Chapter 24

Social Psychology of Health as a Social–Psychological Situation

Maria Orlova

Saratov State University, Russia

ABSTRACT

In this chapter, the author examines the concept of health situations and situations of disease, and suggests a classification of health situations depending on the impact of health on the self-realization of a human in social relationships.

INTRODUCTION

The concepts of health and illness are interdisciplinary by nature and are treated as medical, social, cultural, historical and psychological ones. There has long been a tension in the mental health field generally, and the psychiatric field in particular, between those who favor doing whatever it takes to stabilize a patient and those who see strategic and creative possibilities within the chaos (Bloom, 2000).

SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY OF HEALTH AS A SOCIAL–PSYCHOLOGICAL SITUATION

Psychological approaches to the concept of health are represented in a number of models of health. Here, the understanding of health as biological, social and personal adequacy found in works by Myasishchev (1995) is of particular interest.

Phenomenological philosophers noted that it is rather difficult to express and convey the original experience, a feeling of health. According to Leder
(1995), a contemporary phenomenologist, experience of health is not inherent to us; we can only recognize it as opposed to the disease. Health is a great outcast, “to be healthy means to be free from certain constraints and problems calling for self-reflection” (Leder, 1995). Health is defined not only as the absence of disease.

Merleau-Ponty (1945) talked about physical “I can” as all those actions that are available to me due to my health. An approach that measures human health by the productivity, is, of course, based on a solid economic foundation. Thus, in 1993, the World Bank prepared and published “Investing in Health” (Jamison, 1993) report. Health is often viewed as the price to achieve other purposes not related to health per se. (Stepanov, 1999).

In addition, in the sociocultural aspect, health is treated as a component of life satisfaction and subjective well-being.

Judin (2000) considers the concept of health to be multifaceted: it is a fact determined by medical research, a certain norm and a significant value.

Rozin (2000) concludes that health is not a natural phenomenon, it is a social artifact. Personality develops individual and adapted to itself concepts of health. For a person, health is not only and not so much an opportunity to act effectively in social terms as to fully realize themselves. That is why we speak about a health ideal: it is a human state which a person seeks and which, as he believes, enables him to feel like a human, to be in harmony with himself. Based on the ideas of the anthropological approach developed by Slobodchikov and Shuvalov (2001), the individual norm of psychological health is the best that is possible at a particular age for a particular person, under appropriate conditions of development. Thus, the phenomenon of health should be investigated in the context of biological, social and personal, subjective and objective, adaptation and self-actualization.

In our view, the study of personal meaning of health and illness, multifaceted nature of this phenomenon involves systematic study which can be realized within the framework of situational approach that highlights the objective and subjective components. Objective and subjective situations are analyzed, in particular, by Stebbins (1981) who understands objective situation as the actual physical and social environment, and subjective one as any component of the subjective situation perceived by the person and therefore of a certain value.

Thus, health could be viewed as a situation presenting condition for, and illness as an obstacle to a person’s self-realization.

Burlachuk and Korzhova (1998) believes that on the person’s health pole the most important are the situations related to their social and, above all, professional status.

We propose to single out the situation of health concept by analogy with the situation of disease concept determined by us in 1983 (Orlova, 2009). In our view, the situation of health and disease should include:

- An objective component - health as a medical fact and objective resource situation in life that reflects the psychological “price” of health for the implementation of existing, first of all, creative, in particular, the professional capabilities of the individual;
- A subjective component - it is characterized by the degree of importance of health for the realization of the leading motives of personality as well as personal and social identity. It is characterized by the degree of activity of the patient’s personality and self-regulation mechanisms. We have identified three types of health situations, depending on its relevance to professional realization.