

Subjective Experience of Alienation: Measurement and Correlates*

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Results of empirical studies of alienation are described, based on cultural-historical and activity approach to meaning and to the existential-analytical model of dialogue with the world. Two versions of the (Russian) Subjective Alienation Questionnaire based on the Alienation test by Maddi et al. were validated on student and Internet samples (N = 901). In this test alienation showed negative correlations with meaning, hardiness, self-determination and other subjective and psychological well-being variables. Significant age- and profession-related differences in alienation were found and discussed. Future research directions of social and psychological aspects of alienation and existential analysis effects on alienation are proposed.

Key words: alienation, estrangement, meaning, measurement

Das subjektive Erleben von Entfremdung: Messung und Korrelationen

Ergebnisse von empirischen Studien über Entfremdung werden beschrieben, die auf kulturhistorischen und handlungsorientierten Annäherung an Sinn und an das existenzanalytische Dialog-Modell beruhen. Zwei Versionen des (Russischen) „Subjektive Entfremdungsfragebogen“, der auf dem Entfremdungstest von Maddi et al. beruht, wurden an Studenten- und Internetgruppen (N = 901) validiert. In diesem Test zeigten sich negative Korrelationen mit Sinn, Festigkeit (hardiness), Selbst-Bestimmung und anderen subjektiven und psychologischen Wohlbefindlichkeitsvariablen. Die gefundenen signifikanten alters- und berufsbezogenen Unterschiede in Entfremdung werden diskutiert. Zukünftige Forschungsrichtlinien für soziale und psychologische Aspekte der Entfremdung und existenzanalytische Therapiewirkung auf Entfremdung werden vorgeschlagen.

Schlüsselwörter: Entfremdung, Sinn, Test

Theoretical background

The idea of alienation has a long history within European cultural and philosophical tradition: its roots can be found in the Old Testament and in the works of Plato and his followers. The understanding of alienation has evolved greatly over the ages, but the fact that the notion has remained, testifies the importance of the phenomenon behind it: the subjective experience of being separated from the world resulting from inability to establish meaningful relationships with the world or lack of desire to do so. Historically, the world in question was understood primarily as social world, the *Mitwelt*, and people labeled alienated were those unable to become part of the society, like mental health patients, or those who willingly tried to transcend it, „outsiders“, like Camus' Mersault or Hesse's Steppenwolf (Wilson 1956).

This social aspect of alienation seems to be indeed fundamental, if we accept Vygotsky's idea that appropriation of

the cultural-historical experience of humanity that happens in a dialogue with others (initially, significant others from one's immediate environment and, later on, members of past generations through books and works of art) forms an individual's mind (e.g. Wertsch 1985). But in the course of this development an individual becomes increasingly independent from the society by discovering a personal dimension. As a result, an individual's dialogue with the world is not completely determined by his or her biological needs and social roles anymore. As a result the dialogue develops into an inner dialogue aside to the outer. The phenomenology of this dialogue is described in existential analysis (Längle 2004; 2005; 2008).

On this level, alienation can be seen as an individual's inability to establish contact with the personal dimension, so that interaction with the world remains guided by biological needs and social norms, rather than by the individual's personal values and aspirations. In terms of existential analysis,

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an alienated person is unable to perceive the questions that life asks him/her, because these questions are asked in the language of values that do not have a personal meaning for him/her: the dialogue with the inner world is ruptured, and the dialogue with the outside world is impoverished. This understanding of alienation fits quite well with the existing Marxist and existential traditions (Fromm 1955; 1961).

Within psychology, the notion of alienation was at the peak of its popularity during the 1960s and the 1970s. Numerous empirical instruments (Seeman 1991) were devised to measure different aspects of alienation, such as powerlessness, normlessness (anomie), social and cultural alienation, meaninglessness, social distrust, and a wide range of empirical studies were undertaken. However, at present one can say that alienation has remained a philosophical and sociological concept that did not make it into mainstream psychology because of numerous, often incompatible interpretations attributed to it by different authors (Schacht 1971) and for the lack of correspondence between numerous empirical constructs in which it was operationalized (e.g. Brookings, Dana, Bolton 1981).

The fact that the general notion of alienation has fallen into relative disuse (not counting the more concrete concepts, such as social alienation and parental alienation) does not imply that it has been proven useless for psychologists. The phenomenon of 'a certain blindness' of human beings to values that make life meaningful, observed by James (1899) and discussed by existentialist and Marxist authors, has not become less widespread nowadays, especially in countries like Russia, that have experienced a period of transition from one value system to another, which led to an increase in existential vacuum. It is true, though, that in order to be viable as a psychological concept alienation requires a psychological theoretical framework that would bridge the gap between the philosophical works (of Marx and Fromm, on the one hand, and Heidegger and Sartre, on the other hand) and the much more mundane matter of empirical research.

The present paper presents a brief outline of our empirical research findings using a psychometric tool developed on the basis of Maddi's theoretical approach to alienation.

Maddi's theory of existential neurosis

An attempt at creating such a psychological theory of alienation was made by Maddi (1967; 1998). Drawing upon Sartre's existential philosophy and Fromm's understanding of alienation, Maddi proposed the concept of 'existential neurosis'. The symptoms of existential neurosis are meaninglessness, or 'the chronic inability to believe in the truth, importance, usefulness, or interest value of any of the things one is engaged in or can imagine doing' (Maddi 1967, 313), 'blandness and boredom' (Ibid.) of affective tone, and low to moderate levels of activity associated with low selectivity therein. Apathy instead of sadness makes existential neurosis

different from depression, which it resembles, and absence of lack of energy symptoms distinguishes it from neurasthenia. A person suffering from existential neurosis is alienated both from the self and from the society (other people); an example of existential neurosis can be provided by Mersault, the character of Camus' (1946) *The Stranger*.

According to Maddi (1967; 1998), the precursor to existential neurosis is a conformistic lifestyle, when a person acts as nothing more than a player of social roles and an embodiment of biological needs. Conformism is formed as a result of lack of existential courage (hardiness) needed in order to cope with existential anxiety, which necessarily arises whenever one makes an original, authentic choice that adds to the meaning of one's life. Under stressful circumstances conformism may turn into existential neurosis that can take four different forms: *vegetativeness* (inability to see anything as interesting or worthwhile), *powerlessness* (perceived inability to reach one's goals), *nihilism* (adoption of anti-meaning, cynicism), and *adventurousness* (sensation-seeking in order to overcome meaninglessness).

In addition to their theory of existential neurosis, Maddi and his colleagues have developed the Alienation test (Maddi, Kobasa, Hoover 1979), a psychometric tool measuring subjective attitudes that correspond to each of the four forms of existential neurosis (vegetativeness, powerlessness, nihilism and adventurousness) in relation to five different spheres of life: work, society, relationships (other people), family and self. Each of the 60 items taps into attitudes that correspond to one form of existential neurosis in one life sphere. Respondents are instructed to indicate the extent of their agreement to each item using a 101-point percent scale (0 to 100).

Sample items:

- No matter how hard you work, you never seem to reach your goals (Work, Powerlessness).
- Most of life is wasted in meaningless activity (Self, Nihilism).

This test is probably the most comprehensive, and at the same time psychometrically sound measure of alienation among the existing ones (Seeman 1991), and on this grounds it was chosen for the research presented below.

Development of the Subjective Alienation Questionnaires (SAQ)

All the research presented below was done in Russian language. The original 60 items of the Alienation test were translated into Russian and supplemented with additional 60 items. The resulting 120-item pool was reviewed in a group discussion with two other experts, after which it was administered in a series of research studies.

The test was then administered online and advertised on several psychology-related servers, yielding an Internet

sample (N=403). It was also administered in paper-based form to students of different Moscow universities specializing in management, law and economics (N=156), psychology (N=80), creative arts (N=39) and other disciplines (N=19). The total sample included 697 respondents, of those 204 men and 488 women, aged between 16 and 55. The participation in the research was voluntary and anonymous for all participants. Respondents on the Internet were asked to indicate their gender, age, education level (5 levels) and occupation (by entering the name of their profession).

Because of the large size and complicated structure of the item pool (120 items, 10 scales), the item selection process was based on item-total correlations of each item with total alienation score and two scales, corresponding to a form of alienation and a sphere of life. After 60 items were selected, confirmatory factor analysis was performed. Five different models were compared, the theoretically expected model (correlated alienation form factors, independent sphere factors) showing the best fit (Chi-sq.=4092, df=1646, $p < .001$; RMSEA=0.049; CFI=0.832; NNFI=0.820), which, however, was far from perfect most likely due to a large model size (188 parameters), heterogeneous sample and non-parametric distributions of some of the items. However, the reliability coefficients of the scales were quite satisfactory (see Table 1), and scale intercorrelations corresponded to those reported by the authors of the original test.

In order for the questionnaire to be applicable to high school and unemployed university student populations, it was

decided to develop a student version of the questionnaire by replacing the alienation from work scale with alienation from study. Sample items:

- No matter how hard you try, you can never learn everything teachers want you to (Powerlessness).
- Studying is useless: I will not be able to apply most part of knowledge I get (Nihilism).
- If a friend tells me he/she really liked a lecture, I find it hard to believe him/her (Vegetativeness).
- It is more challenging to cheat skillfully during an exam than to learn everything (Adventurousness).

In order to measure alienation in four other life spheres, those best items from the adult version were selected that were applicable to teenage samples. In order to make the questionnaire more participant-friendly and less time-consuming, a 5-point response scale was used in the student version.

The participants were students of a Moscow high school (N=48) and students of different Moscow and Tashkent universities specializing in law, management and economics (N=64) and psychology (N=87). The total sample included 64 men and 136 women (4 not indicated), aged between 13 and 21.

The resulting scale alpha reliability values of the two Russian questionnaires and of the original English version are shown in Table 1. Correlations between corresponding scales of adult and student versions of Subjective Alienation questionnaires assessed on a small sample (N=34, two-week interval) ranged between .43 and .70.

	English version (Maddi et al.)		Adult version (SAQ-A)			Student version (SAQ-S)	
	N items	alpha	N items	alpha N=697	retest r N=30	N items	alpha N=204
General Alienation	60	.95	60	.95	.93	73	.93
Alienation from Work / Study	12	.83	12	.83	.92	16	.87
Alienation from Society	12	.80	12	.81	.89	11	.76
Alienation from Other People	12	.75	12	.84	.94	16	.75
Alienation from Family	12	.77	12	.85	.90	14	.79
Alienation from Self	12	.92	12	.84	.90	16	.82
Vegetativeness	15	.88	16	.87	.91	19	.82
Powerlessness	15	.90	16	.86	.85	16	.79
Nihilism	15	.82	16	.86	.93	20	.82
Adventurousness	15	.76	12	.75	.90	18	.81

Tab. 1: Structure and psychometric properties of the SAQ-A and SAQ-S

Correlations of subjective alienation with other variables

Together with the Subjective Alienation Questionnaires, other scales were administered to some participant subsamples, including the Russian versions of Purpose in Life Test (Crumbaugh, Maholick 1967; Leontiev 1992), Hardiness Personal Views Survey (Maddi; Leontiev, Osin 2006), Ryff's scales of Psychological Well-Being (Ryff, Keyes 1995; Shevelenkova, Fesenko 2005), Subjective Happiness Scale (Lyubomirsky, Lepper 1999; Osin, Leontiev 2008), Satisfaction With Life Scale (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, Griffin 1985; Osin, Leontiev 2008), Sense of Coherence Scale (Antonovsky 1988; Osin 2007), Locus of Control Scale (Bazhin, Golyunkina, Etkind 1993),

Generalized Self-Efficacy Scale (Schwartz, Erusalem, Romek, 1996), Self-Determination Scale (Sheldon 1995), Multidimensional Inventory of Loneliness Experience (Salikhova, Leontiev, Osin, 2008) and Balanced Inventory of Desirable Responding (Paulhus 1998).

The correlations between subjective alienation and other variables are shown in Tables 2-4. Quite as expected, alienation was found to be negatively associated with subjective well-being (life satisfaction and happiness), life meaning, psychological well-being, hardiness, sense of coherence, self-determination and internal locus of control. These significant moderate correlations were reproduced across several samples, which providing the evidence for validity of the new Russian-language alienation measures.

SAQ-A scales	Scale p < .05 p < .01	General Alienation	Work	Society	Relationships	Family	Self	Vegetativeness	Powerlessness	Nihilism	Adventurousness
		Subjective Happiness	-.44	-.29	-.15	-.36	-.43	-.54	-.53	-.45	-.30
Satisfaction with Life	-.40	-.38	-.15	-.32	-.32	-.44	-.45	-.43	-.34	-.04	
Purpose in Life Test	-.62	-.47	-.28	-.55	-.57	-.60	-.63	-.62	-.52	-.27	
Hardiness	-.66	-.40	-.38	-.61	-.57	-.68	-.68	-.61	-.54	-.36	
Sense of Coherence	-.65	-.44	-.42	-.58	-.52	-.65	-.65	-.56	-.57	-.41	
Ryff	Positive Relationships	-.61	-.50	-.42	-.62	-.37	-.54	-.56	-.61	-.57	-.29
	Autonomy	-.18	-.14	-.14	-.23	-.07	-.11	-.12	-.21	-.18	-.07
	Environmental Mastery	-.62	-.50	-.32	-.55	-.48	-.62	-.65	-.58	-.48	-.34
	Personal Growth	-.27	-.21	-.12	-.30	-.16	-.22	-.19	-.28	-.22	-.17
	Purpose in Life	-.46	-.39	-.27	-.37	-.40	-.38	-.48	-.37	-.39	-.31
	Self-Acceptance	-.55	-.42	-.28	-.52	-.44	-.56	-.55	-.49	-.49	-.33

Tab. 2: Pearson correlations of SAQ-A with other scales (Psychology students, N=45)

SAQ-A scales	Scale p < .05 p < .01	General Alienation	Work	Society	Relationships	Family	Self	Vegetativeness	Powerlessness	Nihilism	Adventurousness
		Subjective Happiness	-.56	-.47	-.37	-.47	-.40	-.59	-.62	-.54	-.44
Satisfaction with Life	-.56	-.47	-.34	-.50	-.41	-.56	-.60	-.52	-.45	-.36	
Loneliness	.65	.32	.43	.65	.61	.57	.58	.62	.61	.48	
SDS: Perceived Choice	-.40	-.43	-.21	-.29	-.27	-.44	-.46	-.42	-.33	-.15	
SDS: Self-Awareness	-.60	-.56	-.34	-.57	-.34	-.61	-.62	-.56	-.52	-.39	

Tab. 3: Pearson correlations of SAQ-A with other scales (Internet sample, N=240)

SAQ-S scales	Scale	General Alienation	Society	Study	Relationships	Family	Self	Vegetativeness	Powerlessness	Nihilism	Adventurousness
	$p < .05$ $p < .01$										
Subjective Happiness		<u>-.33</u>	-.23	-.22	-.28	<u>-.39</u>	<u>-.33</u>	<u>-.43</u>	<u>-.34</u>	-.26	-.15
Satisfaction with Life		<u>-.43</u>	-.25	-.30	-.28	<u>-.47</u>	<u>-.48</u>	<u>-.51</u>	<u>-.40</u>	<u>-.38</u>	-.25
Purpose in Life Test		<u>-.48</u>	<u>-.33</u>	<u>-.35</u>	<u>-.35</u>	<u>-.43</u>	<u>-.52</u>	<u>-.57</u>	<u>-.47</u>	<u>-.42</u>	-.25
Hardiness		<u>-.65</u>	<u>-.60</u>	<u>-.67</u>	<u>-.56</u>	<u>-.54</u>	<u>-.59</u>	<u>-.63</u>	<u>-.61</u>	<u>-.63</u>	<u>-.46</u>
Ryff	Positive Relationships	<u>-.41</u>	-.26	<u>-.42</u>	<u>-.54</u>	-.35	-.29	<u>-.45</u>	<u>-.54</u>	-.37	-.13
	Autonomy	<u>-.45</u>	-.35	<u>-.43</u>	-.32	-.36	<u>-.47</u>	-.35	-.52	<u>-.46</u>	-.33
	Environmental Mastery	<u>-.63</u>	<u>-.45</u>	<u>-.58</u>	<u>-.45</u>	<u>-.59</u>	<u>-.65</u>	<u>-.59</u>	<u>-.64</u>	<u>-.62</u>	<u>-.44</u>
	Personal Growth	<u>-.43</u>	<u>-.41</u>	<u>-.51</u>	-.35	-.27	-.34	<u>-.54</u>	<u>-.40</u>	<u>-.40</u>	-.15
	Purpose in Life	<u>-.72</u>	<u>-.49</u>	<u>-.63</u>	<u>-.64</u>	<u>-.59</u>	<u>-.73</u>	<u>-.70</u>	<u>-.71</u>	<u>-.63</u>	<u>-.55</u>
	Self-Acceptance	<u>-.53</u>	-.29	-.38	<u>-.43</u>	<u>-.56</u>	<u>-.64</u>	<u>-.58</u>	<u>-.56</u>	<u>-.45</u>	-.35
Locus of Control (internal)		<u>-.67</u>	<u>-.54</u>	<u>-.68</u>	<u>-.50</u>	<u>-.59</u>	<u>-.55</u>	<u>-.56</u>	<u>-.62</u>	<u>-.74</u>	<u>-.48</u>
General Self-Efficacy		<u>-.51</u>	<u>-.41</u>	<u>-.51</u>	<u>-.40</u>	<u>-.42</u>	<u>-.47</u>	<u>-.50</u>	<u>-.53</u>	<u>-.45</u>	<u>-.39</u>

Tab. 4: Pearson correlations of SAQ-S with other scales (Law, management, economics students, N=64).

Correlations with the total score of the BIDR social desirability test for management students (N=85) ranged between -.19 and -.43 for different SAQ scales (general alienation: $r = -.41$; $p < .001$). The Purpose-In-Life test exhibited a comparable correlation ($r = .38$; $p < .001$). When social desirability was partialled out, the absolute values of the correlation coefficients changed slightly, but the set of significant correlations between SAQ scales and other measures remained the same.

Differences in alienation between demographic groups

No significant gender differences were found in the internet sample and the student samples separately using the SAQ-A. Within the combined sample, the absolute magnitude of these differences was very small. The SAQ-S data were similar.

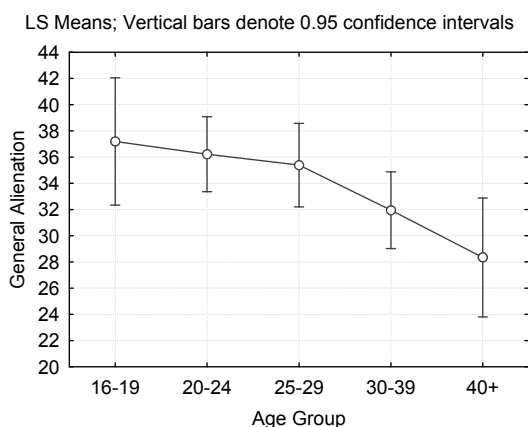


Fig. 1: Levels of general alienation measured by SAQ-A in the internet sample (N=403)

Age differences were more pronounced. The internet sample was divided into 5 age groups with roughly equal number of participants, and the differences were tested using one-way ANOVA. Significant differences were found in general alienation ($F(4,399)=3.16$; $p < .05$), alienation from other people ($F(4,399)=3.18$; $p < .05$), alienation from family ($F(4,399)=3.07$; $p < .05$), alienation from self ($F(4,399)=3.47$; $p < .01$), vegetativeness ($F(4,399)=3.60$; $p < .01$) and adventurousness ($F(4,399)=8.00$; $p < .001$). In all cases alienation decreased with age. However, when the sphere and form subscale scores were calculated as proportions of the total alienation score for each respondent, significant differences were found only in alienation from society ($F(4,399)=4.17$; $p < .01$), vegetativeness ($F(4,399)=3.99$; $p < .01$) and nihilism ($F(4,399)=5.28$; $p < .001$). The share of alienation from society and nihilism increased with age, whereas vegetativeness peaked in the 20-24 age group and steadily decreased with age. Differences in general alienation related to education within internet sample were also significant ($F(4,399)=3.44$; $p < .01$). However, when a factorial ANOVA was performed, only the age main effect came out significant.

When the internet sample and three student subsamples were compared using one-way ANOVA, significant differences were found for absolute scores on all 10 alienation subscales (general alienation: $F(3,511)=15.50$; $p < .001$). The pattern was the same: psychology and creative arts students showed the lowest levels of alienation; management, law and economics students exhibited higher levels, and the highest were found in the internet sample. The structure of alienation

(relative scores), however, differed across groups: alienation from society, nihilism and adventurousness were especially pronounced for creative arts students, while future psychologists had the highest alienation from family and relatively high vegetativeness, but the lowest alienation from self of all samples.

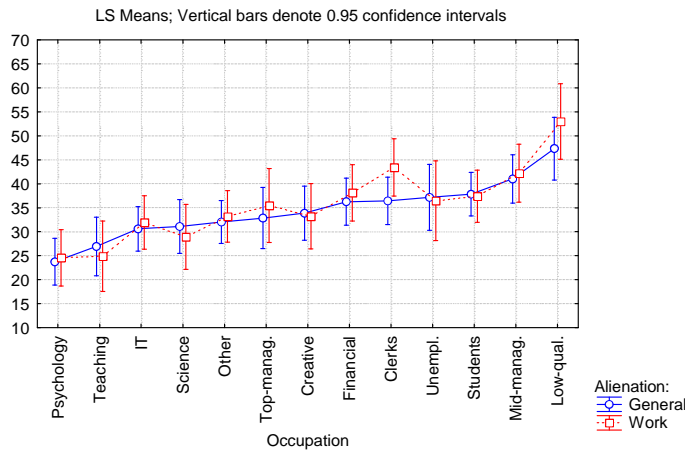


Fig. 2: Levels of general alienation measured by SAQ-A in professional subgroups of the internet sample (N=403).

As part of online testing procedure, respondents were asked to indicate their occupation by entering its name. Similar professions were grouped, after which 13 professional groups emerged (with no less than 20 members in each group), and a one-way ANOVA was performed. Differences in absolute scores on all scales were significant (see Fig. 2). As expected, they were the most pronounced for alienation from work ($F(12,389)=4.96$; $p<.001$). Again, psychologists demonstrated the lowest levels of alienation, along with teachers, IT professionals and scientists. Those highest in alienation were people doing work which does not require higher education, middle-level managers, students and unemployed.

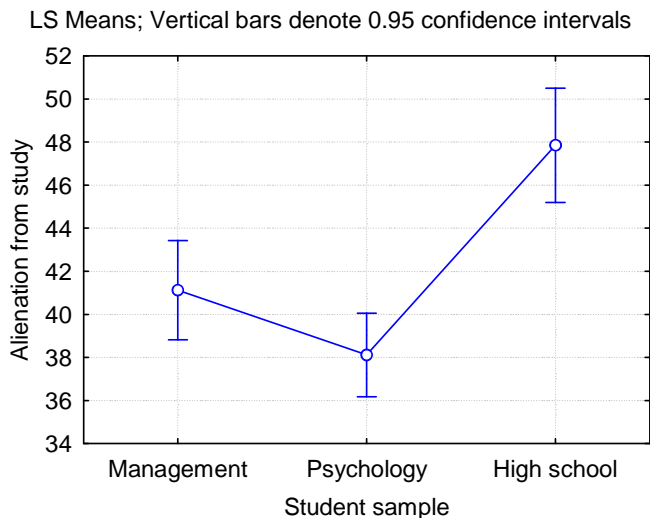


Fig. 3: Levels of alienation from study measured by SAQ-S

The data obtained using student version of the SAQ on two university student samples (management and psycho-

logy) and a high school sample was compared across samples. Unsurprisingly, the differences in alienation from study (shown on Fig. 3) were the most pronounced ($F(2,199)=17.02$; $p<.001$) of all scales. Management and psychology students only differed significantly in alienation from study, whereas high school students differed from combined university student sample and showed higher alienation from study, vegetativeness and powerlessness, as well as general alienation.

Discussion

The two Russian-language Subjective Alienation Questionnaires have been developed as reliable and valid psychometric tools suitable to assess the subjective experience of alienation. This work is still underway: the Internet-based study is being carried on in order to increase the sample size, which would make it more suited to the complexity of SEM models being tested and would allow for a more detailed analysis of age- and profession-related differences in alienation.

However, the results obtained to date are promising. Alienation emerges once again as an empirically validated construct encompassing four distinct but closely interrelated forms described by Maddi. People high in alienation are inclined to be dissatisfied with life and themselves, less happy. They are much more likely to experience existential vacuum (meaninglessness) and are less able to cope with stresses, as their lower hardiness and lower sense of coherence suggest. They feel less competent (have lower environmental mastery and self-efficacy). They have mostly external locus of control (resignation), perceive less choice in life and are less aware of themselves. They have fewer positive relationships with other people and experience loneliness much more often. Thus, alienation is related to lower subjective and psychological well-being. The relationship between subjective experience of alienation and behavioral indicators of adaptation and productivity is yet to be investigated.

The correlations with other variables obtained using the student version of the questionnaire were in many cases higher than those obtained using adult version. Although it could be caused by sampling differences, this effect is likely to result from the difference in response formats: adult version with its 101-point scale may entail lower respondent motivation, as it is more demanding to fill out, and its results might be less reliable. Social desirability is a possible threat to the validity of measurements obtained using SAQ. It is likely to be higher when the questionnaire is administered in a non-anonymous setting. Addition of a short lie scale would allow to control this effect and, possibly, to correct the scores accordingly.

Gender differences found in alienation are so small in magnitude that they can only be discovered in large samples. They are mostly caused by differences in adventurousness, which is higher for men. Age differences in absolute values

of alienation are also mostly caused by decreasing adventurousness: vegetativeness decreases with age somewhat less, and two other forms do not change. However, the structure of alienation changes with age: particularly, nihilism becomes more pronounced for mature people. Their higher share of alienation from society can be explained by the fact that older people who grew up in Soviet Union find it harder to discover values within the new system of social relationships. Unfortunately, the present analysis is only based on an Internet sample with a limited age range, which does not include people aged over 55; additional studies are needed to obtain a complete picture of age differences in alienation.

In complete accordance with Marx' understanding of labour activity as fundamental for a human being, the profession-related differences in alienation were more pronounced (in absolute values) than those related to age, gender and education. Higher levels of alienation found in unemployed people and members of professions that do not require high education are quite predictable, although it is not very clear whether these differences can be explained by difference in education levels or in levels of life satisfaction due to socio-economic status. However, higher levels of alienation found in office clerks and middle-level managers (whose socio-economic status in Russia is comparable to that of psychologists and is markedly above than that of teachers) suggest that some kinds of activity that involve personality may be less conducive of finding value and meaning in life and psychological well-being.

The fact that psychologists emerge as the least alienated professional group suggests that their case is not the one of cobbler's wife being the worst shod: quite the contrary. Most likely, their professional knowledge and self-awareness help them to pay more attention to their own psychological well-being, and their professional activity helps them to see more value and meaning in different spheres of life than an average person does. This might be especially true for existential psychologists, as our previous research suggests (Leontiev, Osin 2006). The existing theoretical considerations that alienation from work is closely related to professional burnout (Längle 2003) do not completely agree with the data, as it is well-known that members of helping professions and teachers can be particularly prone to burnout. However, the individuals experiencing acute burnout are probably less likely to visit educational and psychology-related websites and participate in online research. The relationship between burnout and alienation in different spheres of life could be a topic of additional empirical studies.

The differences between high school and university students can be explained by the fact that during high school many students experience their study activities as imposed upon them, rather than chosen, whereas university students are studying a profession of their own choice. The relationship between alienation and academic success is also to be investigated in future studies. The present data lie in

agreement with the idea of importance of satisfaction of the need for autonomy for psychological well-being proposed within Self-Determination Theory (Ryan, Deci 2002).

Future perspectives

Empirical validation of the Subjective Alienation Questionnaires is an instrumental step towards the development of a new psychological concept of alienation. The theoretical foundations for this work can be found in Russian psychology, namely, in the cultural-historical approach (L. S. Vygotsky, S. L. Rubinstein) and the psychological theory of activity (A. N. Leontiev, D. A. Leontiev), which fit well with the existential approach (V. Frankl, A. Längle). Within this theoretical framework, experience of alienation can be understood as a subjective state that reflects the more objective state of the system of relationships to the world that individual has established and is actively carrying out. By adopting and carrying out certain patterns of activity (relationships to the world that have a certain meaning) individuals can create personal meaning that is subsequently consciously represented (Leontiev 1999). Alienation is an ontological situation when these relationships do not provide one with meaning and a subjective experience of meaningfulness ensues. These theoretical ideas are detailed elsewhere (Osin & Leontiev 2007; Osin 2007, 2008), and correspond quite well with the existing understanding of meaning and alienation as emergent phenomena resulting from engagement into an interaction with the world or disengagement thereof (Csikszentmihalyi, Nakamura 2003), with a reservation that this engagement is meaningful and is guided by personally adopted universal values.

Existential analysis offers a phenomenological description of the dialogue between human being, his/her personal dimension and the world. In cases of alienation, this dialogue is disrupted or impaired. Alienation seems to be an opposite state to a fulfilled existence. This hypothesis was partly confirmed in our work with the PIL test described above, but additional studies using more complex instruments, like Existence scale (Längle, Orgler, Kundi 2003) and a wider range of populations, including clinical patients, can give more information about this relationship. More importantly, existential analysis offers not only a theoretical framework, but also a therapeutic practice of re-establishing one's broken dialogue with the world. Longitudinal studies can reveal how existential therapeutic work affects the patients' experience of alienation.

The phenomenon of alienation is multifaceted and is caused by an interplay of personal and social factors. Marx (1844/1959) believed that people feel powerless because in reality they have too little power in their hands, too little freedom, and therefore, changing the social system seemed to him the only feasible way towards overcoming alienation. But later on Fromm (1941) has shown that when people are given freedom, they often refuse to take it in their hands.

Perhaps, one possible way to overcome alienation as a social phenomenon is to work on a personal level by means of humanistic therapeutic practices, which help people to be more aware of their own lives and those of others, to make and implement their personal free and responsible choices.

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