REVIEW REPORT

Reviewer: Dr. Anna Stetsenko, PhD, Full Professor

on dissertation Ekaterina Vasilevskaya on topic: «Motivating Potential of Possible Selves in Academic Domain», submitted for the purpose of obtaining Doctor of Philosophy in Psychology HSE (PhD HSE)

Dissertation by Ekaterina Vasilevskaya on the topic: «Motivating Potential of Possible Selves in Academic Domain»

Relevance of the dissertation topic. This dissertation presents a sound and well-grounded investigation into an important topic of how the “possible selves” that the students develop in the course of their academic studies – the images of and conceptions about how and who they can be in the future – impacts their learning motivation, including in light of their ethnic/cultural background. The relevance of the topic is that a better understanding of relationships between possible selves and academic pursuits can help advance our models of academic motivation and its major constitutive dimensions, processes, regularities, and mechanisms.

The novelty of the results and conclusions. The reported findings can be considered to be novel since they touch upon various aspects and dimensions (or attributes) of the possible selves in relationship with academic motivation that had not been previously explored. A comparative analysis of positive possible selves and negative possible selves among Russian and American students is novel and provides interesting results.

The validity of scientific statements and conclusions formulated in the thesis. The study is based in a thorough review of the previous research on the possible selves and the broader field of research on motivation and has a reasonable theoretical grounding. The scope of this review is sufficient and
allows the author to suggest meaningful research questions that are addressed in the course of empirical study. The findings are supported by a carefully planned empirical study employing a number of methods (questionnaires) with a sufficient level of reliability as ascertained through previous research and validation. The overall methodological approach is commensurate with the study’s objectives. Further, the use of statistical analysis is sound and the interpretation of results can be seen as valid and adequate. The conclusions are coherent and match the objectives of the study so that the dissertation can be said to have a logical, coherent and well supported structure.

Comments on the thesis.
The work is well written and soundly argued. It is important that the author undertakes a theoretical discussion of various constructs related to the concept of possible selves including while touching on various conceptions of the future (across various theoretical frameworks), which builds a solid grounding for the chosen approach to the possible selves. I was surprised, however, not to see references to Markus and Kitayama works on collectivism versus individualism – the topic addressed in the dissertation -- since this is one of the core works on this topic and the author of the dissertation thoroughly relies on other works by Markus. Speaking of this distinction of collectivism versus individualism, its application could be more nuanced if the author also considered critiques of broad generalizations along these lines. Consider the following. The author writes that

> It is considered that Eastern and Western cultures fundamentally diverge: the first is dominated by collectivist priorities of interdependence (interpersonal harmony, group cohesion, social duty), while the second is dominated by individualistic priorities of independence (separate identity, personal fulfillment, autonomy) (Sedikides, Gregg, 2002). Since the 2000s, scientists have shown that the motivating potential of possible selves differs
depending on the culture (Western or Eastern society) (Unemori et al., 2004). Russia is considered to be the country between the East and the West, therefore it is interesting to study the attributes of possible selves among representatives of Russian and American cultures.

However, it has been empirically shown that cultures might not diverge so sharply within specific domains such as, incidentally in a close relation to the present dissertation, the domain of academic studies such as in schools and universities. In particular, Setsenko, Little, Oettingen, & Baltes (1995) have suggested and empirically supported the view that

When considering the development of self-related cognition, such as self-ascribed potential for academic achievement [and motivation, possible selves etc. as related constructs – AS], one could easily suggest that major differences should exist between children schooled in Western versus non-Western societies. These societies are thought to be characterized by substantially different views of the self, associated, for instance, with predominantly individualistic versus predominantly collectivistic orientations, respectively (Berman, 1990; Hofstede, 1991; Meyer, 1988; Triandis, 1989). By assuming, however, profound differences between Western and non-Western views of the self (e.g., by ascribing the self-efficacious, internally controlled individual to the standards of Western societies only), we may be underestimating possible similarities in certain domains, such as schooling.

Further critiques could be found in works by other authors such as Li (2006), who has similarly argued for caution in generalizing across cultures

In this line of work, for example, it has been found that “counter to the common view that Chinese selves are predominantly social, adolescents expressed many more individual than social goals and agency” (see Li, 2006, p. 482). Further, in reviewing existing research, Li argues that “Chinese selves [as exemplifying presumably strongly collectivist cultures - AS] may be much more complex in meaning, dynamic in process, and variable from context to context (Helwig et al., 2003; Mascolo & Li, 2004; Wang & Li, 2003; Yau & Smetana, 1996, 2003).” Note that this conjecture is highly consistent with the views and findings from Stetsenko et al. (1995).

In addition, it is not clear if the sample of American students truly represents the mainstream American culture as marked by what is assumed to be the Western individualistic ethos. Student population in American Universities is notoriously diverse (more so compared to the general population demographics) and the University in Florida where the sample had been drawn from consists largely of Hispanic students (63%), many of whom might be recent immigrants, African-American students (14%), Asian students (3.4%), almost 7% international students and only 11% non-Hispanic white students (of whom some could be recent immigrants, or at least second generation immigrants from all over the world, including
Eastern Europe, see on demographics at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Florida_International_University#Demographics. Without knowing the specific demographics of the students who were sampled in this study, it is impossible to make conclusions along the broad cultural contrasts such as individualism versus collectivism in the pattern of findings obtained in the dissertation.

This critique and suggestions do not invalidate Vasilevskaya’s dissertation and instead can serve as suggestions for future investigations and interpretations. I do think they need to be taken into account in, for example, future publications based on the present study.

**Conclusion.** Ekaterina Vasilevskaya dissertation work on the topic: «Motivating Potential of Possible Selves in Academic Domain» meets the requirements for work for the degree of a candidate of science at HSE. I consider it possible to award Ekaterina Vasilevskaya degree in psychology at HSE (PhD HSE).

Anna Stetsenko, PhD
Professor
Ph.D. Programs in Psychology/Human Development and in Urban Education
The Graduate Center of The City University of New York
365 5th Avenue, New York, NY 10016
Email astetsenko@gc.cuny.edu
http://annastetsenko.ws.gc.cuny.edu/

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