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# Features of Authenticity Development in Future Psychologists

Halyna RADCHUK<sup>1</sup>,  
Zoryana ADAMSKA<sup>2</sup>,  
Mariya OLIYNYK<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Doctor of Psychology, professor, head of Applied Psychology Department, Ternopil Volodymyr Hnatiuk National Pedagogical University, Ternopil, Ukraine, [galyna012345@gmail.com](mailto:galyna012345@gmail.com)

<sup>2</sup> PhD in Psychology, associate professor of Applied Psychology Department, Ternopil Volodymyr Hnatiuk National Pedagogical University, Ternopil, Ukraine, [zoryanada@ukr.net](mailto:zoryanada@ukr.net)

<sup>3</sup> Doctor of Pedagogy, professor, head of Pedagogy and Psychology of Preschool Education Department, Yuriy Fedkovych Chernivtsi National University, Chernivtsi, Ukraine, [oliynykm69@ukr.net](mailto:oliynykm69@ukr.net)

**Abstract:** The article addresses an acute problem of contemporary psychology - theoretical and empirical study of authenticity development of psychology students. The article describes awareness of authenticity of psychologists as a professionally important integral personal characteristic based on a theoretical analysis of existing approaches in Ukrainian and foreign psychology. This construct implies respectful attention and fair treatment of oneself and own feelings, recognition of own value which makes clients feel that they are understood and accepted. This helps clients understand and accept their own feelings, learn to trust themselves, find strength to realize their own uniqueness, and acquire the ability for self-development. The Authenticity Scale methodology by Alex M. Wood, P. Alex Linley, J. Maltby, M. Baniotis and S. Joseph was used in an empirical research of the authenticity development features in future psychologists – Bachelor's degree graduates (adaptation of S. Nartova-Bochaver, V. Bardadimova). The basis for this methodology is personality focused understanding of authenticity, which has three levels: self-alienation, authentic living, and acceptance of external influence.

Quantitative and qualitative analysis of the obtained results show that most students-future psychologists have high level of awareness of their authenticity. At the same time, a majority of students show dependence from thoughts, evaluations and expectations of their environment, as well as insufficient level of understanding of themselves and their inner world, which, in turn, can lead to self-alienation. There is also correlation between empirical indicators on the Authenticity Scale and respondents' age. It has been established that with age the level of authenticity awareness, the ability to uphold own beliefs and live in accordance with own values gradually decreases.

**Keywords:** *authenticity; psychologist authenticity; authentic living; acceptance of external influences; self-alienation.*

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## 1. Introduction

The most important task of any psychologist is to create such favorable psychological conditions, under which a client feels understood and accepted, understands and accepts own feelings, learns to trust oneself, finds strength to realize own uniqueness, and acquires an ability for self-development. Thus it becomes apparent that personality of a psychologist, their ability to realize and accept own capabilities, and forecast changes in own life position also become their tools in addition to special psychological techniques. As C. Rogers notes, personality changes are possible only if a therapist acts in accordance to how he/she is, i.e. a therapist is honest in the relationship with a client and does not hide behind an artificial "facade", but shows true feelings. The feelings that a psychologist understands and experiences and that he/she is able to pass on to clients is called authenticity (congruency). According to C. Rogers, the more sincere and authentic a psychotherapist is in their relationship, the more likely a client is to experience personality changes (Rogers, 2001).

Consequently authenticity can surely be considered as one of the most important characteristics of modern psychologists. Therefore one of the priority tasks of psychological education and training is to create favorable conditions for full personal and professional development in general and authenticity development in particular.

## 2. Literature review

Nowadays, there is no unanimously accepted definition of an "authenticity" concept in Ukrainian and foreign psychology. In most psychological studies, authenticity is often associated with humanistic (A. Maslow, C. Rogers, G. Olport, and others) and existential psychology (J. Bugental, A. Lenge, S. Maddi, R. Mey, V. Frankl, and others).

Thus A. Lenge considered attitude of openness towards oneself, own feelings, thoughts, fears and joys, sadness and pain, to be a prerequisite for authenticity development. Only under these conditions a person gets enough internal space to be able to remain oneself under any circumstances. The researcher distinguishes three structural functions – central abilities of a person that are needed for self-development. These abilities are indicated from the outside, but they should be internalized in order to become autonomous, authentic and productive: 1) respect towards oneself (make oneself an object of attention); 2) fair attitude to oneself (self-perception through own experiences, intuition, thoughts and behaviors, and reaching a

degree of consistency with oneself to live up to own meanings and values - to take oneself seriously, to be open to oneself, to remain in touch with oneself); 3) recognition of own value of oneself (Lengle, 2002).

V. Frankl believed that searching for and implementing life senses allow people to become and be themselves: "... a person defines oneself. A person defines what he/she will become within own abilities and environment." (Frankl, 2016, p.142). Finding and realizing oneself requires, first of all, not only reflection on true feelings, aspirations, states, etc., but also "self-transcendence" (Frankl, 2016).

E. Osin points out that being authentic means living in accordance with own conscience, accomplishing what feels internally justified and being "faithful to oneself". Authenticity is always associated not only with experience, but with self-realization, done in inseparable unity with the outside world. E. Osin lists following existential conditions necessary for manifestation of authenticity in human existence: 1) awareness or openness to internal and external experience - sensitivity to oneself, ability to listen to oneself, discovery and acceptance of own feelings, awareness of own right to feel, experience, e.i. "to be"; 2) trust in oneself – internal consensus with own feelings; 3) ability to make decisions – correlation of possible versions of an action with own internal voice; 4) the ability to act even in a situation where there is no clear "internal evidence" – a retrospective trust in oneself, which allows a person to act on own accord, to follow own choice, to listen to doubts (Osin, 2004).

Each of the conclusions mentioned above focuses on the importance of individual development of an ability to perform self-discovery, self-awareness, and consequently self-determination. It is also indicated that personal self-realization takes place in inextricable unity with environment. However, we would like to draw attention to the fact that A. Langle, F. Frankl and E. Autumn do not fully disclose the main mechanisms, role and importance of the environment in personal authenticity development.

In personality-oriented concept authenticity is viewed as a complex integral notion, that is composed of three mutually aligned levels a) a person's primary experience; b) their symbolized awareness and c) their outward behavior and communication. Researchers A. Wood, P. Linley, J. Maltby, M. Baliouisis and S. Joseph, examine three aspects of authenticity: self-alienation, authentic living and accepting external influences (Wood, Maltby, Baliouisis, Linley, & Joseph, 2008).

Comparing recent experiences with experiences that are reflected in cognitive awareness, the researchers point out the first aspect of authenticity

- an inevitable mismatch between knowledge and experiences (“real I”), impossibility of perfect congruence between these aspects of experience, resulting in a certain level of self-alienation of an individual. Subjective experience of not knowing oneself or experience of facing the true identity is an authenticity indicator (Wood, Maltby, Baliousis, Linley, & Joseph, 2008).

The second aspect of authenticity lies in consistency of conscious experiences with actual behavior (Rogers, 1961). Authentic living implies behavior and expression of emotions in a manner consistent with a clear understanding of physiological states, emotions, beliefs and knowledge. In other words, researchers define authentic living as the ability to be faithful to oneself in most situations and live in accordance with own values and beliefs (Wood, Maltby, Baliousis, Linley, & Joseph, 2008).

The third aspect of authenticity is a possibility to accept the influence of other people – a value of living up to expectations of others. People are social beings and both, self-alienation and authentic living, are related to their social environment (Schmid, 2005). Assimilation of views of others and adoption of external influences determine the sense of self-alienation and the experience of authentic living.

Overall, self-alienation, authentic living, and acceptance of external influence compose a three-tiered personality-oriented view on authenticity. It serves as the basis for Authenticity Scale methodology (Wood, Maltby, Baliousis, Linley, & Joseph, 2008), which we have used in our empirical research.

There were several attempts to study the phenomenon of authenticity in Ukrainian psychology, for example, in the works of V. Zlyvkova, Z. Karpenko, N. Kohutiak, O. Kochubeinyk, S. Lukomska, O. Stoliarchuk, V. Tatenko, T. Tytarenko, O. Fedan and others.

Z. Karpenko defines authenticity as one of the most important integral characteristics of a person, who is at the intersection between subjectivity (able to perform free-willed, spontaneous self-expression and actualization of internal potential), ego-identity (self-identification, integrity, continuity of own life story; stable self-image that is realistic), individuality (creative hypostasis of a person as a distinct subject of living, congruence as a mutual correspondence between thoughts, feelings, and actions), self (the peak of personal growth that embodies totality, integrity of personality manifestations, unity of conscious and unconscious, "union" of opposites), and world of life (specific world created by a personality, representing the intentional field of latent (unconscious) and explicit as well as reflected and realized meanings) (Karpenko, 2006).

According to V. Tatenko authenticity should be viewed through individual subjectivity. "Being a subject of one's mental life means: 1) willing to be; 2) striving to be a human being; 3) being able to be a human being; 4) navigating the space and time; 5) creating new meanings and forms; 6) acquiring experience; 7) projecting new forms and meanings; 8) purposefully realizing the essential project of own living" (Tatenko, 2002, p. 4).

Ukrainian scholars (Z. Karpenko, V. Tatenko) view authenticity in an inseparable connection with individual's subjectivity. In this context specification of such connection needs to be clarified. It is important to understand the exact logical relation between concepts of "authenticity" and "subjectivity" indicated by researchers: identity, submission or subordination; and whether these concepts can be considered as independent and equal phenomena in individual's structure or some of them are broader and thus more supreme to others.

Many foreign psychologists (I. Vachkov, I. Grinshpun, A. Kosevska, R. Kočiūnas, S. Kratochvil, M. Liberman, S. Nartova-Bochaver, C. Rogers, M. Priazhnikov, I. Yalom and others) as well as Ukrainian researchers (O. Demchuk, A. Vorobiov, S. Kalishchuk, V. Tatenko, H. Radchuk, O. Fedan and others) consider authenticity as one of the most crucial professional qualities of a future psychologist.

In particular, C. Rogers points out the importance of establishing a relationship between a psychologist and a client that would nurture mutual personal growth and internal freedom. The researcher considers three important qualities of a psychologist in this context: congruency, unconditional positive attitude and empathetic understanding (Rogers, 2001).

J. Bugental calls authenticity an integral professional and personal quality of a psychologist, which includes being sincere with a client, willing to be oneself in direct reactions and behavior. Only a truly authentic therapist can serve as an example of flexible behavior to a client (Bugental, 1965).

Based on the premises of J. Bugental's works, R. Kočiūnas defines authenticity as a core quality of a psychotherapist and the most important existential value. He distinguishes three main signs of authentic existence: full awareness of present moment, choice of own lifestyle, and acceptance of responsibility for the choices one makes (Kočiūnas, 1999).

A. Lenge notes that "while being congruent or authentic, therapist should relate only to oneself, maintaining own limits, and talk only about what he/she is really feeling and thinking – thus expressing the real I" (Lenge, 2002, p.45).

O. Fedan also defines authenticity as the core quality of a therapist: "If a therapist play a role of a technical expert only, being detached from own reactions, values, feelings, then consulting would be sterile and its efficiency very questionable... An authentic psychologist can express their feelings and doubts if it helps counseling process. Such therapist would allow oneself to not know the answers to all questions, to talk about own experiences and feelings, to manifest own "real I" in direct reactions and in overall behavior" (Fedan, 2017, p 184).

Very convincing in this context is the statement V. Tatenko makes: "It is in mutual influences of self-sufficient objects where the real social and psychological conditions of their common authentic being arise. Each of these objects can freely create, act and take responsibility for what has been done; try to define own path and walk it while considering the interests of significant others" (Tatenko, 2017, p. 109).

Thus based on the theoretical analysis we came to a conclusion that authenticity of a psychologist is an integral personality characteristic, which manifests itself in respectful attention and fair treatment of oneself and own feelings, and recognition of own personal value. Thanks to these, a client feels understood and accepted, acknowledges and accepts own feelings, learns to trust him or herself, finds strength to realize own uniqueness and acquires ability for self-development.

### **3. Design and research methods**

**The purpose** of the paper is to explore theoretical argumentation and empirical research of authenticity development of students-future psychologists. The objectives of the study include theoretical analysis of existing approaches to determining authenticity by Ukrainian and foreign psychologists, argumentation of empirical study method for researching authenticity development features in psychology students, and analysis of the results.

#### ***3.1. Methodology***

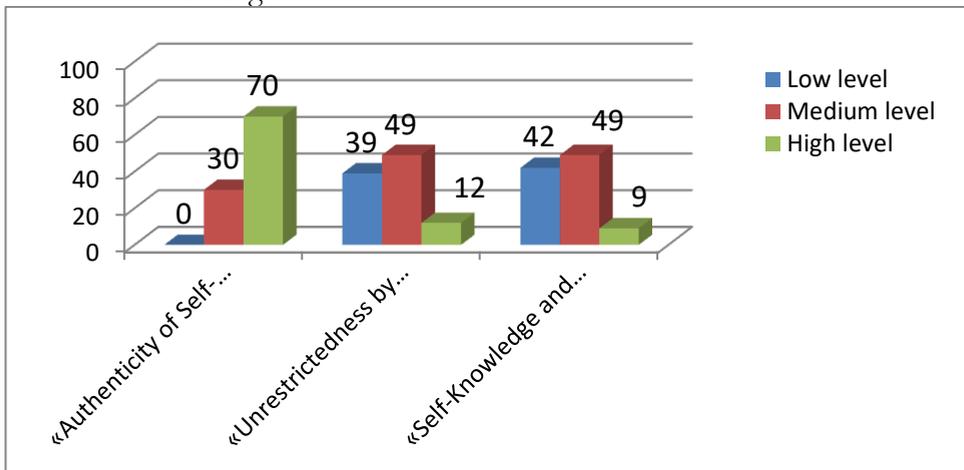
In this empirical study we aim at identifying development characteristics of authenticity of future psychologists. The study population consisted of 45 graduates of Psychology and Practical Psychology Bachelor programs at the Ternopil Volodymyr Hnatiuk National Pedagogical University, aged between 20-22 years. The Authenticity Scale methodology developed by Alex M. Wood, P. Alex Linley, J. Maltby, M. Baliousis, S. Joseph and adapted by S. Nartova-Bochaver and V. Bardadymov was used

for the purpose of the study. (Wood, Maltby, Baliousis, Linley, & Joseph, 2008; Nartova-Bochaver, Bardadymov, 2012).

The Authenticity Scale is a questionnaire that is composed of 12 statements. The respondents are asked to assess how accurately these statements characterize them on a scale from 1 (doesn't characterize me at all) to 7 (characterizes me very well). The adapted version of the questionnaire includes 3 scales, each of them covers one of the indicators of personal authenticity: Authentic Living; Unrestricted by Others (called Accepting External Influence in the original version) and Self-Knowledge and Acceptance (or Self-alienation). The qualitative data analysis is done by adding up the points on each of these scales according to answer key.

#### 4. Research results – statistical data and their interpretation

The analysis of results is presented in Figure 1. Seventy percent of respondents scored high on the Authentic Living Scale. This indicates that the majority of graduates who participated in the study show a high level of personal authenticity awareness, ability to be faithful to oneself in majority of instances, stand up for one's beliefs, and live up to personal values. However, thirty percent of future psychologists do not show confidence when defending their self-value. Sometimes it is more important for them to be accepted by others, thus they are not willing to stand up for their own beliefs and are prone to being guided by values of others and not their own when making life decisions. There were no respondents who scored low on the Authentic Living scale.



**Figure 1.** Distribution of empirical indicators across the authenticity scales in psychology students (N=45)

Almost half of the respondents (49%) show medium levels of development on the Unrestricted by Others scale. This can indicate that the majority of psychology students can be easily influenced by opinion of others, and sometimes their actions are defined by expectations of other people. Twelve percent of all respondents reported high level on this scale. They appear to be very dependent on the opinion of others, can be easily lured into doing what other people tell them rather than following their own beliefs; their actions are dependent on the expectations of their environment. A bit more than a third of respondents (39%) scored low on Unrestricted by Others scale. They are independent of the opinions, assessments, directions and expectations of those around them.

Similar tendency can be observed in distribution of results on the Self-Knowledge and Acceptance scale. Forty-nine percent of respondents who scored in the middle on this indicator are characterized by an inadequate level of understanding of themselves and their inner world. These respondents might experience self-alienation from their “real I”. Forty-two percent of future psychologists who rated low on this scale have good understanding of themselves, they feel their inner world, have a good connection with their “real I”, and don’t experience self-alienation. Interestingly, there are still nine percent of students who scored high on this scale, indicating that they have a very low level of self-understanding, inability to comprehend their inner world, loss of connection with their “real I”, and feeling of self-alienation.

A correlation analysis was performed to identify essential connections between specific indicators. There is an interesting correlation between the indicators of Authentic Living, Unrestricted by Others scales and the age of respondents (table 1).

**Table 1** - Correlation between Authenticity Scale indicators

	Age	Authentic Living	Unrestricted by Others	Self-Knowledge and Acceptance
Age	1	-,364*	,408*	,121
Authentic Living	-,364*	1	-,364*	,123
Unrestricted by Others	,408*	-,364*	1	,343
Self-Knowledge and Acceptance	,121	,123	,343	1

\*. Significance level at 0.05 (two-tailed).

It is important to note that there was a negative correlation between age of respondents and scores on Authentic Living scale. ( $r = -0,364$ , at  $p \leq 0,05$ ). This can indicate that the awareness of own authenticity, ability to stand up for own beliefs and live according to one's values decrease with age. Similarly, the dependency from thoughts and expectations of others goes up as the age increases. This was reflected in the positive correlation between indicators of age and Unrestricted by Others scale ( $r = 0,408$ , at  $p \leq 0,05$ ).

Negative correlation between indicators on the Authentic Living and Unrestricted by Others scales ( $r = -0,364$ , at  $p \leq 0,05$ ) indicates that the higher is the dependency on external thoughts and assessments, the lower is the awareness of own authenticity. And vice versa, the better a person is aware of own uniqueness, the higher is their ability to stand up for own beliefs and live according to own values, the lower is their dependence on the expectations of others. Table 1 shows that there are no significant correlations between indicators on the Self-Knowledge and Acceptance scale and age, as well as other indicators.

Therefore, based on the empirical research we can conclude, that majority of students can be characterized by high awareness of personal authenticity, faithfulness to oneself in most life situations, ability to stand up for own values and beliefs and to live according to them. However, significant number of them may be dependent on assessment, thoughts and expectations of others. Almost half of the respondents do not fully understand themselves and their inner world, which can lead to self-alienation.

While carrying out the comparative analysis of the results of our research and other existing studies, our attention was drawn to a research done by S. Kalishchuk. The researcher investigated characteristics of subjective hierarchical system interconnections between social-ethical values of a psychological activity. Authenticity in psychological profession is viewed as a subjective value. Results of her study indicate that psychology students value "unconditional positive acceptance" and possibility of personality's influence on other people during therapy (authoritative position of a psychologist). At the same time they are aware of the importance of their own personal maturity, self-acceptance and self-development as psychology professionals. Authenticity is viewed as a separate value, which serves as a manifestation of personal uncertainty and lack of confidence and could be hidden behind the mask of a professional, being it a diagnostician, a therapist or a teacher (Kalishchuk, 2011). It is important to note that the

conclusions made by S. Kalishchuk is confirmed by the findings of our empirical research.

## 5. Conclusions

Our theoretical analysis implies that authenticity is one of the most important qualities of modern psychologists. Therefore it is crucial to create favorable conditions for their personal and professional development. After summarizing the existing approaches, we came to a conclusion that authenticity of a psychologist is an integral personality characteristic that manifests itself in polite attention to and fair treatment of oneself and own feelings, acknowledgement of personal value, which makes clients feel that they are understood and accepted. It also helps clients understand and accept their own feelings, learn to trust themselves, find strength to realize their own uniqueness, and acquire the ability for self-development. The empirical findings indicate that the majority of graduates-future psychologists have high levels of authenticity awareness. However, significant number of respondents may be dependent on assessments, thoughts and expectations of others; they may lack self-awareness and understanding of their inner world, which in turn can lead to self-alienation.

Potential for future research lies in defining psychological and pedagogical conditions for authenticity development in future psychologists in higher educational institution setting.

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