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## Workplace: Subjective Alienation and Individuals' Health

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**Abstract.** *There are many sociological studies that have consistently demonstrated the importance of workplace alienation and its association with human health. However, nearly all research has focused on the objective dimension of alienation, overlooking the significance and in-depth understanding of subjective or covert forms of alienation. The purpose of this study is to explore the role and impact of subjective alienation on the mental and physical well-being of individuals, utilizing secondary analysis of data. The spillover effect of this type of alienation in relation to workplace behavior can significantly impact many aspects of people's lives. Generally, alienation is the feeling of being disconnected and often occurs in the presence of or presumed differentiation in social status. It lies in the discrepancy and contradiction between subjective emotion and objective sensation; it is an inauthentic human relationship. This study finds that as a subtle form of bullying, covert alienation can produce significant levels of stress, which has countless consequences including emotional, financial, and physical problems. The findings also suggest that a lack of support in helping alienated individuals results in further alienation, leading to deviant behavior. Overall, this study may be helpful to organizations in recognizing maladaptive behaviors that might cause workplace alienation. Moreover, this study can be an additional avenue to literature reviews, specifically in the area of subjective alienation.*

**Keywords:** subjective alienation, people, workplace, alienation, depression, looking-glass self, theory, spillover effect.

**JEL Codes:** J28

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### 1. Introduction

Workplace alienation has been the focus of various studies that have consistently indicated its association with individuals' well-being (Pearlin 1999; Mann 2001; Pearlin and Bierman 2013;

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Cockerham 2014). According to Oshagbemi (1996), workplace environment and the modes of workplace interaction and association tremendously affect the quality of individuals' life, particularly physical and mental health more than any other situation in society. Everything an individual does or experiences at work has psychological and physiological implications that can cast a "pervasive shadow over" an individual's whole life (Coburn 1978). Although many studies have focused on the objective form, very limited research has been conducted on intrinsic or subjective aspects of alienation. Therefore, the purpose of this article is to explore and describe this dimension of alienation, utilizing various existing literature reviews. Subjective alienation is a form of silent bullying in which the perpetrator uses uncivil, dysfunctional, and passive behavior to generate anxiety for the intended target (Roter 2019). Any type of alienation, which often arises from a lack of connection and lack of gratification from social interaction, is a very common emotional experience that exists everywhere (Amarat, Akbolat, Unal, and Karakaya, 2018; Harvey, 2018; Ifeagwazi, Chukwuorji, and Zacchaeus, 2015; Mann 2010). This can happen in the workplace, at home, school settings, or other places where people doing activities such as banking, or groceries, or even online teaching. However, the level of intensity and the frequency of its occurrence is different from place to place and from one individual to another. Alienation more likely to affect particularly those who are more vulnerable to anxiety, are in fear of being judged, lack social and family support, and are deficient in power and control over resources. Although latent alienation may not always be real, it can provoke objective behavior, generating many adverse psychological, emotional, and physical problems ranging from anxiety and depression to heart disease (Kaplan 1976; Shapin 2012; Sias 2012). The targets of subjective behavior experience being disconnected from their peer groups resulting in an inability to establish a profound relationship with the work environment or lack of desire to do so (Evgeny 2008). According to Evgeny (2008), the alienated individuals are emotionally distressed, socially isolated, and experience victimization of any actual or perceived act. This in turn leads to individuals' poor role performance, high level of depression, poor self-esteem and self-worth, suicidal attempts, and often abusive relationships (Augustyn & Vanderbilt 2010). People who are, or feel estranged may no longer have the aspiration to be creative, or even if they are creative, the creation may be in opposition to what is expected of them. For example, if a professor feels like an outsider, he or she might not have the enthusiasm to participate and provide feedback in departmental meetings. At the same time, if the professor does provide feedback, it might not be relevant to the situation.

Objectification of others has been and continues to be a major concept and a key factor in humiliating others in social settings and social interactions. Objectification of individuals subjectively can take many forms, including failing others based on their physical appearance, and diffuse and specific status characteristics. Being the target of real or perceived objectification can often take place when the other participants in the interaction are indifferent or fake towards others in situations. Presenting oneself to others, if indifferent, involves mostly superficial acting and usually lacks explicit feeling and emotion



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(Hochschild 1979). Cockerham (2014) states that workplace intentional objectification is a process of minimizing the status of another and lessening the individual to an object. The goal of objectification for whatever the reason, is to alienate others in situations. Alienation takes many forms and shapes such as shunning, cutting off all interaction, depersonalization, discontinuing communication, and manifesting ignorant behavior (Sias 2012; Zahavi 2006). The individual who feels subjectively rejected develops a sense of seclusion, subordination, and oppression; including economic oppression (Ross and Mirowsky 2009). Alienation, particularly in the subjective form might be the result of others' behavior. This might also be instigated by one's own fallacy of self-perception and misconception of another's conduct. To better understand subjective behavior and its emotional outcome in situations, utilizing a sociological theory can be helpful.

## 2. Theory

Although there may be many sociological theories that can be applied to explain subjective alienation in the workplace. I believe "Looking Glass-Self" by Charles Horton Cooley, which also is among the key foundation of symbolic interaction theory, can potentially be helpful to guide this study. This conceptual framework provides a better understanding and can explain how the definition of a situation might impact perception and how perception might influence the reality of a situation. More often, people interact according to how they perceive, understand, and give meaning to the situation in interactions. Situations entail gestures in a specific context as a particular and a complete dialogue that can be persuasive in how people interpret and comprehend and adjudicate the situation (Shrauger and Schoeneman 1979; Hewitt and Shulman 2011). Gestures real or perceived can be understood by employing Cooley's "looking-glass self". According to Cooley (1926), people's ideas of themselves have three principal elements including the imagination of how one appears to the other; the imagination of how the individual is viewed or judged, and finally, what the individual sees in his or her imagination about how he is perceived or judged by the other. This would lead individuals to some sort of self-feeling, pride, or embarrassment. Since perception of oneself plays a significant role in one's self-image, self-esteem, and self-concept, those who have low self-esteem or feel insecure are more vulnerable to the appraisal of others in situations (Frank and Gecas 1992). If self-evaluation, based on the perception of other's judgment is negative, then the individual would be more likely to distance himself from the other, leading to more isolation.

Interpreting and knowing specific behaviors in specific situations, which substantially impact an individual's well-being requires both objective (skills), and subjective or social knowledge. Both subjective and objective knowledge are interdependent of one another. According to Cooley (1926), social knowledge requires "verstehen", the ability to interpret and understand an action that does not



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take place physically through doing systematic, careful reading, and research. Regarding subjective alienation, social knowledge is needed in understanding gestures in social situations. The power of understanding, which mainly originates from social knowledge, is composed of many elements including one's experience, status, cultural background, and personality. Thus, if an individual lacks social knowledge to interpret gestures or symbols in situations, they may have a misconception, leading to negative sentiment and self-alienation (Blumer 1968; Hewitt and Shulman 2011). Frank and Gecas (1992) and Charon (1995) state that the ability of interpretation and understanding of perceived or actual responses of others depends on the predisposition that is brought to the situation. In addition to the predisposition, an individual's memories, experiences, and expectations play a significant role in the process of personal feelings. For example, it might be more common for an individual who has experienced adverse behavior from previous social and workplace settings to have a lower level of tolerance and at the same time, a greater level of stress when interacting with others. Charon (1995), Hewitt and Shulman (2011), Auguste and Lee (2014) emphasize that the lower the individual's expectations and higher experience in social interaction, the less likely the individual is to react negatively to the behavior or gesture of others. For example, if an individual defines the situation in interaction positively, he or she would feel more integrated and less estranged. Thus, considering looking-glass self, behavior in the workplace can be real or falsified, depending on how each individual displays and executes the conduct. According to Charon (1995), there are times that people do not like others as associates. Hence, they establish a perception related goals, reason the relevant issues, apply past experiences, consider the impact of the decision on self and others, decide upon the proper line of actions, and finally, create the conditions to carry out those actions. This account by Charon (1995) can be applied to explain, particularly the actor who initiates the act through gestures, to alienate the unlikeable individual in interaction.

Cooley (1926) and Thomas (1951) state that people realize and respond to behavior in situations through the creation of their own ideas of reality. Accordingly, if people understand themselves through their own constructed reality, then one can infer that people's perceptions of a gesture or an incitement can be "false positive", where the individual perceives things that are not there or true. So, these people may misinterpret and infer gestures in situations incorrectly, or they may not! Of course, individuals from different cultural backgrounds may differ greatly in their definition of behavior. In the context of such uncertainty, interpretation of behaviors are generally left to the recipient or target of the act to define what constitutes those behaviors. This is why care needs to be taken when dealing with subjectivity.



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### 3. Subjective alienation

The concept of alienation in relation to powerlessness, subordination, and worthlessness is originated in the work of Karl Marx, the relationship of workers to their own products. Alienation for Marx was a social evil created by social order to overregulate and limit people from their own natural desires for autonomy and individuation. Even though the concept of alienation is associated with the work of Marx, its inherent themes of people's deprivation and suffering, personal degradation, and social malaise can also be found in Durkheim's concept of anomie, the Max Weber's iron cage, the overreaching objectivism of George Simmel, looking-glass self of Cooley, and definition of the situation by W.I. Thomas (Nisbet 1966; Hewitt and Shulman 2011). Although all social scientists have different perspectives on alienation, they all share the notion that any form of alienation leads to loss of self or the loss relation with others. Alienation as the consequence of social relations is defined as feelings of dehumanization, disconnectedness, disintegration, despair, self-estrangement, disassociation, and being isolated from social settings or activities in which individual views his/her relationships from social context as no longer tenable (Lukes 1967; Bronfenbrenner 1979; Mann 2010; Harvey 2018. According to Mann (2010), alienation sets off the absence of a meaningful relationship between one's status, identification, social relationships, lifestyle, and work. Alienation, traditionally, has been defined in measurable terms such as those set off by aggression, insult, and offensive verbal or physical behaviors. On the other hand, the subjective dimension of alienation, which is a form of bullying and often rooted in hypocrisy has not received adequate consideration. So, what is subjective alienation and what are the causes and the consequences?

Generally, subjective alienation as an emotional condition and as the cognitive link between the social environment and psychological distress refers to the failure of the natural interconnection among individuals from social settings (Kinney 2012; Kalekin-Fishman 2006). The alienated individuals see their interactions and relationships in the social context as no longer reasonable (Kalekin-Fishman 2006; Ross and Mirowsky 2009; Hochschild 1979). It is the objective and subjective feeling of isolation, unhappiness, lack of involvement, or only instrumental involvement with work and with others (Kalekin-Fishman 2006; Ritzer and Stepnisky 2014; Hochschild 1983; Bronfenbrenner 1979). Subjective alienation can be defined as an invisible and implicit feeling of being detached and distanced from others and institutional structure as a result of either real or perceived behavior of others. Kinney (2012) defines subjective alienation as an indirect and subtle form of alienation, which often occurs external to, or independent of the victim's knowledge. Kinney (2012) maintains that when subjective consciousness and behavior is at odds with objective and visible behavior, people often experience alienation. Ross and Mirowsky (2009) and Hochschild (1979) describe subjective alienation as when an individual is being presented as an object, but invisible and out of mind by others surrounding the individual. Here, neither the interaction nor the communication associated with the behavior of others is authentic, but rather



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embedded in contradiction and hypocrisy, or merely misinterpreted by the individual. Depending on the context and the content of the interactions, behavior, and gesture in the workplace is complex that can be authentic, unintentional, or purposeful, superficial, fake, and intentional. Hochschild (1979) and Hewitt and Shulman (2011) refer to surficial and fake acting as feelings of performing for public display and define authentic behavior as deep acting feeling that are internally consistent with external behavior; it is based in deep-seated emotion. This is analogous to what Goffman termed “back and front stage” performance. Whatever the course and the purpose of behavior, people tend to perceive, interpret, and act towards the conduct based on their own given meanings to the interaction in the situation (Kaplan 1976; Hochschild 1983; Hewitt and Shulman 2011). The act which starts with impulses originated in internal feelings, and what is most important is the overt portion of the act; the external manifestation of inner feelings and internal process. If an individual is interacting with others does not consume the act or digest the information, s/he will be more likely disturbed in the situation. According to Cooley (1926), Shrauger and Schoeneman (1979), Barbalet (2002), Zahavi (2006), and Komatsu (2012), to evade being disturbed in a situation, one needs to know that “self” is not an internal entity and the mind operates by combining subjective emotions and objective sensation. One also needs to realize that the external forces more often affect, alter, and even replace internal feelings.

Subjective alienation in relation to the work environment is about “emotive dissonance”; displaying emotion that lacks consistency with what people feel internal. It is the outcome of who one really is and how one really acts. Of course, the actuality or authenticity of the actual act would only be known by time, experience, and through trial and error (Hochschild, 1979, 1983; Mirowsky and Ross 2009). As Simmel stated (cited in Ritzer & Stepnisky 2014), subjectivity often bears secrecy; a condition in which individuals have the intention of hiding something. Subjective alienation is tangential, an immeasurable experience, and therefore, its definition is in the “eye of the beholder”. According to Kantian philosophy, if we cannot see, smell, or hear causations, it would be difficult not only to define but to infer that some events cause others. Subjectivity is synthetic knowledge and an interpretation of probability. As Pusey (1987, p. 25) states, “I cannot understand you and I have no knowledge about you unless I can enter your experience in a way that allows me to understand what you mean.” In alignment with Pusey’s argument, Zahavi (2006) states that the human mind is subjective and can only be understood by inhabiting an environment that is necessary to share with others. This would facilitate the validation of subjectivity by seeing actions and gestures, spotting facial expressions and postures, and by noticing discrepancies in telling and doing. Of course, one needs to be attentive in using bodily behavior and gestures to evaluate certain actions in certain situations. This is because the body of one individual does not necessarily resemble that of another, and direct access to another person’s mind is impractical. People infer and assume others’ frames of mind most often based on what they have experienced



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themselves. Since subjectivity is internal, private, and is based on one's viewpoint, assumptions, conviction, and perception, it needs very careful interpretation and consideration.

#### 4. Causes

In addition to contradictions, discrepancy, and fakeness in-group relationships, the causes, and feelings of being subjectively alienated are multifaceted and have many dimensions. Since it plays a major role in people's life, particularly their health, it is helpful to realize why such behaviors occur in the workplace. Generally, people themselves can contribute to their own alienation by the fallacy or error in reasoning and misinterpretation of gestures in situations. The fallacy of interpretation or "miscomputation" can further be explained by utilizing the ideas of Robert Merton's "self-fulfilling prophecy", Thomas's theory of the "definition of the situation" and Charles Horton Cooley's "Looking glass-self", which is used to guide this study. The term self-fulfilling prophecy is used to explain a false definition of the situation evoking a new behavior which makes the original false conception true (Merton 1948, p. 477). Accordingly, a belief may come true if people already think and act as if it is true. Based on the notion of self-fulfilling prophecy, individuals in the workplace may misinterpret and misunderstand an act as a result of misconceptions, creating a reality that can only be ideal to themselves, but not really in actuality. According to Thomas and Thomas (1928), "if men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences. In other words, people's actions are the result of interpretation in situations. This is closely related to what Merton expressed when discussing "self-fulfilling prophecy". In alignment with Thomas and Thomas, Cooley (1926) states that people realize and respond to behavior in situations through the creation of their own ideas of reality. Consequently, if people understand themselves through their own constructed reality, then one can infer that people's perception of a gesture or an incitement can be a "false positive", where the individual perceives things that are not there or true (Shapin 2012; Thomas and Thomas, 1928; Cooley 1926). Thus, people who are, or think that are subjectively alienated in the workplace may indeed infer the gesture in situations incorrectly, or may not! If an individual in an interaction perceives the other person's gesture and behavior as fake and deceptive, that idea would become part of their reality. Of course, not all gestures and actions in a situation are the result of fallacy in misinterpretation, they can be real and purposeful. The factors that play a part in the subjective alienation of an individual in the workplace are multidimensional, including but not limited to: scapegoating, individual experience and status characteristics, and incompetency and favoritism by administration and supervisors.

The scapegoat is the practice of trying to single out an individual or individuals by those who themselves more often feel subordinate and experience powerlessness and disadvantages as do the targets/ victims (Merton 1948; Wright, Hoffman, and Grove 1988). This is often related to either fitting in or making



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some people pleased. The scapegoat, the person who is violated, is often used as a tool by perpetrators to justify their own failures; seeking to maximize their own subjective and objective status. Here, subjective status refers to the positive feelings and the mindset of oneself, which evidently impacts an individual's subjective and objective well-being. Objective status is one's external and visible social standing such as one's occupation. It is the conspicuous status that people identify and contemplate. Both the subjective and objective statuses are embedded in power and control that people desire to possess (Hochschild 1979; Nandori 2011; Shapin 2012). Generally, scapegoating and blaming others is a cultural universal and an epidemic of social phenomena. It is a short cut and convenience way to justify our own problems by blaming others (Joly, 2016). According to (Wright, Hoffman, and Gore 1988), it is an expression of an individual's internal personality structure and expression of external environmental forces, inducing behavior that provokes irrational and poor judgment, resulting in anxiety for the target and may provide gratification and emotional nourishment for the offenders. Scapegoating serves as a defense mechanism for those who think others have failed them, and no bit of behavior concerning scapegoating occurs in isolation (Wright et al.1988).

An Individual's personal history and cultural backgrounds such as values, customs, language, class, and religion impact their social interaction in various situations. The differences in background and membership based on cultural elements contribute to some forms of social separation and isolation in the workplace. People who predominately associate and interact with those like themselves may develop misconceptions and misunderstandings of other people's behaviors in situations. This in turn gives rise to the formation of cultural fallacy or ethnocentrism, leading to evaluating and interpreting other people's behaviors and gestures from one's own perspective. The formation of cultural fallacy would lead to more marginalization, social distance, and social exclusion. Of course, ethnocentrism, and having certain feelings and attitudes towards others are also a learned behavior; acquired in earlier life and not exclusively in association with others. Either ascertained at an earlier age, or in interaction with others in later life, the subjective alienators rely on their own misconceptions embedded in their thinking, minimizing space for the targeted individuals (Ambrose, Bridges, Lovett, DiPietro, and Marie 2010). According to Charon (1995), Frank & Gecas (1992), the process of interpretation and understanding of a perceived or actual response of others in the workplace also depends on the predisposition, individual's memory, experience, and expectation that brought to the situation. For example, it might be more common for an individual who has experienced adverse behavior from previous social and workplace interactions to be more agitated and stressed out.



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Status characteristics influence individuals' adjudication on how people are perceived, judged, and evaluated. Status characteristic is the individual's social standing and identity that influences the distribution of power, control, and prestige in social settings. According to Berger, Ridgeway, and Zelditch (2002), status characteristics are features of individuals that are differentially evaluated in terms of desirability and honor that influence group members beliefs about each other in situations. As a comprehensive concept, it constitutes both diffuse and status characteristics. Specific status characteristics, which can also be used interchangeably with achieved status, are related to an individual's ability in terms of specific knowledge, experience, and skills. Diffuse or ascribed status includes more broad traits such as age, gender, race, and ethnicity. Although both specific and diffuse characteristics can effectively influence people's expectations and evaluations in social interaction, diffuse characteristics play a more significant role (Simpson and Walker 2002). If status characteristics become salient or noticeable in the workplace, it may generate praise from some but not necessarily from all people. Thus, status characteristics have both positive and negative values. Those who perceive and present the status characteristic of others in a negative and antagonistic manner might themselves be either competitive or insecure, as they see a threat to their own social status in the same social setting. Accordingly, competition and insecurity which can also be grounds for gossip, are sources of prejudice, discrimination, and alienation. Gossip, which is a common workplace occurrence, has a chaotic quality that disrupts and harms the relationships that are critical to a healthy work environment. It is used as a social and relational aggression through manipulation, development of cliques, and isolation of coworkers Kartch and Valde, 2016). Dunbar (2004) refers to gossip as a ubiquitous phenomenon and a form of informal communication that accounts for almost 65% of people's speaking time. This quantity of time indicated by Dunbar (2004) implies that the workplace, where people spend hours and hours, is not immune to such behavior. Non-formal workplace talking which is more often aimed at co-workers, may in fact inflame people's feelings, causing social distance. Landau, Meier and Keefer (2010) proclaim that when people feel uncertain and insecure about their own existing positions, they are more likely to apply any methods to objectify others in situations and fuel their own individuals' ego.

Status characteristics generate differentiation and imbalance power relation in social interaction. The presence of differentiation, either voluntarily or involuntarily, real or imaginative, would lead to more marginalization, social distance, and social exclusion. Barbalet (2002) states that people with lower social status characteristics who feel differentiated or do not have the sufficient power in a relationship, would experience some sorts of fear, making them more vulnerable to the victimization of subjective alienation. In general, differentiation may limit or prevent individuals from achieving satisfactory needs or desires in the workplace, causing people to feel disaffected from the importance of their own qualities and potential. The feelings of having inadequate qualities result in lower self-image and self-worth, furthering social distance. According to Trimble (1987) and Frank and Geca (1992), people who feel insecure and have lower self-worth and negative perceptions of themselves are more likely to be



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alienated than those with moderate or high opinions of themselves. Simply put, the way people imagine and feel about themselves affects their perception of how they are appraised by others.

Subjective alienation in the workplace can also be related to the lack of incompetency, favoritism, and nepotism by administration and supervisors. If there is bias, indifference, or disliking of others, supervisors may tactfully or directly encourage bullying by some individuals against others. Charon (1995) and Hewitt and Shulman (2011) state that when people are faced with issues such as not liking others, they will more likely try to exclude them from social interaction and social settings. They establish perception related goals, take account of the relevant issues, decide upon the appropriate line of action, and finally, create the conditions to carry out those actions (Charon 1995; Hewitt and Shulman, 2011). In this case, the action is aimed to alienate those who are least favored to those in charge. According to Rothschild (2016), a meta-analysis of about 100 ethnographic of recorded research of the American workplace concludes that supervisors and administrative incompetency contribute to maladaptive behavior in the workplace, resulting in stress-related conditions and estrangement. No matter what the contributing causes are, the ramification of subjective alienating behaviors can have devastating consequences on an individual's health.

## **5. Consequences**

Subjective alienation in the workplace can be detrimental for many people more than any other social issues. It is the most powerful predictor of individuals' health, particularly psychological well-being (Coburn 1979). A substantial body of evidence has accumulated over the past several decades, supporting the conclusion that the workplace environment can have devastating effects on peoples' health. The effect is multifaceted and multidimensional, but it often begins with stress and anxiety, subsequently leading to numerous health-related problems (Hulsheger and Schewe 2001; Pearlin, Leonard and Bierman 2013; Weiss and Lonquist 2015). The presence of job-related stress in the workplace has been and continues to be a major concern for many people. Stress as a macro-level concept is the most commonly used term in modern-day- societies among people. It is used to indicate or elucidate various and different levels of human discomfort. As a broad concept, there are likely to be different perception, understanding, and meanings of it. However, it can be defined as a state of imbalance within an individual, elicited by an actual or perceived disparity between environmental demand and the person's ability and capacity to deal or cope with those demands (Colligan and Higgins 2006; Kalekin-Fishman 2006). According to Peltzer, Oliver, Khangelani, Wyk, and Nompumelelo (2008) and Cockerham (2014), stress also means a situation in which a person feels tense, restless, nervous,



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anxious, and frustrated from the failure of others to reflect a self-image consistent with what is intended by the person who feels alienated. Stress, as a subjective and an objective form, is related to one's location in society and has numerous serious negative spillover effects. The spillover effect can be defined as the impact of an event, or events, in one area on other areas of an individual's life.

Stress enhances the mind-body reaction to stimuli, causing fear or anxiety in the individual and often beginning with a situation that people find threatening, whether the threat is real, or imaginative (Cockerham (2014). Stress and anxiety, if not dealt with in early phases of progression, will most likely lead to depression. Depression as a major psychological disorder is defined as a condition of the brain and nervous system that causes a loss of pleasure and interest in life (Burgess 2009). According to Karp (1996) and Wright (2009), alienated and lonely individuals who experience or perceive themselves as being unwanted, deeply suffers from depression. Depression, according to Karp (1996), steals away an individual's true identity, preventing them from seeing who he or she might someday be, and replaces the individual's life with a "black hole". The impacts of stress caused by subjective alienation are numerous and include behavioral and physiological effects.

People's behavior and their conception of themselves and others are more likely shaped by their own social experience. Human social experiences are more often influenced by social external behavior or actions, internalized by individuals in interaction, and might be exhibited later in situations. The displayed external behavior is rooted in internally expressed messages that are kept in the brain. The brain as a complex hardware and writing program holds the information people experience to generate various behaviors, feelings, and thoughts (Hess, Grant, Lacasse, and Classen Nathan 2014). Although adaptability and changes in the brain might occur in response to various stimuli and experiences, if not dramatic, the information is going to be there (Hess et al. 2014). So, the experience and information that is retained by alienated individuals can be stored in their brains and would be displayed when re-thinking the loss of their "place" in the work environment. Place, according to Goffman (1963) is defined as a person's role and status set within a particular social network or organization. Alienation in general, and alienation from the "place" in particular, is the initial step toward becoming mentally ill and insane (Goffman 1963; Foucault 1967). Insanity as explained by Foucault (1967) is the inability to work and follow the pattern of a groups' life. As people become imbalanced and malfunction, they would lose their sense of rationality and are no longer able to accurately analyze and digest information in situations. According to Hulsheger and Schewe (2001), Colligan and Higgins (2006), and Cockerham (2014), isolated and subjectively imbalanced individuals are more prone to transgressive conduct and disorganized patterns of activity such as domestic violence, child abuse, road rage, and eating and sleep disorders. If the imbalanced and estranged individual does not receive adequate support to be freed from malaises of alienation and return to the level of "normalcy", further deviant behavior might follow. Deviant behavior as defined by Geddes and Callister (2007) is a deliberate action to harm oneself or



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others in defiance of societal rules and norms. It ranges from stealing, disorderly conduct, and domestic violence to substance abuse, homicide, and suicide.

A meta-analysis of the literature review suggests that workplace-related stress is associated with numerous physiological conditions including, but not limited to: cardiovascular disease, stroke, hypertension, susceptibility to infectious disease, gastrointestinal tract diseases, stomach ulcers, high blood pressure, headaches, and sexual impotency (Tausig, Michelloo and Stee 2004; Ross and Mirowsky 2009; Cockerham 2014; Weiss and Lonnquist 2015). Work-related stress is a strong predictor of individuals' psychological and physical well-being and directly influence many illnesses (Coburn 1978). According to (Peltzer, Oliver, Khangelani, Wyk, and Nompumelelo 2008), it has been estimated that about 80 percent of all modern diseases have their origin in stress-related behaviors. Peltzer et al. (2008) also noted that among educators, four of the most prevalent workplace stress-related conditions are hypertension, stomach ulcers, diabetes, and major mental distress. Of course, all stress-related consequences are interconnected, begin with the brain, and diffuse to other parts of the body. As a Kurdish proverb states: The root of all health is in the brain, its trunk is its emotion, and the branches and leaves are the body. The flowers of health bloom when all parts operate together.

## **6. Conclusion, implications, and future research**

The purpose of this study is to provide insight into the importance of subjective alienation. The study suggests that understanding subjective aspects of human behavior in social interactions and situations is important for preventing workplace bullying, prejudice, and hypocrisy which are often the grounds for alienation. Subjective alienation as a form of secrecy can turn an individuals' life upside down to the point that they feel trapped, isolated, and have no desire or reason to fight. The findings suggest that the causes of alienation are multifaceted and multidimensional. This includes contradiction in behavior, artificiality in interactions, scapegoats, power differentiation, and disparity in status characteristics. It may also be a result of misconception, self-fulfilling prophecy, insecurity, and personal identity. Whatever the cause, the consequences and spillover effect of subjective alienation are complex and detrimentally impact both the physical and mental aspects of an individual's health.

Looking-glass self-theory was adopted to direct this study. The theory suggests that the definition of a situation, whether imaginative or actual, impacts perception, which in turn, might influence the reality of a situation. The review of the literature supports the notion that people themselves can contribute to their own alienation by fallacy or error in reasoning, intuition, and misinterpretation of gestures in situations. Consistent with the looking-glass self, subjectivity is internal, private, and difficult to



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measure. It is often measured by action, gesture, posture, discrepancies in behavior, time, trial and error, and personal experiences and belief systems.

The overall framework of this study may be beneficial to organizations in recognizing maladaptive behaviors that might cause workplace alienation. This might, in turn, help the employers safeguard against potential harmful workplace situations. This can be done by implementing and carrying out effective policies and rules against those who treat others unfairly. Furthermore, it can be a good source and additional avenue to literature reviews, particularly in the area of subjective alienation. Finally, this study is not without its limitations, primarily in terms of generalizability. Since this study was approached from a macro-level perspective using a secondary analysis of data, future research should employ a more empirical approach and narrow the focus on specific workplace settings.

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