

PSYCHOLOGIST'S PERSONALITY IN SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS

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Personality and professional activity of psychologist in modern Russia are the objects of collective discourse, because psychological problems of population became quite sharp in last years because of extreme socio-economical and political conditions of life. Besides, psychological services, and generally practical psychological work, are to a great extent the new areas for Russian society. Hence, the poor possession of information gives birth to some tension within society, different sorts of suppositions and anxieties. We assume, after Moscovici (1988), Guimelli (1993) and Wagner (1996), that given social significance, social relevance of the subject and insufficient knowledge of it, social representations (SR) about psychologist's profession and personality should have been formed.

We will be understanding SR as cognitive, iconic, emotionally loaded, and collectively shared phenomenon being an attribute of a social group appearing in the process of a collective discourse. In our research we analyzed SR about psychologist's personality and professional activity, formed within different professional groups which directly interact with psychologists-practitioners doing their duties: medicine workers, teachers, managers, and workers of law-enforcement agencies. The necessity of interaction with specialists of new profession – psychologists – creates some uncertainty, expectations, fears, and requires collective symbolic coping. Such coping is carried out through professional and interpersonal communication, reading popular science psychological literature, and obtaining data from mass media. This results in what Moscovici and Hewstone (1983) have described as transformation of science into common sense, unfamiliar into familiar. The schemes of explanation – SR – are being formed, which, on one hand help to cope with uncertainty, and on the other, fix in themselves anxiety and ambivalence in respect of this uncertain subject.

We attempted revealing structural organization of SR about psychologist's personality and professional activity as a complex of mental elements having different extent of

significance. For revealing divergences between the structure of professional opinions of psychologists themselves about psychological profession (scientific content) and SR which have been formed in other groups (naive knowledge), we have carried out comparative analysis of professional psychologists groups and representatives of the listed above practical areas consuming psychological services. Besides, we aimed at revealing peculiarities of each group's SR and the way of its organization.

Method

Participants

Totally 212 people took part in this research (72 men and 140 women), aged 23-46, residents of Tver, representatives of five professional groups: secondary school teachers, physicians, managers of industrial enterprises, workers of law-enforcement agencies (police officers) and psychologists themselves, who constituted approximately similar (on the number of subjects) groups.

Technique of research

Research program consisted of the following stages:

1. Pilot research of SR field of each profession representatives by method of group interview (focus groups);
2. On the base of content analysis of interview the "Psychologist's Personality" questionnaire was built up, containing 206 statements. It was offered to each subject personally. The person was supposed to evaluate each statement on two parameters: "ideal" psychologist's and "real" collective psychologist's image. For evaluating each parameter the 10-point scale was offered. 212 subjects filled in the questionnaire. Furthermore, the same subjects were involved in "Personality Differential" which contained the scales describing the peculiarities of psychologist's personality, which were grouped within traditional scales of "Semantic Differential";
3. The obtained data were processed by means of correlation and factor analysis, and t test. For description of SR field the "intercorrelation index" was used showing the number of tight correlation links of each element of the field (Guimelli, 1993). The high index was considered $n \geq 35$, i.e. the meaning exceeding two thirds of maximum n meaning. Elements possessing such index were interpreted as central to the structure of SR.

The following hypotheses were put forward:

1. Contents of blocks in SR structure of each group, which relate to desirable (ideal) image of psychologist and existing (real) professional, significantly differ from contents of professionals image, used by psychologists themselves.
2. There are differences in contents of SR about psychologist's personality between the studied groups of professionals-practitioners, and these differences are related to peculiarities of their professional activity.
3. There are significant differences in contents of "real" and "ideal" image blocks in the SR structure on the total sample.

Results

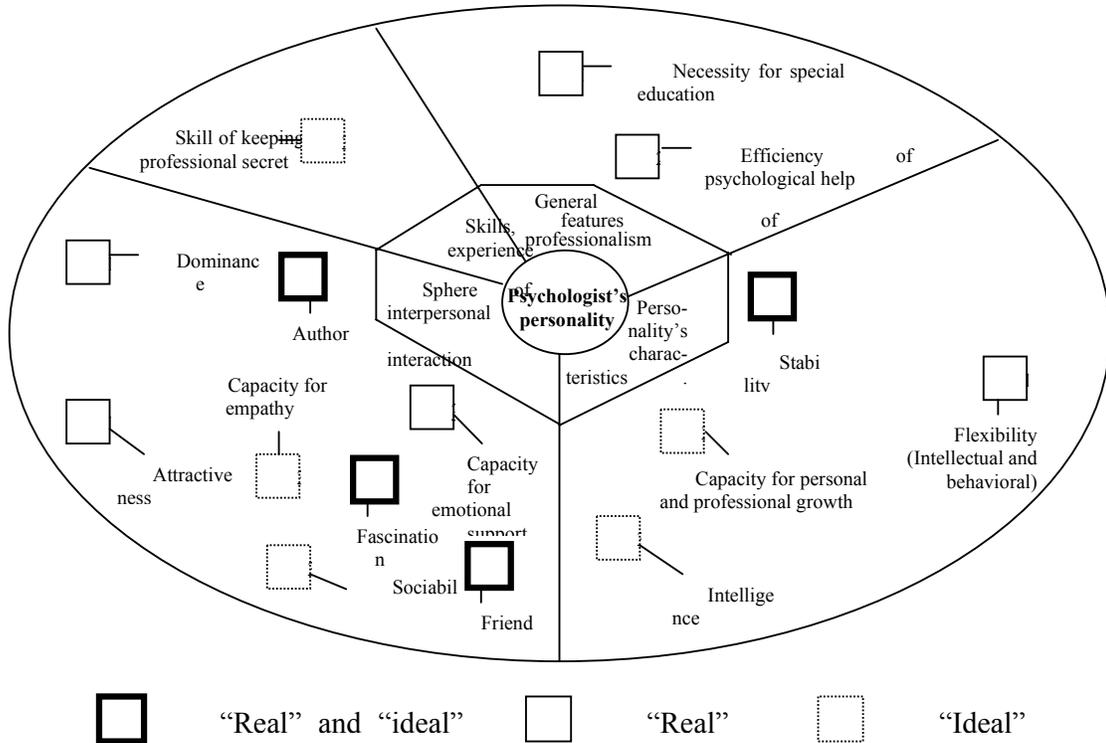
With the help of content analysis of interview the basic topic blocks were revealed and the circle of judgements about personality and professional activity of psychologist of all studied groups was defined. The experts were involved in this work. With the help of "Psychologist's Personality" questionnaire and "Personal Differential" methodic the data about contents of SR on blocks "ideal" and "real" image were obtained for each studied group, plus data about comparison of SR contents of groups members with opinions of psychologists themselves (results of t test, $p=0.05$).

In the *teachers'* group, according to data of qualitative analysis of focus-group material, it is possible to speak of teachers' high extent of identification with psychologist's role in school and of a positive attitude towards psychologist. At the same time, according to questionnaire, in the "ideal psychologist" block teachers in contrast to psychologists rate significantly higher elements "responsiveness" ($t=3.24$) and "friendliness" ($t=2.42$), "control of emotions" ($t=2.89$), "activity" ($t=3.12$), "openness" ($t=2.01$), "capacity of empathy" ($t=2.71$), "closeness of professions of psychologist and pedagogue" ($t=4.30$), "tolerance" ($t=2.29$), and "charismatic features" ($t=2.26$). According to data of intercorrelation analysis, we may assume that desirable general attractiveness of psychologist's personality involves, first of all, his/her openness, responsiveness, friendliness, and capacity of empathy.

In "real psychologist" block teachers in contrast to other professional groups rate significantly higher such elements as "charismatic features" and "fear of psychologist". By and large, the field of SR about psychologist in teachers' group could be seen as

poorly structured: intercorrelational indices do not exceed 33 (see Figure 1), while in all other groups they reach 37-40. Probably, such erosion of SR field relates to the fact that psychologist's profession in this group is poorly specified and is perceived as not so much different from the one of pedagogue.

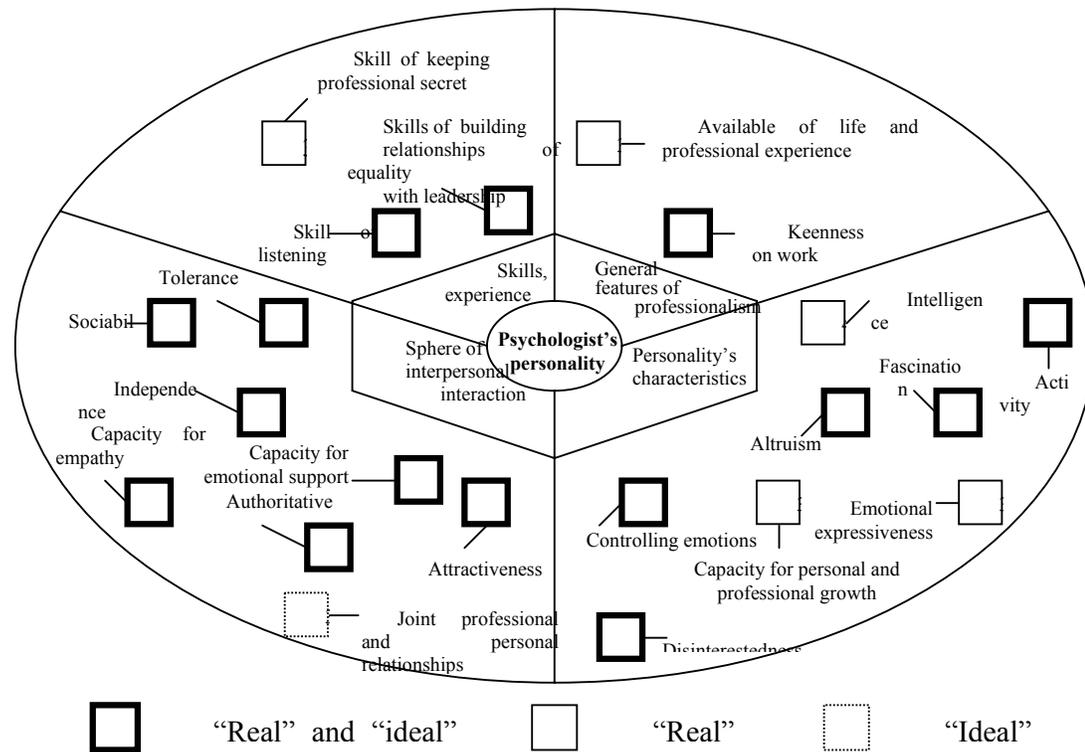
Fig. 1 Structural core of the SR field in professional group of teachers



In *physicians* group SR about psychologist is distinguished by its compactness and high integrity. There are 26 elements with high intercorrelational indices (35 and higher) (see Figure 2) in the structure of SR. “Ideally” physicians see psychologist as stress-resisting, emotionally-neutral personality with rich experience and special education. “Ideally”, from physicians’ point of view, psychologist’s professional role should differ from those of physician and pedagogue, but so far, in reality, according to physicians’ point of view, it is close to the role of physician.

Comparing physicians’ SR and opinions of psychologists themselves revealed that physicians, in the “ideal psychologist” block, assess significantly lower such qualities as “charismativeness”, “attractiveness”, “fascination” ($t=3.30$), as well as “activeness” ($t=2.13$). At the same time, physicians assess higher than psychologists, in the “real

Fig. 3 Structural core of the SR field in professional group of police officers

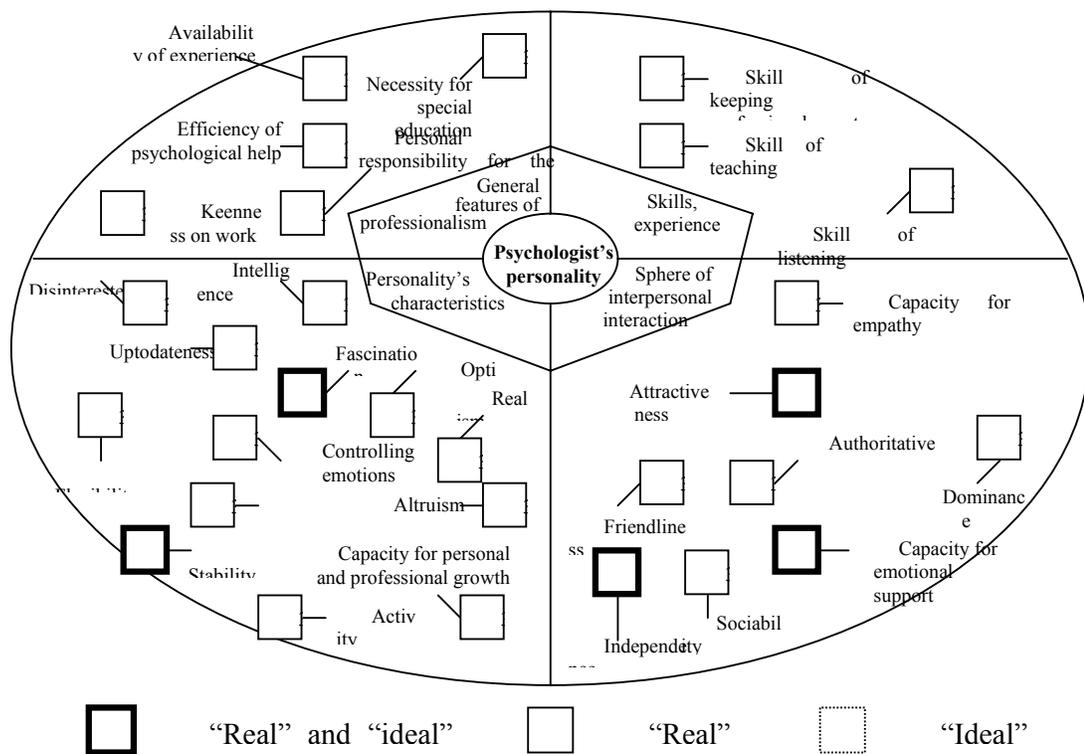


There are also some significant differences in the block of real qualities: officers rate significantly lower authoritativeness ($t=2.36$) of the real psychologists, their communicability ($t=4.66$), confidence ($t=3.81$), than psychologists themselves, but at the same time perceive them as more directive in their style of professional interaction ($t=2.87$) and more successful personally, than do psychologists themselves. We may suppose that in professional environment of officers SR about psychologist is close in explanation of its role to the image of so-called Soviet time "politruk" – political leader, teacher, tutor, while the standard function of psychologist in psychological professional environment reminds more of the role of medicine doctor, healer, i.e. the specialist able to provide support.

In *managers'* group SR about psychologist's personality and professional activity is well structured: there are 29 elements in the field of SR which have high intercorrelational indices (see Figure 4). The most significant places among them take elements of real image, which describe professionalism of psychologist: availability of

experience, special education, work efficiency, keenness on work and personal responsibility for client (the latter feature is met in the SR field of this group only). It is in the group of managers that among the features of real psychologist the central are such professional skills as skill of listening, teaching, keeping professional secret, ability of providing emotional support, authoritativeness, tolerance, and flexibility. It is notable that in managers' SR the block of "ideal qualities" of psychologist does not differ on the significant level from professional psychologists' opinion about ideal specialist. From the differences between the blocks of "ideal" and "real" elements one can draw a conclusion that managers see the reserves of professionalism first of all in increasing of emotional stability and developing of emotional maturity.

Fig. 4 Structural core of the SR field in professional group of managers



Comparative analysis of SR of different professional groups has enabled to detect significant differences in contents of their SR. Socio-professional identity of psychologist is defined only through comparison of this profession with more traditional professions of physician and pedagogue. Thus psychologist is associated more often with the role of physician in the groups of managers, physicians and psychologists

themselves. Psychologist is associated with the role of pedagogue more often in the groups of teachers and police officers. In the groups of teachers, physicians and police officers the contents of “ideal” and “real” images of psychologists is similar to a great extent, while standard and reality of psychologist’s image significantly deviate for managers and psychologists-practitioners themselves. The position of these groups towards psychologist is also significantly different, it was measured on the basis of “Personal Differential” data. Thus in teachers’ group the position is remarkably positive, in officers’ group it is neutral and negative, in physicians’ and managers’ groups - neutral, and in psychologists-practitioners’ group – positive and neutral.

The carried out comparison of SR on blocks of “ideal” psychologist shows existence of significant differences between the groups. Thus comparing managers and officers we see that officers value more dominance and aggression ($t=3.12$) than managers, and those in turn value in psychologist more independence ($t=2.09$), education ($t=2.81$), skills of listening ($t=2.22$), keeping professional secret ($t=2.73$) and providing efficient help ($t=2.45$). When comparing managers and teachers significant differences are that teachers wish to see psychologist more similar in his/her professional role with pedagogue ($t=2.21$), evoking fear ($t=3.38$) and being more emotionally stable ($t=2.18$), but not obligatory having special education ($t=3.03$) as managers wish.

According to results of factor analysis of these questionnaires for the whole sample it is possible to extract two basic factors, embracing 81% of dispersion. First factor contains “General perception of psychologist’s personality” pole which combines elements related to general attractiveness of personality (kindness, altruism, openness, fascination, justice, friendliness, capacity for empathy, honesty, tolerance), and “Power and independence” pole which includes such elements as dominance, independence, ability to establish relationships of equality with leadership, and power. The second factor has two poles: “Justice” (personal responsibility for client, justice, honesty and so on) and “Fear of psychologist” (energy, activity, closeness of psychologist’s and pedagogue’s professions, distrust towards psychologist, and fear). These factors are the organizing ones within the SR structure, playing the role of semantic constructs serving for assessment and explaining of phenomena.

Discussion

The data obtained from the total sample enable us to say that SR about psychologist and psychological activity to a greater extent contain characteristics of personality, rather than those of professional labor. Revealed with the help of factor analysis axes “attractiveness/independence” and “justice/fears” apparently reflect ambivalence of SR contents. Some contradictoriness of constructs involved is probably explained by tensivity, anxiety towards to poorly understood psychological work, by attributing to psychologist some special “authority”, “power”, and by hopes for his/her justice and honesty.

Hypothesis 1 was partly confirmed: differences between existing SR of studied groups on the blocks of “ideal” and “real” elements and according opinions of specialists are significant only within teachers’ and officers’ groups. Contents of their SR to a greater extent “assimilates” psychologist to their own professional model.

Comparative analysis of SR of different professional groups enabled to detect significant differences in contents of their SR. As for naive explanation of psychologist’s profession essence SR of different groups, it turns out to be lacking in its specifics and tend to be similar with either the physician’s or the pedagogical models. Thus psychologist is associated more frequently with the role of physician in groups of managers and physicians. And psychologist is associated more frequently with the role of pedagogue in the groups of teachers and police officers. In the groups of teachers, physicians and police officers the contents of «ideal» and «real» psychologist image is to a great extent similar. In police officers’ SR contents the specific contents elements are psychologist’s dominance, activity, power, energy, and independence. SR of pedagogues and physicians are actually identical containing such elements as openness, altruism, capacity for empathy, and emotional expressiveness.

What differs significantly as well is the attitude in the SR structure about psychologist of the groups involved. Thus teachers and managers have a positive attitude, and the group of police officers has the negative and neutral one.

Thus hypothesis 2 is partly confirmed. Apparently “socialization” of psychology, in Moscovici and Hewstone’s terms (1983), its transformation in the new common sense is carried out under direct influence of professional stereotypes and models of professional behavior.

By means of “Personal Differential” methodic the “ideal” block in psychologist’s image and collective image of the “real” psychologist for the four groups were extracted. The significant differences on the “evaluation” and “power” factors were revealed between the “ideal” and “real” images. High personal attractiveness, confidence, stenity, well-developed self-control, independence, and extraversion characterize the «ideal» image. The “real” psychologist is assessed significantly lower on the level of general attractiveness and on the will qualities. Thus the hypothesis 3 is confirmed. SR is seen as a complexly organized phenomenon in contents of which it is possible to find divergences between available and desired.

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