CONSCIENTIOUSNESS DIMENSION AND PATHOLOGICAL PERSONALITIES

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Abstract
Personality disorders must also be approached from a dimensional perspective always, as it allows more subtle assessments of the dominating temperament and character. As it has both genetic conditionings and social-cultural ones, the Conscientiousness dimension – closely related to activism – centers the personality's structure and it may favor or disadvantage the individual destiny. The adaptive variants of Conscientiousness favor personal self-directedness process, self-control and the subjective well-being. In return, the maladaptive variants – in terms of extremely high or low values, accompany most of the personality disorders.

3 The Conscientiousness dimension – a component of the Big Five model, also called Five Factor Model – is one of the basal dimensions of personality, easy to investigate by means of the current instruments of personological assessment. It may be correlated both to the Persistence dimension – temperament factor – and to Self-directedness – character factor – from Cloninger’s 7 factors model. So, Conscientiousness – both genetically conditioned and shaped by interpersonal and educational experiences within the personogenesis – is a mouldable dimension (1)(5).

Its assessment, allows to estimate the self-control ability, a must in any personological characterization. Conscientiousness represents the foundation of Self-directedness on a medium and long-term basis of the human person and conditions – along with the agreeableness dimension – the person’s ability to learn from experience (2).

Its extreme variants in a positive or negative sense, may define pathological personality traits, which are easily recognized from a clinical point of view. However, they are also frequently encountered in the absence of a proper categorical diagnosis.

The Conscientiousness dimension characterizes best the manner in which the person relates to activity. It contains several facets such as trust in one’s own abilities – that correlates best with self-esteem – to which is added caution, need of rigor and order, responsibility, persistence, efficiency in action and moral integrity.

A person with high values of Conscientiousness – in an adaptive sense – is characterized by a high level of self-control and trust in his own abilities, high expectations and standards, being always eager to rise and progress. He is a neat and pedantic person, meticulous and tenacious in front of obstacles. Usually prefers an organized and well-structured style of activity, is cautious in his decisions, responsible, perseverant and completes all the assumed tasks. His emotional manifestations are controlled, slightly expansive and contagious, less flexible and spontaneous. Such a person is trustworthy, complies easily with norms and authorities and adopts very easily a balanced and healthy lifestyle regimen.

Thus, the psychobehavioral manifestations of Obsessive-Compulsive Personality Disorder, Borderline Personality Disorder, Antisocial Personality Disorder and Narcissistic Personality Disorder, but also of Avoidant Personality Disorder and Histrionic Personality Disorder may be dimmed, exacerbated or nuanced by the values of Conscientiousness. These are also predictive factors for a diversity of episodes and mental illnesses, in the case of which the therapeutic compliance influences in a decisive manner.

Key words: Conscientiousness, personality disorders, self-directedness

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characterized by a high flexibility, spirit of adventure, prefers assuming risks and frequent changes. He has a high tolerance to unstructured tasks and adapts himself easily and quickly to new situations. He is a spontaneous, casual and nonconformist person who tends to resist any form of authority when he feels restrained from manifesting himself freely and naturally.

Low Conscientiousness in a maladaptive sense, manifests itself by a very low self-control, lack of professional enthusiasm and a total lack of respect to social norms and regulations. A person with excessive low values of this dimension lacks discipline and perseverance, is unpredictable, and does not respect his promises and initial plans. He is very easy to distract, excessively relaxed as to the tasks received, disorganized and inefficient in actions. He is characterized by immaturity, deficiency in searching the meaning of life and irresponsibility. From a professional point of view, his achievements are usually below the level of his aptitudes. He is a stubborn person, hard to lead, who takes decisions impulsively ignoring the consequences and who often commits toxic excesses and immoral acts (4).

The high or low values of the Conscientiousness dimension, in an adaptive sense, substantiates specific personological attributes that can be commented and understood always in connection with the other dimensions of the person (1).

Maladaptive Conscientiousness is sometimes a characteristic of pathological personalities. In its extreme variants is defining for the obsessive-compulsive personality, at its the opposite pole being the borderline and antisocial type personalities. They are the most representative correspondences of personological categorical diagnosis, uniting attributes that derive directly from the high or low values of the Conscientiousness dimension.

Thus, a very high Conscientiousness, in the case of obsessive-compulsive personality disorder, it manifests through the tendency of controlling his own behavior and that of the persons around him, in an exaggerated manner, in excessive devotion for work, perfectionism, rigidity, excessive preoccupation for organization, order and details, joining social norms and beliefs, incapacity to relax and enjoy himself. In borderline and antisocial type personality disorders, an excessively low Conscientiousness is manifested by total lack of self-control due to pathological impulsiveness and disconsideration for the other persons around him, affective and attitudinal instability, relational hypersensitivity and low tolerance to frustration. Severe behavior disorders are associated with the violation of legal and moral norms, irresponsibility, ignoring the hazard, incapacity to learn from experience (2).

The histrionic personality disorder is characterized by such low values of Conscientiousness that explain low self-control and recurrent impulsive conducts in case of this personality.

In the case of the other pathological personalities, the Conscientiousness dimension may be commented more from the quality point of view, according to its various facets, its values, overall, are not near to the extreme ones (3).

The perfected self-control of the paranoid personality, decreases under the circumstances in which he loses control over the entourage that he usually selects and dominates. The schizoid is restrained and hypercontrolled apparently, in fact being indifferent and affectively detached. The schizoid is meticulous and perseverant only in his eccentric and bizarre behavior.

The narcissistic personality controls his attitude selectively according to the “quality and value” of the entourage.

In the avoidant personality, reserved and retreated, the exaggerated self-control derives from the lack of trust in his own abilities, especially in the social and relational ones. The dependent personality, also with low self-esteem, is undecided, lacks initiative and spontaneity, he may be resistant and perseverant in routine activities, sometimes even in unpleasant tasks if the dependence relation imposes it.

Knowledge and assessment of the Conscientiousness dimension allow the recognition of a specific individual vulnerability with a predictive and prophylactic role, particularly within the context of some of its extreme values, even in the absence of a categorical personological diagnosis.

It may condition the clinical and evolutional feature of the psychopathological pictures and the therapeutic compliance, that its high values may simultaneously favor or disadvantage.

The dysfunctionality corresponding to the extreme variants – may be potentiated, masked or compensated by the other dimensions.

As it is tightly connectatable to activism, the Conscientiousness dimension is a measure of efficiency in roles of the human person and a permanent support of self-determination.

References:

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