ARTICLE

Quasi-Development as an Illusion of Personal Growth

Svetlana N. Kostromina, Maria V. Makarova
St. Petersburg State University, St. Petersburg, Russia

ABSTRACT

This article explores the concept of quasi-development from theoretical, methodological, and empirical perspectives. The study consists of two parts, examining the components and functional manifestations of quasi-development. A theoretical definition of the phenomenon of quasi-development is proposed. In Study 1, the perceptions of quasi-development in two groups of respondents were analyzed by using content analysis: one group consisted of 30 individuals without psychological education and the other of 10 individuals with a psychological background. The study revealed several features of quasi-development, including an attitude towards development where change occurs for the sake of change, an illusion of infinity of options and intensity of development induced by external influence, a desire to obtain a ready-made "recipe" instead of taking responsibility, a lack of correlation between life experience and emotional history, and a lack of a meaning regulator. In Study 2, key components of quasi-development and its connection with magical thinking were assessed by using data from 33 respondents without psychological education, but with experience of seeking psychological help and striving for self-development. The study also explored the correlations of quasi-development markers with the Revised Paranormal Belief Scale proposed by J. Tobacyk. The peculiarities of the social context of modern individuals and the ways of constructing identity were also considered. Finally, the article raises questions about the need for further research on the phenomenon of quasi-development.

KEYWORDS

personality development, self-development, quasi-development, magical thinking, sustainability, self-changes, neoliberal form of subjectivity

Introduction

The concept of quasi-development is generally viewed as a construct of ordinary consciousness, which describes the tendency to become overly fixated on psychological practices that give the illusion of personal growth within a social context. Although it is not always explicitly acknowledged, this phenomenon is present in counseling and psychotherapeutic discourse. Its inclusion into the discourse of personality psychology considerably broadens our understanding of the mechanisms and phenomenology of self-development and personality change, expanding on classical ideas (Adams et al., 2019).

Amidst the high uncertainty of ongoing social transformations, growing emotional tension and stress, individuals' subjective sense of control over events can foster confidence in the future. In many cases, people turn to various parapsychological practices, including magical thinking, as a psychological defense to reinforce their sense of control (Escolà-Gascón et al., 2020). In an unpredictable future and disrupted way of life, the challenge of personal stability and variability (Bleidorn et al., 2021) transforms into a problem of personal sustainability, which requires individuals to identify the most effective coping strategies for their life plan (Kostromina et al., 2022). Our study explores how the pursuit of personal growth, coupled with magical thinking, helps individuals create the illusion of self-change in response to the need to construct a new identity in changing times.

Personal Development and Sustainability

Today, it is widely acknowledged by researchers from different fields that there are global civilizational changes taking place that require individuals to transform their ways of interacting with the world (Rubinshtein, 1973) in order to maintain personal sustainability (Topal et al., 2021). In the current context of "change of changes," traditional processes of adapting and maintaining stability (homeostasis preservation) are becoming less relevant. Instead, pre-adaptive processes that encourage diversity, universal readiness for change, and generate new forms of life (Asmolov, 2010) are becoming more important in responding to these changes. These processes promote diversity, pre-specialization, universal readiness for change, and generate new forms of life (Asmolov et al., 2017). Self-determination processes are also becoming increasingly crucial, with a growing tendency to prioritize meaningful and variable possibilities over necessity (Leontiev, 2011).

The ongoing global social changes have led to a shift in people's behavioral goals, from external achievements to internal self-development. The traditional question of "How to get what I want" has been replaced by a more pressing one, "What do I really want?" (Suvalko, 2013). Consequently, cognitive knowledge is being replaced by a spiritual aspiration to transcend the limitations of everyday life and navigate morally challenging ethical conflicts. Researchers often view spirituality as a fundamental

principle of human self-development, which enables individuals to appeal to higher value instances in the construction of their personalities (Znakov, 2021). The ways individuals resolve existential contradictions become a measure of their individuality and subjectivity. As V. V. Znakov (2021) notes,

> at such moments of personal knowledge, when an individual experiences self-development, something more than a "down-to-earth" image or model of external events emerges. The inner meaning of these experiences becomes the psychological basis for the formation of the spiritual essence of what has become the subject of the individual's intellectual and moral reflection. (p. 136, trans. by Ekaterina Purgina [E. P.])

According to A. V. Brushlinsky (2003), spirituality represents the goals, aspirations, and meanings realized in human life. A. V. Brushlinsky stresses that spirituality is not a super-psychic phenomenon, but rather a set of different qualities of the psyche that are the most crucial attribute of an individual (p. 49). It is a deeper level of activity that represents an ontological way of mental existence. Spirituality entails establishing a correlation between personal, subjective experiences that may change over time and collective, stable perceptions, with meaning as the underlying source of this correlation (Grishina, 2019). The concept of meaning guides the activity of the subject, allowing for the differentiation of various qualities of the same events and the inclusion of these events in different systems of connections and relations. This process occurs as a continuous dynamic of variables and their meanings (Asmolov, 2015).

Activity is a defining characteristic of personality, which manifests in various forms, including super-situational, supra-role activity within an individual's context, social acts within interpersonal relationships, and "deeds" in the meta-individual plan (Petrovsky & Petrovsky, 2014, p. 71). However, expanding activity beyond its limits requires overcoming the attitudes developed in preceding conditions, and it does not happen automatically (Asmolov & Petrovsky, 1978). When individuals engage productively in societal development, even at the cost of their own well-being, society as a whole becomes qualitatively dynamic, leading to evolvement. Nonetheless, V. A. Petrovsky (2010) highlights the concept of impersonality, whereby an individual's presence or absence does not influence others' behavior, rendering them devoid of personality. Therefore, personality activity is a synthesis of personalization, supra-situational activity, and creative communication, defining an individual path.

Personality development is closely tied to determinant processes, as individuals progress steadily through each age period and solve specific psychophysiological tasks. Prominent psychologists such as L. S. Vygotsky, J. Piaget, and E. Erikson provided ample evidence for this phenomenon. As personogenesis unfolds, biological factors play a decreasing role in controlling the development of personality, while higher-value and meaning-based factors increase in importance. The formation of the spiritual sphere is accompanied by the emergence of personal meaning, which contributes to semantic and reflexive self-regulation. This level of self-determination is associated with the phenomenon of transcendence and self-transcendence, which involves the readiness and ability to move beyond the current level of development and advance to the desired personal level (Frizen, 2013).

According to F. Nietzsche (1883–1885/2005), the phenomenon of self-transcendence involves overcoming one's actual givenness and entering into the realm of the possible: "freedom from" and "freedom for". E. Fromm (1955/2013) posits that a healthy individual is a person who can provide answers to existential questions, overcome passive existence, and become a creator of their life. In the works of V. Frankl (1946/1962), self-transcendence is described as the intentionality of life itself, a focus on something outside oneself: "to become oneself" means to realize oneself without paying attention to oneself. The scope of self-transcendence and self-determination of an individual is characterized by openness to new experiences and tolerance of uncertainty. A "closed" meaning sphere is associated with adaptive functions, which prioritize clear goals and actions that align with established requirements. In contrast, an "open" meaning sphere corresponds to "non-adaptive activity" (Asmolov & Petrovsky, 1978, trans. by E. P.). The more open an individual's semantic sphere is to new experiences for the assimilation of infinite meanings, the more it is realized as individuality, self-transcends, and subsequently develops.

Personal Development and Quasi-Development

According to V. V. Znakov (2021), the presence of a special need for the unusual in the psyche of modern individuals, which he calls "the need for the transcendent". As Znakov puts it, the border between the imaginary and the real is not absolute, and the coexistence of the possible and admissible with the impossible, such as beliefs in witchcraft, UFOs, and intelligent extraterrestrial life, is consistent with physical laws (p. 228). Psychologists have found that paranormal and superstitious beliefs share a psychological foundation with the belief in extraterrestrial life (Swami et al., 2011). This "transcendental hunger" is often satisfied by an increased interest in fairy tales, myths, and fantasy (Subbotsky, 2007). Coping with fear and providing a sense of control over the uncontrollable are some of the functions of these coping strategies, especially when rational explanations are not available (Vyse, 1997). Therefore, non-rational cognitive phenomena can be meaningful and useful in the inner world of individuals.

E. V. Subbotsky (2015) puts forward a hypothesis that consciousness is the ability of a person to exist simultaneously in two distinct realities: the visible, ordinary reality and the invisible, magical reality. According to him, this dual structure of consciousness endows individuals with the abilities of reflection, creativity, and spontaneity. However, it also creates fundamental challenges for human existence, the primary one being the constant need to maintain a clear boundary between ordinary and magical realities (p. 14).

Magical thinking refers to the belief that there is a causal coherence between unrelated events, despite the absence of any plausible causal connection between them, and is explained as the result of supernatural influence (Sternberg et al., 2007). S. Freud first described magical thinking as the basis of animism, religion, and superstition, which are characteristics of primitive communities (Freud, 1913/2001). The Oxford Dictionary of Psychology defines magical thinking as the belief that "thoughts themselves can cause effects in the world, or that thoughts about something are tantamount to actions" (Colman, 2009). B. Malinowski links magical thinking with a low level of education and unwillingness to understand the essence of phenomena, as well as low self-esteem (rational thinking and success); he also describes a connection

with religiosity of uneducated people (as opposed to educated and religious) for whom magic and religion lie in the same area (Malinowski, 1922/2014). Magical thinking is natural and peculiar to preschool children, and over time, it should be lost naturally (Zhmurov, 2012). High rates of magical thinking in a personality (immersion into esoteric doctrines and reorganization of life according to them) in psychiatry are indicators of the adaptation disorder (Koroleva, 2009), magiphrenic syndrome (Zhmurov, 2012), and a symptom of schizotypal disorder (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). There is a relationship between New Age practices and beliefs and schizotypal personality traits, particularly those concerning magical ideation (Farias et al., 2005).

Not only is there a natural and evolutionarily understandable mechanism for magical thinking in individuals (Norenzayan, 2016), but there is also evidence of an increase in magical beliefs due to socio-cultural influences. Culturally specific traditions are transmitted through intergenerational communication (superstitions, for example), as well as supported by the media (astrological predictions, psychics), which convinces people of the existence of supernatural forces (Subbotsky, 2015). Thus, magical thinking appears to connect the real and the unreal, what is and what we want to believe. It is a kind of door that provides a mental transition between the real and the desired. Its strength lies in the ease of transition, providing movement toward "sacred knowledge" that reduces uncertainty and gives the possessor of this knowledge a transition to the next stage of development. However, it remains unclear whether personal development, which many people identify with the concept of personal growth, genuinely takes place in this case.

The concept of personal growth, introduced by C. Rogers, lacks a strict definition and unambiguous interpretation (Rogers, 1961/2012). Personal growth is closely related to the concept of a mature personality, characterized by dynamism, intentionality, autonomy, individuality, integrity, and constructiveness. Personal growth has a positive meaning, such as "gaining of knowledge or activity, an active position, mastering of an ideal image," but it can also be a kind of "turning away from oneself" because personal growth is substituted with the formation of necessary qualities (Bratchenko & Mironova, 1997; trans. by E. P.). Personal growth is fundamentally about freeing oneself to create a unique life path. It involves seeking to improve areas of weakness and continually evolving through new experiences and changes.

Nevertheless, a relevant question arises: To what extent can the described changes be regarded as personal development? It is easy to determine the willingness of people to change and develop through external motivation, such as the desire to adjust to the situation or accept the challenge. They largely manifest themselves in the form of actions, which, nevertheless, can be initiated by internal needs. Internal needs arise when a person has an understanding of some deficit of personal resource, for the replenishment of which they can ask for specific help (a psychologist, a coach, a trainer), and then they become a source of their own changes. This appears to be development. At what moment does the desire for development, self-evolvement, and change become an illusion of development? It is likely that the phenomenon of "quasi-development" is connected with the absence of this semantic regulator or its insufficient level. That is, in the focus, there is a desire to develop and change, but the person cannot answer the

question "Why?" Changes caused only by external circumstances cannot be qualified as development because the source should be in the developing individual, and this source is supplemented and actualized by external influence (Sergienko, 2009).

We define development as the process of an individual developing a unique intentionality through active transformation of oneself and the surrounding world. This process is characterized by internal orderliness and connectedness, as well as a persistent drive to move forward despite external influences and personal limitations. *Quasi-development,* on the other hand*, is a phenomenon observed in adults where change is pursued without a clear purpose or direction. This illusion of necessity and infinite self-development options is often determined by external factors,* such as social pressures to be successful or to constantly move forward. Individuals who engage in quasi-development often seek a "recipe" or easy solution, and avoid taking responsibility for their personal growth. This phenomenon is also characterized by a lack of correlation between a person's life experiences and their life history.

Research Design

Since the concept of quasi-development is based on commonly held beliefs and ideas, the first step in our research was to confirm its viability, i.e., its actual existence in society. In order to validate this phenomenon both theoretically and empirically, we conducted two studies on two different samples.

Study 1 compared the author's interpretation of quasi-development with the ideas about this phenomenon in two groups of respondents, followed by a content analysis of the data. To accomplish this objective, a survey was administered and data from two distinct groups were analyzed, one comprising individuals with psychological education and the other without. This division allowed us to explore quasi-development from two perspectives, that are ordinary people and professional psychologists. The primary goal of this study was to identify whether people had encountered this phenomenon, which we defined as quasi-development, and to determine its primary features.

Study 2 aimed to operationalize the phenomenological empirical referents of quasi-development and involved respondents without psychological education who had experience participating in psychological practices.

In both studies, we used the semi-structured interview method. In Study 2, we also administered the Revised Paranormal Belief Scale by J. Tobacyk (adapted for Russia by D. S. Grigoryev, 2015) alongside the semi-structured interview.

Study 1: Theoretical and Empirical Validation of the Phenomenon of Quasi-Development

Study Sample. We conducted interviews with 40 respondents aged 34–55 ($M = 46.3$, $SD = 9.07$). The sample was divided into two groups based on their level of psychological knowledge and professional experience. *Group 1* consisted of 30 respondents aged 34–55 who had no professional knowledge of psychology, but had higher education. *Group 2* included 10 experts with psychological education and professional experience in various fields of psychology aged 38–50. Independent sampling was employed to

allow for external validation of the concept, collection of phenomenological data, identification of semantic components, and interpretation of the content.

Research Methods. The main research methods employed were semi-structured interviews and content analysis. Six open-ended questions were developed, with three questions designated for each group. These questions are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Questions for the Two Groups of Respondents

Questions for non-psychologists (Group 1)	Questions for psychologists (Group 2)
1. To what extent do you agree or disagree that there is a concept of quasi-development?	1. Do you believe that quasi-development is a phenomenon that exists?
2. In your opinion, what are some ways in which quasi-development manifests itself in life?	2. What are some characteristics that distinguish quasi-development from personality development? How can you recognize that someone is experiencing quasi-development?
3. How do you differentiate between development and quasi-development?	3. Have you ever encountered examples of quasi-development in your professional life?

To minimize the subjective and negative nature of responses and foster constructive discussion, questions about quasi-development were formulated as an opposition to the concept of development for both layman and professional understanding. We included a reference to the respondents' idea of personal development in the questions to understand how they formulated their ideas about development or lack thereof, and how this relates to quasi-development. This approach was designed to explore the nuances of respondents' perceptions and provide a comprehensive view of the phenomenon.

We employed a phenomenological analysis (Kvale, 1996; Smith & Fieldsend, 2021), in which we grouped semantically similar responses, and counted and identified the number of responses and meaning groups.

Study Results

The results of the phenomenological validation of the "quasi-development" construct of personality are presented in Table 2, which outlines the generalized perceptions of quasi-development in the two groups of respondents.

Table 2

Results of the Comparative Analysis of Responses to the Questions About Quasi-Development in the Two Respondent Groups

Attributes of the concept	Group 1	Group 2
Acknowledging the existence of the phenomenon of quasi-development	55% of the participants expressed full confidence in the existence of quasi-development, while 33.3% assumed its existence	All participants, based on their own understanding of the concept of quasi-development, were able to confirm the existence of individuals exhibiting quasi-development whom they had encountered in their professional activities

Table 2 Continued

Attributes of the concept	Group 1	Group 2
Subjective feeling of the lack of development	10% are unable to identify any general patterns of quasi-development, as they perceive it as a purely subjective evaluation of human activity. 30% associate quasi-development with the feeling of frustration resulting from the failure to achieve desired outcomes in their pursuits	65% of respondents observe a clear contradiction between the concepts of development and quasi-development, and therefore suggest defining the characteristics of quasi-development as those that are fundamentally opposed to the attributes of human development
Inability to apply the skills learned through deliberate personal development in practical situations	7% of the participants acknowledged the practical application of acquired skills and observed changes in their personal growth journey	25% emphasize the possibility of activity and compensation that may not result in actual change
Lack of purpose and meaning	10% identified goal-setting and meaning-making factors as relevant to quasi-development	10% associate quasi-development with the pursuit of solutions to irrelevant life problems
Unwillingness to take responsibility	50% of respondents associated quasi-development with a strong interest in esoterics, spiritual practices, and sects that can lead to a loss of control over one's life	50% compare quasi-development to development, emphasizing the subjectivity and personal responsibility of individuals in finding solutions to their life tasks

The results of the phenomenological analysis of the related constructs of development and quasi-development indicate that, in both layman and professional understanding, quasi-development is perceived as: (a) a personality's desire to develop, often driven by compensation, dissatisfaction with current circumstances, or an insatiable thirst for change, fueled by a belief in the necessity of spiritual improvement; (b) the concept of unlimited possibilities and intensity of personal growth, often linked to a reluctance to take responsibility and a preference for receiving a ready-made recipe from a mentor; (c) a lack of connection between life experiences and emotional states, as well as an inability to explain the use of psychological practices for personal growth.

Based on the data obtained, we can conclude that the phenomenon of quasi-development is recognized by both professional psychologists and individuals without psychological education. Furthermore, the interpretation of quasi-development closely aligns with the one we propose, which supports the empirical validation of the quasi-development phenomenon.

Study 2. Empirical Verification of the Phenomenon of Quasi-Development

Study Sample. We conducted interviews with 33 participants, consisting of 14 men and 19 women aged 30–49 (M = 38.6, SD = 5.02). Participation was voluntary and 87% of the participants had a higher education. Of the participants, 51% reported being married or in a relationship. The primary requirement for participants was the absence of psychiatric disorders, prior experience with psychotherapy, personal growth trainings, and psychological education.

Research Methods. To investigate the level of engagement of research participants without psychological education in personal growth and self-development activities available on the market, and to understand their subjective experiences, we conducted a semi-structured interview consisting of four open-ended questions. These questions were designed to elicit the respondents' views on personal and spiritual growth, as well as their understanding of changes that occur throughout life. The questions were as follows: "Do people change over the course of their lives?", "Can these changes be considered growth or development?", "What is personal growth and how do you understand it?", and "What is spiritual growth or spirituality?" By analyzing the respondents' responses to these questions, we were able to link the theoretical markers of quasi-development to perceptions in everyday consciousness, as well as to the characteristics described by experts and empirical referents.

After completing the semi-structured interview, the respondents were asked to complete the Revised Paranormal Belief Scale, which was adapted for use in Russia by D. S. Grigoryev in 2015. This scale measures people's inclination towards irrational and pseudoscientific beliefs, which are often considered as paranormal phenomena that contradict the fundamental principles of science. We correlated high scores on this scale, which are indicative of magical thinking, with the components of personality quasi-development. On the one hand, this type of thinking allows the individual to evade responsibility for their actions and life events, but on the other hand, it also restricts their ability to take proactive measures.

Study Results. The results of the interview regarding participants' involvement in personal growth and development showed the following:

– Over 60% of the respondents expressed confidence in the possibility of human change throughout their lives, while only 15% completely denied this possibility;

– Half of the interviewees of the interviewees (50%) perceived growth and development as changes that occur in their lives, regardless of whether the changes were positive or negative;

– Approximately 40% of the participants believed that personal growth is a natural process, while 45% maintained that it requires conscious and directed effort. Of the respondents, 15% denied the existence of personal growth as a process;

– In defining the concepts of spiritual growth and spirituality, the participants were divided into three almost equal groups: 31% connected these concepts with religion, 37% associated them with psychology, and 31% gave these concepts their own meaning.

We conducted a phenomenological analysis to identify markers of quasi-development, which included "Change for the sake of change," "Lack of a meaning regulator," "Lack of personal responsibility," "Lack of connection between life experience and emotional history," and "External influence." We conducted inter-subjective testing to confirm these markers (Almaev, 2012). An independent expert was interviewed using the phenomenological approach to identify categories that aligned with the research objectives. The markers identified by the expert were then compared to those identified by the author. As a result, 86% of the markers and categories matched (see Table 3).

Table 3

List of Markers Identified in the Interview Analysis

Marker	Description	Examples from the interviews
Change for the sake of change	In their interviews, the respondents noted changes that they associate with the practices	"But I really feel that there are a lot of changes waiting ahead. I don't mean changes in my life circumstances, but changes in my personality." "I had the feeling that he wasn't talking about me, he was talking from inside of me. It was as if I were the one telling the story"
Lack of a meaning (semantic) regulator	Causality is attributed to unrelated objects and events; random events are perceived as significant, with extra meanings attached to them	"But I believe something led me there for a reason". "2013, on December 13 I'm taking my first course with Guruji. And Guruji was born on May, 13 [emphasis added]." "… there were many coincidences, which, as it turned out later, were not accidental"
Lack of personal responsibility	Personal responsibility is shifted to events, people, and objects by attributing the outcome of a situation to external forces rather than to one's own actions or decisions ("everyone in my family experienced this," unprocessed trauma, astrology, numerology, tarot, palm reading, etc.)	"How could I learn anything different if I grew up with my mother. 90% of my attitude to the world is my parents." "I had a good experience … in chiromancy, palm reading". "And the shaman works with the souls of grandfathers ... She said there was some woman behind me …" "… the magician watched me on Instagram[1] and saw a dark channel next to me"
Lack of connection between life experience and emotional history	Despite the active declaration of the goal of self-development, no specific actions are being taken to address the problem(s) at hand.	"And I realized that the work that I've done now—it's going to bring change in my life." "I realized everything, if there's the right mindset, the money can come in unknown ways"
External influence	The respondent's choice of development is influenced by authoritative figures, leading to an unfounded degree of trust in them. The person lacks fundamental knowledge within the chosen direction of development.	"I have a high degree of trust in her and I listened." "He said that I had some kind of teacher's arcana sewn into my numerology there, that I really need to teach … and that's what I'm going for." "We have our pluses and minuses, our frequencies, in each finger. We're all antennae, conductors, 6–7–8–12 Volt. I have that voltage increasing right now. Or in Hertz … however it is measured [*laughs*]"

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[1] Instagram™ is a trademark of Instagram Inc., registered in the US and other countries. По решению Роскомнадзора, социальная сеть Instagram полностью заблокирована в России как экстремистская организация.

To evaluate the psychotherapeutic activity of our respondents, we identified categories that differentiate the experience of seeking psychological help and developed a system to weigh each parameter. Table 4 presents the points (1 or 2) assigned to certain types of "psychological" activity.

The "Activities to enhance personal growth and psychological competencies" category includes motivational online marathons and art therapy, which were scored 1 point due to their low degree of immersion and casual nature of participation. Personal growth trainings and mentology, on the other hand, are considered events of higher organizational order that require involvement and intensive attendance, so they were assigned 2 points.

The "General psychological trainings" category covers a variety of specializations, such as corporate and professional trainings aimed at improving competencies and skills. We gave them a score of 1 due to their social orientation, together with coaching, metaphorical maps, and transformational games, which respondents found entertaining and satisfying their curiosity. However, specific areas such as mindfulness trainings were given a score of 2 because they involve deep immersion and require active participation.

Based on the interviews, we identified a separate category called "Quasi-psychological trends", which includes all techniques that have no scientific evidence base, are not recognized by the professional community, but are still popular. All the indicated techniques in Table 4 are assigned 2 points.

Lastly, we highlighted the "Self-help" category, which largely refers to passive acceptance of psychological information and literature on personal growth. This category includes areas related to the free time of respondents who are interested in such knowledge and were assigned 1 point.

Table 4

Data on Psychotherapeutic Activity of Respondents

General category	Activity	Frequency of occurrence
Seeking psychological help	Personal request	27
	Psychotherapy lasting for one year or more	22
	Family counseling	10
	Children counseling	13
	Consulting a clinical psychologist	3
	Group psychotherapy	8
	School psychologist	3
Activities to improve personal growth, psychological competence	Personal growth training	14
	Motivational marathons	17
	Art therapy	2
	Mentology	3
General psychological trainings	Corporate, professional	12
	Personal, specific competencies (e.g., communicative)	12
	Raising awareness	6
	Coaching	6
	Metaphorical maps	4
	Transformational game (psychological)	3

Table 4 Continued

General category	Activity	Frequency of occurrence
Quasi-psychological trends	Guruji Art of living DSN personal growth	2
	Zhong Yuan Qigong	3
	Women's energy	3
	Sat Nam Rasayan Healing	2
	NLP	3
	Quantum Psychology	3
	Osho Dynamic Meditation	2
	Human design	4
	FEID (*a system of skills for further energy-informational development of a person*)	2
	Cleansing practices	5
	Establishing financial channels	3
	Transformation Game (esoteric)	5
	Energy therapy	5
	Reiki, palm healing	3
	Cholotropic breathing	2
	Astrology, numerology	9
Self-help	Reading psychological literature	24
	Subscriptions to groups, blogs, channels	27
	Interacting with psychologist friends to resolve an implicit request	30
	Meditation, mantras	15

During the interview, the highlighted markers for all respondents totaled 238 points, with an average of 7.2 points per respondent (Mode = 2, Median = 3, σ = 11.4) indicating active involvement in psychological activities.

The responses from the semi-structured interview were analyzed to compare activity types and quasi-development markers. The results indicate an uneven distribution, with a significant number of quasi-development markers present in some interviews and none in others. While all interviews had indicators characterizing signs of quasi-development, a third of respondents had more than the average number of quasi-development markers. For the majority of respondents, the number of quasi-development markers did not exceed the average for the sample. The marker "Lack of personal responsibility" had the highest number of points at 71 (30%), followed by "Lack of a meaning regulator" with 66 points (28%). "Lack of connection between life experience and emotional history" had 36 points (15%), "Change for the sake of change" had 33 points (14%), and "External influence" had 32 points (13%) of the sample. Thus, the marker "Lack of personal responsibility" prevails in the quasi-development phenomenology, representing the number of causal connections ("everyone in my family experiences this"; "my parents did this"; "unworked past trauma") and the number of "magics" used (numerology, astrology, tarot, immersion into past lives, etc.).

Believing in the existence of various external forces that actively influence a person's life can indicate a lack of control over their life and a deficiency in critical thinking skills. Excessive self-reflection can result, and this may lead to a mismatch between the development sphere and external and internal factors of life activity. To support this claim, we will present the results obtained through the "Belief in the paranormal" technique, which are shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1
Mean Scores of Participants on J. Tobacyk's Paranormal Belief Scale
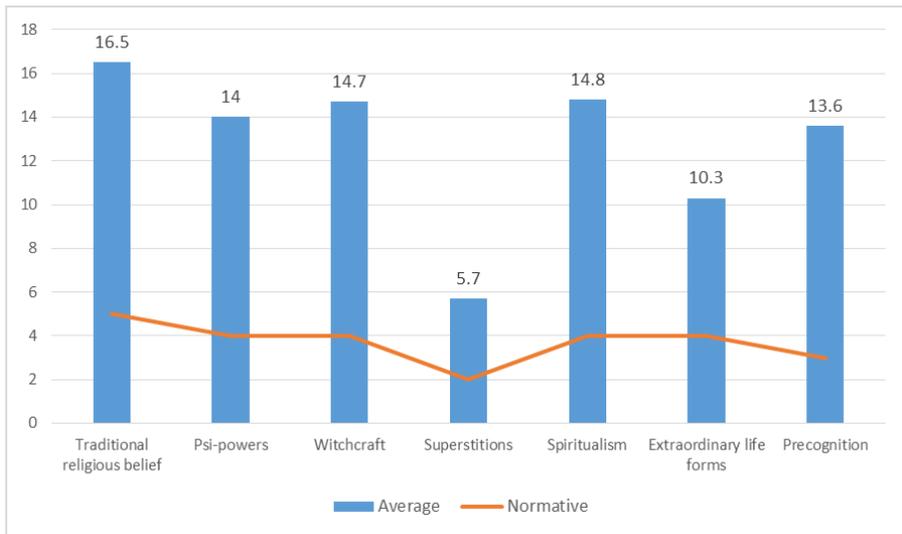
In the sample, all subscale indicators have values higher than the normative ones. For 98% of the respondents, the *Traditional religious beliefs* indicator is higher than the normative ($M = 5.26$, $SD = 1.35$), indicating that they have stable religious attitudes that they rely on in their lives. 45% of the sample demonstrated scores on the *Superstition* subscale above normative values ($M = 2.27$, $SD = 1.22$). Average scores on the *Precognition* subscale are also above normative and are presented by 75% of respondents ($M = 3.59$, $SD = 1.32$). *Witchcraft* is represented in 73% of respondents ($M = 4.72$, $SD = 1.57$). The results for the subscales *Psi-powers* ($M = 3.93$, $SD = 1.72$) and *Spiritualism* ($M = 3.99$, $SD = 1.58$) are fairly similar, with 97% and 78% of the respondents demonstrating these characteristics, respectively. *Extraordinary life forms* are less vividly represented in respondents' answers, above the normative index ($M = 3.44$, $SD = 1.40$) values are recorded in 69% of respondents.

The results of the analysis of the methodology reveal that research participants rely on various forms of magical thinking to explain different situations they encounter in life. Apart from having a stable religious faith and belief in superstitions, the respondents have a positive attitude towards the possibility of controlling other people's thoughts and affecting surrounding material objects by their cognitive

activity. They also believe in the existence of magical forms of life and the possibility of communicating with the souls of other people and transient states of mind.

Thus, the presented sample of respondents is characterized by the manifestation of components of quasi-development and magical thinking. To confirm the connection between the markers of quasi-development and magical thinking, a Pearson correlation analysis was performed using the IBM SPSS Statistics 23 application package.

Table 5

Results of Correlation Analysis

	Change for the sake of change	Lack of a meaning regulator	Lack of personal responsibility	External influences	Personal and psychotherapeutic activity
Traditional religious beliefs	–	–	–	.491**	.349*
Psi-powers	.482**	.444**	.452**	.651**	.507**
Witchcraft	.390*	.366*	.358*	.480**	.547**
Spiritualism	.450**	.364*	.400*	.529**	.484**
Precognition	.358*	–	–	.454**	.546**

Note: ** $p \leq .01$; * $p \leq .05$.

The results of the correlation analysis show significant connections between the "Belief in the paranormal" study data and quasi-developmental markers. Specifically, the *Psi-powers* subscale correlates positively with almost all the main quasi-developmental characteristics, including "Change for the sake of change" (.482), "Lack of a meaning regulator" (.444), "No personal responsibility" (.452), "External influence" (.651), as well as with the "Personal and psychotherapy activity" scores (.507). This suggests that respondents believe in the possibility of manipulating objects and people for their own purposes through personal change and are willing to attend events that will bring them closer to this goal (Grigoryev, 2015).

In our sample, 66% respondents identified themselves as adhering to traditional religions (with 9% identifying as Buddhists). Occasional participation in ritual culture and religious events influenced their experiences. As expected, indicators of personal and psychotherapeutic activity did not show a significant correlation with this subscale. However, the "External Influence" marker showed a positive correlation with the *Traditional religious belief* subscale ($p \leq .01$).

Significant positive correlations were found between the *Witchcraft* and *Precognition* subscales and the indices of "External influence" and "Personal and psychotherapeutic activity" (.547 and .546 respectively), indicating that the more a person believes in witchcraft, magic rites, and the effectiveness of predictions

such as horoscopes, the more they are susceptible to external influence and seek psychotherapeutic support. In the phenomenology of the respondents, these two aspects often do not simply overlap but mutually reinforce each other. Those who are believed to have "magical abilities" convincingly "predict" events and guide our respondents towards "working through" certain aspects of their development. The *Spiritualism* subscale also positively correlates with the above markers of quasi-development, "External influence" (.529) and "Personal and psychotherapeutic activity" (.484). This correlation reflects not only a person's belief in the possibility of interaction with the soul but also a direct influence on the reconstruction of their past experiences (e.g., in a previous life) in light of predictions and with the aim of forming the image of a desired future.

It should be noted that the marker "External influence" has the strongest connection with the scale "Belief in the paranormal", underscoring the importance of external stimuli in shaping and maintaining magical thinking. Such information, presented in appealing marketing offers, has an affordance for any person experiencing difficult life situations.

Discussion of Results: Social and Psychological Contextualization of Quasi-Development

Paradoxically, mythological thinking, esoterics, and magic are important for the self-determination of modern individuals who are equipped with high technology and scientific data. There is evidence that humans may be biologically predisposed to such beliefs (Norenzayan, 2016). Quasi-development is not only a personal psychological phenomenon marked by carelessness, susceptibility to influence, and a desire for constant change, but also a cultural practice for constructing identity (Campbell, 2000). This practice is congruent with the image of those living in "fluid modernity" (Bauman, 2000), whose existence is characterized by a process of renewing potential identities (Khoroshilov, 2022).

The mass culture and media of late modernity establish normative scenarios for personal development, which in turn give rise to the phenomenon of quasi-development. This can be seen as one of the significant psychological effects of Teo's neoliberal form of subjectivity. According to Teo (2018), neoliberalism serves as an undifferentiated spiritual-practical content that acts as a precondition for the formation of a new type of subjectivity. As a result, the neoliberal form of subjectivity becomes psychologically dominant, subordinating all other variants of personality formation that are seen as an aggregate of individual characteristics.

In a world where business and commercialization dominate interpersonal relationships, globalization, and the transformation of the self into a type of "life entrepreneur," the prevailing mode of thinking is one of rational choice. The main content of the neoliberal self is the continuous monitoring of life success in its material expression. Teo (2017) argues that psychological disciplines serve to support all tendencies of the neoliberal form of subjectivity, including self-control, rigid discipline, and the pursuit of success.

In addition, societal ideals of perfectionism, a highly competitive culture, and the increasing individualization of responsibility for failing to meet standards of personal success can make it appealing to adopt a quasi-developmental approach. However, the excessive emphasis placed on achieving success can turn a healthy desire for accomplishment into perfectionism, resulting in frustration, neuroticism, and maladaptation. Psychologists actively study perfectionism (excessive striving for perfection) as a dysfunctional personality trait (Stoeber, 2018). Garanian et al. (2018) identify several parameters in the structure of perfectionism, including "standards of performance and aspirations that are exaggerated in comparison with individual capabilities," "excessive demands placed on others and exaggerated expectations of them," "constant comparison of oneself with the most successful individuals," and "dichotomous evaluation of activity results and planning based on the 'all or nothing' principle."

When considering the existential implications of quasi-development, it is worth reflecting on Rollo May's "myth of Proteus" as a symbol of the idea of constant change and the personality type of "proteans" (Lifton, 1993) who are continually in a state of flux (May, 1991). While the search for novelty and transformation can provide an escape from anxiety, it can also lead to superficiality and a lack of depth. As May (1991) noted, "playing any role in any situation makes it impossible to hear the inner voice that comes from deep within ourselves," and avoiding this inner voice can result in profound loneliness and isolation. However, the negative consequences of the Proteus myth extend beyond personal well-being; in a world that is constantly changing, adapting to new circumstances is a necessity.

Conclusions

The convergence of dynamic aspects of an individual's life path and their endeavors to affirm their being entail the interplay between "higher" and "lower" levels of their personality. Transformational and situational changes differ from typical adaptive changes and reflect the emergence of a new subjective quality, that is authorship in relation to life. The personality becomes a factor in its own changes. The context of daily life and routine for modern individuals embodies the strategic practices that support the maintenance of identity and connection to life's path, while also reducing uncertainty and coping with life's transience (Martsinkovskaya, 2017).

In today's transitory world, maintaining and preserving stability requires specific strategies, primarily through constant change (Kostromina, 2021). However, this type of change is not merely adaptive but rather pre-adaptive, relying on personal self-processes such as self-knowledge, self-understanding, self-development, self-actualization, and self-modification. Self-change is driven by internal needs traditionally linked to self-determined behavior, such as autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2019). It is expressed in the individual's sense of freedom regarding external and internal forces and their conscious development, which is the semantic dominant. On the other hand, quasi-development entails an illusion of the infinity of options and the intensity of development induced by external influences, leading to change for the sake of change. Its phenomenological markers are as follows:

"Change for the sake of change", "Lack of a meaning regulator", "Lack of personal responsibility", "Lack of connection between life experience and emotional history", and "External influence". Our assumption that quasi-development is associated with a high degree of magical thinking was validated in this study. However, the findings have certain limitations, such as the lack of prior research on the topic, insufficient sample size for statistical measurements (rendering regression analysis and U-Mann-Whitney test unreliable and statistically insignificant), and potential biases in evaluating the phenomenon. Further investigation into the phenomenon of quasi-development necessitates the identification of additional factors that influence its process, immersion into the phenomenological field, and the expansion and reinforcement of the empirical base of research. Our study represents an initial exploratory stage and requires additional clarification of hypotheses and the implementation of new research designs.

Therefore, the analysis of the theoretical, methodological, and empirical aspects of the quasi-development concept presented in this article enables us not only to establish its existence but also affirm its phenomenological and empirical validity. Consequently, it is possible to advance towards a more in-depth investigation of this construct and the development of diagnostic tools that can accurately differentiate between genuine personality development and quasi-development with a high degree of reliability.

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