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# PSYCHOLOGICAL DETERMINANTS OF THE INDIVIDUAL'S PROPENSITY TO MANIPULATE IN INTERPERSONAL INTERACTIONS

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## ABSTRACT

The article presents results of research on individuals with different levels of propensity to manipulate in interpersonal interactions. The objective of this empirical research is to determine psychological peculiarities of individuals with propensities to manipulate and also to determine psychological factors of the personal propensity to manipulate. Key variables of our research are propensity to manipulate (dependent variable) and a range of psychological parameters that describe personal, individual and topological, motivational, value- and orientational, sense and existential fields of personality as well as peculiarities of their manifestation in interpersonal interaction (independent variables).

**Keywords:** manipulation, propensity to manipulate, Machiavellianism, psychological determinants.

## INTRODUCTION

Scientific interest in the manipulation phenomenon is related to its wide spread in all the fields of human life. Every person has manipulative potential (Shostrom, 1994, p.11; Sheinov, 2012, pp.43). "A modern person is a manipulator whoever this person is – a car seller who is persuading you to buy a car, a father of a 15-year-old son who is convinced that he knows what career his son should follow, a teenager who "works on" adults to get an expensive watch... There is a legion of manipulators. Inside all of us lives a Manipulator who continuously applies various false tricks to get this or that benefit" says Everett L. Shostrom (Shostrom, 1994, p.11).

Nevertheless, one should state that people are different regarding the level of manipulation propensity (Wilson, Near, Miller, 1996, p.285). Propensity to manipulate is viewed as a subject's readiness to manipulate other people to achieve his/her own aims (Karakulova, 2009, p.183). However, when manipulation is used as a dominating strategy of behaviour, propensity to manipulate is viewed as a personal feature – Machiavellianism (Sheglova, 2009, p.12).

Initially the notion "Machiavellianism" was introduced to denote politics that stands in opposition to moral norms and is based on the principle "the ends justify the means". This position is reflected in the views of the Italian scholar and political figure Niccolo Machiavelli (1469-1527) and was described in his treatise "The Prince" (1532).

In psychology this notion was introduced by Richard Christie and Florence Geis (1970). They say that Machiavellianism is a *psychological syndrome* combining cognitive, motivational and behavioral characteristics which are interrelated. Among key psychological components of Machiavellianism are:

- belief of a subject that while communicating with others one can and must manipulate;
- skills, specific abilities to influence others, ability to understand intentions and reasons for behaviour of other people (Znakov, 2000, p.16).

Developing views of R. Christie, Florence Geis and Tae Moon think that the content of the notion of Machiavellianism is revealed in three psychological components: in behaviour (using manipulation tactics in the process of interpersonal interaction), in attitude to others (cynicism, regarding others as weak, succumbing to suggestion, depending on society), in moral nihilism (when moral impedes achievement of the desirable result) (Geis, & Moon, 1981, pp.766-775).

Anna Ruslina considers Machiavellianism to be a behavioural strategy the content of which in the Western culture corresponds to the content of the notion "stratagemity" in Eastern-Asian culture (Ruslina, 2007, pp. 194-205). In its narrow meaning "stratagema" means a purely military trick, but in a broad meaning this notion is used to describe tricks in political, economic and criminal activity, as well as in the field of interpersonal interaction. Oleksiy Voyevodin stresses that "only one real criterion is recognized in Chinese stratagemas - effectiveness of actions in the race for power and resources" (Voyevodin, 2002, p. 7-8). Thus, the general principle of Eastern "stratagemity" and Western "Machiavellianism" is the same - "the ends justify the means".

Mitzi Ames and Aline M. Kidd define Machiavellianism as a *personal feature*, namely as propensity of a person to manipulate others using psychological tactics of influence in interpersonal interaction (Ames, & Kidd, 1979, pp. 223-228).

Machiavellianism was considered from the viewpoint of different conceptual approaches and the common ground for the majority of scholars was orientation for positive or negative peculiarities of this phenomenon. Machiavellianism was called an important component in the structure of psychic organization of a political leader (Deluga, 2001, pp. 339-363; McCann, 1992, pp. 469-479). It was revealed that personal Machiavellianism is a component of successful entrepreneurial activity (Skinner, 1983, pp.29-33). From the viewpoint of evolutionary approach (Barrett, & Henzi, 2005, pp. 1865-1875; Byrne, & Whitten, 1988, pp.1-23), as well as resource management theory (Hawley, 2006) Machiavellianism is recognized as a successful behavioural strategy to achieve individual goods.

However, a great number of scientific studies substantiate the negative aspect of Machiavellianism, in particular, disregard on the part of Machiavellians for public moral and ethical norms (Christie, & Geis, 1970; Geis, & Moon, 1981, pp. 766-775; Schepers, 2003, pp. 339-352). According to clinical and psychological approach, Machiavellianism was associated with subclinical psychopathy. This psychological phenomenon was considered along with narcissism and psychopathy within the structure of a holistic syndrome, the so called "Dark Triad" (narcissism, Machiavellianism, psychopathy) (McHoskey, Worzel, & Szyarto, 1998, pp.192-210).

Viewing Machiavellianism as a mechanism of psychological defense stresses both its possible use as an adaptation technique in unstable and critical social conditions and its destructiveness when this way of defense is expressed excessively (Larina, 2010, p.75-83; Sokolova & Ivanyshchuk, 2013, pp. 87-101).

Thus, an excessively expressed propensity to manipulate in interpersonal interaction can be considered as an undesirable personal feature as a Machiavellian is characterized as a person who treats others as a means of achieving his/her own aims and tends to ignore public moral norms. In fact, due to this his/her manipulations can be destructive for those they are aimed at, as well as for society in general. Use of manipulation creates barriers in the process of constructing subject-subject interaction and also restricts spiritual growth and development of personal maturity of a Machiavellian.

It is obvious that personal propensity to manipulation is determined both by external (family, social and cultural, social and political, situational) and internal factors (personal features, moral qualities, peculiarities of value and motivational sphere, etc.). Considering this, nowadays it is highly topical to study the factors of manipulation propensity, which in its turn will facilitate elaboration of the effective ways of psychological work aimed at manipulation prevention and elimination. These aspects are in the focus of our research.

## RESEARCH PROCEDURE

The participants of the study were 400 students of the 2<sup>nd</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> years of day-time and extramural departments from two higher educational establishments of Lviv. Among them were students of various faculties and specializations, namely: Philosophy Faculty, Geography Faculty, Faculty of Mechanics and Mathematics, Biology Faculty, Philology Faculty, Foreign Languages Faculty, students specializing in Economics and Law.

As the majority of methodologies are designed for those who are older than 18, the results of students who were not 18 at the time of the study were not taken into account. The group of participants consisted of 18 - 25-year-old students (Mean=19,68, Median=19). Among them were 209 females (52,25%) and 191 males (47,75 % from the general number of the participants).

The following hypotheses were offered:

1. It is likely that propensity to manipulate others is determined by personal, value and orientational and motivational factors;
2. The higher the propensity to manipulation, the higher the level of personal dominance that is expressed in social interactions;
3. The higher the propensity to manipulation, the stronger is emotional detachment in attitude towards other people.

The study used the following methodologies: Mac-IV by Richard Christie and Florence L. Geis (1970) adapted by Viktor Znakov (2001); Five-Factor Personality Questionnaire (5PFQ) by Paul T. Costa and Robert R. McCrae (1991) adapted by Anatoliy Khromov (2000); Fundamental Interpersonal Relations Orientation (FIRO-B) by William Schutz adapted by Aleksei Rukavishnikov (1992); Califor-

nian Psychological Inventory (CPI-462) by Harrison Gough (1987) adapted by Nadezhda Tarabrina and Natalia Grafinina (1993); Questionnaire of Terminal Values by Ivan Senin (1991); Personal Anxiety Diagnostics Methodology by Charles D. Spielberger (1970) adapted by Yuriy Khanin (1976); Motivation to Success and Motivation to Avoid Failure Diagnostics Methodology by Artur Rean (2004).

The study was conducted in groups in five weekly series, each 45-60 minutes long. As the total number of questions (closed and half-open) was 871, the methodologies were grouped in such a way that the participants were offered about 150-200 questions per series. Additionally age and gender data of the participants were obtained. Findings of the research obtained by means of standardized methodologies were processed in relation to the keys and were introduced into electronic environment of Statistics 6.0. In the process of results processing the following mathematical and statistical procedures were used: descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, comparative analysis according to Scheffé's test, discriminant analysis, multiple regression.

### FINDINGS OF THE RESEARCH

Analysis of the descriptive statistics makes it possible to state that distribution according to the Machiavellian scale is close to normal ( $K-S p \geq 0,05$ ). It means that indicators of the majority of the participants according to this scale were in statistically average intervals. Average indicator of the group was 75 points (Median=75; SD=12,9). According to the results of descriptive statistics, the participants were divided into three groups. Group 1 consisted of 54 individuals (13,5% from the general number of the participants), who had over 88 points according to the Machiavellian scale. This group was conditionally called "*inclined to manipulation*". Group 2 includes 55 individuals (13,75%) who had less than 62 points according to this scale. Group 2 was conditionally called - "*not inclined to manipulation*". Group 3 included 291 individuals (72,75%) whose results are in the interval from 62 to 88 points. Group 3 was conditionally called "*average inclination to manipulation*".

Application of discriminant analysis revealed that correctness of participants' classification according to the level of manipulation propensity is presented in the following way ( Table 1):

Group	Percent Correct (%)	Not inclined to manipulation	Average inclination to manipulate	Inclined to manipulate
		p=,13750	p=,72750	p=,13500
Not inclined to manipulate	67.27273	37	18	0
Average inclination to manipulation	94.15807	4	274	13
Inclined to manipulate	94.44444	0	3	51
Total	90.50000	41	295	64

**Table 1. Classification Matrix for the groups of the participants which are characterized as having low, average and high level of manipulation propensity**

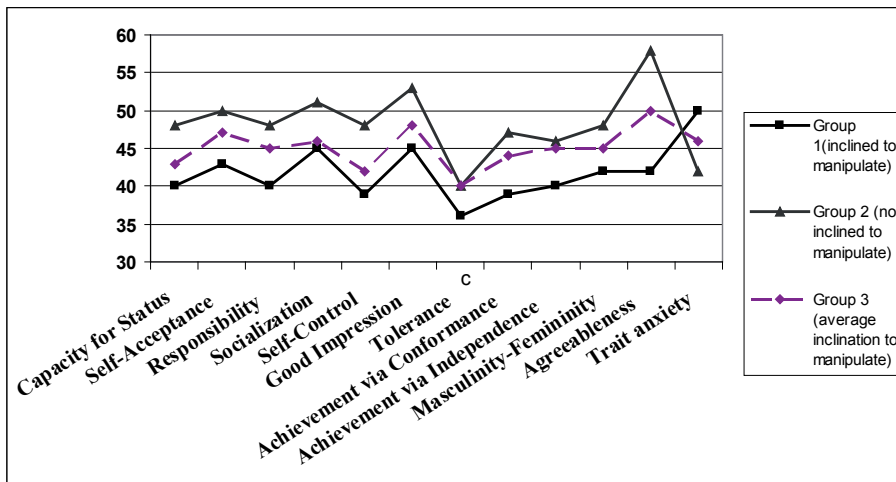
Source: Own research

The Table shows that correspondence of participants' relation to the group with high level of manipulation propensity is provided in 94,44 % of cases. Thus, classification error is 5,56%. Correctness of the participant' relation to the group with low level of manipulation propensity is 67,27% (classification error 32,76%). Correctness of the participants' relation to the group with average level of manipulation propensity is 94,16% (classification error 5,84%). General percentage of classification correctness is 90,5% (classification error - 9,5%) that testifies to the quite high accuracy of dividing participants into the groups according to the level of manipulation propensity in interpersonal interaction.

Individuals from group 1 are characterized as having high indicator according to the Machiavellian scale of Mac IV methodology (Mean=96,19; Median=94; SD=7,01). Group 2 is characterized as having low indicator of manipulation propensity (Mean.=54,56; Median=56; SD=5,49). The participants from group 3 are characterized as having average indicator according to the Machiavellian scale (Mean=75; Median=75, SD=7,17).

Dispersive analysis allowed us to single out scales where one can see statistically significant differences in group indicators. Comparative analysis according to Scheffe's test made it possible to find out differences in psychological parameters of individuals with high, low and average manipulation propensity. The results of comparative analysis of personal peculiarities of individuals with different levels of manipulation propensity revealed statistically significant differences which are graphically presented in Fig. 1:

**Fig. 1 Comparative diagram of the research findings according to CPI-462, 5FPQ, personal anxiety diagnostics**



Source: Own research

Thus, individuals who are inclined to manipulate are characterized by relatively low general competence in social interactions. In general, these people have



external orientation, though they are not too sociable. They are not confident in their social environment, have low self-acceptance, which can be seen in negative social and value attitude towards themselves, inadequate self-evaluation, low reflection of their internal world and actions, doubts regarding their abilities and capabilities. At the same time, when influencing others they rely more on their social status or position than on open and direct defense of their personal views.

It was also revealed that people with expressed manipulation propensity are not persistent in pursuing power and leader positions; they prefer to avoid the responsibility as a leader and direct competition. Also they are not characterized as being disciplined, self-organized, consistent and responsible.

People who are inclined to manipulate others have a higher level of personal anxiety that reflects a tendency to accept a wide range of situations as dangerous ones and respond to them with a certain reaction. In this case manipulation can be considered as a sort of defense reaction of an individual who is trying to avoid situations that are subjectively perceived as dangerous for self-evaluation and life in general. In this context manipulation propensity was considered by Elena Sokolova and Halyna Ivanyshchuk (Sokolova, & Ivanyshchuk, 2013, pp. 87-101).

Participants who are inclined to manipulate are impulsive, have low control over emotional sphere. They are characterized by low stability level, personal maturity, sensitivity to social requirements and conventionality. These individuals tend to question ethical and moral norms and do not try to produce positive impressions on others.

In general, individuals who are inclined to manipulate are characterized as being socially detached that manifests itself in suspicious, emotionally cold attitudes towards other people, low efforts to understand an interlocutor, lack of sincere interest in interlocutor.

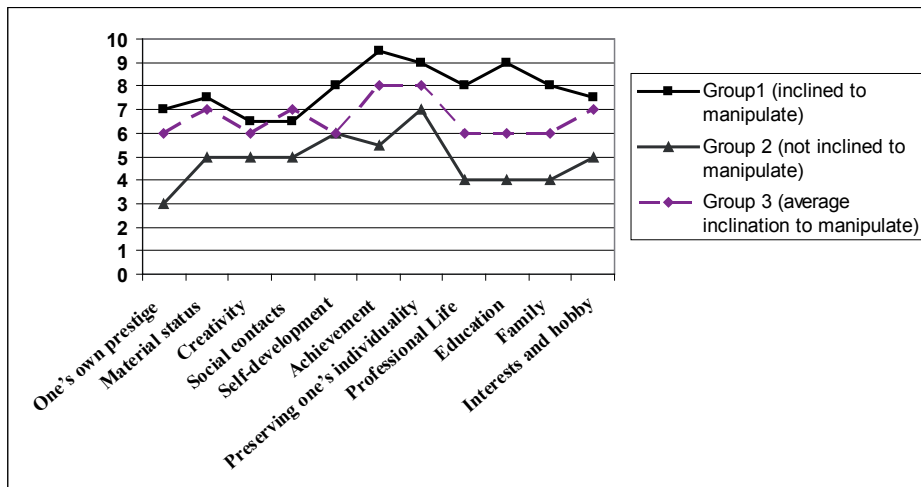
Following the polar scale "*Masculinity-Femininity*" manipulation-oriented participants are close to masculinity pole (Mean=42T). Thus, they are more rational than sensitive, task- and goal-oriented, can be intolerant of others, however, at the same time are emotionally dependent on their behaviour.

Participants with low levels of manipulation propensity are more disciplined, responsible and organized. They can take responsibility, feel better under stress and can stand pressure on the part of social environment. People who are not inclined to manipulate are characterized as having high levels of self-acceptance and self-confidence, they have well-formed systems of self-regulation.

People with average level of manipulation propensity are different from those who are inclined to manipulate in higher level responsibility, hard work, perseverance, organization and activity planning skills. From those who are not inclined to manipulate they differ in higher behavioural flexibility, adaptability, ability to quicker adapt to changes, they have slightly lower levels of responsibility, self-control and attempt to produce a good impression on others.

Analysis of value and orientational field made it possible to detect significant differences in persons with different levels of manipulation propensity (See Fig. 2).

**Fig. 2.** Comparative diagram of the study findings according to the Questionnaire of terminal values by Ivan Sienin



Source: Own research

As one can see, individuals who are inclined to manipulate show high indicators on all the scales, which reflects importance of different fields of life for a person. In particular, it concerns professional field (Mean=8), family (Mean=8), social and political field (Mean=8), education (Mean=9), interests and hobby (Mean=7,5). Those inclined to manipulate higher evaluate the importance of professional, educational, family, social and political and leisure fields of life as compared to those who are not inclined to manipulate.

Regarding terminal values, it turned out that the most important for individuals who are inclined to manipulate are "Achievements" (Mean=9,5), "Preserving one's individuality" (Mean=9), "Self-development" (Mean=8), "High material status" (Mean=7,5). Thus, they think it is important for an individual to try to achieve significant results in different spheres of life, highly appreciate when a person is independent on others, is trying to preserve uniqueness and peculiarities of one's personality, views and beliefs, one's lifestyle. At the same time, individuals inclined to manipulate appreciate opportunities for self-improvement and self-realization.

Respondents who are inclined to manipulate are characterized as believing that material wealth is one of the key conditions of well-being. For them material prosperity can become the ground for developing the feeling of one's own significance and high self-esteem. In general, persons with expressed propensity for manipulation more (in comparison with others) evaluate significance of different terminal values and life spheres. It is confirmed by the significant correlation ratios in Table 2.



Re	Ac	M/F	Ag	PR	Ed	Fm	H	Pr	Mat	Cr	1	2	3	Anx	Ae	Iw	Ind I	Ind A	Ind C	4
-0,39	-0,35	-0,39	-0,51	0,7	0,73	0,51	0,4	0,51	0,61	0,37	0,52	0,66	0,39	0,31	-0,5	-0,42	-0,32	-0,5	-0,54	0,54

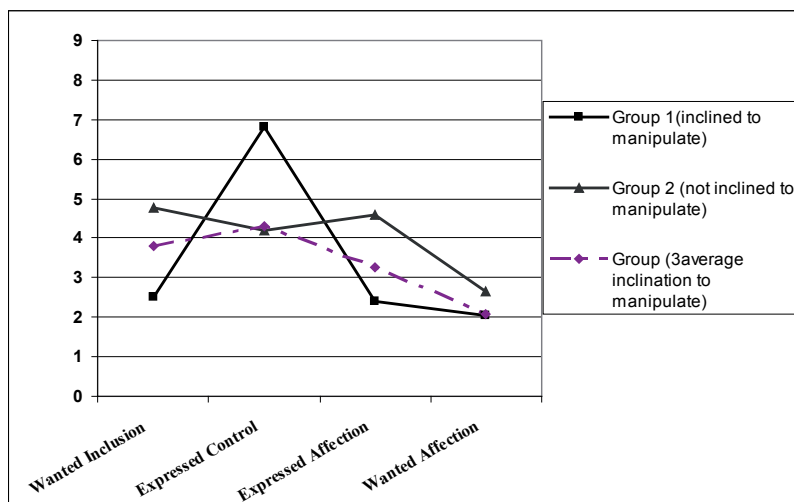
**Table 2.** Significant ratios of correlations between the scale “Machiavellianism” of Mac-IV methodology and diagnostic methodology scales  $p \leq 0.01$ <sup>26</sup>

Re- Responsibility; Ac-Achievement via Conformance; M/F- Masculinity-Femininity; Ag-Agreeableness; PR- Professional Life; Ed - Education; Fm - Family; H- Interests and Hobby; Pr- Importance of one’s Prestige ; Mat- Material Values; Cr - Creativity; 1 - Value of Self-development; 2 - Achievement; 3 - Value of Preserving one’s Individuality; Anx - Trait anxiety; Ae - Expressed affection; Iw - Wanted Inclusion; Ind I - Index of Inclusion; Ind A - Index of Affection; Ind C - Index of Control; 4 - Opposing control.

Source: Own research

Researching such aspect of motivation as its orientation towards achieving success and avoiding failures, there were no significant differences found between people with different levels of manipulation propensity. Generally, indicators according to the scale of the methodology by Artur Rean indicate that motivational pole of the participants is not clearly expressed, however, there is a tendency of motivation towards success (Mean=12). Thus, their motivation is based on hope for success and need for achieving success.

**Fig. 3** Comparative diagram of the research results according to FIRO-B



Source: Own research

<sup>26</sup> Correlation ratios between other scales and “Machiavellianism” scale proved to be insignificant with  $p \leq 0.01$

The results of comparative analysis according to the scales of FIRO-B methodology, which reflect human needs intensity in the fields "inclusion", "control" and "affection", show differences in participants with different levels of manipulation propensity (Fig.3)

Generally, the higher the individual's propensity for manipulation, the lower is his/her behaviour intensity aimed at building and maintaining interpersonal interaction, in particular, interaction that is based on affection and love (see Table 2).

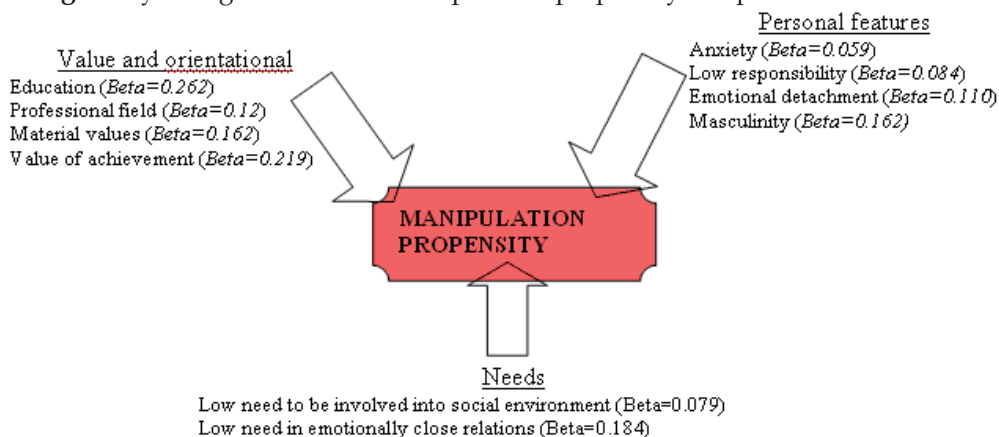
Individuals inclined to manipulate (as compared with other participants) do not show clearly expressed need to be involved in the social environment, do not expect from others emotional attitudes towards themselves, are very careful while selecting people with whom they build close relations. According to Everett L. Shostrom, such people have difficulties in building deep interpersonal contacts fearing disclosure and disapproval on the part of others (Shostrom, 1994, pp. 26-28).

The participants with high levels of manipulation inclination are characterized as having high behaviour intensity aimed to satisfy their need to control others in the process of interpersonal interaction, as compared to individuals with average and low inclination to manipulate. It is proved by the significant correlation ratio between the scale "*Machiavellianism*" and "*Index of Inclusion*" (see Table 2). They are characterized as trying to control and influence others feeling competent and responsible. This combination along with low responsibility for their actions explains why such individuals choose techniques of covert influence, as it makes it easier to prove that one is not responsible for the consequences of the decisions made and actions taken.

Growth of personal propensity to manipulate leads to the growth of conflict intensity in the field of interpersonal control. It is indicated by the significant correlation ratio between the scales "*Machiavellianism*" and "*Opposing control*" (Table 2). Expressed attempt to control and influence others is combined with non-acceptance of such behaviour on the part of others.

In order to separate psychological determinants that influence the level of intensity of manipulation propensity regressive analysis was applied which resulted in regression model with high level of correspondence to the output data ( $R^2=0,7858$ ). Thus, regression model explains 78,58% of the dispersion. Ratio of multiple correlation ( $R=0,8865$ ), which determines the level of dependency between psychological parameters and the level of manipulation propensity, is statistically significant. On the basis of the afore-mentioned the model of psychological factors of individual's manipulation propensity in interpersonal interaction was built (Figure 4).

According to the regression model, the most significant factors that determine manipulation propensity (on the basis of the meanings of regression ratios) is contribution of such factors as value of education and value of achievement. But in general, all factors relatively equally contribute to the model that shows their equal influence on the level of manipulation propensity in interpersonal interaction

**Fig. 3.** Psychological factors of manipulation propensity of a person

Source: Own research

## CONCLUSIONS

Thus, our assumption about psychological determinants of manipulation propensity is confirmed, which resulted in identification of value and orientational factors (value of educational and professional fields, life values – material values and value of achievement); personal factors (anxiety, low responsibility, emotional detachment, masculinity), need and motivational factors (low need to be involved in social environment, low need in emotionally close relations).

The research revealed that individuals with expressed inclination to manipulation in interpersonal interaction differ from those not inclined to manipulate in a range of psychological peculiarities. In particular, they are characterized as having high anxiety levels, low self-acceptance and lack of confidence in their abilities. At the same time they are not confident in and suspicious of the social environment. It coincides with understanding of Friedrich S. Perls and Everett L. Shostrom about low confidence of an individual in himself/herself and others as an important factor for choosing manipulation as a main strategy of achieving one's aim (Shostrom, 1994, p.25). In interpersonal interaction such people are not prone to assertive influence; they tend to use their social status or position as a way to influence others.

The hypothesis that expressed manipulation propensity leads to the growth of the degree of dominance of such people was not confirmed. In particular, it was revealed that individuals with expressed inclination to manipulation are not persistent in pursuing power and leadership, though it is typical of them to have high need to control social environment. It is likely that due to lack of confidence in their abilities to openly stand up for their ideas and beliefs they resort to psychological manipulation that allows them to influence and control others in a covert way, avoiding direct competition.

Hypothesis that was based on the assumption that manipulation-inclined individuals are characterized as being emotionally detached from others was fully

confirmed. The results obtained support the conclusions of R. Christie and F. L. Geis who named high level of Machiavellianism “cool” syndrome (Christie, Geis, 1970, p.285). Our findings are consistent with the findings of Olga Karakulova who noted that people inclined to manipulation have lack of interest in interpersonal interaction and detached position in the group which results in the decrease of their adaptability (Karakulova, 2008, pp. 15-20).

Manipulation-inclined individuals usually give high significance to different fields of social life and life values, particularly, material values, values of self-protection and self-development. They quite significantly try to meet social standards of success and prestige but at the same time do not think that it is necessary to adjust their behaviour to moral norms and standards of socially desirable behaviour. According to Arkadiy Prigozhyn, values and beliefs are to dissolve in the norms in such a way that they should not be reproduced in orders, tasks and stimuli, as then they become part of internal world of a person and are invariable (Prigozhyn, 2010, p.49). Thus, a number of questions arise: “Is it possible to talk about conscious orientation of a manipulation-inclined individual towards internalized human values?”, “Are these values those vectors which the manipulation-inclined individual is guided by when choosing behavioral strategy?”, “Do these values work only as landmarks to evaluate others?”... Searching for the answers to these and other questions are the prospects for further research work in the field of studying psychological peculiarities of individuals with expressed inclination to manipulation in interpersonal interaction.

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