
SENSE OF THREAT IN THE CONTEXT OF BEHAVIOURAL AND SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR PATTERNS

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Annotation. For a long time action of a person in emergency situations have been of interest to social sciences. The work refers to the interpretation of one's behaviour in emergency situations juxtaposing it with the context of sense of security. The authors put emphasis on the subjective process of experiencing threat and security which is called in psychology a sense. In search for instruments that serve coping with challenging and emergency situations the category of Type A Behaviour Pattern was indicated (TABP). It was considered a mechanism which paradoxically plays an adaptive and non-adaptive role. The factor differentiating the level of adaptation is the result of action in the form of a success or failure. The indicated mechanism was also interpreted in the context of cultural conditions. In the presented work the authors also assessed the efficiency of coping with emergency situations by people with this behavioural pattern.

Keywords: sense of threat, sense of security, Type A Behaviour Pattern, adaptive mechanism, difficult situation

INTRODUCTION

For a long time action of a person in difficult situations have been of interest to psychology. There were descriptions and attempts to explain behaviour of people examining both subjective determinants of an individual as well as external factors. Various classifications of difficult situations were presented accenting their burdensome meaning for a subject. Different adaptive mechanisms were indicated in the form of behaviour mechanisms and personality mechanisms which are attempts to cope with requirements of a situation based on available means. Under conditions of adequacy between difficulty of a situation and a range of available means and abilities to use them the relation between a person and his environment is stable. However, in the absence of such adequacy as in case, for example, of emergency situation a person looks for adaptation instruments.

The purpose of the paper is to discuss what are the prerequisites and contributing internal and external factors for the sense of experiencing threat.

Methods of critical and systemic references analysis are used for the development of this paper.

THE SENSE OF THREAT AND THE SENSE OF SECURITY

In common interpretations concerning effective operation of a person it is claimed that speed of action can be such a measure. Brief analysis of many situations in which suddenly occur threats to security of a person or community leads people to a conclusion that only quick, immediate response can prevent threats or combat them. Without prejudice to the rank of such measures and their usefulness in many situations we should indicate interpretations in which automatic and instinctive actions are distinguished from those reflective and intellectual ones. This is related to twofold forms of knowledge possessed by a person and differing in the level of its availability to a subject. They refer to declarative knowledge which is sometimes called “knowledge that” (factual knowledge) and procedural knowledge which is called “knowledge how”. The declarative knowledge is easily accessible, easy to modify, however, information processing with its participation is slow. The procedural knowledge is contained in the procedures for processing information and behaviour management. In contrast to the previous one this kind of knowledge is basically not available to the consciousness of a person and difficult to modify. Regardless of that by means of this knowledge information is processed very quickly. Excellent examples of procedural knowledge are defensive mechanisms and interpersonal behaviour scripts. With these two types of knowledge are associated two types of information processing: controlled processing and automatic processing. Let us indicate characteristics of controlled processing:

- it is dependent on cognitive resources (attention, working memory),
- it is sequential in nature,
- it runs slowly,
- it requires a cognitive effort.

Automatic processing is characterized by the following features:

- it is independent of cognitive resources,
- it is parallel in nature,
- it runs very quickly,

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- it runs without a cognitive effort ¹.

Indicated interpretations related to declarative and procedural knowledge refer to information processing mechanisms that can vary by the pace of their implementation and affect the speed of action in emergency situations. So, it is worth remembering that effectiveness may not necessarily be strictly linked to a quick response since in various situational conditions it may turn weighty when both forms of information processing are combined (an automatic form and controlled form). The carried out interpretation refers to the distinction made by Kahneman² who wrote about quick and slow thinking. In the first case, these are acts carried out in an automated way, not available in insight mechanisms being at disposal of a subject of an action. In the other case, thinking refers to the acts taken by a subject in such a way that is fully controlled by the same subject in an introspective way³.

People living in certain cultural conditions acquire certain patterns of behaviour that, on the one hand, have preconditions associated with individual properties (for example, in the form of temperament traits), on the other hand, they are stimulated by social and cultural pressure. Such an instrument for raising effectiveness is increase in intensity and speed of behaviour called Type A Behaviour Pattern that forms a peculiar set of behaviour appropriate for a particular group of people occurring in certain situations. In the undertaken analysis we assess how effectively people with this behavioural pattern cope in emergency situations.

In such a context, it is worth making a comparison between the important concepts of sense of threat and sense of security. A weighty interpretation of security issues is made by Piwowarski who when writing about security culture sees in it three mutually interpenetrating elements in the form of a mental and spiritual stream, rational, organisational and legal stream and material stream. He understands security culture as a phenomenon that allows a person to achieve principal objectives of his activities regarding control of threats, recovery of security in the situation when it has been lost, optimization of development in the context of security, taking action that serve the growth of potential that serves security⁴.

A reference to the proposed by Piwowarski concept in the form of security culture requires indicating the following terms that are significant both in developing issues of security

¹ Cf. Czajkowski, W. *Psychologiczne mechanizmy działania w warunkach zagrożenia*. Kraków: Wyższa Szkoła Bezpieczeństwa Publicznego i Indywidualnego APEIRON w Krakowie, 2014, p. 48-50.

² Kahneman, D. *Pułapki myślenia. O myśleniu szybkim i wolnym*. Poznań: Media Rodzina, 2012.

³ Czajkowski, W. *Psychologiczne mechanizmy działania w warunkach zagrożenia*, p. 36.

⁴ Piwowarski, J. *Fenomen bezpieczeństwa. Pomiędzy zagrożeniem a kulturą bezpieczeństwa*. Kraków: Wyższa Szkoła Bezpieczeństwa Publicznego i Indywidualnego „Apeiron” w Krakowie, 2014, p. 41-42.

sciences and those present in theoretical conceptualisations and empirical studies undertaken in psychology. The first of them is the term of threat. Threat in the meaning proposed by Zięba is “a state of mind or consciousness elicited by the perception of phenomena that are evaluated as adverse or dangerous”⁵. In turn, Kalina believes that threat ... “is in reference to a certain subject a danger that he is aware of or not, loss of a particular good or value (for example, life, health, property, sovereignty, a loved one, etc.) or temporary or relatively durable loss of capability of development in its broad sense”⁶. It seems that in the proposed interpretations, especially in case of Zięba’s conceptualization it would be better to call threat the sense of threat by exposing personal, subjective nature of this state relativized to its perception or awareness by a subject. In this case, the definition is a broad interpretation embracing also such situations in which threat is of external, objectified nature.

Therefore, it seems that in psychological interpretation sense of threat should be defined as a subjective state of a subject tantamount to negative emotional experiences arising from the stimuli affecting a subject. In such interpretation are understood the stimuli widely affecting a subject putting in this category also the stimuli limited solely to internal states of a person in the form of experience, observations and ideas. Such interpretation is important insofar as the sense of threat can be a subjective state not having objectivised, external conditions. The situations can be pointed out in which someone suffers an extremely strong the sense of threat in the situation when others do not experience such a state. Indicated difficulties in interpretation and definition associated with the concept of threat and sense of threat suggest the need to take into account multiple points of view in organizing this issue. It seems clear that raising the issue of threat in terms of international relations is something different when analysing the sense of threat experienced by a particular subject being in an extreme situation. Moreover, the analysis of the concept of threat should be relativized to the concept of security. Piwowarski draws attention to such understanding of the issue pointing out the interrelationship between these concepts⁷. In psychological interpretation the two concepts are inextricably interlinked conditioning each other. This is especially true when the concept of the sense of threat is used. Feeling threatened a person loses the sense of security. Feeling secure they do not feel threatened. In these interpretations it is also worth remembering about specific cases of

⁵ Zięba, R. Kategorie bezpieczeństwa w nauce o stosunkach międzynarodowych. *Bezpieczeństwo narodowe i międzynarodowe u schyłku XX wieku*. Warszawa: SCHOLAR, 1997, p. 4.

⁶ Kalina, R. M. Ogólne kategorie klasyfikacji i charakterystyki zagrożeń zewnętrznych. *Człowiek w sytuacji trudnej*. Warszawa: Polskie Towarzystwo Higieny Psychiczej, 1991, p. 80-81.

⁷ Cf. Piwowarski, J., p. 9.

unusual experiences not typical for an average person. The case concerns such situations in which one feels a lack of the situations which are characterised by a high level of the sense of security. This level is so high for them that it is no longer a comfortable state. Due to it in such situations these people feel the need to find themselves in the contexts that provide a certain level of the sense of threat. Carrying out such activities leads to such a situation when experiencing threat they feel comfortable⁸. The category of people described here is determined as people with increased need for stimulation. The level of the need for stimulation makes a temperamental variable being, as a rule, a permanent characteristics of that person. The way of acting of such people is associated with their extremely interesting psychological characteristics called Type A Behaviour Pattern (TABP) making a permanent behavioural functioning scheme⁹.

SUCCESS AND FRUSTRATION IN ACTION. ADAPTABILITY AND UNADAPTABILITY OF TYPE A BEHAVIOUR PATTERN

At this point we refer to the issue of the activity level of a person interpreting its adaptability. We would like to draw your attention to the term of Type A Behaviour Pattern (TABP) in psychological theory of human functioning.

Type A Behaviour Pattern is described as:

- intensive pressure to achieve independently chosen but usually poorly defined goals,
- a deeply perpetuated tendency to an intense rivalry,
- permanent pursuit to success and confirmation of one's own value,
- constant engagement in numerous and diverse activities which usually contain completion deadlines,
- habitual propensity to speeding up the pace of doing multiple physical and mental activities,
- extraordinary physical and mental alertness¹⁰.

It seems that such behaviour characteristics can be relatively easily associated with people who play roles of leaders. However, it is worth pointing out that these are characteristics related to a set of behaviours and not to a description of personality properties.

⁸ Czajkowski, W. *Psychologiczne mechanizmy działania w warunkach zagrożenia*, p. 9-10.

⁹ Czajkowski, W. *Type A Behavioral Pattern and Coronary Heart Disease: Theoretical and Methodological Dilemmas. Studies on Communication and Stress*, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Akademii Pedagogicznej, 2006.

¹⁰ Rosenman, R.H., Friedman, M. Neurogenic factors in pathogenesis of coronary heart disease. *Medical Clinics of North America*. 1974, 58: 269-279.

The cited authors also indicated a set of behaviours that make up Type B Behaviour Pattern as opposed to Type A Behaviour Pattern with particular emphasis on a relative lack of the sense of pressure, excessive ambition, the need for urgency of action, tendency to rivalry and a fight with deadlines. In positive characteristics there is emphasised the ability to relax, easiness in experiencing satisfaction, undertaking activities consistent with the course of activity of the nearest social environment. The third set of behaviours was also indicated which is called Type C Behavioural Pattern which was similar to B Pattern but it additionally contained a chronic feeling of anxiety and feeling of threat. It seems that this characteristic is particularly important at the time when we describe action of a person in an emergency situation. In the cited work¹¹ Rosenman and Friedman drew attention to the impact of the self-defined behaviours on the increase in the risk of developing coronary heart disease. They warned that examination of the problem of coronary heart disease as the effect of individual risk factors evidences at least of negligence apart from the attractiveness of a transparent cause-effect relationship. The conducted research incline us to accept that emerging health risks result from the interaction of many factors of a long-lasting nature.

Behaviours that make up A Pattern are characterised by ambition, aggression, tendency to rivalry even in situations which are not competitive. In the 1980s Friedman wrote about people who present “the chronic pattern of type A behaviour” calling it emotional syndrome characterised by constantly gnawing feeling of time pressure and easily provoked hostility. Equally specific behaviours are related to excessive vigilance, impetuosity and affectivity in the manner of speaking, excessive muscle tension, quick performance of many actions, the feeling of tense pressure, impatience to slowness of other people, preoccupation with oneself and excessive sense of responsibility. These people usually focus on several issues at the same time. In general these behaviours can be defined as increasing the pace of life. The main "axial" behavioural components of Type A Pattern are:

- a high degree of aggressiveness,
- easily provoked hostility,
- feeling of time pressure, and obsessive even competitive striving for achievements¹².

¹¹ Ibid.

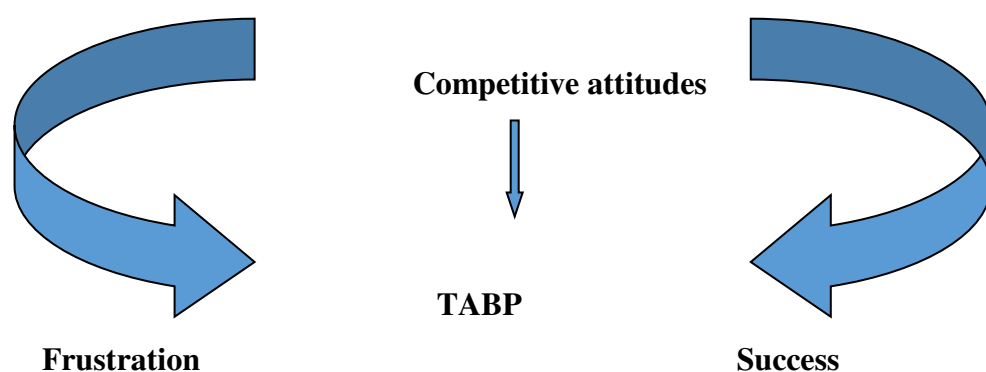
¹² Matthews K.A. Psychological perspectives on the Type A behavior pattern. *Psychological Bulletin*. 1982, 91: 295; O'Connor, N.J., Manson, J.E., O'Connor, G.T., Buring, J.E. Psychosocial risk factors and nonfatal myocardial infarction. *Circulation*, 1995, 92(6): 1462.

In the recently developing concept Byrne claims that to TABP of crucial importance is competitive attitude. This concept is understood as motivational predisposition to demonstrating many behaviours such as:

- achievement-oriented behaviours,
- behaviours expressing time pressure,
- behaviours related to appropriation and collection (with features of compulsivity),
- unyielding behaviours in situations of confrontation with others¹³.

In case of competitive attitudes Byrne interchangeably uses the term of motivation predisposition and a set of the cognitive beliefs conditioning the indicated behaviours. Competitive attitude as a motivation predisposition is related to nonspecific increase of agitation of the autonomic nervous system. In psychological characteristic of competitive attitudes their consequences appear to be important. Successfully completed actions resulting from competition are of adaptive importance as a result of expression of commitment of a person to their objectives. In turn, the actions facing difficulties leading to frustration as a result from blocking an effective implementation of the objectives are of non-adaptive importance leading to negative health consequences associated with coronary heart disease. Context of the operation of an effective leader functions in public awareness by means of the term “a man of success”. The indicated interpretation suggests a possibility of dual interpretation of leader’s behaviour depending on the results of his action in the environment.

The interpretation proposed by Byrne finds its clear reflection in the following scheme.



Pic. 1 Frustration and success as consequences of interdependence of competitive attitudes¹⁴

¹³ Byrne, D.G., The frustration of success: Type A behaviour, occupational stress and cardiovascular disease. *Stress and health: Research and clinical applications*. Sydney: Harwood Academic Publishers, 2000.

¹⁴ Ibid.

Therefore it is worth referring to this issue taking into consideration both possibilities of interpretation. TABP can lead a person to success resulting largely from the competitive actions incorporated into socializing mechanisms and transferred in social relationships and determined by their individual abilities and expertise. On the other hand TABP can lead to failure due to situational conditions and possible deficiencies in person's expertise.

Presented interpretations seem to be a useful key allowing to answer the question how TABP affects person's behaviour and why some of the people having this instrument at their disposal achieve success and others experience frustration with its all emotional consequences.

The indicated characteristics of Type A Behaviour Pattern are well tailored to stereotypical understanding of a person who serves as a leader, manager by showing his commitment, the intensity of the efforts taken by him and psychological and somatic cost borne in connection with physical and emotional burden. Perceiving of a leader as a very active person, involved in their actions creates a constructive picture of a person who can influence others in emergency situations.

In the presented interpretation of the instruments used by a person in order to defend against the sense of threat and loss of security it is also worth referring the issue of coping with challenges arising from emotionally demanding situations. In various interpretations this issue is raised in categories of mechanisms of dealing with stress, collecting and developing the means which serve meeting numerous challenges and threats arising from physical and social environment. The indicated issue is a significant and important complement in the process of understanding of actions of someone who experiences the sense of threat.

THE SENSE OF THREAT AND COPING MECHANISMS

Stress, anxiety and coping with them are inalienable aspects of human life. Strategies and styles of coping play a central role in determining physical and psychological comfort of a person when they are a subject to negative or stressful events in their lives. Treating the issue historically we should indicate and recognize Freud's research who looked to the process of forming defensive mechanisms that serve distancing to difficulties and risks emerging in life. The question that appears is the question about adaptability of such forms of action which are initially unaware and directed at minimizing of psychological cost appearing in such situations.

In more recent studies coping is understood as a reaction to external stressors or negative events. These reactions are usually aware strategies or styles. In the older literature unaware

mechanisms were emphasized which have to be exposed by clinicians in order to build adaptive forms of action in difficult situations.

Comprehending stress usually referred to one of the three interpretations of the concept of stress:

- stress as an incentive,
- stress as a state of body (body's reaction to incentives),
- stress as a relationship between an environment and a subject.

In the latter sense the concept of stress was used by Lazarus and Folkman who wrote about stress as follows: "[...] a special kind of relationship between a person and an environment which is appraised by a person as overtaxing or exceeding his abilities and threatening his good"¹⁵.

The indicated ways of understanding stress are usually partial and conditioned by interpretation in the context of a specific paradigm. Mainly in the interpretation of stress attention was drawn to negative consequences of its action as it usually happens in the models of the biometrical model group. In the case of the concepts referring to coping models, struggling, remedial processes, overcoming the focus was rather on person's efforts aiming at coping with difficulty of a situation. In the field of stress and coping significant changes were introduced, highlighted, for example, by Heszen¹⁶:

- emphasising subjective aspects of a person,
- conducting research in natural conditions,
- emphasising phenomenological data – activity of a person is rather determined by a subjective interpretation, personal perception than objective reality,
- analysis according to a circular scheme (approach of the general theory of systems).

By such understanding of stress and coping issues it is much easier to build biopsychosocial models of activity of a person referring to the concept of Engel¹⁷ than it used to be by using different than the above four assumptions.

The concept of coping is usually a direct consequence of an accepted definition of stress. Thus, for example, in Lazarus and Folkman's perception coping is "... constantly changing, dynamic cognitive and behavioural efforts aiming at mastery of external and internal demands

¹⁵ Cf. Lazarus, R.S., Folkman, S. *Stress, appraisal and coping*. New York: Springer, 1984.

¹⁶ Heszen, I., Ratajczak, Z. *Człowiek w sytuacji stresu*. Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2000.

¹⁷ Engel, G.L. The clinical application of the biopsychosocial model. *American Journal of Psychiatry*. 1980, 137(5): 535-544.

appraised by a person as overtaxing or exceeding his resources”¹⁸. It is worth noting that under this concept there is a possibility to bring defensive mechanisms within the scope of the concept of coping.

According to Lazarus’s transactional concept coping with stress is a function of the process of the initial cognitive threat assessment. If, on the basis of this assessment, a subject interprets a transaction as a stressful one, a basic adaptive process in the form of coping is launched. In turn, the process of coping with stress depends on the secondary threat assessment in which a subject analyses what he can do to cope with the requirements of a situation.

The process of coping contains behavioral and cognitive acts of action which have to fulfil the following functions:

- to change a situation for better by changing one’s own destructive action (concentration on *I*) or by changing destructive or threatening environment,
- to regulate emotions (calming down)¹⁹.

Under certain conditions the both indicated functions can enter into conflict with each other reducing the likelihood of coping with threat. Implementation of the function of calming down in certain conditions can block the ability to take action that is necessary for adaptation. Examples of such actions could be avoiding unpleasant thoughts, denial, rationalisation, use of sedatives. Efforts to calm down can be useful if they do not block adaptation actions.

Heszen-Niejodek basing on empirical research distinguished such dimensions of coping as:

- searching for information *versus* avoiding information,
- searching for social support *versus* avoiding social support,
- activity *versus* refraining from activity,
- striving to cause changes in oneself *versus* striving to cause changes in one’s environment,
- realistic perception of the reality *versus* unrealistic perception of the reality,
- temporal presentist orientation (focusing on ad hoc goals) *versus* temporal futuristic orientation (focusing on future goals)²⁰.

¹⁸ Cf. Lazarus, R.S., Folkman, S. *Stress, appraisal and coping*, p. 141.

¹⁹ Terelak, J.F. *Stres psychologiczny*, Bydgoszcz: Oficyna Wydawnicza Branta, 1995, p. 282-283.

²⁰ Heszen-Niejodek, I. Radzenie sobie z konfrontacją stresowa (wybrane zagadnienia). *Nowiny Psychologiczne*. 1991, 72-73 (1-2): 13-26.

Terelak in the interpretation of such a set of dimensions of coping considers that their distinction is not useful due to a high degree of specificity of stressful situations²¹.

There were also attempts of meta-analyses of the definition of stress which created an integral model of coping with stress. Matheny together with his colleagues as a result of meta-analysis of thirty-five definitions of stress and related results of empirical research suggests understanding of coping as [...] “an effort, conscious or unconscious, related to prevention, elimination or reduction of stressors or to toleration of their effects in a way least harmful”²². In this interpretation, it is necessary to distinguish between coping as a quality (related to temper and personality) and coping as a style (related to cognitive styles, dependency on a field). The attention is also drawn to the need to distinguish between coping as a process and coping as a result. Coping is considered as a special case of general adaptive abilities taking into account all predispositions of biological, psychological and social nature.

There is also a distinction between coping and automated adaptive reactions concerning implementation of learned routine behaviour. An important criterion here is newness of a situation. Lazarus in his conception identifies four ways of coping with stress each of which has a dual function: a function of solving a problem and a function of regulation of emotions. They can be directed to one’s own *self* or to an environment. They are:

- searching for information,
- direct action,
- refraining from action,
- intrapsychic processes (cognitive processes regulating emotions including defensive mechanisms).

In addition to these basic categories in empirical studies there was distinguished a number of other ones as, for example, confrontation, distancing, taking responsibility, reevaluation, wishful thinking, escape, blaming.

Taking action of such a nature that orders terminology and conceptualisation of the issues of security threats creates opportunities to build a model of action of a person in the conditions of the sense of threat. Such a model should provide opportunities to cover with its scope a few essential floors for interpretation of a dangerous situation. First, it is a matter of analysis of situational factors through the prism of risk and possessed broadly defined resources. Secondly,

²¹ Terelak, J.F. *Stres psychologiczny*, p. 284.

²² Matheny, K.B., Aycock, D. W., Pugh, J.L., Curlette, W.L., & Canella, K. Stress Coping: A Qualitative and Quantitative Synthesis with Implications for Treatment, *The Counseling Psychologist*, 14(4): 499–549.

it is a matter of analysis of situational factors related to personality, temper and behavioural predispositions. Thirdly, it's a matter of acquired patterns of reacting at somatic, vegetative and immunological levels. Fourth, it is a matter of behavioural factors perceived in terms of their healthy or unhealthy nature.

Creation of such a model may give chances and possibilities to efficiently analyse, interpret and promote actions of people and groups of people who are professionally associated with the context of acting in situations of threat to essential values.

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GRĖSMĖS POJŪTIS ELGESIO IR SOCIALINIO ELGESIO MODELIŲ KONTEKSTE

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Santrauka

Socialiniuose moksluose jau seniai domimasi individo elgesiu įtampos, grėsmės kupinose situacijose. Tyrinėjant asmens saugumo svarbu suvokti, kaip paprastai individas reaguoja į grėsmę ar išskirtinę situaciją. Straipsnyje pristatoma individų elgesio pobūdžio tokiose situacijose analizė, akcentuojant, kaip šis elgesys susijęs (ar nesusijęs) su saugumo jausmu, kaip individas adaptuojasi, kokių strategijų imasi individualiu lygmeniu. Atskiriamas instinktyvus elgesys (momentinė reakcija į grėsmę) ir adaptyvus elgesys, nepalankioms aplinkybėms tęsiantis. Straipsnyje pabrėžiama, kad svarbios (gal net svarbesnės) procedūrinės žinios (tai yra žinios, esmingos elgesio kontrolei, bet jas sunku ar net neįmanoma sąmoningai (ar bent greitai) keisti), deklaratyviųjų atžvilgiu. Elgesį apibūdina dvi determinantės. Pirmoji susijusi su individo temperamentu, antroji - civilizuoto žmogaus savybės, išsilavinimas. A elgesys yra sudėtingas elgesių kompleksas, jam svarbus kontekstas, ką asmuo apibrėžia, kaip saugią aplinką, ar saugumo kultūrą.

Pagrindinės sąvokos: grėsmės jausmas; saugumo jausmas; A elgesys; adaptaciniai

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