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REPRESENTATION ABOUT OBJECTS OF DESTRUCTION AND ADULTS' USE OF VIOLENCE AGAINST THEM

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Abstract

The article deals with the problem of developing a general mechanism for adults' destructive behavior. The purpose of the research is to study the relationship between the representation of intra-, inter- and metapersonal objects of destructive impact and also the evaluation of the contribution of violence as a means of implementing destructiveness. The empirical hypotheses are: a) the presence of relations between the objects of destructive influence and b) the influence of the concept of violence on the specification of the destruction object. The study is carried out through questionnaires and takes into account 188 adults (age: $M = 33.7$, $SD = 4.21$, gender - 46% male, 52% female).

The first hypothesis is not confirmed: representations of destruction objects are not conjugate with one another, which indicates the isolated and non-contiguous nature of adults' destructive actions and does not conform to the data of studies of destructive behavior of teenagers and youth groups. The second hypothesis supported the idea that violence concretizes representations about objects of destruction. Regardless of the type of violence, its level contributes to the strengthening of ideas about the destroyed object. The obtained results show the prospects for developing the concept of a general mechanism of destructive behavior from the point of view of the psychological behavior theory.

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Keywords: Destructive behavior, mechanism of destruction, destructive object.



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1. Introduction

Destructive behavior has been always an object of social and scientific interest. In social sciences, destructive activity is studied from the perspective of social philosophy, economics, psychology, sociology and linguistics.

Destructive behavior is not unambiguously defined in psychology and is seen as the equivalent of unreasonable aggressive behavior (Fromm, 1973) or self-damaging (Baumeister & Rollings 1976), but in any case it is something going beyond social norms (Durkheim, 1951). At present, basic directions in studying destructive behavior are theories of aggression and deviant behavior. The cognitive direction of studying social behavior is less popular, but rather promising. It is used to analyze criminal behavior in terms of analyzing the mechanisms for deciding whether to commit criminal acts (Walters, 2016).

The authors define destructive behavior in the context of cognitive representations, as a rational, conscious and purposeful process of destructive impact on social objects.

What should be understood as social objects that are destructed? Among the scientific works of the last decades, there are studies of destruction in relation to various types of objects. The intrapersonal area stands out, which deals with cases of self-damaging and suicidal behavior. The second area of research is focused on interpersonal destructive actions - insults, threats, revenge and violence towards people around. The third area, metapersonal, is devoted to the destruction of social-role behavior. Its borders are wide and extend from disobeying the rules of interaction in the educational process to extremist actions.

Strategies for investigating destructive behavior are similar. They focus on describing the specifics of destructive actions, its backgrounds, psychological traits regulating destructive activity. At the same time, destructive actions are described from the position of aggression as the desire of a person to cause harm to himself or another object.

But in this case, the question of the regularities of planning and implementing destructive actions remains without attention. For example, self-harm can not be explained solely from the standpoint of aggression towards oneself, nor does the studying of the notion of revenge prevent one from predicting the risk of self-damaging behavior. The motives of destruction do not go with the objects of destructive influence in the intrapersonal, interpersonal or metapersonal contexts.

So, this article is aimed at clarifying the ideas about the motives and objects of destructive impact as elements of a general mechanism of destruction. An important circumstance is that the empirical part of the research is conducted by a sample of adults, not teenagers or youth. This allows clarifying and broadening the notion of the specifics of the destructive manifestations inherent in this age category.

2. Problem Statement

The key problem of the research lies in the absence of the ideas about the mechanism of destructive behavior in modern psychological science, which allows analyzing intra-, inter- and metapersonal varieties of manifestation of destructiveness. This situation is determined by the fact that existing researches are focused on specific types of destructiveness, explained by models that are not transferable to other areas of destructive activity and not applicable for their analysis.

At the same time, varieties of destructiveness can have unified sources of psychological determination. For example, today the role of self-appraisal is clearly defined in the formation of teenagers and youth's destructive behavior. There are several lines of research revealing its impact on a) self-harm (Baumeister & Scher, 1988), b) violence against other people (Donnellan, Trzesniewski, Robins, Moffitt, & Caspi, 2005), c) violation of the role behavior and insubordination (Kalgi, Aliyev, 2015). Thus, it is empirically established that self-damaging actions are associated with low self-appraisal and non-acceptance; self-appraisal is associated with aggression towards other people and, at the same time, victimization, that is, exposure to violence by others. In general, these works affirm the dependence of all kinds of reactive destructive behavior on low self-appraisal (Shaheen & Jahan, 2014). Also the patterns of the emergence of proactive, purposeful destructiveness are determined. It is presented as a way to increase the teenagers' level of self- appraisal by destroying social relations and objects. This line explains the self-harm, insults, provocation of teachers (Lo, Cheng, Wong, Rochelle & Kwok, 2011). And only self-appraisal does not have a significant impact on destructive behavior; its mediator is the relationship of social inclusion (Twenge, Baumeister, Tice, & Stucke, 2001). Low social inclusion reduces prosocial behavior and leads to more traumatic consequences of the destructive behavior of teenagers and young men (Twenge, Baumeister, DeWall, Ciarocco & Bartels, 2007). So, following the logic of studying the influence of self-appraisal parameters on destruction, it is possible to build a unified mechanism of destructive behavior. It should explain the types of destructive behavior - self-destruction, destructive interaction and destructive role behavior by a minimal and unified set of variables.

It is important to determine the characteristics of the destructive actions of adults who are obviously different from teenagers and youth by the stability of social behavior caused by the specifics of internal and external regulation. After all, teenagers are inclined, for example, to vandalism, admit self-destructive actions, and violate the rules of social - role behavior - right up to crime. Being characteristic of teenagers, are they present in adults?

To describe the mechanism of destructive behavior, the authors use the psychological activity theory (Bedny, Meister, 1997). According it, person's social behavior is based on conscious perceptions of the needs, motives, purpose of the activity and the conditions for its implementation. They constitute an internal (mental) plan of action, embodied by a person into reality through purposeful efforts. The achievement of the result depends on the relationship between the motives, the goals, and also transformed objects in the process of achieving the goal.

The simplified model of the mechanism of activity includes three stages: 1) the formation of the motive for the activity, 2) the definition of the goal of the activity in the form of the image of the achieved result; and 3) the specification of the ideas about the conditions for the realization of the goal: the object of activity, the means of achieving the goal. Applying these provisions to destructive behavior, the authors consider the internal plan of activity in the form of an image of an object that is destructed in accordance with a specific motive. At the same time, the authors do not specifically analyze the needs and goals of the destructive action, the motives of destruction are not considered, the relationship between all these elements are not determined. Their discussion goes beyond the scope of this publication

In this article, the third stage of destructive behavior is considered: the conditions for the realization of the goal: 1) the object of destructive impact; and 2) the means of destruction. From the point

of view of the activity theory, it is necessary to understand what relations exist between the objects of destructive influence and the means of influencing it to achieve the goal. This let clarify the essence of the key elements of the internal plan for destructive activity – the goal and motive of destruction.

The objects of destruction areas are the areas, in which a person concentrates his destructive activity. As it has been already noted in the introduction, they are diverse: they are intrapersonal objects (transforming body and manipulating body parameters, for example, fasting or overeating), interpersonal objects (threats and aggression in relations with others), metapersonal objects (violation of role and normative behavior, expressed through the destruction of social objects - buildings, transport). Their mutual influence or exchange may indicate a single mechanism for the realization of destructiveness: the generality of the destructive goal or the unity of the motive that determines the destructive activity.

The second issue to be studied is the definition of means to achieve the goal - destructive impact. It, within the framework of the authors' model, is the person's representation about violence. Violence is seen as an excessive use of force in the process of transforming an object. It should be noted that from the standpoint of the theory of destructive aggression, violence acts as a means of causing harm to another person. However, the scope and forms of violence in social behavior often go beyond aggressiveness, or, on the contrary, destructive actions may not be related to the manifestation of aggression. Thus, violence is inseparable from aggressive behavior, but in the context of destructive behavior, its role may be different. The question of the role of violence in the determination of destructive behavior is important for understanding the internal plan of destructive action and its implementation in reality.

3. Research Questions

The research is aimed at studying two issues:

- 3.1. Are representations about intra-, inter- and metapersonal objects of destruction united?
- 3.2. Does the notion of the admissibility of violence affect the representation of intra-, inter- and metapersonal destruction objects?

4. Purpose of the Study

The basic goal of the research is to study the mechanism of destructive behavior from the perspective of the psychological activity theory. It is solved by addressing the conditions of activity: the object of destruction and means of destruction and is considered in two empirical tasks.

The first task is to study the relationship between representations about the objects of destruction. The research specifies their behavioural indicators: intrapersonal objects (exhaustion of body resources, disregard for health), interpersonal objects (the break of friendly relations, aggression towards relatives), metapersonal objects (observance of role models of behavior) objects.

The second task of the research is to determine the impact of perceptions of violence on the image of destruction object. Clarifying the relationship between the image of violence and the objects of destruction will allow one to understand the role of violence in destruction, to determine whether destructive behavior is possible without violence.

5. Research Methods

The method of collecting empirical data was a specially developed questionnaire. It characterized two types of representations: a) the one about the areas of destruction, B) the one about the causes of violence in social behavior.

Part of the questionnaire, studying the representations of destruction areas, included 15 statements, describing destructive influences towards the inter-, intra- and metapersonal relations fields.

Intrapersonal objects included statements indicating the person's destructive impact on the body and health. They were researched with the help of the statements "I refer myself to people who work to exhaustion", "I sacrifice my sleep when carried away by the deed," "I believe that the body must serve its master until the loss of strength", etc.

Interpersonal objects of destruction characterized the desire to destroy relations with nearby people or to adversely affect them. For example: "I want to respond toughly if a friend prevents me from achieving the required", "I would rather break off relations if friendship harms my interests," "when you need to protect your honour, you can be tough on a friend" and so on.

Metapersonal objects of destruction described the actions of rejection of socially-role behavior. For example: "I don't like boss's order if it goes against my character," "I primarily follow my own experience in my work, and then instructions," "I will be disappointed if the chief assesses my work formally, without regard for my personality", etc.

These statements were summarized in three thematic clusters. The measure of consent of the survivor with the statement inside the block was given 1 point. The highest score for the block was 5 points. The processing of the questionnaire was carried out by means of generalizing the statements with which the interviewee agreed.

After the questionnaire, the consistency of the answers within the blocks was evaluated by calculating Kuder–Richardson coefficient, used in cases of analysis of the consistency of dichotomous variables within the scales (Kuder and Richardson, 1937).

Thematic blocks have satisfactory homogeneity: intrapersonal block - K-R20 = 0.71; interpersonal K-R20 = 0.81, metapersonal K-R = 0.73. The block indicators, based on the results of the consistency assessment, were considered as study variables.

The second part of the questionnaire measured the perceptions of the causes of violence. In total, it included 10 statements, grouped into two blocks: manipulation and defence.

For example, the manipulative causes of destructive effects were described in the following way: "violence simplifies the solution of the problem"; "violence is the best way to make someone to act", "violence is justified when it is necessary to achieve justice quickly" and so on. The defensive causes of destructive effects were described thus: "violence allows you to protect yourself", "violence is the best way to stop other people from rash actions", etc.

Consistency of the answers was also evaluated by calculating Kuder–Richardson coefficient. Indicators of manipulative and defensive causes of destructive actions are rather homogeneous ("Manipulative" K-R 20 = 0.85, "Defensive" K-R 20 = 0.83), which allows one to summarize the points of the questionnaire in the form of indicators and expose them to statistical processing.

The questionnaire was conducted on a sample of 188 adult survivors of extramural department of the Law faculty of the State Institute, who studied psychology. Age parameters of the respondents are: M = 33.7, SD = 4.21; sex parameters - 46% of the respondents identified their gender as male, 52% - female, 2% did not specify sex.

Statistical testing of the hypothesis was carried out through a one-way variance analysis ANOVA. The essence of the static verification of empirical hypotheses is that the increase in the expression of the dependent variable should be associated with an increase in the severity of the independent variables, provided that the dispersions are homogeneous. The statistical effect of the influence of variables was regarded by the authors as confirmation of the empirical hypothesis

6. Findings

Two empirical hypotheses were tested:

1. The hypothesis of conjugation of the representations of destruction of various species did not find statistical support. The obtained results show that representations about destructiveness in relation to various objects are not conjugate and the concretization of ideas about one type of destruction does not lead to a concretization of representations about other types of destruction at a statistically significant level.

It is likely that the manifestations of intra-, inter- and metapersonal destructive influences are isolated from each other, and they are realized as actions of destruction of certain kind that do not cover other possible objects.

2. The hypothesis about the influence of the causes of violence on the change in perceptions about the areas of destruction has been statistically confirmed.

The manipulative motive of violence (M = 2.1, SD = 1.37) affects the representation of intrapersonal destruction ($F(4, 368) = 6.351, p < 0.001$), interpersonal destruction ($F(4, 368) = 5.214, p < 0.001$); metapersonal destruction ($F(4, 368) = 4.944, p < 0.001$). Dispersion of the variables is homogeneous, $p < 0.05$.

The defensive motive of violence (M = 3.2, SD = 1.32) affects the representation of the intrapersonal ($F(6, 368) = 3.211, p < 0.05$); Interpersonal ($F(6, 368) = 6.596, p < 0.001$), metapersonal destruction ($F(6, 368) = 6.771, p < 0.001$). Dispersion of the variables being compared is homogeneous, $p < 0.05$.

In the research, the manipulative and defensive motives of violence do not correlate with each other. ($r = 0.13, p > 0.47$).

7. Conclusion

Research is aimed at studying the general outlines of the mechanism of destructive social behavior. At the same time, it focuses on the destructive behavior of adults, because it is less studied, in contrast with teenagers and youth. However, adults have a more specific strategy of social behavior - they are consistent in their way of life, preferences and relationships. Along with this, correction and prevention of destructive behavior towards adults is of current interest.

The key goal of this work is to analyze the mechanism of destructive action on the basis of ideas about the psychological structure of activity. The authors determined the relationship between representations about objects of destructive impact and also assessed the impact of violence as a means of influencing the representation of objects of destruction. Through the questionnaire, there were measured the representations of intrapersonal, interpersonal and metapersonal varieties of destruction objects, as well as manipulative and defensive causes of violence.

The authors have formulated two empirical hypotheses. The first is that the objects of destruction are conjugated; the second is that the idea of violence concretizes the images of destruction objects.

Results of testing the first hypothesis showed that the areas of destructive influence of adults are not conjugated. In terms of social behavior, the results mean that self-harm or disregard for health (intrapersonal destructiveness) is not statistically significant with the desire to break off relations, persecution or revenge of nearby people (interpersonal destructiveness), and they, together or separately, do not affect the rejection of social role behavior (metapersonal destructiveness). These conclusions do not conform to the results obtained in teenagers and youth samples. In them, self-harm (intrapersonal destructiveness) is accompanied by alienation from peers and close relatives (interpersonal destructiveness), problems with social role behavior (metapersonal destructiveness) (Bartlett, Holditch-Davis & Belyea, 2007). The manifestation of adults' destructiveness appears to be more object-oriented, concrete and consistent than that in teenagers.

So, the results lead to idea that it is required to study the mechanism of adults' destructive behavior in the choice of objects of destructive impact. As the testing of the first hypothesis showed, destructive representations of adults are isolated, but their destructive actions are consistent and substantive, they can be embodied as a specific goal of transformation or destruction.

By studying it, one sees an appeal to the person's ideas about himself and his relationships with others. For example, it is known that repeated changes in appearance (plastic surgery) are more motivated by customer's perceptions of the self-image than by objective indications (Ferraro, Rossano, & Andrea, 2005). Also, vindictiveness, insults and threats against other people are based on the self-image (Twenge & Campbell, 2003). Apparently, destruction objects can be detected by analyzing problems in intra-, inter- or metapersonal contexts of the representation of the self-concept.

The testing of the second hypothesis showed that violence in general details the representation about objects of destructive impact. Survivors with a clear representation about violence had a concrete representation about the object of destructive impact. On the contrary, subjects who did not represent violence as a tool for solving social problems did not have clear images for destruction. In the context of these conclusions, the recognition of violence as an effective tool for achieving the goal specifies and details the image of the object to be destroyed. It can be health, body, relationships with nearby people, norms and requirements of social behavior

It is important to emphasize that the considered types of manipulative and defensive violence are not conjugated, that is, the preference for one type of violence does not indicate a change in the level of the other. At the same time, they have similar in nature effect: both manipulation and defensive through the use of violence specify the destructive impact. In this case, the authors find conclusions of foreign criminologists reasonable in the studying the sample of criminals about that the specification of the

purpose of aggression increases the damage caused by violent actions (Bowen, Roberts, Kocian & Bartula, 2014). Thus, the study of the formation of motivation of violence allows predicting the potential readiness of adults for destructive actions. The role of representation of violence in the mainstream of obtained results is reduced to the regulation of destructive activity. Social objects undergo transformation or destruction due to representations of the effectiveness of violence, for example, to solve problem situations through violence, or to control their body, health, other people or professional relationships.

In conclusion, the authors note that the conceptual prerequisites for this study are based on Russian psychological activity theory. From this position, destructive behavior is seen as a conscious, purposeful process of using violence to manipulate, and to change social objects. In contrast to the concepts of aggression, this view of destructiveness concentrates on the representation of an internal plan of action - motives, goals and conditions for the implementation of destructiveness. The obtained results show the prospects and feasibility of the further studying of destructive behavior from this sight angle.

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