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**KUCHERENKO Yehor** – Candidate of Psychological Sciences, Associate Professor, Head of the Department of Psychology, Private Higher Educational Establishment “Kyiv Medical University”, 2, Boryspilska Str., Kyiv, Ukraine, postal code 02099 ([y.kucherenko@kmu.edu.ua](mailto:y.kucherenko@kmu.edu.ua))

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7462-0638>

**SHYROKOVA Anna** – Master of Psychology, Professor’s Assistant, Department of Psychology, Private Higher Educational Establishment “Kyiv Medical University”, 2, Boryspilska Str., Kyiv, Ukraine, postal code 02099 ([a.shyrokova@kmu.edu.ua](mailto:a.shyrokova@kmu.edu.ua))

**PIVEN Liubov** – Master of Psychology, MD, Professor’s Assistant, Department of Psychology, Private Higher Educational Establishment “Kyiv Medical University”, 2, Boryspilska Str., Kyiv, Ukraine, postal code 02099 ([l.piven@kmu.edu.ua](mailto:l.piven@kmu.edu.ua))

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3063-5544>

## PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSISTANCE TO ADULTS AT THE THRESHOLD BETWEEN POST-TRAUMATIC RECOVERY AND SELF-GROWTH, BASED ON PSYCHOSYNTHESIS

**Abstract.** *The purpose of this article is to theoretically explore the peculiarities of providing psychological assistance to adults based on psychosynthesis during the liminal period between their post-traumatic recovery and self-development. The research methodology involves theoretical generalization and synthesis of classical, modern, and original scientific sources that address the problem of liminality and psychosynthesis as a method of post-traumatic development for adults. The scientific novelty lies in the authors’ proposal of the concept of a “liminal pause”, based on the dominance of a protective subpersonality within the structure of a traumatized client’s personality, based on psychological assistance experiences during the full-scale war. Furthermore, the phenomenon of liminality is conceptualized through the interplay of external and internal dimensions within the fundamental concepts of psychosynthesis. The conclusions define post-traumatic adult development as a liminal process, in which threshold self-awareness and threshold self-transformation are differentiated. It was found that the main methodological stages of psychosynthesis coincide with the psychoeducational tasks of post-traumatic development as a targeted self-development process for adults within various forms of organized psychological assistance. Central to this process is the development of the conscious self’s ability to disidentify from divergent subpersonalities in the structure of threshold self-awareness (“knowing oneself”). It was established that self-regulation and self-realization, as processes of threshold self-transformation in adults during the post-liminal period, are achieved through the development of willpower. Achieving identificational uncertainty – where any subpersonality is recognized by the adult client as a false identification – enables the capacity for “self-possession” and “self-transformation”, aimed at the maximal realization of the Self, the theoretical analysis of which is also presented in the article.*

**Key words:** *liminality, liminal pause, identification, post-traumatic development, psychosynthesis, disidentification, Self, conscious Self, subpersonalities.*

**КУЧЕРЕНКО Єгор** – кандидат психологічних наук, доцент, завідувач кафедри психології, Приватний вищий навчальний заклад «Київський медичний університет», вул. Бориспільська, 2, Київ, Україна, індекс 02099 (y.kucherenko@kmi.edu.ua)

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7462-0638>

**ШИРОКОВА Анна** – магістерка психології, асистентка кафедри психології, Приватний вищий навчальний заклад «Київський медичний університет», вул. Бориспільська, 2, Київ, Україна, індекс 02099 (a.shyroкова@kmi.edu.ua)

**ПІВЕНЬ Любов** – магістерка психології, докторка медицини, асистентка кафедри психології, Приватний вищий навчальний заклад «Київський медичний університет», вул. Бориспільська, 2, Київ, Україна, індекс 02099 (l.piven@kmi.edu.ua)

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3063-5544>

## ПСИХОЛОГІЧНА ДОПОМОГА ДОРΟΣЛИМ НА ПОРОЗІ МІЖ ПОСТТРАВМАТИЧНИМ ВІДНОВЛЕННЯМ ТА САМОРОЗВИТКОМ НА ЗАСАДАХ ПСИХОСИНТЕЗУ

**Анотація.** *Мета статті* полягає у теоретичному дослідженні особливостей надання психологічної допомоги дорослим на засадах психосинтезу в лімінальний період між їхнім посттравматичним відновленням та саморозвитком. **Методологія** дослідження полягає у теоретичному узагальненні та синтезі класичних, сучасних та авторських наукових джерел, в яких розроблено проблему лімінальності та психосинтезу як методу посттравматичного розвитку дорослого. **Наукова новизна** полягає в тому, що авторами вперше на основі досвіду психологічної допомоги в умовах повномасштабної війни висунуто ідею лімінальної паузи через домінування захисної субособистості у структурі травмованої особистості клієнта, а також концептуалізовано явище лімінальності через взаємозв'язок зовнішнього та внутрішнього у базових концепціях психосинтезу. У **висновках** визначено посттравматичний розвиток дорослого як лімінальний процес, в якому розрізняють порогове самопізнання та порогову самозміну. Виявлено, що основні методичні етапи психосинтезу збігаються з психоедукаційними завданнями посттравматичного розвитку як цілеспрямованого саморозвитку особистості дорослого в умовах організованої психологічної допомоги різних видів. В основі цього процесу – розвиток здатності свідомого Я до розототожнення з різноспрямованими субособистостями у структурі порогового самопізнання («знання себе»). Встановлено, що саморегуляція та самореалізація як процеси порогової самозміни дорослих у постлімінальний період досягаються засобами розвитку волі. Внаслідок досягнення ідентифікаційної невизначеності, коли будь-яка субособистість кваліфікується дорослим клієнтом як хибне ототожнення, уможливорюється здатність до «володіння собою» та «перетворення себе», які спрямовані на максимальну реалізацію Самості, теоретичний аналіз якої також представлено у статті.

**Ключові слова:** лімінальність, лімінальна пауза, ототожнення, посттравматичний розвиток, психосинтез, розототожнення, Самість, свідоме Я, субособистості.

**Problem statement.** Social liminality in modern Ukraine is an epochal change that involves structureless transitions in national and cultural-historical self-identification, standing “on the threshold between” war and peace (from Latin “limen” – threshold, boundary). On the one hand, society confirms an unshaken belief in victory in the Russian-Ukrainian war and the beginning of peace; on the other hand, uncertainty reigns about how post-war social structures must replace those shaped during wartime and pre-war periods.

In anthropological psychology, war is interpreted as a liminal period or social liminality where the struggle against the enemy destroys the established cultural-historical structures and makes the construction of new ones impossible (Horvath et al., 2009). The pre-war structures were relatively stable but are now reflected upon by society as irreversible (“a peace that cannot be returned”). Since the war began, but especially during its full-scale phase, social structures are not only being destroyed but are also difficult to build as stabilizing (“a peace that must be achieved and maintained”). On this foundation, the social liminality deepens personal liminality, the experience of which depends on the nature of psychotrauma and the ability to independently overcome its consequences.

The problem of psychotraumatization in Ukrainian psychology has gained unprecedented relevance, first of all, with respect toward researching and treating post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Meanwhile, there are grounds for the study of a unique case of crisis self-identification of the adult population "on the boundary between" national and individual, present and future, life and death etc. This experience is felt as identification uncertainty (Kucherenko, 2023) and affects the existential situation of clients in psychological assistance (Kucherenko, Khomych, 2022) reinforcing their pressing need to find answers to the questions: "Who am I?" and "Who am I not?" (Sørenthen, 2020, p. 304).

Hence, the self-identification of our fellow countrymen comes to threshold self-awareness or personal liminality. Its uniqueness lies in the fact that the psychological boundary between the national and the individual diminishes through self-identification with the nation, where the "personal" and the "national" share a common will (social psychosynthesis) (Sanner, 2023, p. 15–16). Conversely, personal will in self-identification is realized through disidentification with any identifications, primarily with dominant and protective ones. In this way, one comprehends oneself as a subject (as Self) possessing consciousness and will, and thus can choose individualized manifestations of the national, as well as the social and human in general, in personal life (personal psychosynthesis) (Kucherenko, 2023, p. 101).

The end of the war is a post-liminal period in which new social structures are formed. Therefore, the personality of an adult after victory hypothetically needs to re-identify and develop new psychological structures in lieu of those now obsolete or destroyed (de-structuring and restructuring) (Yeomans, 2018). However, there is a risk of a liminal pause or neurotic "stagnation" in the protective structure (protective subpersonality) which normatively dominated during the war (Kucherenko, 2023). Consequently, for many, life after the war will "pause" the possibility of post-traumatic development (PTD) implying a transformation of personality as an act of will (Assagioli, 1974b).

**Analysis of basic research and publications.** While the problem of PTD in Ukrainian psychology appears to be underdeveloped, it is highly required not only within the context of scientific research but also in terms of psychological aid. In foreign psychology, the phenomenon of PTD has been mainly studied in affected individuals (as victims) post-factum, namely as a correlation between the experience of overcoming trauma and their personal growth and self-actualization (Kaufman, 2021, p. 138–148). A system of psychological assistance in Ukraine needs, in our opinion, a methodological orientation toward PTD (and not only PTSD) as the guarantee of maintenance of mental health of the population during the post-war (post-liminal) period.

Since March 2022 up to November 2023, we have been testing psychosynthesis in psychological assistance to the civilian population and military personnel at all stages of the war within the volunteer project "Psychosynthesis in Wartime" (Sanner, 2023). Preliminary results of our research were presented at international scientific-practical conferences throughout 2022 at Italian Society for Psychosynthesis Psychotherapy (SIPT; Italy), the International Association for Peace Studies (IARS; USA) and the European Psychosynthesis Association (EPA; Netherlands). Unlike techniques oriented mainly to post-traumatic disorders of different aetiology or psychopathologies in general, psychosynthesis is directed to the development of the "healthy" part of personality, its resilience, by applying a variable system of techniques and exercises and their combinations (Assagioli, 1974a). Based on the empirical data gathered and analysis of individual cases, the development of not only a general theory of liminality in domestic psychology but also a methodology for post-traumatic development has been initiated.

**The purpose of the article** is to reveal the features of the psychological help to adults at the threshold between post-traumatic recovery and Self-growth, based on psychosynthesis practice and liminality studies in Ukraine.

**Presentation of the main research material.** In the scientific legacy of the founder of psychosynthesis, R. Assagioli, psychotraumatization is described through the concept of suffering, which became synonymous with psychotrauma in psychosynthesis. As R. Assagioli believed it to be a "normal part of human life", he did not consider all types of suffering to be exclusively pathological aftereffects (Assagioli, 2023a, p. 33). In adulthood, experiencing conflicts and normative and life crises is "a point of transition to a higher level" (Assagioli, 2023a, p. 42). In various works, R. Assagioli repeatedly explored not only the "points" but also the psychological, psychotherapeutic, and educational means of "transition" through different sufferings: death

of relatives, disappointment in love, generational conflicts, family quarrels, sexual life disorders, religious and political crises (Assagioli, 1974a, 2023). Consequently, in psychosynthesis, the after-effects of psychotraumatization are experienced as transience (liminality), during and as a result of which the personality may develop or not.

R. Assagioli defined the concept of development symbolically: liberation from difficulties, transition from a potential to actual. Development belongs to one of the 15 groups of symbols of transpersonal experience and includes two stages: the first lasts as the formation of personality from childhood to adulthood; the second – from the state of a “normal” person to the state of an “awakened” personality (Assagioli, 2007, p. 89–90). In other words, personal development (the first stage) is the foundation for spiritual (the second stage), when satisfying biological and personal needs (according to A. Maslow) “often gives rise, paradoxically, to feelings of boredom, melancholy, emptiness, meaninglessness. This causes a more or less blind search for ‘something else’, something greater” (Assagioli, 1974a, p. 106).

Childhood traumas, particularly due to family upbringing, are not recognized as leading in psychosynthesis (as in psychoanalysis), but they are considered in the work (Assagioli, 2023a, p. 7). The experiencing of external conflicts that have become internal is the main source of psychotraumatization and potentially leads to self-development in an adult. R. Assagioli believes that the degree of traumatization of an event and the extent of suffering are subjective, dependent on age, and hence should be “evaluated in connection with the development and resources of the one who ‘lives’ through this experience” (Assagioli, 2023a, 53–54). The scientist emphasized: “Regardless of what a person has experienced, they must here and now take responsibility for the changes they want to achieve in their personality, rather than blame their parents or society” (Assagioli, 2023a, p. 6).

Given the uniqueness of each client's existential situation, including their traumatic experience, the methodology of psychosynthesis involves applying all the techniques the professional possesses and combining them. Nevertheless, the method is not eclectic, for it has “its own precise model”, according to which a therapeutic plan is developed with orientation toward the client’s past, present, and future “in the right proportions”. Preference, R. Assagioli writes, is given to the present with a step-by-step transition from short-term to medium-term and long-term perspectives (Assagioli, 2023b). Therefore, an individualized approach should become the core of psychological aid in the post-war period when the concept of “war-affected” may turn into, sadly, a stigma for decades to come, as by this time the existential situation of Ukrainians with post-liminal dynamics is going to be a challenge for trauma specialists.

According to A. Yeomans, deep distress and disorientation of the traumatized personality are integral parts of its complex “journey through difficult times” (in psychosynthesis, a crisis and disbelief in overcoming it are metaphorically called “dark times”). The ruined “structure” of habitual life (de-structuring) amplifies the individual's uncertainty about the possibility of making a “transition”, so the first signs of PTD appear at the stage of conscious doubts about overcoming the crisis, when support and help from others do not instill belief that “there is light at the end of the tunnel”. Thus, liminality (in-between time) can be defined as an experience in transition between former life and unknown future, for the construction of which there are no clear ideas.

A. Yeomans rightly calls the transitional period a time for seeking questions, but not answers to them, an opportunity to “love the questions”, where the typical answer “I don’t know” is the norm of liminality, encouraging the person toward openness to the unknown as something new. It is time for self-help, in which the traumatized personality masters the balancing of mind and body, tension and relaxation, effort and the absence of it. This is exactly what psychosynthesis offers, as it is in the general sense a method of self-care. The psychotherapist considers that even disbelief in psychosynthesis as the means of self-help is a sign of normal development, which finally ends with construction of new internal structures (restructuring) (Yeomans, 2018).

R. Assagioli criticized the view that initially a person is an organic whole, as they have “various, sometimes contradictory tendencies, which sometimes become the basis for the formation of semi-autonomous subpersonalities”. It is precisely this very divergence of the human psyche, inner conflict, which calls for personal psychosynthesis, or self-realization according to A. Maslow’s interpretation (Assagioli, 1974a, p. 36–38).

As a result of psychotraumatization, internal conflicts intensify, above all between the surviving (traumatized) and protective subpersonalities. At the same time, the protective one normally dominates

as “transitional” and “temporary”. Without delving into the psychodynamic features of these conflicts (Kucherenko, 2023), it is noted that they appear in the field of consciousness as internal dialogue in the form of diverse narratives and imagery already after completing the emotional-behavioural reaction stabilization, i.e., during the process of adaptation and self-recovery. Here, the inner dialogue is the phenomenon of the liminal state when the subject realizes their identification uncertainty under the pressure of the abovementioned subpersonalities. The symptomatically prolonged experience of liminal states makes the latter resemble a disorder, particularly PTSD, although in reality, this is a sign of a liminal pause, the dominance of the protective subpersonality over the desire of the conscious Self to change personality. That is essentially what characterizes PTD: a desire for change.

It is worth mentioning that the possibility of mistake in clinical practice while qualifying changes in “normal” parts of personality as pathological had also been warned by R. Assagioli (Assagioli, 1974a, p. 39). Clarifying the relation between spiritual development and mental disorders, he urged specialists to clearly differentiate between the similar symptoms of growth and pathology. However, post-traumatic development is the personal development, self-actualization (personal psychosynthesis), which doesn't always get to the level of spirituality (spiritual psychosynthesis) as spiritual needs of the personality are more of an exception than a rule (Assagioli, 2023a, p. 4).

In wartime conditions, the need for self-actualization (e.g., heroic) in some compatriots is even more actualized than the need for survival (self-preservation), and is sometimes perceived precisely as a spiritual or transcendent experience of self-sacrifice on the verge between life and death (Assagioli, 2023c). However, in psychological assistance in the post-liminal period, it is necessary to carefully recognize pseudo-spiritual needs, through which the client's protective subpersonalities, caused by psychotraumatization experienced during the liminal period, are revealed (Kucherenko & Khomych, 2022, p. 48).

It comes to mind that in the work “I Conflitti Psicici” (“Psychic Conflicts”), R. Assagioli proposed as early as 1928 an idea of PTR, particularly on the example of working with loss in psychosynthesis. The scientist designated the stages of psychoeducation aimed at restoring the life of a client (patient) after a trauma: “knowing oneself”, “mastering oneself”, and “transforming oneself”. These stages, (tasks of psychosynthesis) according to R. Assagioli, start only after “the storm subsides” and the “gloomy” consequences of suffering, when internal conflict becomes a stimulus for seeking a new meaning in life or “flowers on the ruins after the storm” (i.e., at a post-liminal period) (Assagioli, 2023a, p. 55–56).

It is clear that in psychoeducational work for the purpose of PTD, precisely as it is in psychosynthesis in general, the concepts of plasticity of the unconscious and the laws of psychodynamics (the “laws of psychosynthesis”) have been paramount, since R. Assagioli and his students have developed them over the hundred years. The empirical achievements of neuroscience, the comparative analysis of which concerning the theory and methodology of psychosynthesis was conducted by P. Ferrucci – a prominent Italian psychotherapist, philosopher, and student of R. Assagioli (Ferrucci, 2012), have become the evidence base for these principles.

At first glance, it seems that in psychosynthesis trauma is a determinant or factor of self-development. Actually, the traumatic experience itself is only a potential source of the “transformation of conflicts and sufferings into the psychosynthesis of all our resources” (Assagioli, 2023a, p. 6). In internal conflicts, the “structural material” for this transformation is the opposing aspirations, motives, psychic functions, and subpersonalities that express them in the form of diverse roles. Under conditions of social liminality, the conflict of subpersonalities often manifests externally not directly, but through their masks (Kucherenko, 2023).

The prominent specialist in psychosynthesis, K. Sørenthen, studied the identification and transformation of “structural elements” in client suffering as principles of psychological counselling for adults, specifically awareness- and will-based counselling (Sørenthen, 2020). In the study of liminality of an adult subject, this principle aligns with the essence of threshold self-awareness processes (awareness of diverse subpersonalities through disidentification from the Self) and threshold self-change (development of the will as a transformational function of the Self) (Kucherenko, 2023).

R. Assagioli explored the development of the will through the creation of a structure of the will act, in which he identified six functional processes or sequential stages (these should not be confused with aspects of the will, its types, and properties): 1) conception, intention, and goal-setting based

on evaluation, motivation, and value system; 2) understanding the goal, studying the real conditions for its achievement; 3) selection and acceptance of a positively formulated decision; 4) affirmation of the accepted decision through faith and self-confidence; 5) planning specific actions, constructing an appropriate program; 6) systematic implementation of the program and control over its execution (Assagioli, 1974b, p. 135–136).

In conclusion, we have the following: the course of the main stages of PTD coincides with the tasks of psychosynthesis at the level of threshold self-awareness (“knowing oneself”) and threshold self-change (“mastery of oneself” and “self-transformation”), in which self-awareness and will are mechanisms for developing the liminality of the subject (Self), when a traumatized personality can potentially grow “on the threshold between” the experience of psychotraumatization (survival) and protection in a liminal society.

We would like to note that liminality in psychosynthesis refers to at least five theoretical issues, including: 1) the threshold between the field of consciousness and the individual unconscious; 2) the difference between individual and collective unconscious (called “psychological osmosis” by R. Assagioli); 3) the difference between the three levels of the individual unconscious (the lower, middle, and higher) (Assagioli, 1974a), which in some interpretations correspond to the biological, social, and spiritual grounds of personality (Schaub R. & Schaub B., 2003); 4) the difference between the conscious “Self” and the field of consciousness as subjective and objective sides of the phenomenon of awareness (Assagioli, 1974a); 5) the difference between the conscious “Self” and subpersonalities as semi-autonomous forms of manifestations of the whole personality, represented on various levels of the unconscious and realized only in the field of consciousness (Assagioli, 2022). The last two problems are classified as applied and explain psychic phenomena of disidentification, identification, and self-identification.

The fundamental problem of “boundaries”, “transitions”, and “thresholds” is substantiated by R. Assagioli as the difference between “internal” and “external” psychic activities (Assagioli, 2007, p. 225–240). In both distinctions, the act of will is a self-determined process that changes not only “the external through the internal”, but also “the internal through the external” (Assagioli, 1974b). For instance, a courageous act is first conceived in one’s mind as something internal while the external manifestation of one’s courage is solidified as a stable image of the act. The process of transformation literally means “giving new form” to both the “external” (e.g., social behaviour) and the “internal” (primarily moods and attitudes), to which the “Self” does not belong, since it is a subject that is not further divisible (Kucherenko, 2018: 96). However, in psychosynthesis, transformation refers not only to a change in the forms of manifestations of psychic expression but also aligns them under the principle of emergence, integrating each psychic element and function into a “connection with the greater whole” (Assagioli & Vargui, 1973).

In academic psychology, the concept of the “internal” predominantly identified with the “Self”, with personality, with the “inner world” (Maksymenko, 2006), while activity and motivated activity equate with the “external”, emphasizing the dialectical unity of the subjective (the psychic as the internal) and the objective (the social as the external).

In psychosynthesis, the personality is not identified with the “Self”, as it is an external form of manifestation, an “instrument” of expression of the conscious “Self”, often referred to as the personal “Self”, meaning the subject of self-awareness as “observer and director” (Assagioli & Vargui, 1973), capable of disidentification – direct knowledge of the personality as something separated from the “Self”, i.e., external to it (Assagioli, 1974a, p. 5). Thus, in psychosynthesis, the frontier between “internal” and “external” is dynamic: it is defined according to the disidentification of the conscious “Self” from the content (a field) of consciousness. Unlike other approaches, in psychosynthesis, the “threshold” of self-awareness is defined in the plane of the field of consciousness in which any internal content each time turns to be external in relation to the “Self” (Romenets, & Manokha, 2003, p. 507). This depends on the development of the will as a function of the conscious “Self”, which in threshold self-knowledge always “projects” the object of observation to the periphery, strengthening the central position of the “Self” (Firman, 2020).

The problem of the initial and final “boundaries” of the “Self” in psychosynthesis is, at the first glance, complicated by the fact that the conscious “Self” is a projection or reflection of the Higher Self, which does not belong to the psychic but is expressed in it through the higher unconscious, the content of which can reach the field of consciousness (Assagioli & Vargui, 1973). This is not the Self according

to C. Jung as an archetype in the “structure of the psyche”, indicating its transcendental basis “without the possibility of scientific proof” (Assagioli, 1967). From an essentialist perspective, psychosynthesis denies the existence of two “Self” by insisting on a single “Self” or “Higher Self (Transpersonal Self)” as a living, transcendental, yet not psychic reality (Sørenthen, 2019). It gets the status of spiritual, a priori essence of human being, standing on the verge between individual and universal (ontological) according to R. Assagioli (Assagioli, 1967). At the same time, “identification with the universal does not mean the loss of self-identity, but rather its enhancement and intensification”; it is “overcoming boundaries in time and space” while preserving self-awareness. The Self does not have attributive qualities that can be expressed in the categories of everyday consciousness (Assagioli & Vargui, 1973) and is not altered forms of the categorization of consciousness (Kucherenko, 2013, p. 135). The Self as a living reality is not a part of the unconscious, but is expressed through the higher unconscious, identification with the content of which R. Assagioli equates to the peak experiences according to A. Maslow (Assagioli & Vargui, 1973).

In psychosynthesis, the conscious “Self” has been given empirical status: it is a projection of the Self and acts as an outpost for the personality, being characterized by subjectivity, i.e., the ability to awareness and will.

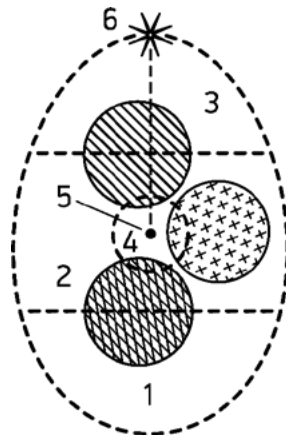
Overall, the phenomenon of experiencing the Self as a transpersonal experience of the constancy and continuity of the “Self” (literally “experience beyond the limits of the personality”, which always has limitations) can only be discussed in connection with the development of the will of the conscious “Self”, the key role in which is played by psychoeducational “preparation” at the level of the personality (Assagioli & Vargui, 1973). However, in the structure of liminality, the question of the volitional ability for self-change as a purposeful restructuring of the traumatized personality of an adult with the aim of self-realization remains open.

We have established that in the practice of psychosynthesis, there is a distinction between the liminality of personality and the liminality of the subject. The former refers to the experience of the forced loss of established self-identification (self-identity) due to changes in social roles, or the conscious abandonment of it in the context of a purposeful search for a new identity, caused by exhaustive identification with the dominant defensive identification (at the end of the liminal pause). Through threshold self-awareness, the key essence of liminality – disidentification – is achieved, wherein the conscious “Self” realizes the inconsistency of divergent identifications (defensive and surviving subpersonalities). These appear in the field of consciousness as separate objects (images or models of the “Self”) that partially, and thus erroneously, reflect the whole personality. Subsequently, liminality at the level of the subject can develop as an introspective ability for threshold self-awareness and self-change, which involves voluntarily entering a reflective state of consciousness, experienced as disidentification from the dominant identifications of one’s personality – defensive and/or surviving. Functionally, the defensive subpersonality is falsely positive, while the surviving one is falsely negative. Both have their imagery-narrative forms of manifestations in internal dialogue, which in psychosynthesis are researched by means of autobiographical psychodiagnostic techniques.

If we observe the “internal” aspect of liminality in the process of threshold self-awareness, a logical inconsistency arises that liminality is merely structured introspection aimed at extreme self-identification (De Pari, 2017), and does not require external, and hence volitional, capacities for changing the personality as a system of identifications (subpersonalities) in behaviour and activity. In psychosynthesis, however, the “threshold of cognition” of the subject and the “threshold of change” of the personality as its externally expressed form of resource activity always coincide methodologically: it is impossible to leave the differentiation of traumatized and defensive subpersonalities as the final result of psychological assistance, not to mention empirical research on the phenomenon of liminality in general. Thus, the transition of post-traumatic development as its essential volitional, and therefore resource feature remains unnoticed by both practitioners and researchers.

In the first phase of psychosynthesis (“self-knowledge”), the conscious “Self” in “internal differentiation” of divergent subpersonalities cannot identify itself with any of them (identificational uncertainty), for “Self” is felt as something greater than everything from which it has disidentified itself (“I am more than a victim and more than a strong person who has overcome disdain”).

In Figure 1 the surviving or traumatized subpersonality (such as the Victim) is represented as mainly located in the lower unconscious (number 1) and partially in the field of consciousness (number 4). Similarly, the defensive subpersonality (the Fighter for Justice) is in the higher unconscious



**Fig. 1. The structure of the personality according to R. Assagioli (version of the “egg diagram” from 1973): 1 – lower unconscious; 2 – middle unconscious; 3 – higher unconscious or superconscious; 4 – field of consciousness; 5 – conscious self; 6 – higher self or Self. The Shaded circles represent subpersonalities**

(number 3), and likewise reaches the threshold of consciousness (number 4), dominating as a defence mechanism that constitutes the resourcefulness of post-traumatic growth. These subpersonalities have divergent needs and ways of satisfying them (ambivalent) and for this reason an internal conflict is generated. Subsequently, the subject in the process of such threshold self-awareness qualifies these subpersonalities as false, since subjectively they are experienced as extremely opposite identifications (respectively, the worst and the best). This liminal state of search for self-identification alternately makes the conscious “Self” dependent upon falsely negative or positive images (Fig. 1).

The falsely positive variant of self-identification in contemporary practice is a psychological resource for growth, but on the other hand, it has a somewhat premature and defensive nature. In our view, this is but a transitional stage of healing, where for example, the Fighter for Justice helps the traumatized client to “survive to live on”. However, it is not the final form of personality that allows one to “live on” as its dominance over time leads to a liminal pause – an identification dependency or psychological “imprisonment”, where a person, according to modern psychiatrist A. Alberti, unconsciously defends “psychological death” as a source of safety. Hence, it isn’t a temporary psychological resource, but a sort of “psychological painkiller”, from which dependency can increase. Conversely, in psychosynthesis, authentic self-identification (identification with the Self) is considered truly resourceful, as it involves the risk of liberation from “deadly safety”, accompanied by existential anxiety (Tesler & Kucherenko, 2020). In this sense, the psychological resource is the ability to gain freedom, to “become who we truly are” (Frankl, 2023, p. 119).

In the second stage of psychosynthesis (“self-control”) the conscious Self exercises will as a function of the regulation of the expression of subpersonalities in the external world, primarily behaviourally. Self-change as a psychological resource here expresses itself in coordinating the interaction between subpersonalities in everyday life. It is the development of self-regulation concerning emotional-behavioural manifestations of diverge subpersonalities on the basis of their prior acceptance, rather than final preference for just one—the traumatized or the defensive one (e.g., Victim or Fighter for Justice). At this stage, the will acts as a function of the Self in choosing any identification directly in role behaviour that is self-expression (manifestation of the Self) into the multiple nature of personality.

The question often arises “what is the resourcefulness of identification with the traumatized part of the personality?”. First and foremost, it is the possibility of traumatization; however, performed not through the psychotherapeutic interventions of a specialist but as a result of the client's choice. This act testifies to their responsibility for the internal work on the traumatic experience they possess, rather than being possessed by it. One of the main advantages of psychosynthesis is that it provides psychoeducational techniques for psychological assistance in forming clients’ capabilities for psychological distance (disidentification) from the experience of trauma – that is, flexibility in readiness to experience it after some time when “self-possession” includes possessing autobiographical content available in the field of consciousness.

Autobiographical experience consists of subpersonal narrative (stories) and their corresponding imagery (event images) which constitute the essence of the subjective world of personality and always strive for external objectification (the eighth and ninth laws of psychosynthesis). That is why subpersonalities in this category, such as the Wounded Child or the Angry Adolescent are



unconsciously expressed in adulthood as autonomous behaviour patterns: they have not yet been integrated in the second stage of psychosynthesis – that is, they don't have the volitional regulation from the conscious Self.

R. Assagioli saw effectiveness in the client's independent application of will-development techniques only after thorough psychoeducation, particularly based on the ten psychodynamic laws he began developing in 1909 and finally presented in 1974 as the laws of psychosynthesis (Assagioli, 1974b).

In the third stage ("self-transformation"), will "restructures" subpersonalities internally (imaginary-narratively) and externally (as behaviour). This leads to a higher degree of freedom where we not only have different options for expressing personality but can also change them in the future in connection with our spiritual essence. It is in the shift from regulation to transformation that liminality develops as the unfolding of the Self in real space and time, in particular its active "expansion" to personal boundaries one desires to transcend.

The conscious Self chooses a unifying centre of self-realization (a higher socially significant goal that prevails but does not contradict the personal needs) authentically reflecting the Self. It is around this centre, as the cornerstone of post-traumatic development, that psychosynthesis really takes place: the self-change of personality in the wide sense as self-realization. Through a planned and detailed process of achieving an ideal personality model that aligns with the unifying centre, an act of will is performed, an idea that, thanks to R. Assagioli, became a sort of manifesto of psychosynthesis in the 1970s, laying the foundations for coaching and other self-improvement practices. It should be reminded that R. Assagioli identified six stages in the structure of the will act, which were discussed earlier.

We consider, that at the fourth stage (actual psychosynthesis), the conscious Self, based on the unifying centre, integrates internal and external activities of previously identified subpersonalities.

It is underlined in psychosynthesis that the Self has a transcendent and immanent nature (Kucherenko, 2018, p. 119–126), that is, it expresses itself in what it is basically not, namely through the change in personality in the attempt to realize itself in the most authentic way. Therefore, the external aspect of personality and the internal aspect are transformed in an act of will, as previously noted. Synthesis in the process of such transformation is achieved through the gradual reduction of any identification distinctions and internal oppositions in working with subpersonalities, which are initial for each client, especially as a result of psychotraumatization (Vargiu, 1974). This gradual transition from automatic and mundane identifications toward authenticity finds a place in other humanistic psychologists, (A. Maslow and I. Yalom) who, unfortunately, did not suggest practical means for this process. In contrast, R. Assagioli developed techniques and exercises which made psychosynthesis a comprehensive method of self-realization, ranging from analytical and problem-solving tasks to synthetic and developmental ones.

**Conclusions.** Based on the analysis carried out, it has been established that in the theory of psychosynthesis, post-traumatic development is understood as self-development that takes place with psychological assistance of various kinds, as well as within the educational system. The goal is to teach individuals self-help and self-realization techniques based on the experience of psychological trauma and the independent overcoming of its consequences. Self-development is primarily ensured through psychoeducation of the client, which is aimed not only at psychological recovery but also at further self-realization within their current existential situation. Psychoeducation and methodology of psychosynthesis in psychological assistance include "knowing oneself", "mastering oneself", and "transforming oneself" and are based on the use of various techniques and exercises, as well as their combination with an individual approach.

Based on the study of primary sources, it was found that the founder of psychosynthesis, R. Assagioli, did not propose an original concept of mental development but instead developed a classification of conflicts and crises at different age periods. This work became the basis for further study of personal self-realization and spiritual development, which is rather exceptional than regular. Therefore, it can be concluded that post-traumatic development (PTD) involves personal psychosynthesis, which does not always include the realization of spiritual needs. In psychosynthesis, there is a specific role assigned to medico-psychological differentiation of criteria for personal development and signs of pathologization. For example, PTSD and normative liminal states in PTD have similar symptoms,

including counterfactual statements and negative nostalgic memories (traumatic flashbacks) against the backdrop of an internal dialogue with diverse narratives and imagery.

Based on a comparative analysis of the theory of psychosynthesis and the results of our previous research, it has been established that under conditions of social liminality (e.g., during and after war), PTSD occurs after the normalization of the experienced sufferings to overcome post-traumatic consequences. It is a transitional (liminal) process that potentially includes self-realization provided that the unconscious internal conflict between the traumatized (surviving) and protective subpersonalities is resolved. In the early stages of PTSD, the temporary and exhaustive dominance of the protective subpersonality normatively leads to a liminal state, which is perceived by the adult client as identification uncertainty and leads to threshold self-awareness. In contrast, neurosis develops during the liminal pause – a period of unconscious resolution of the internal conflict in favour of the prolonged (chronic) dominance of the protective subpersonality within the personality structure.

It has been revealed that the goal and methodological essence of psychosynthesis in trauma work are mutually agreed upon: the level of awareness and transformation of the “structural elements” of the internal conflict (primarily the traumatized and protective subpersonalities) by the client is the starting point in the methodical direction of flexible psychological assistance at all stages. Accordingly, threshold self-awareness corresponds to the first level of PTSD, and the second is threshold self-change. Threshold self-awareness involves disidentification, where the personality (interaction of diverse subpersonalities) becomes the object of cognition for change by the Self (subject). The transition from threshold self-awareness to self-change is the essence of PTSD, especially in the post-liminal period, when the liminal pause as a defence mechanism of traumatization can block further self-realization for a long time. The Self's striving to achieve inner wholeness (synthesis) of the personality through the change of its structure is the primary task in PTSD, requiring the purposeful development of will.

**Prospects for further research** are empirically studies the correlation between the experience of various types of trauma and the course of post-traumatic development as a liminal process of adults.

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