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PSYCHOLOGICAL DETERMINANTS AND INTRAPSYCHIC MECHANISMS OF POST-TRAUMATIC GROWTH: A PERSON-CENTERED DIMENSION

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This article systematizes the phenomenon of post-traumatic growth within the person-centered paradigm. It argues for the limitations of clinical-nosological approaches focused solely on symptom reduction when explaining constructive personality changes under conditions of chronic traumatization. Based on Carl Rogers' phenomenological theory and Stephen Joseph's theory of organismic valuing and growth through adversity, trauma is interpreted as a state of systemic disorganization containing implicit potential for the structural reconstruction of the psyche. The study defines the intrapsychic architecture of growth, which is realized through the synergy of three mechanisms: 1) the reactivation of the organismic valuing process, facilitating the restoration of authenticity and an internal locus of control; 2) the process-based regulation and symbolization of affective experience, necessary for integrating fragmented experiences; and 3) the positive accommodation of the self-concept, involving a cognitive-existential reconfiguration of belief systems. It is established that the dynamic transition from maladjustment to growth is determined by the presence of a facilitating intersubjective environment and the actualization of self-determination resources.
Keywords: *post-traumatic growth, person-centered approach, intrapsychic mechanisms, organismic valuing process, disorganization, positive accommodation, symbolization of experience*

Problem Statement. Amidst the full-scale war, Ukrainian society has confronted traumatization of an unprecedented scale. Today, psychological science faces the necessity of revising traditional approaches to trauma work, as the pathocentric model–focused exclusively on reducing symptoms of post-traumatic reactions–proves insufficient to encompass the existing continuum of traumatic experience. An overemphasis on psychopathology risks stigmatizing normal reactions to abnormal circumstances and ignores the adaptive potential of the psyche. Consequently, the search for internal personality resources that allow for the integration of traumatic experience into a new self-structure has acquired exceptional relevance. In this context, scholarly interest naturally gravitates toward the concept of post-traumatic growth. However, the direct extrapolation of existing models to the Ukrainian context requires caution. Responding to current challenges, Ukrainian psychological science has made significant progress in addressing constructive personality changes following traumatic events. Significant contributions to the study of psychological stability, resilience, and post-traumatic adaptation have been made by researchers such as Tytarenko (2019), Klymchuk (2021), Zasiekina et al. (2023), Pohorilska and Naidonova (2024), and others.

Despite a substantial body of work, the issue of the intrapsychic mechanisms of post-traumatic growth from the perspective of the person-centered approach remains insufficiently articulated in Ukrainian discourse. Most studies focus on adaptation outcomes or social factors, overlooking the phenomenology of experiencing the state of «disorganization» described by C. Rogers (1959) as a necessary stage for restoring agency under conditions of permanent security threats.

The person-centered approach of C. Rogers, and the theory of organismic valuing and growth through adversity developed within its framework (Joseph & Linley, 2005), offer a relevant methodological lens for resolving this dilemma. The state of disorganization is a consequence of the inability to assimilate threatening experiences into an existing rigid self-concept (Rogers, 1959). However, it is precisely this critical incongruence that paradoxically mobilizes the actualizing tendency – considered the organism's fundamental drive toward preservation and enhancement (Rogers, 1963). In this context, scientific interest shifts toward understanding growth as a result of a deep acceptance of one's own vulnerability (Rogers, 1961) and the restoration of authenticity. Post-traumatic growth is constituted as a practice of living in alignment with an internal locus of evaluation, made possible through the

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positive accommodation of traumatic experience (Joseph, 2011; Wood et al., 2008).

The purpose of the article is to theoretically substantiate the intrapsychic mechanisms of post-traumatic growth within the person-centered paradigm and to identify the key psychological determinants that facilitate the transition from traumatic disorganization to constructive personality changes.

Analysis of the Problem. The concept of «post-traumatic growth» was introduced into scientific circulation by R. Tedeschi and L. Calhoun in 1995 and subsequently acquired the status of a measurable psychological construct following the publication of the PTGI in 1996 (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1995; 1996). Although the term is firmly associated with these researchers, the phenomenon of positive change resulting from trauma is conceptually new neither to psychology nor to a broader range of philosophical and religious teachings, a point repeatedly emphasized by the authors themselves (Tedeschi et al., 2018).

Compelling evidence of reframing trauma in a positive dimension can be historically traced in the narratives of Western and Eastern thinkers (Dickinson, 2024; Gupta & Chaubey, 2024) and is axiomatic to human thought. Stephen Joseph, in developing his own theory of growth through adversity, illustrated this with F. Nietzsche's well-known maxim «What does not kill me makes me stronger» which was reflected in the title of his seminal work (Joseph, 2011).

Almost simultaneously with Tedeschi and Calhoun, the academic discourse was enriched by complementary theoretical models. For instance, C. Park and colleagues proposed the concept of «stress-related growth» and a corresponding questionnaire, viewing growth as a result of meaning-making and cognitive processing of a stressful event (Park, Cohen & Murch, 1996; Park, 2010). In parallel, V. O'Leary and J. Ickovics introduced the concept of «thriving» albeit in the context of women's health. They described thriving as a transformation process that elevates the individual to a level of functioning superior to their premorbid state (O'Leary & Ickovics, 1995).

Within health psychology, G. Affleck and H. Tennen developed the concept of «benefit finding». They emphasized the adaptive function of seeking positive meaning in difficult life circumstances and chronic illnesses (Affleck & Tennen, 1996). A significant contribution to understanding the nature of this phenomenon was also made by A. Maercker and T. Zoellner, who proposed the «Janus Face Model» differentiating between the constructive side of growth and its illusory, self-deceptive component; the latter may serve as a form of psychological defense (Maercker & Zoellner, 2004). Despite terminological discrepancies, all these approaches formed a categorical architecture within which the contemporary understanding of post-traumatic growth crystallized.

However, it must be acknowledged that it was Tedeschi and Calhoun who first conceptualized growth specifically within the context of post-traumatic stress and established an empirical foundation via the PTGI. This shifted the focus of researchers and practitioners toward studying the positive consequences of traumatic experience coexisting with pronounced disorder symptoms. Despite the apparent paradox of gaining through suffering, the concept of growth expands the possibilities for personality recovery by not focusing exclusively on the maladaptive aspects of a seismic event.

Within the existential-humanistic tradition, the idea that suffering can act not merely as a destructive factor but as a potent catalyst for personal development has been viewed as a fundamental ontological premise. V. Frankl substantiated the concept of «tragic optimism» postulating the human capacity to transform inevitable suffering by seeking and finding meaning in traumatic circumstances. Meaning allows the individual not only to preserve integrity but to ascend to a new level of spiritual maturity in dire life circumstances (Frankl, 1992).

Similar views were expressed by I. Yalom. He elaborated on the idea of confrontation with «boundary situations» – the irreversibility of death, responsibility, isolation, and meaninglessness. These situations destroy neurotic defenses and prompt the individual to transition from a mode of «forgetfulness of being» to a state of authentic existence. Trauma becomes the forced upheaval through which a person reevaluates priorities and abandons the trivial in favor of the essential (Yalom, 1980).

A. Maslow noted that the path to self-actualization often runs through the destruction of an illusory sense of security and a direct encounter with existential reality. This painful experience becomes a prerequisite for shifting from deficiency motivation to the level of B-values. Maslow observed that a significant proportion of self-actualized individuals acknowledged the leading role of life crises and tragedies in their integration and acquisition of wisdom, which allowed them to abandon superficial goals in favor of deeper self-realization (Maslow, 1970).

However, the most systemic and psychologically rigorously verified foundation for understanding the mechanisms of personality transformation following trauma was proposed by Carl Rogers. In Rogers' phenomenological theory of personality, post-traumatic growth is implicitly embedded in the concept of moving toward «full functioning». Rogers viewed a traumatic event not as an isolated pathology but as a state of critical incongruence; such a rupture between the established «self-concept» and a new threatening experience cannot be assimilated using existing defense mechanisms. Consequently, a process of disorganization is triggered, where the rigid structure of the personality disintegrates under the pressure of reality, causing intense anxiety and vulnerability (Rogers, 1959).

Rogers saw a unique potential for change in disorganization. The actualizing tendency of the organism does not vanish during trauma but directs efforts toward reorganizing the psyche at a higher level of complexity. At this threshold moment, the individual needs the necessary conditions of empathic understanding and unconditional acceptance; only then can the organismic valuing process–inherent in every person–integrate the traumatic

experience into a more flexible and realistic «Self» structure. Thus, the characteristics of the fully functioning person according to Rogers (1961) can be viewed as a prototype for the categories of post-traumatic growth.

In contemporary person-centered discourse, the understanding of the intrapsychic dynamics of trauma has been significantly refined. The core of the discussion focuses on the process-oriented aspects of personality. M. Warner (2013), in her concept of «fragile process», argues that traumatization disrupts the person's capacity to modulate the intensity of experience. For a person in this state, direct contact with traumatic material evokes excessive arousal, perceived as an imminent threat of self-disintegration or annihilation. Consequently, growth cannot be forced through cognitive restructuring or cathartic release, as these are likely to trigger protective dissociation. Instead, the mechanism of recovery relies on the careful regulation of affect intensity. This safe containment allows for the restoration of the interrupted cycle of symbolization, thereby returning fluidity to the psychological process.

In turn, D. Mearns and B. Thorne (2000) examine trauma in the theory of «Configurations of Self» as a factor in the formation of a rigid protective part of the personality (e.g., «Self-as-victim»), which blocks the actualizing tendency for the sake of safety. From this perspective, growth is a process of intrapsychic dialogue where the protective configuration is assimilated into a more flexible structure, restoring a lost sense of agency (Mearns, 1999). This picture is complemented by the process-experiential approach of R. Elliott (Elliott et al., 2004), where the mechanism of growth appears as the emotional transformation of automatic schemes (changing one emotion with another) and subsequent meaning-making. R. Knox (2013) adds the necessity of restoring «relational depth» as a condition for restarting the organismic valuing process blocked by interpersonal trauma.

Stephen Joseph, countering dominant cognitive models, provided a new reading of the phenomenon within the person-centered approach. He refuses to view post-traumatic growth as a reduced set of potential positive changes. Instead, Joseph asserts that growth is a manifestation of the innate tendency toward self-actualization, activated by an existential crisis (Joseph, 2015). Joseph subjects the «medical model» to significant criticism for pathologizing natural adaptive processes (Joseph, 2011; 2021). Symptoms of intrusion and avoidance are viewed by him as indicators of cognitive-emotional work to overcome the incongruence between the «self-concept» and the traumatic experience (Joseph & Linley, 2008), excluding their evaluation in the context of disorder symptomatology. He agrees with Rogers that the state of «disorganization» creates the tension necessary to break down rigid structures and rebuild them at a higher level.

Central to S. Joseph's system is the Organismic Valuing Theory of Growth through Adversity, developed jointly with P.A. Linley (Joseph & Linley, 2005). It postulates the existence of an internal «compass» that distinguishes experience beneficial for development from that which is destructive. Trauma destroys the subjective «assumptive world» (Janoff-Bulman, 1989), causing the person's projection onto the world to become irrevocably distorted. The individual faces a choice of adaptation mechanism: assimilation or accommodation. *Assimilation* is an attempt to return to the previous state by «forcing» new experience into old schemas, leading to psychological fragility (the «glued vase» metaphor). Conversely, *accommodation* involves rebuilding the «Self» structure according to the new reality (the metaphor of «creating a mosaic» from broken pieces). Although the term «accommodation» is generally characteristic of cognitive models (J. Piaget) and describes a mental process, in his theory, Joseph proceeds from the Rogerian premise of organismic valuing.

Joseph also introduces a social context into the model through Self-Determination Theory (Patterson & Joseph, 2007) to explain the role of the individual's internal resources in growth. Successful reorganization depends on a facilitating environment that satisfies basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. An empathic environment provides the resource to withstand the anxiety of the disintegration of the old worldview. Social pressure and introjects, conversely, activate rigid «conditions of worth» blocking healing and leading to fixation or negative accommodation (Joseph & Linley, 2006). Consequently, the focus of therapy shifts from techniques to creating a safe relationship for restoring contact with the organismic valuing process belonging to every person (Joseph, 2004).

S. Joseph also problematizes the nature of declared changes, warning against illusory growth in accordance with the «Janus Face model» (Maercker & Zoellner, 2004). Illusory growth is a palliative coping strategy, a form of psychological defense or social desirability; it merely mimics well-being but blocks true accommodation of experience. Drawing on C. Ryff's model, the scholar asserts that authentic post-traumatic growth occurs in the plane of eudaimonia. Thus, a valid criterion for healing is not a return to previous levels of comfort or the absence of distress, but a qualitative improvement in functioning in the spheres of autonomy, purpose in life, and depth of relationships (Joseph et al., 2012). In this context, Joseph substantiates the paradox of the coexistence of pain and development: a person may continue to feel sadness and loss, yet their existence becomes more conscious, wise, and authentic, requiring the evaluation of trauma consequences specifically through the expansion of existential competence rather than the achievement of subjective satisfaction (Joseph & Linley, 2008; Joseph, 2011).

Discussion. Post-traumatic personality recovery requires a change in epistemological foundations, namely a transition to a non-directive framework of development facilitation. It is worth noting that in the Ukrainian context, growth occurs under conditions of chronic stress, meaning disorganization may have a cyclical character. Post-traumatic growth also cannot be narrowed down to the epiphenomenon of survival, as it is the lawful result of complex intrapsychic work.

The transformation of traumatic experience is ensured by the functioning of three interconnected internal mechanisms:

1. Reactivation of the Organismic Valuing Process. Since the natural mechanism is often blocked, its reactivation serves as a mechanism for restoring authenticity, enabling a departure from traumatic fixation. A traumatic event introjects rigid «conditions of worth» into the individual's consciousness–externally imposed scenarios of reaction (e.g., a prohibition on weakness, an imperative of hatred or forgiveness)–which alienate the person from their true experiences. Shifting the locus of evaluation from an external reference circle to an internal one is a necessary prerequisite for growth. Aligning one's life choices with the organism's deep wisdom promotes the restoration of congruence. Consequently, the activation of the psychological factor of authenticity becomes possible (Wood et al., 2008).

An authentic personality is capable of integrating trauma because it does not deny its pain for the sake of conformity to social norms, but acknowledges it as part of its unique path, which is the essential feature of post-traumatic growth.

2. Processual Regulation of «Fragility» and Symbolization of Experience. This serves as a vital pathway for processing the affective material of trauma. Phenomenologically, traumatic experience is often «unspeakable», represented in the psyche by fragmented images, somatic reactions, or «states of horror» lacking verbal equivalents. While traditional defense mechanisms (repression, dissociation) aim to isolate this experience, the mechanism of growth involves the restoration of the symbolization process, often disrupted in what M. Warner (2013) defines as «fragile process». In this specific mode of functioning, the psyche struggles to modulate the intensity of emotional pain, leading to either flooding or dissociation.

The essence of this mechanism lies in the gradual titration of affect—regulating the intensity of the experience to a manageable level where «exact symbolization» becomes possible. It involves finding a precise semantic equivalent for the felt sense («exact empathic naming»), thereby transforming «silent horror» into a coherent narrative. Unlike a pre-existing competence, this is a restorative act that re-establishes the connection between somatic signals and their cognitive interpretation. This capacity to maintain a safe distance from the overwhelming pain prevents pathological fixation and allows the frozen traumatic experience to resume its natural processual flow.

3. Positive Accommodation of the Self-Concept. This is regarded as the essential mechanism of structural personality changes. Drawing on the model of adaptation to threatening events by S. Joseph and P. Linley (Joseph & Linley, 2005), we assert that post-traumatic growth results from the dominance of positive accommodation processes over assimilation processes. Assimilation represents an attempt to preserve the old model of the world by distorting the reality of the trauma, which is an energy-consuming and maladaptive method. The mechanism of positive accommodation involves the deconstruction of previous basic beliefs and the construction of new cognitive schemas that account for the fact of trauma but are not limited by it. This is intrapsychic work to expand the self-concept, rebuilding a rigid self-perception into a flexible, realistic identity («I am vulnerable, but resilient; the world is dangerous, but it has meaning»).

This mechanism is closely linked to the existential reevaluation of values described by V. Frankl and I. Yalom. The success of accommodation depends on psychological factors such as cognitive flexibility and the formation of meaning-of-life orientations. It is flexibility that allows the psyche to abandon irrelevant life goals and invest energy in meanings significant for post-traumatic existence.

Conclusions.

1. The expediency of shifting the scientific paradigm in studying the consequences of psychotraumatic events has been substantiated; a transition has been made from the clinical-nosological approach to a phenomenological model of post-traumatic growth. Within the person-centered approach, post-traumatic changes acquire the status of a systemic reconstruction of the personality's self-structure, extending beyond the simple reduction of distress or restoration of homeostasis. The symptom complex of intrusion and avoidance, as well as the state of personal disorganization, are interpreted as valid phenomenological markers of the psyche's intense adaptive work. Such a view legitimizes suffering as a necessary stage in seeking a new configuration of the Self and actualizing the subject's eudaimonic potential under conditions of crisis experience.

2. It has been established that the productive transformation of traumatic experience is realized through the complementary interaction of three intrapsychic mechanisms that ensure the transition from protective assimilation strategies to constructive accommodation, namely:

1) Reactivation of organismic valuing performs the function of restoring internal regulation. Organismic valuing, inherent in every human, is capable of differentiating authentic needs from normative scenarios of experiencing introjected by society.

2) Symbolization of affective experience (via the regulation of intensity within the «fragile process») ensures the integration of traumatic material by transforming dissociated somatic impressions into a coherent narrative, thereby restoring the interrupted flow of experiencing.

3) Positive accommodation of the Self-concept serves the cognitive-semantic reconstruction; it replaces rigid worldview schemas with a more flexible identity, implying the recognition of one's own vulnerability as an existential given.

3. Based on the analysis of processual mechanisms and their methodological operationalization, the architecture for empirical research into the psychological factors of post-traumatic growth has been defined. It is theoretically grounded that the effectiveness of intrapsychic trauma processing is determined by a configuration of specific

resources covering the motivational, cognitive, and intersubjective spheres of the personality. The foundation for restoring organismic valuing is provided by self-determination resources: satisfaction of basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, which, combined with a high level of self-acceptance and an intention toward personal growth, create conditions for the functioning of an internal locus of control.

Simultaneously, the capacity for structural changes in the self-concept is defined by the specificity of cognitive-worldview accommodation, specifically the balance between positive and negative reconstruction of beliefs, where the key factor is a constructive change in worldview allowing the integration of traumatic experience into a more complex cognitive schema, as opposed to rigid assimilation. Important predictors of growth are also identified as intersubjective resources: the quality of interpersonal support and a sense of belonging–which provide the necessary facilitating environment for the safe «containment» of affect and the reduction of the risk of pathological fixation on trauma, since without external conditions of safety, the launch of the organismic process is impossible.

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Illia Yermak. Theoretical analysis and systematization of scientific sources, writing the main text of the article;
Natalia Barinova. Formulation of the research aim and objectives, definition of the methodology, general editing of the article.

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ПСИХОЛОГІЧНІ ДЕТЕРМІНАНТИ ТА ІНТРАПСИХІЧНІ МЕХАНІЗМИ ПОСТТРАВМАТИЧНОГО ЗРОСТАННЯ: ОСОБИСТІСНО-ЦЕНТРОВАНИЙ ВИМІР

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У статті систематизовано феномен посттравматичного зростання в межах особистісно-центрованої парадигми. Обгрунтовано обмеженість клініко-нозологічних підходів, зосереджених виключно на редукції симптомів, у поясненні конструктивних особистісних змін в умовах хронічної травматизації. На основі феноменологічної теорії Карла Роджерса та теорії організмічного оцінювання і зростання в умовах негараздів Стівена Джозефа травму інтерпретовано як стан системної дезорганізації, що містить імпліцитний потенціал для структурної реконструкції психіки. Визначено інтрапсихічну архітектуру зростання, яка реалізується через синергію трьох механізмів: 1) реактивації процесу організмічного оцінювання, що сприяє відновленню автентичності та внутрішнього локусу контролю; 2) процесуальної регуляції та символізації афективного досвіду, необхідної для інтеграції фрагментованих переживань; 3) позитивної акомодації Я-концепції, що передбачає когнітивно-екзистенційну реконфігурацію системи переконань. Встановлено, що динамічний перехід від дезадаптації до зростання детермінується наявністю фасилітативного інтерсуб'єктивного середовища та актуалізацією ресурсів самодетермінації.

Ключові слова: *посттравматичне зростання, особистісно-центрований підхід, інтрапсихічні механізми, процес організмічного оцінювання, дезорганізація, позитивна акомодація, символізація досвіду.*

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