**Vygotsky’s Catharsis and Asymmetrical Dialectics: Exploring the Potential Correlations between Emotions, Second Language, and Personality Dynamics – Narrative Review**

**Abstract**

The study explores the often-overlooked concept of Vygotskian catharsis within asymmetrical dialectics to gain a deeper understanding of the correlation between Second Language Development (SLD) and personality formation. Departing from political connotations commonly associated with Vygotsky, a narrative literature review is adopted. Here, the catharsis is considered as a participatory element across such oppositional forces as affect, cognition and social dynamics. It is adapted after Robbins’ (2001) observation, the significance of Vygotsky’s triadic nature of asymmetrical dialectics, where thesis, antithesis *and* catharsis fuse to achieve synthesis. Within this framework, it is suggested, “the affective contradiction” (Vygotsky, 1971) is transformed through catharsis to form Second Language (L2) and personality correlations, thus impacting SLD and individuals holistically. The analysis also indicates a possible individual-cognitive-affective facet to SLD, suggesting the need for further research. This in turn points to another underexplored aspect: the dynamics of transformation during SLD, the potential of the individual personality and its interconnectedness with society and the common good.

Keywords: catharsis, dialectics, L2, emotions, personality

**1. Introduction**

The concept of catharsis usually associated with Aristotle tends to be used to imply the role of conflicting emotions resulting from “fear and pity” evoked by tragedy, yet performing purifying actions (Sewall & Conversi, 2024). The idea has long captivated researchers in psychology and literature but seems scarce in the field of Second Language Development (SLD). Regardless of its various meanings (Dafermos, 2018), there still seems to be a dearth of studies pertaining to Vygotskian interpretation of catharsis (Meng et al., 2023). Particularly, to the author’s knowledge, there is a paucity of research on the corelation between catharsis, SLD and personality within Vygotskian asymmetrical dialectics. Subsequently, its potential significance for research, educational pedagogy, prospective teaching and learning remains unknown. The understanding of dialectics as merely a dichotomy, that is, a dyadic relation between two contradictory forces, without the embedded role of catharsis, documented by Robbins (2001) decades ago, appears to be dominant today. This notion remains largely unexplored and is yet to be fully understood in SLD. The present study aims to bridge this gap, albeit partially.

More recently, literature has emerged on Vygotsky’s concept of catharsis in relation to SLD. For instance, Seerig and Nicolaides’ (2022) study signalled the contributory role of catharsis in transforming English language learners’ emotions, while being engaged in English literature. This in turn facilitated both language learning and more interestingly also personal growth. In contrast, Golombek et al. (2022) investigated through the lens of Vygotsky’s interpretations of imagination, emotion, and catharsis, along with Nussabaum’s narrative imagination, the impact of the counter-narratives on rural teachers’ perceptions of immigrant emergent bilingual students. The analysis revealed teachers’ emotional engagement and growing empathy towards the students. These studies thus are indicative of participatory characteristics of catharsis both for learners and teachers.

In a similar vein, Cross (2012) discussed catharsis against the backdrop of emotional and creative processes in teaching and learning, while Gómez and Escandón (2017) recalled the tension-catharsis cycles in language learning to signify the involvement of individual perceptions and subjective experiences in this process. In comparison, Escandón (2014) investigated how writing in a foreign language can give rise to cathartic and subsequent subjective transformations However, it is Xu and Zhang (2023) who specifically investigated the connections between catharsis and cognitive-emotional struggles in language learning. They concluded that both positive and negative affect together form a dialectical process. Aligning with Xu and Zhang’s (2023) findings, the current study utilises selected excerpts from their article to deepen the understanding of catharsis within asymmetrical dialectics.

It is also worth noting that Pishghadam & Ghadiri (2011) investigated the impact of asymmetrical (AS) scaffolding, as opposed to symmetrical, on the reading achievement of adult English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners in Iran. The research revealed that asymmetrical interactions in class are more effective at improving not only reading comprehension achievement but also self-confidence and motivation. The results were consistent with Vygotsky’s theories. These studies provide an invaluable perspective on the complexity of the interplay between emotions, language learning and subjective transformations that additionally denote the impactful qualities of catharsis. Reversibly, however, little attention has been paid to the contributory characteristics of catharsis in asymmetrical interactions among such opposing forces as cognition, affect, and social during the course of SLD. This can further be taken to suggest that the clashes of opposites can cause a crisis and therefore subsequent potential regressive travels (Ross, 2023) which, however, can be transformed into a positive force by means of catharsis (Connery, 2018). Furthermore, the fact that the corelations among these varying forces may be asymmetrical (Pishghadam & Ghadiri, 2011) also indicates varying degrees of their impact and relations to the catharsis that can potentially influence the individual holistically.

This scenario, therefore, prompts an important question that previous research appears to have not fully investigated: whether cathartic experiences relate to SLD and personality dynamics within asymmetrical dialectics and whether conflicts among asymmetrical relations across oppositional variables, which can lead to a crisis, can affect or distort cathartic experiences and later reflect in SLD and personality dynamics. In light of this, it is not an overstatement to suggest that this notion appears, to the author’s best knowledge, to be largely under-researched. Therefore, the study provides an important opportunity to contribute to the growing area of research and revive further multidisciplinary debate to understand catharsis in SLD or as a potential language, pedagogic and psychological intervention tool.

**2. Methodology and Terminology**

The study adopts a narrative literature review, adhering to the stages of identification, “recording, understanding, meaning-making, and transmitting information” (Onwuegbuzie & Frels, 2016, p. 49). Although traditional reviews are often criticised for subjectivity or a biased content in addition to a non-transparent methodology, they can still offer an opportunity to represent the “excellent overview of wider literature concepts – not just review of outcomes.” (Petticrew & Roberts, 2006). In this regard, Hammersley (2020, p. 35) notices after Torrance (2004, p. 3) that the methodology of systematic reviews, particularly the criteria for including and excluding studies, may be “taken to absurd and counterproductive” extremes. This in turn can carry a risk of compromising the content and diminishing the crucial role of imagination, creativity, background knowledge and “scientific sensibility” (Hammersley, 2020, p. 35). Therefore, Kraus et al. (2022) assert that narrative reviews similarly to systematic reviews can still represent both independent and critical investigations.

By compiling the selected literature on the topic, with a main emphasis placed on Vygotsky’s interpretation of catharsis, the study revisits its attributes to unite it with L2 and personality corelations. In line with Lim et al. (2022), the article seeks to enhance the existing body of knowledge and provide an alternative perspective on this crucial aspect related to SLD.

Before proceeding further, however, the terminology used should be clarified. For brevity, distinctions among the following concepts are not detailed in this paper, as the intention is for them to convey a wide-range of meaning at this stage. Hence, the term Second Language Development (SLD) is employed to avoid mismatches between intentional, conscious learning and subconscious language acquisition (Krashen & Terrell, 1983) as it is not the primary focus of this present paper. While references to English as a L2 signal it as an additional language or one among many, equally, such terms as affects, feelings and emotions are applied interchangeably and loosely, as are personality, character and identity.

Having established the key terminology, the article proceeds to explore in greater depth Vygotskian understanding of catharsis before relating it to L2 and personality development.

**3. VYGOTSKIAN CATHARSIS**

Vygotsky’s interpretation of catharsis is one of the key concepts discussed in his *Psychology of Art* (Defermos, 2018). It is also where a different perspective in some aspects to Aristotle’s (Barrs & Richmond 2024; Smagorinsky, 2011) and Freud’s (Connery, 2018; Meng et al., 2023; Vygotsky, 1971) was proposed. In this regard, Meng et al. (2023) draw attention to the fact that catharsis was traditionally viewed as the culmination of emotional experiences with no room for new emotions. Conversely, Vygotsky’s use of the term evolved into a transformative concept when conflicts, tensions and negativity can be turned into a more, though not necessarily pleasant, natural mechanism for all individuals, not just those affected by trauma or distress (Connery, 2018; Meng et al., 2023). Within this framework, a crisis which is usually characterised by contradictions (Dafermos 2018; Dafermos, 2024; Fleer et al., 2017; Veresov, 2016; Veresov, 2020) develops into “the creative act of overcoming feeling, resolving it, and conquering it,” as accentuated by Vygotsky (1971, p. 248) himself. In this way, “painful and unpleasant affects are discharged and transformed into their opposites [as] a complex transformation of feelings” to attain a balance between emotion and cognition (p. 214). According to Veresov and Mok (2018, p. 94), it is in catharsis that conflicts can be “resolved” and individuals transformed. Hereof, this process is thus not a mere release of conflicting or supressed emotions but their transformation in favour of a new creation. Daformos (2018, p. 108) stresses:

Catharsis is one of the most important dimensions of *tragic paradox* that consists of the desire to go through an unpleasant even painful experience in tragedy or in life.

This scenario can be linked to navigating through a crisis, where an individual regenerates their damaged self (Dafermos, 2024; Kozulin, 1990, p. 264) to be ‘reborn’ in the pursuit of a new initiative. It can be named as a phoenix-like experience (Dafermos, 2024, p. 8). Interestingly, Vygotsky’s frequent reference to the Bible quote, “The stones which the builders rejected is become the head stone of the corner” (Psalm 118:22 in Vygotsky, 1997, p. 233), Dafermos (2018) discerns, may also imply his strong interest in understanding contradictions and crises in life which tends to be rejected, yet it can still become the cornerstone. It can be further argued that for the contradiction to become the proverbial cornerstone, it must go through “a complex process of overcoming difficulties and adapting” (Vygotsky, 1997, p. 99) during which, it is often forgotten, the catharsis may become an integral part of it.

In the course of development, the objective and subjective, the internal and external, the individual and social meet holistically to create the developmental and asymmetrical dialectical continuum. Here it is also worth echoing Vygotsky’s consideration of “personhood” who when referring to Feurebach noted that “it is not thought that thinks: a person thinks” (McCafferty, 2018, p. 78). He (Vygotsky, 1997, pp. 11–113) writes:

Indeed, mental life is characterized by breaks, by the absence of a continuous and uninterrupted connection between its elements, by the disappearance and reappearance of these elements . . . We must not study separate mental and physiological processes outside their unity, because then they become completely unintelligible. We must study the integral process which is characterized by both a subjective and an objective side at the same time.

This asymmetrically dialectical and simultaneously transformative spectrum appears to involve degenerative-regenerative properties arising from conflicts among opposing variables experienced during a crisis but also from cathartic qualities of the crisis. It is because at the moments of crisis the opposites clash to create asymmetrical corelations that can be catharised to arrive at synthesis. In this way, not only regressive but also cathartic movements are involved. Considering that this complex process may transcend a mere emotional release since it can potentially lead to the formation of a new self, it is likely that an individual is impacted holistically (Pishghadam & Ghadiri, 2011), including language and personality changes.

In this context, affecting the innermost being, catharsis emerges as a crucial force closely linked to *perezhivanie* usually interpreted as emotional or lived through experience (Blunden, 2016; Connery, 2018; Lantolf & Swain, 2020; Meng et al., 2023; Smagorynsky, 2011). For the same reason, the cathartic experience may neither be detached nor separated from language or personality co-relations. For instance, Mok (2017, p. 27) interprets catharsis as “transforming an individual’s perception of themselves, others and the world”. Whereas Khinkanina (2014, p. 87) likens it to confronting “personal challenges” and uncovering deeper truths about “life phenomena”. Correspondingly, Larrain and Hayne (2020, p. 806) recognise Vygotsky’s concept of catharsis as involving both the resolution and transformation of contradictory emotions. It is thus possible to observe that this experience extends beyond bodily emotional discharges to include social and individual reorganisations which give rise to transformations impacting in turn both. This centrality of emotions to personality has been recognised by Vygotsky (1987, p. 327) as “the nucleolus of the personality.” It is because “the experience that is most emotional is that which is inner and personal.” Yet, there is very little research on the corelation between catharsis and language alongside personality trajectories.

Given that human development in Vygotsky’s analogy is often compared to drama, wherein it can equally involve emotional momentum/apex, resolution and the subsequent transformation of conflicting emotions by means of catharsis, its role should thus not be underestimated for language and prospective educational and pedagogic purposes. Smagorysnky (2011, p. 335), referencing Yaroshevsky (1989), reminds us of Vygotsky’s (1929) records in which he voiced that “Dynamics of the individual=drama … The individual as a participant in a drama.” In turn, the drama stands here as a reminder of the asymmetrical course of development that can also be seen as irregular or revolutionary as it entails the dialectical interaction among the oppositional variables (Ross, 2023). This was echoed in Pishghadam & Ghadiri’s study (2011), which exemplified the effectiveness of asymmetrical interactions among peers in EFL settings.

Essentially, within this process, there is a consequent point of “maximal tension” necessitated by virtue of the contradictory forces that reaches a breaking point or displacement which might only be transformed through catharsis (Robbins, 2001, pp. 72–73). Termed as the “affective contradiction,” Vygotsky (1971) encapsulated the idea in the analysis of Bunin’s story “Gentle Breath or Easy Breathing” (Robbins, 2001; Barrs & Richmond, 2024). According to Robbins (2001, p. 73), the same analysis captured his “entire stance” on catharsis, where thesis, antithesis, *and* catharsis participate to construct synthesis. By virtue of these universal qualities, this traverse may also form integral mechanisms embedded within SLD developmental trajectories. It involves not only re-processing, handling, re-creating cognitive processes but also regulating the “affective contradiction” (Vygotsky, 1971) likely to be experienced by all individuals in different social and cognitive contexts during the learning journey as part of the dramatic tapestry of life which is unavoidable. Turning now to the selected extract from Xu and Zhang (2023), the study attempts to demonstrate the discussed concepts.

**4. Implications of Catharsis for SLD or L2 Regressive-Cathartic Dialectical Personality Trajectories Within Asymmetrical Dialectics**

Xu and Zhang’s (2023) research, drawing, inter alia, on Vygotsky’s theory, revealed the potential correlation between *perezhivanie* and catharsis in two Chinese university learners of L2 Japanese. The analysis exposed not only their distinct motivations for studying Japanese but also the dual roles of emotions as enhancers and hinderers of the students’ learning journeys. On the other hand, the findings challenged the idea that negative emotions inevitably impede development, with positive emotions always fostering it. Instead, the research detected the complex play between negative and positive emotions and also revealed, among other things, cathartic influences on the affective domain of language learning. The authors concluded that both positive and negative conflicting emotions identified when studying Japanese relate to the cognitive-emotional struggle, while catharsis is present with regard to learning difficulties and their relevance to language development.

Building on the above argument, the present study debates further the participatory role of catharsis in learners’ cognitive and emotional struggles in addition to its subsequent potential contribution to not only language development but also L2 and personality dynamics as resulting from cathartic and regressive formations, which in turn appear to be closely linked with affective, cognitive and social variables. For this purpose, the current paper utilises the selected experts (Tables 1 and 2) to advance the understanding of catharsis during L2 learning within the asymmetrical dialectics’ framework. It is also further argued that these correlations can have a potential impact on L2 and personality formations mutually. Due to word limits, the tables include only the chosen learners’ responses from the experts (Xu & Zhang, 2023, pp. 167–171) This approach also allowed for placing the main importance on the most significant utterances to illustrate the central argument.

In the given extracts (Tables 1 and 2) it is possible to detect potential asymmetrical correlations and their interplay among such opposing variables as affective (A), cognitive (C), and social (S) dimensions. Interestingly, they simultaneously appear to exemplify the moments of regressions and catharsis, arising at the moments of crisis when the opposites seem to clash. Additionally, it is possible to detect the consequent SLD language and personality co-relations as influenced by regressive and cathartic experiences. While the discussed variables are labelled for illustrative purposes as A, C, and S, it should be emphasised that their boundaries appear to often blur, overlap or permeate. For the same reason, it is difficult at times to delineate clear borders among them. This in turn is the example of the oppositional forces that intersect, clash or overlap to build “up to the point of maximal tension researching the breaking point” that which can be later transformed via catharsis to arrive at dialectical synthesis (Robbins, 2007, p. 73). Using Vygotsky’s (1971; 1971/2024, p. 18) own words:

an affective contradiction, causes conflicting feelings, and leads to the short-circuiting and destruction of these emotions (…) painful and unpleasant affects are discharged and transformed into their opposites. (…) The basis for this process reveals itself in the contradiction.

Specifically, in Expert 1 positive emotional experiences voiced in fascination, happiness, and excitement overlap with more negative feelings of confusion, which are potentially indicative of affective contradictions. Moreover, these affects concurrently intertwine with cognitive, e.g.

learning Japanese alongside sociocultural dimensions, seen, more explicitly, in Teo’s exchanges of views about Japanese literature with teachers and classmates. Ultimately, in the recognition of Teo’s efforts by the teacher not only social, cognitive and affective dimensions appear to meet simultaneously in varying degrees but also, they give indication of potential mutual language and personality correlations to create new entities as expressed in the utterance “my effort in Japanese learning was recognised by a professional, a boost to my confidence.”

Table 1. Teo’s experiences (Xu & Zhang 2023, pp. 167–169), potentially indicating L2 regressive-cathartic personality

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Interactions among affective (A), cognitive (C) and sociocultural (S) variables, indicating conflicting, regressive and cathartic experiences potentially impacting SLD and personality correlations | | | |
| **Extract 1**  I was fascinated (A)  very happy (A)  confused (A)  very excited (A)  I read my first Japanese …(C)  I developed a better understanding of Japanese (C)  I aspired to lean Japanese (A & C)  I read it [Japanese novel] with rich emotion (A & C)  I was able to feel the “beauty in despair” conveyed by Japanese culture (S)  I like the feeling of exchanging my views about Japanese literature with the teacher and other students in the class (S)  my effort in Japanese learning was recognized by a professional (S), a boost to my confidence (A). | **Extract 2**  was annoyed for quite a while (A)  I remembered it [the word “cat”] finally and became more confident (A)  I always forgot how to pronounce it ([the word “cat”] C)  Later I associated it with Mr. Gu (S)  I remembered it finally and became more confident (C&A) | **Extract 3**  I was determined to learn more (A)  I was still very confused (A)  It’s just too agonizing to learn grammar (A&C)  I finally gave up (A)  There were some simple notes in the book, I read but didn’t understand it (C)  Until now, I only know katakana nouns, as for how to use katakana and … grammar rules, I know nothing (C)  I … asked Mr. Gu for help (S)  my purpose is not to learn Japanese language per se (S) | **Extract 4**  enjoy (A)  time-consuming or too difficult (A)  I would give up (A)  I think any language learning is as agonizing (A)  but I hate learning English as a subject matter (A)  I have known many words, understood Japanese literature better and been able to speak simple Japanese, that’s pretty good. (C)  I have tried my best to learn Japanese (C)  I am also fond of English culture (S)  Language per se is not my concern (S) |

A similar scenario seems to be echoed in Expert 2 where contrasting variables, A, C, S conflict to bring affective contradictions which in turn appear to reveal both regressive and cathartic experiences during these times as testified in such utterances as: “I always forgot how to pronounce” the word “cat,” “[I] was annoyed for quite a while” and “I remember it finally and became more confident.” The initial annoyance and possible regressive response in the face of a cognitive challenge, once overcome, finally led to confidence in language *as well as* personality formation. Conversely, in Experts 3-4, the negative affective components seem to dominate over a positive one as captured in numerous adverse expressions: “I was very confused”, “I read but I didn’t understand”, “too agonizing to learn”, “any language learning is as agonizing as in the case in English”. “[I] asked Mr Gu for help”, “I finally gave up” or “I hate learning English as a subject matter”.

Table 2. Ke’s experiences (Xu & Zhang, 2023, pp. 169–171), potentially indicating L2 regressive- cathartic personality developmental trajectories

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Interactions among affective (A), cognitive (C) and sociocultural (S) variables, indicating conflicts and cathartic experiences potentially impacting SLD and personality correlations | | | |
| **Extract 5**  I really like (A)  forced to learn Japanese (A)  really helpless (A)  I excel at English language learning (C)  my overall college entrance exam grade failed (C)  My parents felt disappointed and humiliated by my choice due to the tension between Chinese and Japanese (S & A) | **Extract 6**  I felt very ashamed and it was a heavy blow to my confidence (A)  but I can’t forget the teacher’s disdainful look (A)  Since then, I have always paid special attention to passive voice in speaking and writing. Now, I can use passive voice very well (C)  I immediately consulted the grammar book (C)  I better understood how Chinese, English, and Japanese differ in the use of passive voice (C)  The teacher criticized me in class with a scornful tone (S & A) | **Extract 8**  I was so upset (A)  I was very happy (A)  I knew I had to make some change (A & C)  that’s really beyond my ability (A & C)  My efforts turned out to be very fruitful (C)  I extended my English learning strategies to my Japanese study (C)  (…) reading and listening to Japanese every morning (C)  I often zoned out in class (S)  My listening teacher was quite demanding and rigid (S) | **Extract 9**  It is a wonderful experience (A)  I simultaneously felt the unique beauty that stemmed from this kind of tedious language (A &C)  Learning Japanese has promoted my in-depth thinking on the interconnectedness between language, culture, and thought (A, C, S)  with my improving understanding of Japanese language, I started to taste and appreciate the beauty of this humble style (A,C,S)  I think learning Japanese is a process of better understanding the diverse world (S)  to experience the life or world of other people in another language system. (S)  I thought Japanese people were too polite and too humble at the beginning (S) |

In these statements it is possible to recognise the maximal tension necessitated by means of contradictory forces that equally revealed themselves as emotionally unpleasant experiences for the learner. This situation ultimately reached a breaking point during which Tao tried to catharise this painful experience to transform it into a more positive one. For example, Tao admits “I was determined to learn more,” “I (…) asked Mr Gu for help”, and “I have tried my best”. The whole process, however, appears to be distorted or perhaps not fully developed as he admits to giving up. His reaction in itself points to individual trajectories arising from these complex relations among opposites. Yet, these conditions appear to impact L2 and personality relationships and subsequent L2 and personality pathways.

Notably, the possible asymmetry of oppositional variables when one force or forces intensifies over another or others can not only lead to a conflict, which is not free of regressions, but also potentially initiates the cathartic process. The outcome, however, appears not to be indifferent to L2 and personality trajectory shifts. For instance, in the case of Teo, it seems that the consolation was found in more social aspects of language learning as uttered in Teo’s words: “Language per se is not my concern” or “I am also fond of English culture”. Nevertheless, asymmetrical correlations among varying forces appear to bring different regressive responses to correspondingly influence the effectiveness of cathartic experiences.

To go further, in Expert 5 positive and negative reactions seem to correspondingly coexist with cognitive and social variables, diffusing and intersecting simultaneously. This is evident in Ke’s remarks: “I really like” and “I excel at English” but also “I was forced”, “helpless”, “my overall college entrance exam grade failed”. Additionally, parental disappointment and humiliation was intensified by tensions between Chinese and Japanese cultures triggered by complex feelings in Ke. This is further fuelled by the feelings of shame due to the teacher’s criticism as evident in Excerpt 6. Ke recalls it being a blow to his confidence. The breaking point in this crisis of affective contradictions did not shatter Ke; instead, it was transformed through catharsis. Nevertheless, the asymmetric intensity of opposing forces impacted both Ke’s personality and L2 development, as expressed in *“Since then, I have always paid special attention to passive voice in speaking and writing. Now, I can use passive voice very well; but I can’t forget the teacher’s disdainful look.”* It appears that variables creating diverse systems and mutual corelations affect both SLD and personality development reciprocally.

Finally, the tensions captured in Experts 8 and 9 seem to echo the same asymmetrical patterns. For instance, “that’s really beyond my ability,” “I was so upset” as opposed to “My efforts turned out to be very fruitful and I was very happy.” The contradiction paradoxically initiated cognitive growth in language use despite significant language and affective struggles. Overall, Ke’s experiences reflect the complex interactions between affective, cognitive, and social factors in language learning and personal development that are not free from initial regressions and can be accompanied by cathartic experiences. However, the relations between the two also appear in different degrees and seem also to be co-dependent on affective, cognitive and social relationships. Within this context, L2 dialectical personality developmental trajectories appear to be reflected inthe emotional reactions and cognitive challenges experienced by Ke, coupled with social pressures and tensions. Therefore, it seems that catharsis within asymmetrical dialectics additionally participate in forming L2 and personality correlations, impacting both language learning and personal changes.

**5. Concluding Remarks**

This limited-in-scope study has endeavoured to advance the theoretical aspects of catharsis as a contributory and participatory element not only in SLD but also personality dynamics within the context of asymmetrical dialectics. The analysis highlighted the interconnectedness of affective, cognitive, and social factors, with conflicts, tensions, and regressions being transformed by means of catharsis, thereby contributing to not only SLD but personality formation. However, the complexity and depth of affective (perezhivanie) and cognitive relationships and situational characteristics seem to suggest that there might be variations in cathartic experiences which may in turn be related to regressive responses. This suggests that there might be an individual-cognitive-affective facet to SLD, warranting further research. It is worth echoing here Robbins’ (2001, p. x) often overlooked observation accentuated decades ago that “Vygotsky represents the connectedness of the individual to society (and vice versa), the dialectics of change, and the potentiality of the individual personality.”

Given that this research employed a narrative review and was limited to selected studies, choices were made regarding inclusion and exclusion, likely affecting the final conclusion. Overall, this paper raises more questions than answers with the aim to urge further empirical and theoretical exploration of the discussed ideas. Regrettably, as Dafermos (2018, p. 59) observes, Vygotsky’s early death prevented him from fully developing his comprehensive, dialectical theory of personality development. In this regard, Vygotsky argued that affect should be the foundation of the educational process, stating that “everything else is lifeless knowledge” (1997/2024, p. 7). It seems that catharsis may play some role in it. It is hoped that future research will reveal the characteristics of catharsis in SLD and its impact on personality formation within this often unnoticed concept of asymmetrical dialectics.

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