovanivska V. (2000) on the peculiarities of self-concept as a factor in the formation of addictive behavior.

R. and J. Bayard (1995) are also convinced that being in good relations with *one's inner self*, taking care of it and submitting under its leadership is

what opens up the source from which the good for other people and for oneself originates.

According to M. Rosenberg, self-image depends on the social status of the individual and the possibility of success. In other words, self-image as an emotionally charged view of oneself summarizes the person's self-concept through his/her manifestation in specific relationships and life circumstances.

Regina Clos in her book, *Guilt— Sign of Hope?* (1991) formulated this task as follows: the child's establishment of limits of his own behavior and the guarantee of emotional balance for children depend on the acceptance by adults of the function of the *auxiliary self* where the organization of the *personal self* and personality of the child has not yet sufficiently developed. In such relationships, the child's personality is strengthened, since external stability (assured by the function of the auxiliary self) gradually becomes internal. Thus, the child is able to master the limits of the outside world. His growing autonomy will subsequently make external control superfluous.

Thus, a high level of anxiety among children is an evidence of a high degree of anxiety, emotional stress, which requires the implementation of appropriate psychotherapeutic interventions. A high level of anxiety among schoolchildren is an indicator of disturbance of emotional well-being of children. As noted above, the studied children come from dysfunctional families and are assigned to be raised by biologically alien parents (inmates of family-type homes).

**Conclusions.** The obtained results indicate the need to provide psychological help and support for adolescents with increased levels of anxiety. Once a psychologist received this data, his next step is to identify the relationship of these emotional disorders with other targets of psychotherapeutic influence, such as self-image, defense mechanisms, trauma, settings, and the like. It should be noted that psychodiagnostic work in dealing of a psychologist with a socially

disadvantaged minors has its specifics and should be applied in accordance with the type and levels of maladaptation.

Since among deviants, there are many those who have deep personality disorders (including biologically determined), as well as those who are pedagogically neglected (can't write and read), therefore, they are not able to fill in the basic forms of the techniques. When dealing with them, it is better to use conversation, suggestive methods, or express diagnostics. Concerning the specific goals of psychotherapy to overcome anxiety, one can orient psychologists toward the following steps in dealing with socially disadvantaged minors:

1. To deepen a sensory contact with the environment—tactile, auditory, visual, olfactory, and gustatory ones, to realize the sense of the significance of contact with other people. To develop a sense of stability, groundedness, and internal support through the techniques of body-oriented psychotherapy.

2. To develop the ability to sensitively perceive all sorts of bodily sensations: movement, breathing, tension, and relaxation, specific bodily experiences. To teach children to relieve the feeling of chronic tension or cramping in different parts of the body, as well as enhance their capacity to reduce the feeling of physical pain caused by this tension. To direct the released feelings of fury and anger toward the achievement of specific socially acceptable goals.

It is necessary to teach children to identify and give access to the feeling of horror inside of them, as well as determine its root causes. To integrate this feeling with the self-image so that it becomes a source of the ability to feel fear, depression and to develop one's own sensitivity.

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