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Peculiarities of empathy with persons who are prone to conflicts to a various level

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Abstract. Results of the theoretical and empirical study aimed at determination of empathy peculiarities with persons different in the level of proneness to conflicts. Proneness to conflicts is meant as a property of the personality that reflects the frequency of his or her entering into interpersonal conflicts and the degree of his or her readiness to develop and close problematic situations in the course of social interaction by way of conflicts. Empathy is meant as a relatively stable integral property of a person that reveals itself as an ability to emotionally respond to experiences of the other person, understand his or her emotional states, foresee affective reactions of the other person in specific situations, aspire to give an active help and assistance. Negative significant correlation relationships between the proneness to conflict indicators and empathy indicators were obtained. Revealed and studied are the psychological characteristics of empathy pertaining to prone to conflicts and conflict-free personalities.

Keywords: *proneness to conflicts, empathy, personality*

In the current context of dynamic social and political processes, acute social and economic reformation and essential social and cultural transformations, a man's life becomes more complicated and full of contradictions. Ethnic, religious, economic, political and interpersonal problems grow worse. As a consequence, we witness aggravation of tension, aggression and proneness to conflicts. Therefore, a critical aspect of the practical psychology is to develop a new type of relations that are building upon the humanistic basis and respect for each individual.

With reference to the above, special attention should be paid to formation of the intellectual culture of a personality, emotional maturity, wealth of feelings, consciousness of one's own behavior, responsibility, ability to sympathy and commiseration, ability to understand another person, etc. However, the ability to sympathy and commiseration and demonstration of empathy are influenced by internal psychological factors as well. These are the properties of the personality that accompany such experiences. The indicated properties of a personality may either support empathic experiences and facilitate their advent (sociability, communicability, self-assuredness, positive attitude to other people, tolerance, etc.) or block the development and display of empathy (cynicism, egoism, aggressiveness and so on) [7; 9].

This paper deals specifically with a description of the results obtained in the course of a theoretical and empirical study of relationship between the empathy characteristics and proneness to conflicts. Individual psychological research of empathy with persons characterized by a various (high and low) level of proneness to conflicts was conducted. At the beginning of the research we assumed that the indicators of empathy and proneness to conflicts can be interconnected in different ways. On one hand, proneness to conflicts of a person is a factor that facilitates conflict resolution while on the other hand a conflict disunites people and leads to a mutual ill understanding. Traditionally, psychology defines a conflict as an acute "contradiction" and a clash of oppositely directed and incompatible trends, a separate episode in consciousness, interpersonal interaction or interpersonal relations between individuals or groups associated with negative emotional [6].

Discussions are held until present time about a role of conflicts in the development of a society and each person-

ality in the social environment. These ended in a formation of two exact antipodes of opinion, viz.: 1) conflicts always bring harm and we should get rid of or avoid them; 2) a conflict is a complex social and psychological phenomena which, under certain circumstances, may be progressive and positive.

Scientific literature defines the "proneness to conflict" notion differently. However, all such definitions converge in one point: proneness to conflicts is an attribute of personality that reflects an ability to enter into a conflict. So, for example, Evgeny Il'in defines proneness to conflicts as a complex property of a person that includes petulance, irascibility, aggressiveness (anger) and suspicion. Vladimir Kurbatov views "proneness to conflicts" as irritation, aggressive and self-defensive style of behaviour. The author considers proneness to conflicts as an integral ability of a personality that reflects a frequency of his or her entering into interpersonal conflicts, readiness of a personality to enter into conflicts, degree of his or her engagement into the development and close of problematic situations arising in the course of social interaction by way of conflicts [5].

The literature reports attempts to describe properties of a problem personality. So, empirical data suggests that a problematic personality should, to a certain degree, be of a choleric temperament and reveal a high level of aggression, domination, radicalism, tension, suspicion and self-assuredness; display a low level of moral standards, emotional stability and self-control; in a conflict confrontation such personality aspires, above all, to competition, it does not accept a compromise or is ready for cooperation; a problematic personality is defined by such psychological factors as competence in communication and emotional state. A person who is prone to conflicts quite frequently possesses a definite set of emotional properties such as aggressiveness, obstinacy and irritancy. Such personality is characteristic of a negative attitude to himself and inadequate self-feeling (either over- or underestimated), self-assuredness (or self-distrust) and a desire to avoid changes in himself (rejection of self-cultivation). If a personality has a high proneness to conflicts, it becomes a real initiator of tense relations with surrounding persons irrespective of whether there were previous conflict situations or not. Their interpersonal relations are filled with rejection of other people as they are, a desire to change them, distrust, negation, disrespect, closedness, a desire to win,

domination, assertiveness in assessments and interpretation in the course of communication [2].

The persons prone to conflicts do not possess a predisposition to cooperation which is evident as a lack of ability to dialog style of communication (listens and hears himself only), inability to understand another person and its position, and low communicative competence.

Thus, proneness to conflicts (disposition to conflicts) leads to a distortion of the communication partner's image, mutual misunderstanding and, consequently, to a poor development of empathy. It is well known, the contemporary psychology treats empathy as one of the main regulators of interpersonal communication that facilitates achievement of balance and harmony of interpersonal relations and makes a man's behaviour socially approvable [1].

Empathy is defined, first, as a psychic process aimed at modelling the inward wealth of experiences of the perceived person. Such approach to empathy stresses its dynamic, procedural and phase nature. Secondly, empathy is treated as a psychic empathic reaction to a stimulus. Thirdly, empathy is determined as an ability or property of a personality that has a complex affective and cognitive behavioural nature. This ability is revealed through a faculty to give a mediated emotional response to another person experience which includes a reflection of inward states, thoughts and feelings of the subject of empathy [3].

At large, empathy as a social and psychological property of a personality presents an aggregate of social and psychological abilities of an individual that reveal such ability both to the object and subject of empathy.

In this paper we consider empathy as a relatively stable integral property of a personality that manifests itself in a property to emotionally react and respond to experiences of another person; in the ability to understand his emotional states, force his affective reactions in specific situations and aspire to give proactive assistance and cooperation to other personality [7; 9].

According to the data from literature, empathy is one of the mechanisms that regulate interpersonal conflicts. An interpersonal conflict is a form of intergroup and interpersonal relations which originates from inward contradictions and contradictions with the environment, and is expressed through subjective phenomena of reciprocal perception of people, assumption and resting responsibility for the emergence and resolution of the conflict situation. Empathy appears as a state that determines a selection of actions in a conflict situation, and thereby determines the conflict development. Reflexive and empathic position of the conflict participants ensures decentralization in relations which allows of viewing conflict situations orientating not only on their views. Empathy is viewed as a mechanism through which a conviction in the value of another person and readiness to treat such person positively is formed. Accordingly empathy occupies an important place in conflict interaction and is a mechanism of its regulation [3].

All the above allows us of assuming that a level of proneness to conflict of a person (disposition to conflicts) is correlated with a corresponding empathy level.

So, the **objective of this** message is to narrate the results of the empiric study of the empathy peculiarities with persons characterized by a high and low level of proneness to conflicts.

In order to diagnose a disposition to conflicts, a universal procedure «Placing oneself on the conflict scale» (a modification of the technique developed by Tamara Dembo and Susanne Rubinstein) was applied. The «subject of appraisal» was developed preliminary with a view of forming a single notion with testees about the minimum and maximum manifestations of proneness to conflicts [9]. Selection of this very procedure is due to the fact that we did not find in the available literature any techniques that can be used for diagnosing a general proneness to various levels of conflicts.

Diagnostics of qualitative peculiarities of empathy was conducted with the aid of the standardized, reliable and valid «Modalistic test questionnaire of empathy» (version I – self-appraisal) developed by Olga Sannikova [8]. This technique provides information about five indicators of empathy: emotional empathy (EE), cognitive empathy (CE), predictive empathy (PE), active empathy (AE) and a general indicator of empathy (GIE) which presents the arithmetic mean of all scores related to individual indicators. The questionnaire contains 38 questions (10 questions per each scale; 2 questions are dichotomic). Both basic scores and percentile norms can be used for research purposes. The technique meets all requirements of psychometrics.

Mathematical and statistical procedures applied for processing the results obtained in the course of studies have been processed with the use of the statistical software program SPSS 13.00 for Windows so as to find interrelations between the studied indicators (correlation analysis) and compare the mean indicators of empathy shown by the testees having various levels of proneness to conflicts (according to the t-criterion Student-test).

The empirical study was conducted with the participation of the trainees of the advanced staff retraining department with a specialization in «Psychology» of the Postgraduate Education Division and Training Foreign Citizens of the State Enterprise «Southern Ukrainian K. D. Ushinsky National Pedagogical University». The survey sample was 70 persons aged from 18 to 40.

The empirical data analysis was performed according to the following pattern: first, the results of quantitative analysis of data (correlation analysis) are given which helps to harmonize the space of all researched indicators, secondly, the results of the qualitative analysis (ace or profile method) are supplied thereby the testees are grouped according to a certain attribute. Such approach seems logical because the quantitative analysis, that precedes the qualitative one, provides information about a possibility (availability of significant relationships) or impossibility (absence of significant relationships) of further correlation of the studied phenomena.

The results of the correlation analysis of the empathy indicators and proneness to conflicts indicators are shown in Table 1.

The conducted quantitative analysis made it possible to establish the nature of relationships between the diagnosed indicators. Revealed are the significant negative correlation relationships at 5% level between the proneness to conflicts indicators and the empathy indicators. The correlation analysis results prove that the higher proneness to conflicts is accompanied with lower empathy.

Table 1. Significant correlation relationships between the empathy and proneness to conflicts indicators

General indicator of proneness to conflicts (GIPC)	Empathy indicators				
	EE	CE	PE	AE	GIE
	-240*	-254*	-099	-280*	-263*

Note: 1) n=70; 2) notation * means the relationships at 5% level; 3) abbreviations: emotional empathy (EE), cognitive empathy (CE), predictive empathy (PE), active empathy (AE) and the general indicator of empathy (GIE).

The qualitative analysis allowed of studying psychological characteristics of empathy pertaining to representatives of each group of problem personalities and conflict-free personalities. Preliminary, with the aid of "aces" we singled out from the testee sample two groups of persons: with high level of proneness to conflicts (K_{max} . group) and with low level of proneness to conflicts (K_{min} . group) [9].

We have analysed each profile to elicit specific features of the empathy pertaining to the representatives of the groups having various level of proneness to conflicts. Afterwards, we have compared them in order to look for similarities and differences between them.

Visual profiles of the representatives of each group are characterized by the arrangement of each indicator values relative to the mean line of the series (50th score), by specific configuration of each profile and specific features of empathy that reveals itself through a peculiar combination of indicators. The analysis and psychological interpretation of the profile are performed based upon the indicators that

have maximum deviation from the mean line of the series.

Both profiles are located within the zone of the mean line of the series, which corresponds to the third quartile. The conflict-free person profile (K_{min} . group) is located both within the positive space zone of values (higher than the mean line of the series) and within the negative space zone of values (below the mean line of the series). The diagram for the persons with high proneness to conflicts (K_{max} . group) is located completely within the plane that lies below the mean line of the series, which indicates the evidence of the negative pole of empathy parameters. Visually we can see a mirror image of profiles relative to each other, which is reflected in the significant differences in the indicator series. Prior to analyzing the profiles as to their ranking, we need to rank the most pronounced absolute values of the empathy indicators for each profile based on their deviations from the mean line of the series (see Table 2).

Table 2. Ranks of empathy indicators with persons who possess various levels of proneness to conflicts

Rank	Empathy indicators	
	K_{min} . group	K_{max} . group
1	AE + pronounced active empathy	CE – low cognitive empathy
2	Pronounced general indicator of empathy	PE – non-pronounced predictive empathy
3	EE – low emotional empathy	Non-pronounced general indicator of empathy
4	PE – low predictive empathy	AE – low active empathy

The sign (positive or negative) indicates to which pole the indicator value approximates.

The empathy profiles pertaining to persons different in their level of proneness to conflicts illustrate significant differences (Student t-criterion) in such empathy indicators: AE (active empathy), GEI (general indicator of empathy), EE (emotional empathy), PE (predictive empathy).

Cognitive empathy indicator (CE) with the persons prone to conflicts demonstrates the maximum deviations from the mean line of the series than the same indicator pertaining to the other group representatives (it is located straight on the mean line of the series).

At the same time the representatives of the conflict-free group have the maximum deviation from the mean line of the series for the active empathy (AE) indicator.

Domination of certain trends in the empathy profiles pertaining to representatives of this or that group gives a chance to develop a psychological characteristic of empathy displayed by problem and conflict-free persons. The persons with low level of proneness to conflicts (K_{min} . group) are prone to understand the inner world of another person and be interested in his or her emotional experiences, specific character traits and behaviour. It indicates a developed property of empathy on the whole. Active empathy, being the highest form of empathy manifestation, characterizes the «moral core» of the conflict-free personality. Thereby, it is a manifestation of the natural property to respond experiences of other person and a desire to give an active help and assistance, an ability to

actively assist (AE).

Representatives of the other group (K_{max} . group) possess a low level of cognitive empathy which is based upon intellectual processes of comparison or analogy (CE). Prone to conflicts persons are not so interested in the inner world of another person. They do not think long time about their perceptions and feelings and do not complicate their lives by analyzing the present and future. Their notions about other persons are neutral and they do not allow them, to a certain degree, of understanding the other person and accept him or her. The ability to foresee emotional and behavioural reactions of a person who experiences a situation of emotional ill-being are not critical for persons prone to conflicts.

Conclusions

1. On the basis of theoretical analysis of scientific sources it was established that the proneness to conflicts is viewed as an integral property of a person that reflects the frequency of his or her entering interpersonal conflicts, a degree of readiness of a person to develop and finalize problematic situations of social interaction by way of conflicts. Empathy is meant as a relatively stable integral property of a person that reveals itself as an ability to emotionally respond to experiences of the other person, understand his or her emotional states, foresee affective reactions of the other person in specific situations, aspire to give an active help and assistance pertaining to a certain object of empathic experiences.

2. In order to diagnose the level of proneness to conflicts, a universal procedure «Placement oneself on the conflict scale» (a modification of the technique developed by Tamara Dembo and Susanne Rubinstein) was applied. Diagnostics of the qualitative features of empathy was conducted with the aid of the standardized, reliable and valid "Modalistic test questionnaire of empathy" (version

I – self-appraisal) developed by Olga Sannikova.

3. The results obtained in the course of correlation analysis prove that the higher proneness to conflicts is accompanied with lower empathy. Qualitative analysis made it possible to study psychological characteristics of empathy inherent in representatives of each group of prone to conflicts and conflict-free personalities.

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Ульянова Т. Ю. Особенности эмпатии лиц с разным уровнем конфликтности

Аннотация. Рассмотрены результаты теоретико-эмпирического исследования, направленного на определение специфики эмпатии у лиц с разным уровнем конфликтности. Конфликтность понимается как свойство личности, отражающее частоту её вступления в межличностные конфликты, степень готовности личности к развитию и завершению проблемных ситуаций социального взаимодействия путем конфликтов. Под эмпатией понимается относительно устойчивое интегральное свойство личности, проявляющееся в способности эмоционально реагировать и отзываться на переживания другого человека; в способности понимать его эмоциональные состояния, предвидеть аффективные реакции в конкретных ситуациях; в стремлении предоставить активную помощь и содействие. Получены отрицательные значимые корреляционные связи между показателями конфликтности и эмпатии. Выявлены и изучены психологические характеристики эмпатии конфликтных и неконфликтных личностей.

Ключевые слова: конфликтность, эмпатия, личность.