COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF OPTIMISM AND PERSIMISM OF STUDENTS FROM BULGARIA AND CZECH REPUBLIC

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A comparative analysis by countries, gender and age of the level of optimism and pessimism of students from Bulgaria and the Czech Republic was made in the paper. It was measured by means of the life-orientation scale (Life-Orientation Test-Revised (LOT-R) (Scheier, Carver & Bridges, 1994). 161 persons (89 Bulgarians and 72 Czechs; 85 boys and 76 girls, average age 21.9 years) were examined. The reliability of the scale applied was shown, too. The results show that, as a whole, the students from Bulgaria, both boys and girls, are more optimistically disposed in comparison with the group of the Czechs. Also, however, the boys of Bulgarian origin experience a higher level of pessimism in comparison with the boys from the Czech Republic.

Key words: optimism, pessimism, Czechs, Bulgarians

If this that we believe in something realises it, then actually the positive thinking would be a power. Almost every human being has experienced its strong points. Are they actually, however, real? Do people who think positively actually cope better and easier with life’s challenges in difficult situations? Do they actually, for example, recover faster after illness?

Scientific studies in this respect first paid attention to expectations related to a specific situation, but with time they extended their analysis and directed their attention to expectations as a whole, in a broader sense. The scholars are unanimous that expectations represent a considerable part of the individual and they remain relatively stable in time and environment. In this sense, optimism may be defined as an attitude that good things understood as opposite to bad ones will happen in one’s life in future or this is the expectation that individual’s future goals are reachable through overcoming problem life situations (Scheier & Carver, 1985).

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The term optimism is directly related to the term “attributive style” and cognitive models of learned helplessness in humans (Carver & Scheier, 1981). According to them, people discover the reasons for their present and future expectations in the power and influence of their past experience. The reason for their present feelings, thoughts and behaviour conceals the explanation they give of past events in their life. The trend to attribute to and explain negative results with secure, general and internal reasons is preferred by the pessimists. The trend to explain negative events and worldly knowledge by means of insecure, specific and external reasons is chosen by the optimists.

Optimists and pessimists use different strategies in coping with stress (Carver et al., 1989; Scheier, Carver & Bridges, 2001; Scheier et al., 1986; 2001). The studies conducted in this respect show that optimists use more adaptive strategies, resort directly to actions to cope with problems, they are more direct when they face difficulties of life, direct their attention to efforts they make to cope with the stress situation they are in, perceive it more easily, try personally to grow through it and to derive positive experience from difficulties. The pessimists deny the existence of difficulties, try to avoid the solution of problems and more often give up by leaving the situation. The optimists, when coping with stress by resorting to their emotions, accept and consider the actual situation in its most favourable light. They try to develop themselves as individuals through difficulties they pass through. The optimists use mostly strategies to cope with stress, which are directed to solution of the problem, and the pessimists prefer strategies that are based on emotions, on denial of the situation and are related to a lower degree to reaching goals in the long term.

In the last years, optimism was a subject of analysis by many researchers (Chang, 2001; Peterson, 2000; Snyder, 1994; Scheier & Carver, 1992). The results show that the values of optimism may influence various characteristics of people such as good mood (Weisse, 1992), achievements reached in the environment (Curry, Snyder et al., 1997), physical health (Scheier & Carver, 1987), lighter recovery process after illness or operative treatment (Scheier et al., 1989). The optimists offer more adaptive and stable strategies to cope with stress (Carver et al., 1989), maintain higher levels of psychological well-being during stress situations, accept more easily difficulties of life and adapt faster to life in university (Aspinwall & Taylor, 1992), have safer sexual behaviour (Morrill et al., 1996), have bigger success when participating in programmes to cope with alcohol addiction (Strack et al., 1987), have higher academic, sports, military, labour and political success (Peterson, 2000), have higher personal efficiency (Bandura, 1997) and have higher levels of sense of hope (Snyder, 1994; 2002). There is a reverse relationship between the level of optimism as orientation in life and neuroticism (Smith, Pope, Rhodewalt & Poulton, 1989), negative emotions, chronic anxiety and personal features such as self-doubt, emotional lability and uneasiness (Thompson, 2002). In comparison with pessimists, the optimists are liked more (Carver, Kus & Scheier, 1994), retain longer friendly relations (Geers, Reilly & Dember, 1998), have less negative social experience in the relations (Lepore & Ituarte, 1999), feel more socially supported in stress life situations (Park & Folkman, 1997; Dougall et al., 2001), adapt more easily