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Psychology of Personality: Real and Virtual Context

**QUALITATIVE TYPOLOGY OF SELF-ACTUALIZATION IN
ADULTHOOD**

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Abstract

The article is centered on self-actualization in adulthood. The respondents were working people aged 20-50 (sample size 131) who were living in Moscow city and Moscow region. The method for gathering empirical data was the authors' version of unfinished sentences. During the analysis the respondents were divided into 4 groups: older/younger than 30 and men/women. Aspects of self-actualization were analyzed separately in each group. The research results showed that the group under 30 had balanced type of self-actualization. Young women placed more importance in self-actualization through family, young men – through professional growth. Future-oriented self-actualization was more characteristic of this group, it had more to do with their life plans rather than achieved life goals. Self-actualization of people over 30 was more complex. In this age group we distinguished between men and women who were satisfied or dissatisfied with their career. Women, satisfied with their social position at work, had a balanced self-actualization type. Women, dissatisfied with their career, formed a self-actualization type that we called 'pushed out into family life'. It was characterized by lack of plans for career advancement, a wish to help children buy their own residence and wish to help in raising grandchildren. Men over 30, satisfied with their career, also had a balanced self-actualization. The men, dissatisfied with their career, were characterized by 'compensatory self-actualization' with orientation towards supporting the family.

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1. Introduction

The study of self-actualization became a relevant study subject in the second part of XX cent. This impulse was created by works of A. Maslow. He became interested in self-actualizing personalities, that were quite different from other people, but similar among themselves, through works of his teachers – R. Benedict and M. Wertheimer.

He believed that a person had inherent needs and aptitudes. Some of them are distinct and unique. Healthy, moral and desirable development consists of actualization of this nature, actualization of one's capabilities. The inner nature, in his opinion, "is weak and delicate and subtle and easily overcome by habit, cultural pressure and wrong attitudes toward it... It rarely disappears in the normal person – perhaps not even in the sick person" (Maslow, 1968, p. 127).

According to Maslow self-actualizing person could accept a life's challenge and create a worthy life, full of significance. He especially noted creativity as a general characteristic of a self-actualizing personality that was the basis of all forms of self-expression. A. Maslow created the hierarchy of human needs in which self-actualization ranked the highest.

Maslow attempted to study self-actualizing personalities through analyzing biographies of distinguished persons. A. Einstein, C. Chaplin, E. Roosevelt and others were among his subjects. Consequently the basis of biography choice was the criteria of acknowledgement of the person's achievements by society. The indicator of such acknowledgement was the recognition of the person whose biography was included in the study. A. Maslow identified a series of their psychological characteristics, consisting of 15 traits (as cited in Frager & Fadiman, 2005).

It is worth noting that not a single respondent of Maslow's displayed all 15 of these traits. In his opinion, the term 'self-actualizing people' described not a certain strata, but an ideal which they approached.

In A. Maslow's estimation, 1% of the population could be referred as such. It is no wonder that the object of the study were distinguished personalities and historical figures. However, in reply to criticism A. Maslow later admitted that not only distinguished personalities were able to self-actualize, but also some housewives. Thus, the first researcher of the topic changed the criteria of estimating of self-actualization from social acceptance to subjectivity.

Later ideas of A. Maslow were developed by researchers who created techniques aimed at research of self-actualization differences. Among them was Korostyleva (2001), who in her thesis highlighted two main spheres of self-actualization: professional and family one. We will be focusing on those two, with addition of additional one – leisure.

Self-actualization in this research is defined as "actualization of self in day-to-day life, assertion of one's own special path through life in concrete historical circumstances" (Solodnikova, 2007, p. 65).

Adulthood is defined as actualization of roles of an adult in specific society. That is the reason that working people of different age participated in the survey. Family status was not the criteria for screening the respondents.

2. Problem Statement

Due to change of criteria for defining self-actualization of a personality from social acceptance to subjectivity the question of its possibility among ‘ordinary’ people arises. It is possible to hypothesize that ‘undistinguished’ people have psychological traits of self-actualizing personality (at least, in a subjective perspective). This research was dedicated to the self-actualization self-evaluation analysis.

3. Research Questions

IN this research we wanted to find answers to the following questions:

1. How do ‘ordinary’ people envision a self-actualizing personality, what characteristics they lay stress to, what is important for them?
2. What is the subjective evaluation of their achievements and successes by ‘ordinary’ people that could be considered to be an attribute of self-actualization.

4. Purpose of the Study

1. To find out self-actualization gender aspects of ‘ordinary’ adults
2. To find out self-actualization age aspects of ‘ordinary’ adults
3. To identify self-actualization extent in its main spheres

5. Research Methods

The research consisted of a questionnaire of unfinished sentences, created by the authors. There were 131 respondents with higher or unfinished higher level of education. All of them were working at the time of research and lived in Moscow or Moscow region. 66 men and 65 women participated in the survey. The age representation was as follows: 37% were aged 20-29, 63% were aged 30-50. The data was analysed as qualitative.

6. Findings

The first step was the attempt to analyze the way the respondent finished the sentence ‘*A successful person in my opinion is...*’. The ending of this sentence allowed us to understand how the respondents envision a self-actualizing personality. Only 7% of the sample could not give an answer.

Most often the self-actualizing person was defined as someone who was able to achieve all their life goals (“*Achieved everything that [he] wanted, achieved everything, realized almost all plans*”; “*had success in goals [he] set for himself*” was the opinion that men and women expressed equally often). The second criterion of self-actualization was wealth and independence (“*has everything [he] dreamed of, wealthy*”, “*does not depend on anyone financially, owns a residence, has a good family*”). This opinion was more typical for men than for women). The opinion of the respondents was in line with the research of Abulhanova-Slavskaja (1991) who argued that an important aspect of a mature personality was the ability to define a certain line when one’s material needs were satisfied and one started to consider them to be a condition of living and aim their energy at something else.

The third place was occupied by the opinion that a person who lived in harmony with themselves and the world was self-actualized (“*independent*”, “*self-sufficient*”).

The next most common answer – “*one who has a good job and family*” - emphasized the importance of two main self-actualization spheres. The answer about self-realized person being the one who was content with themselves (“*lives in harmony with themselves and the world*”, “*content, has no regrets about the life lived*”) stressed the importance of self-actualization subjective measure. The answer about the degree of self-actualization becoming evident after one’s death meant that the respondents identified it as a procedural characteristic of life.

A number of answers could not be summed up into categories. For example, “*unenvious*”, “*has strong will, is not afraid of difficulties*”, “*happy*”, “*my parents*”, “*my father*”, “*me*”. Independence of a mature personality, self-actualization in different spheres of life, parents taken as a role model must be noted here.

The next sentence the respondents were asked to finish was ‘*The main quality that makes me feel good in life is...*’ We assumed that such quality helped with successful self-actualization. Only 7% of the respondents failed to answer. From the respondents’ point of view the success in life was defined by clear ideas of life goals and knowledge of the ways to achieve them. Financial independence was also important. Several respondents replied that a sense of humor helped them to feel good in life. It was in line with A. Maslow who considered sense of humor to be one of traits of self-realizing personality.

The leading quality by far was self-confidence. It was named by more than fourth of the sample. Men mentioned it slightly more often than women. Men also mentioned financial independence twice as often as women. Such qualities as self-sufficiency, sense of humor, health, kindness, lack of envy and conscience were found many times. Love, insolence and optimism were also mentioned.

The last sentence that the respondents were asked to finish was ‘*Someone who achieved much in life is...*’ 13% of them didn’t provide a reply. The opinions on the topic differed. Many supposed that it was happy person (equal share of replies among men and women), workaholic, lucky person. There were also answers “*it’s me, my father*”.

Other part of the respondents believed, though, that such a person can’t be happy (only women voiced such an opinion). “*An evil genius, Hitler, has no interest in people, I pity such people*”. This opinion showed that a successful person not always directed his efforts for the good of other people. Some respondents doubted that such people existed at all (“*there’re no such people in my social circle*”, “*there’s always a chance to achieve more*”, “*not self-sufficient*”). Thus, some respondents doubted positive influence of fulfilled life goals on a personality. They underlined the procedurality of self-actualization, its essential unfinalizability. Some respondents gave the following social characteristics of such people as “*oligarch*” (originated only from men), “*philanthropist, helps other, does good*” (from women). The replies that did not fall into any category were as follows: “*a person who wanted something and was able to achieve it*” (woman), “*has a lot of responsibility for people who depend on him*” (woman), “*has a right for rest and a good life*” (man).

The main conclusion from answers to these questions amounted to the fact that the respondents drew a contradictory picture of the man who achieved much in his life. Many noted positive characteristics of successful people, and some were of the opinion that these people were not always happy and can become

'evil geniuses'. In the mind of the respondents, professional roles of successful people were formed: oligarch, philanthropist. Some respondents noted focus of these people on self-actualization (wished and achieved), men again emphasized financial success after reaching which one could rest and have a good life.

The analysis of unfinished sentences emphasized the fact that men viewed financial welfare as an important factor of self-actualization than women. Women more often see this process as 'investment into others', creation of satisfactory atmosphere in interpersonal relationships. Both men and women pointed out the procedural characteristic of self-actualization with the possibility of its evaluation after the person's death. Some respondents noted humor as an important quality of self-realizing personality that A. Maslow described as important.

The second step of unfinished sentences analysis was the separation of all working respondents aged 21-50 into four groups by gender and age (under 30 and 31+).

The conducted content analysis allowed us to distinguish self-actualization types among those groups of respondents.

The main goals in life for women under 30 in family sphere were a successful marriage and birth of a child (the first or second one). This tendency became apparent in answer to unfinished sentences such as '*I hope...*' and '*Three of my greatest achievements in life are...*' All young women had at least one answer, related to family life. Those answers included "*I hope to meet a man and share my life with him*", "*I hope to have a baby*", "*I hope to have another baby*", "*I hope my second marriage will be more successful*", "*I hope my son/daughter grows up to be a decent person*". Among three main achievement of their life the young women also mentioned a successful marriage, even more often birth of a child/children. So self-actualization in family sphere was important for them. More than half of women under 30 were not yet married and had great hopes for its success.

In professional sphere young women also had aspirations for self-actualization. They planned their career. Among the answers to unfinished sentence '*I hope...*' the most frequent type of reply was linked with educational efforts or the work content ("*I hope to get a second education*", "*to learn another foreign language*", "*to find an interesting and well-paid job*"). As this group mentioned completed higher education as a condition of self-actualization in professional sphere when finishing the sentence '*Three of my greatest achievements in life are...*' Another group of answers that were also indicative of educational activity beyond profession were retrieved from the unfinished sentence '*My further life plans include...*' Some respondents expressed a wish to travel. The range varied from a desire to visit certain countries (in Europe or some exotic ones like Malaysia) to unshaped intention to travel.

The plans for self-education and travel could be viewed as an aspiration for self-actualization in additional spheres beyond family and work. It must be noted, though, that further education for young women (and other groups too) could be associated with the wish to improve their position on the labor market, to have greater success in profession, to ensure greater mobility in the society prone to radical social change.

On the whole young women showed plans for self-actualization in main and additional spheres of social relations. This self-actualization type we named *balanced*.

The next group of interest was men under 30. Their first priority was professional plans. They often finished the sentence '*My further life plans include...*' with "to get rich", "to increase my prosperity", "to go into business", "to start my own business", "to become independent". Women showed no such answers. There were also a few replies in line with "to build a career". Young men were more oriented toward financial prosperity unlike women.

That said, young men were also aimed for self-actualization in family relationships. They finished the sentence 'My biggest mistake was...' that measured the importance of family with description of family troubles ("unhappy marriage", "divorce from the woman I love", "didn't marry my girlfriend"). Although they did it a little less than young women. The sentence '*I hope...*' some men ended with "to meet a woman with whom I can live my life". Subsequently we concluded that self-actualization in family relationships was important for young men, but its significance was lower.

It was emblematic that young men did not mention further education in their answers. They probably thought that they were educated enough to build a career, earn more money or start a business.

Thus the self-actualization strategy of young men in Russia could be described as *professional and financial combined with plans for a family*.

Table 01. The significance of self-actualization spheres for women under 30

Self-actualization sphere	Description
Family sphere	Creating a family, birthing/raising children
Professional sphere	Hopes for well-paid job, furthering education
Additional sphere	Self-education, travel

Table 02. The significance of self-actualization spheres for men under 30

Self-actualization sphere	Description
Professional sphere	Career, getting rich
Family sphere	Creating a family with a loved one
Additional sphere	None

The tables 1 and 2 show that self-actualization aspects are gender specific. This process at the age of under 30 is a thing of the future (more plans than actual actions). Young women had more plans for self-actualization through family than through professional growth. They also tend to have plans for self-actualization in additional spheres in the form of self-education and travel. Self-actualization in profession was more important for young men, family sphere was less so, but still present. It is worth noting that they didn't have plans for self-actualization in additional spheres.

Now we will turn to self-actualization types of people over 31. Most often women had 2 self-actualization types. Those who had a career (had a good salary, worked in a bank, was a real estate agent) had a *balanced* self-actualization type. They continued self-actualization through family (they expressed the intention to give their children good education, waited for grandchildren, wished to have a happy second marriage, wanted to give birth to another child). They also showed a new motive in family relationships – helping the parents. Thus, family self-actualization sphere became even more important for women over 31, its contents were enriched.

At the same time they continued their self-actualization in profession. The most typical answer when finishing the sentence '*My further life plans include...*' was the suggestion of further professional development ("to continue my career", "to find a better paying job", etc.). Professionally successful women over 31 kept planning their career (with 'horizontal' and 'vertical' shifts). And they were content with their financial situation and were intent to keep it that way.

Additional self-actualization spheres were also important for them. They mentioned preserving health and active way of life. The sentence '*I don't have enough time for...*' they often ended with "*myself, my health*", "*active leisure, visits to the pool*". Thus successful working women had balanced self—actualization type that unlike that of younger women had more aspects to it.

The other type of self-actualization was identified among women who were *not able to build a career*. This applied most notably to women who worked in state-owned businesses. Inability to realize their potential in work led them to change orientation mainly to family sphere. The evident marker of lack of well-being, forced adoption of such self-actualization strategy of this group was the typical pessimistic ending of sentence '*I hope...*' (for example, "*There's no hope, I have nothing to hope for*"). Their plans for the future they linked mainly with family, more specifically with their children's families. These plans often included help to children (in purchasing their own apartment, in raising children and grandchildren among others). One can assume that they delegated their not completely successful lives to their children (they 'sacrificed' themselves for the sake of their future), hoping that their lives would be more successful.

Additional self-actualization sphere for such women was spending time at the vacation home. The sentence '*I don't have time for...*' they often ended with "*working at the vacation home, gardening, things to do at the vacation home*". Their plans for the future often included renovation, maintenance, expansion of the house.

This type of self-actualization among women aged 31+ could be labeled *pushed out into family life*. It is characterized by lack of career that could be connected to radical social changes in Russia. It made professionally not needed (or low paid) part of the respondents who were at the certain stage of their life ('adulthood'). Their occupation became 'non-prestigious', re-education demanded too much money. Thus, radical social change 'pushed' them into family sphere. Gender aspects of self-actualization among women 31+ are summed up in tables 3 and 4.

Table 03. The aspects of self-actualization among women 31+ who were **satisfied** with their career

Self-actualization sphere	Description
Family sphere	Education for children, expecting grandchildren, marry well, give birth to another child
Professional sphere	To further their career, to find better paid job
Additional sphere	To maintain good health, to care for themselves, to lead active life

Table 04. The aspects of self-actualization among women 31+ who were **dissatisfied** with their career

Self-actualization sphere	Description
Family sphere	Helping children in buying a residence, raising grandchildren
Professional sphere	There is nothing to hope for
Additional sphere	Investments into the vacation home

Men aged 31 and older also displayed several types of self-actualization. They mainly were a function of their self-actualization in the professional sphere. Men, successful in their career (satisfied with their position and income), as well as successful career women hoped for further professional growth. The range of professional strategies was rather wide. When ending the sentence '*My further life plans include...*' they planned to "*open my own business*", "*gain high status in the society*" and "*become CEO of a business*". Having already reached rather high status (real estate agents, bank employees, directors of a state business, heads of private security firm), they planned to continue to grow professionally and socially.

In the sphere of family and relationships they did not have many difficulties partly due to their professional and financial success. They pointed out that they loved their family, wife and children, they considered the birth of the children and parenting to be accomplishments. Although, such answers appeared less often than among women of the same age. Either they take a well-to-do family for granted or assumed that they still would be able to create a satisfying relationship. In short, successful men over 31 displayed *balanced* self-actualization type. Their development in family and professional spheres was well-balanced.

Men with occupation that *did not imply significant mobility or change in job description* showed a different type of self-actualization. In the sample these were for the most part state business employees and employees of the private security company. These men had no hopes for improving their social standing or enrichment of their professional duties. Some of them graduated from military academies and began their careers as military men. Problems, that existed in the army, intensified in the period of radical social change. It forced them to resign from the army, changing professional strategy, and they became guards. But many failed to reach professional growth in this field. They mentioned as their biggest mistake in life graduating from the military academy. The choice they made after school was ineffective in the social situation of post-Soviet Russia. They named as three main achievements in their lives retirement from the army, marriage, birth of children, their own residence.

These respondents compensated their souring career through setting financial goals. They noted as significant life episodes a hope for improving living conditions, helping children to buy their own residence, construction or renovation of the vacation home, purchase of a new car.

Self-actualization in the family sphere for them centered on financial support of family and children. Typically, they finished the sentence '*I could be happy...*' with "*if I could give my children good education*", "*improve my living conditions*", "*if my children were luckier than me*".

So, the self-actualization type of men 31+ with unsatisfactory career could be called *compensatory with orientation toward financial support of the family*. They could not realize their potential through work because of radical social changes that led to change of orientation toward maximum possible financial success, career plans among them were almost nonexistent.

These men as well as those with successful career considered financial their well-being and that of the family to be the main criterion of self-actualization.

However, firstly, it must be noted that in case of satisfactory career orientation toward financial well-being was supplemented, balanced by a range of goals and means of achieving them in other spheres (family, wider social goals). While in cases of unsatisfactory career achieving financial success (for the men themselves or their children) became the leading motive, greatly narrowing the range of life goals (and corresponding actions).

Secondly, peculiarly ‘male’ ending to the sentence ‘*A person happy with their life...*’ was “*when he has financial needs covered*”.

Sport could be named as an additional self-actualization sphere for men of this age both successful and unsuccessful in career. Every fifth respondent pointed out that he didn’t have enough time for sport. Health preservation and maintaining was the additional self-actualization sphere. Apparently, being healthy was one of main life values for respondents in this age group regardless of gender. The ways to achieve it, though, were gender-specific: sport for men and things less specific (“*keeping healthy, beauty care, maybe diets, nutritional supplement use*”) for women.

The aspects of self-actualization among men over 31 were summed up in tables 5 and 6.

Table 05. The aspects of self-actualization among men 31+ who were **satisfied** with their career

Self-actualization sphere	Description
Family sphere	Helping children in buying a residence, raising grandchildren
Professional sphere	Love their family, wife, children
Additional sphere	Sport

Table 06. The aspects of self-actualization among men 31+ who were **dissatisfied** with their career

Self-actualization sphere	Description
Family sphere	Have no expectations of career advancement, plan to solve financial problems
Professional sphere	Too give good education to their children so they could be luckier than their parents
Additional sphere	Sport

7. Conclusion

We identified age and gender self-actualization aspects of personality in adulthood. For the respondents under 30 of either gender had balanced self-actualization type. We presumed that it was directed towards the future (often it was a plan, not reality). Self-actualization strategy can change, depending on where their life will go (in case of setback in a certain sphere of life).

The same self-actualization type was also inherent for people over 31 y.o. with successful career. It was supported by achievements in professional and family spheres.

Women, dissatisfied with their career, displayed pushed out into family life self-actualization type. It was characterized by self-actualization in family sphere due to lack of prestige of their occupation because of radical social changes. Additional self-actualization sphere was work/leisure at the vacation home.

Men, dissatisfied with their career, showed compensatory self-actualization type, aimed at financial support of the family. Lack of career plans was compensated by many ideas for increasing financial welfare of the family. Additional self-actualization sphere was sport as a means of keeping healthy.

Working people participated in this survey, but it would be interesting to analyze self-actualization patterns among adults – successful and not in the family sphere. It could be argued that self-actualization trajectories could be even more complicated.

We hope that these objectives would be addressed in the next research.

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