Mechanisms of social destigmatization

Stigmatization is one of the fundamental psychosocial mechanisms that hinder or even prevent the proper functioning in social and life roles of people with symptoms of the social maladjustment syndrome. It consists in "solidification" the individual in their deviant roles by the social environment. The interpersonal distance of a perceptual-emotional nature forming at that time results in an internal conviction of persons functioning hitherto differently (former or current pupils of social rehabilitation facilities and institutions) that the environments in which they stay are somehow "cut off" from them and do not want to maintain personal relations with them.

The method that has a chance of not only blocking but also reversing this phenomenon in such situations is to initiate destigmatization processes.

The phenomenon of solidification in the role and status of a "misfit" begins with the stigmatization of the "camouflaged deviation", i.e. the abstract status of an individual resulting generally from their socialization experience (Urban 2005). Polarization of attitudes and manifestation of the ways of thinking about life priorities held in such cases leads to the so-called deviant identity, which forces the individual into certain social roles, resulting in a deviant career.

Social interactions stabilize the pro-deviation individual in its way of thinking about itself and thus solidify them in the social roles lacking content and scope, leading to a process of deepening of their marginalization and exclusion. The individual's reaction to this state of affairs is, among other things, an escalation of the level of interpersonal aggression, socially unacceptable ways of satisfying needs, and pathological ways of reducing internal emotional tensions.

The concepts of destigmatization and the concept of positive deviation are relatively new and little analyzed in the context of social rehabilitation pedagogy (Urban 2005). We can assume that the process of destigmatization is, in essence, a process of deleting deviation identity and transforming its dimensions into dominant socially accepted parameters. Acquisition by an individual of the character-

istics of a "normie", as Goffman calls it, and thus get rid of a sense of stigma, changes not only their social status, but above all it transforms its Individual Self and the Social Self, co-creating a psychosocial profile.

The process of destigmatization starts with an individual becoming aware of the previous improper life (their unfortunate fate), which causes the fulfillment of deviant social roles (criminal, aggressor, loser, etc.), and therefore with noticing the effects of the process of negative stigmatization. This process of making someone aware has a nature of »revelation« slightly similar to "schizophrenic revelation". It is a trigger of conversion, which starts the dramatic and long process of »a fight against yourself«, and the sacrifices to be made by an individual can be compared to the described human sacrifices in the history of religion (sacrifices of saints and blessed).

The process of destigmatization is the negotiation or deletion of the deviant identity of an individual and such a transformation of that identity that the deviation Self is replaced by the normative Self. The process of destigmatization is an extremely difficult experience of the fact that two identities are temporarily present – an old deviant one and, to some extent, one imposed onto it as a new positive one.

This phenomenon takes the form of a positive deviation, and thus reveals itself through a rapid manifestation of one's new beliefs (an alcoholic who stopped drinking and is an active member of the AA, a former drug addict who helps others to get rid of the addiction, etc.).

It can be considered that the concept of destigmatization finds measurable support in cognitive psychology.

According to G. Kelly (the precursor of cognitive theory), the primordial element of the structure of the Self is the information that form personality constructs, i. e. coded scripts transforming into knowledge of the social environment, attitudes towards this environment, respect for or lack of respect for social and legal norms. These scripts are generated and developed during the interaction with significant persons, i.e. in the process of socialization.

In the case of people who are poorly socialized, information about the social environment (scripts) is falsified and usually do not comply with the applicable social norms. This is expressed through final complex cognitive structures in the form of the so-called hostile distortion of the attribution of perceiving interaction partners' attitudes as hostile and detrimental to the interests of the individual.

The "hostile distorted attributions" function in the form of the so-called coercive behavior – the individual feels compelled to behave in a hostile manner. Such an attribution links the effects of behavior that are unpleasant to the individual with the hostile intentions of other people.

Correcting or eliminating distorted attributions can be done in the course of a properly conducted reinterpretation of social situations, i.e. both in the course of pedagogically created self-presentation (presenting the self in interactions) and visualization of corrected identity parameters (attributive autopresentation).

Social rehabilitation based on cognitive theories leads to a process of destigmatization, as this process takes place in the context of social interaction. Unconventional methods of social rehabilitation are best suited to achieve this condition. This type of impact is justified by the fact that the destigmatization process develops under the influence of unconventional experiences and the participation of temporal factors (related, among others, to the process of maturing – the individual perceives that their previous life was a disaster, but has not ended yet), and interpersonal factors (among others, of the nature of social support).

We can assume that from the point of view of contemporary social rehabilitation pedagogy, the process of destigmatization will consist in a kind of "superimposition" (assimilation) by an individual of new identity costumes, instead of the previous attempts to deplete or delete (remove) them.

As a side note, it can be added that attempts at depletion or deletion of deviant identities, which today are predominant in the practical social rehabilitation impacts of its institutional forms (penitentiary institutions, shelters for minors and correctional facilities), are one of the main reasons for the lack of effectiveness and sustainability of social rehabilitation changes. Because people who are subject to institutional coercion and design of similar organizational influences will at all costs protect the parameters of their deviant identity using various defensive mechanisms and techniques of social manipulation. This is because they do not have other "substitutive" identity parameters. Depriving them of what they have causes natural and long-lasting resistance. It should also be remembered that an individual deprived of fragments of a deviant identity is not able to survive and function in a total institution such as a penitentiary or correctional institution.

The process of skillfully modifying the former deviation identities by supplementing them with new cognitive scripts and attributes, competences and skills opens up a new space of personal and social development for the ex-deviants-to-be. The content of this space, i.e. the subject of educational impact, are their potentials and personal and social resources created through methodically designed educational activities, aimed at supporting the development of structural factors of cognitive and creative processes. For it is cognitive and creative structures that determine the possibilities of adapting to new social and cultural conditions of socially maladjusted people.

Literature

[1]   Urban B., 2005, *Zachowania dewiacyjne młodzieży w interakcjach rówieśniczych*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, Kraków.

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