

Stress in the USSR. On the Dissemination of Health Knowledge in the Soviet Public Sphere, 1960s–1991

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ABSTRACTS

Wann wird Stress – verstanden als eine mit sozialem Wandel, Zeit- und Konkurrenzdruck assoziierte körperlich-psychische Empfindung – zu einer gesellschaftsprägenden Thematik? Die historische Forschung hat das Thema bislang exklusiv im Westen verortet: Stress als Grundgefühl eines als westlich verstandenen Kapitalismus und /oder Neoliberalismus. Dieser Beitrag zeigt hingegen, dass Stress – der Begriff kam in den 1960er Jahren über Wissenstransfers aus dem Westen in den sowjetischen Kontext – auch in der sowjetischen Öffentlichkeit verbreitet thematisiert wurde. Anhand einer Untersuchung von drei der meistgelesenen sowjetischen Zeitungen beleuchtet dieser Artikel Narrative der Stressthematisierung im sowjetischen Kontext und zeigt damit, wie Stress als Phänomen des sowjetischen Alltags öffentlich gedeutet wurde. Auf diese Weise wird die Vermittlung und Zirkulation von Gesundheitswissen im Spätsozialismus beleuchtet. Zugleich geraten bislang wenig beachtete blockübergreifende Ähnlichkeiten im Verständnis von Emotionen und Körperempfindungen in den Blick.

When and where does “stress” – a psychological and bodily condition associated with the pressure to perform – become a social concern? Previous historical research has situated the topic in the West, linking it to what is understood to be a Western type of capitalism and /or neoliberalism. This article departs from this line of research by demonstrating the broad dissemination of the topic of stress in the Soviet public sphere since the mid-1960s. Based on an examination of three of the most widely read Soviet state newspapers, the article shows how the notion of stress was conveyed to the Soviet public and thereby sheds light on the circulation of knowledge related to health in the period of late socialism. Stress, although the concept originally came to the Soviet context through a process of knowledge transfer from the West, had a life of

its own in the Soviet Union. By analyzing how the concept of stress was adapted to a state socialist context, the article points to previously underexplored cross-bloc similarities with regard to perceptions of emotions and the body.

“Rasskazhite, pozhaluista, o stresse podrobnnee.”
“Izvol’te...” (“Please tell us more about stress.” “With pleasure...”)¹

Since the early 20th century, the English term “stress” has found its way into a great number of languages and has gradually become a central concept people use to make sense of day-to-day experiences of tension and strain. As a bodily and emotional experience of pressure and anxiety, stress has been associated with numerous features of social life in modern(izing) societies such as urbanization, industrial noise, environmental pollution, overburdening responsibility at work, conflicts in private life and others. The times we live in have been labelled an “age of stress”.²

This article examines how the notion of stress was conveyed to the Soviet public since the mid-1960s and thereby sheds light on the communication of knowledge related to emotions and the body in the USSR in the period of late socialism. By demonstrating the circulation of the topic of stress in late Soviet socialism, the article substantially widens the perspective of existing historical research, which has assigned stress its historical place in the West. By focusing on the Soviet Union, my approach departs from previous accounts that have linked the issue of stress to capitalism, neoliberalism and what is seen as a Western type of modernity. As this article shows, stress, although the concept originally came to the Soviet context through a process of knowledge transfer from the West, had a life of its own in the Soviet Union.

By focusing on how knowledge of stress was related to the public in Soviet newspapers, I shed light on the ways journalists and experts from the medical and psychological fields adapted the concept of stress to a Soviet context and thereby contributed to determining what “stress” actually meant in a socialist country.³ This question is far from trivial. As I argue, stress presented a substantial challenge to a regime built on the premise of

1 B. Baranov, *Kogda khuliganiat gormony* [When Hormons Cause Mischief], in: *Literaturnaia Gazeta* 1967, 12 July, p. 11.

2 M. Jackson, *The Age of Stress. Science and the Search for Stability*, Oxford, 2013.

3 I am aware of studies that question if a socialist system ever existed in the Soviet Union. Scholars such as Richard D. Wolff and Stephen A. Resnick, for example, argue that the USSR developed into a form of state capitalism. If one followed this diagnosis, the question of stress in the Soviet Union would have to be addressed differently than it is done in this article. However, the question of the “real” nature of the Soviet system is not as central to the issue as one might think. The challenge faced by the Soviet regime of making sense of stress in a socialist context did not emerge only, and perhaps not even primarily, from reasons to be found in the structure of the political and economic system of the Soviet state. Rather, it also resulted from this state’s claim to represent a socialist order. The newspaper narratives analysed in this article should be seen as responses to the challenge of addressing stress in a social context that was socialist by aspiration and declaration. See R. D. Wolff / S. A. Resnick (eds.), *Class Theory and History. Capitalism and Communism in the USSR*, New York 2002. Also, see M. Postone, *Time, Labor, and Social Domination. A Reinterpretation of Marx’s Critical Theory*, Cambridge 1993.

optimized planning not only of the economy and work processes, but also of recreation.⁴ Therefore, for the proponents of a socialist system, the existence of stress is anything but self-explanatory: If stress was admitted to exist in the Soviet Union – and, as I will show, it was –, it was a phenomenon in acute need of explanation.

In view of its omnipresence in our world one might be tempted to consider stress a universal, essentially ahistorical aspect of human life. Historians of emotions and the body, however, have argued plausibly in the last two decades that feelings and bodily sensations have a history and do not exist independently of the concepts and terms we use to refer to them.⁵ The work of such historians as Mark Jackson, Patrick Kury, and Lea Haller suggests that this is also true in the case of stress.⁶ They demonstrate that the term, first coined in the 1920s, for many decades remained a word used almost exclusively by scientists from different fields (ranging from materials science to physiology and psychology). “Stress” only came into broader use in the 1970s in Western Europe and North America when a veritable boom of social stress awareness occurred, a boom that, in some respects (think of the discussions surrounding the concept of burn-out), lasts until today.⁷ Building on the cited studies, I understand stress here as a socially and culturally shaped experience that is subject to historical fluctuations of public awareness.

This article is based on an examination of three of the most widely read Soviet state newspapers (*Pravda*, *Izvestiia*, *Literaturnaia Gazeta*) in a period spanning from the late 1960s – the time, when Soviet newspapers began writing about stress – to the collapse of the USSR in 1991. As will be shown, by the 1970s the official discourse of these news-

4 On the ideals linked to the planning principle in the Soviet context, see M. Schulze Wessel, *Zukunftsentwürfe und Planungspraktiken in der Sowjetunion und der sozialistischen Tschechoslowakei: Zur Einleitung*, in: M. Schulze Wessel/C. Brenner (eds.), *Zukunftsvorstellungen und staatliche Planung im Sozialismus. Die Tschechoslowakei im ostmitteleuropäischen Kontext 1945–1989*, München, 2010, pp. 1–18, 2–11.

5 For an introduction to the field of history of emotions, see J. Plamper, *The History of Emotions. An Introduction*, Oxford (UK) 2015; B. Hitzer, *Emotionsgeschichte – ein Anfang mit Folgen*, <http://www.hsozkult.de/literaturereview/id/forschungsberichte-1221> [10.06.2016]. For an approach that focuses explicitly on the interplay between emotion-related terminology and concepts on the one hand and emotions on the other, see U. Frevert et al. (eds.), *Gefühlswissen. Eine lexikalische Spurensuche in der Moderne*, Frankfurt a. M. 2011. On the history of the body, see, for example, M. Möhring, *Die Regierung der Körper: “Gouvernementalität” und “Techniken des Selbst”*, in: *Zeithistorische Forschungen* 3 (2006) 2, pp. 284–290; P. Sarasin, *Reizbare Maschinen. Eine Geschichte des Körpers, 1765–1914*, Frankfurt a. M. 2001.

6 Jackson, *The Age of Stress*; P. Kury, *Der überforderte Mensch. Eine Wissensgeschichte vom Stress zum Burnout*, Frankfurt a. M. 2012; L. Haller, *Stress, Cortison und Homöostase. Künstliche Nebennierenrindenhormone und physiologisches Gleichgewicht, 1936–1960*, in: *NTM. Zeitschrift für Geschichte der Wissenschaften, Technik und Medizin* 18 (2010) 2, pp. 169–195; E. Ramsden/D. Cantor (eds.), *Stress, Shock, and Adaptation in the Twentieth Century*, Rochester, NY 2014; C. Borck, *Kummer und Sorgen im digitalen Zeitalter: Stress als Erfolgsprodukt der fünfziger Jahre*, in: *Archiv für Mediengeschichte* (2004) 4, pp. 73–83. For another important contribution to the historiography of stress see the recent special issue of *Zeithistorische Forschungen* ed. by Lea Haller, Sabine Höhler, and Heiko Stoff: *Zeithistorische Forschungen/Studies in Contemporary History*, Online edition, 11 (2014) 3 (<http://www.zeithistorische-forschungen.de/3-2014>).

7 See S. Höhler, *Resilienz: Mensch – Umwelt – System: Eine Geschichte der Stressbewältigung von der Erholung zur Selbstoptimierung*, in: *Zeithistorische Forschungen* 11 (2014) 3, pp. 425–443; H.-G. Hofer, *Labor, Klinik, Gesellschaft: Stress und die westdeutsche Universitätsmedizin (1950–1980)*, *ibid.*, pp. 382–405; J. Melling, *Making Sense of Workplace Fear: The Role of Physicians, Psychiatrists, and Labor in Reframing Occupational Strain in Industrial Britain, ca. 1850–1970*, in: Ramsden/Cantor (eds.), *Stress, Shock, and Adaptation*, pp. 189–221.

papers was no longer following a monolithic ideology. Rather, different and conflicting narratives of stress can be detected.⁸

I have taken into consideration only articles that both contain the term stress – originally borrowed from the English language, the Russian loanword *stress* gained currency in the Soviet Union the 1970s – and treat the issue in some depth.⁹ A total of 120 such texts have been taken into account. About one third of them made stress their main topic and therefore I have analysed them here in more depth. The authors of these articles – journalists, professional science writers and experts from the fields of medicine and psychology – fulfilled a key function in a process of public communication, in which knowledge of stress was imparted, negotiated, and moulded between different bearers of knowledge and the readers of Soviet newspapers.

In studying the dissemination of stress-related knowledge to the late Soviet public, this article takes up impulses from recent discussions on the topic of knowledge dissemination in the fields of history of science and in science and technology studies. Scholars such as Jonathan R. Topham, Andreas W. Daum and James A. Secord have demonstrated how moving beyond a narrow focus on famous scientists and their “high science” can contribute to a better understanding of how knowledge is produced and how it circulates in society.¹⁰ Those who, like the authors of the newspaper articles analysed here, disseminate knowledge in public do more than merely transmitting an existing body of knowledge. They select and interpret knowledge – and thus modify it – as they pass it on. Texts such as the newspaper articles analysed here, therefore, constitute an important body of sources as they provide insights into the interwoven processes of knowledge production and knowledge circulation.¹¹

8 As my primary interest lies in the dissemination of health knowledge to a broader public, I pay less attention to expert publications that addressed a professional readership. For examples of Soviet expert literature on stress, which covered a broad range of topics in psychology and medicine (both veterinary and human), see, for example, P. J. Sprincis, *Stress zhivotnykh i ego vliianie na kachestvo miasa* [Animal Stress and Its Influence on Meat Quality], Moscow 1977; *Nauchnyi sovet AN SSSR i AMN SSSR po fiziologii cheloveka, Stress, adaptatsiia i funktsional'nye narusheniia. Tezisy vsesoiuznogo simpoziuma* (13–14 iunია 1984 g.) [Stress, Adaptation, and Functional Disorders. Proceedings of the All-Union Symposium (June 13–14 1984)], Kishinev 1984; *Ministerstvo zdravoochraneniia MSSR, Stressovye sostoiianiia i preduprezhdeniie ikh vrednykh posledstviu. Ukazatel' otechestvennoi literatury za 1980–85* [Stress and the Prevention of Its Negative Effects. A Bibliography of National Literature for 1980–85], Kishinev 1985.

9 Derived terms such as “stress-inducing” (*stressuiushchii*) are also taken into account.

10 See, for example, J. R. Topham, *Rethinking the History of Science Popularization/Popular Science*, in: F. Papaneloupou/A. Nieto-Galan/E. Pedriguero (eds.), *Popularizing Science and Technology in the European Periphery, 1800–2000*, Aldershot 2009, pp. 1–20; A. W. Daum, *Varieties of Popular Science and the Transformations of Public Knowledge: Some Historical Reflections*, in: *Isis* 100 (2009) 2, pp. 319–332; J. A. Secord, *Knowledge in Transit*, in: *Isis* 95 (2004) 4, pp. 654–672; A. Schirmacher, *Introduction: Communicating Science: National Approaches in Twentieth-Century Europe*, in: *Science in Context* 26 (2013) 3, pp. 393–404. For a discussion of public knowledge dissemination in the Soviet context, see J. T. Andrews, *An Evolving Scientific Public Sphere: State Science Enlightenment, Communicative Discourse, and Public Culture from Imperial Russia to Khrushchev's Soviet Times*, in: *Science in Context* 26 (2013) 3, pp. 509–526.

11 Newer literature has also demonstrated that the dissemination of knowledge should not be understood as a one-way process that operates “from above”: The dichotomy between “active” expert “popularizers” and “passive” lay recipients has been called into question. Instead, the recipients of knowledge are now more commonly seen as having an active role themselves as they interpret and contextualize what they learn and thereby change

The Historiography of Stress

Stress is connected to questions that touch upon the very foundations of the social world. Firstly, it is linked to norms and values related to both mental and physical health. Secondly, the concept of stress touches upon the question how societies manage time. This in mind, it seems surprising that stress has not had a more prominent place in historical scholarship. In this section, I will briefly review the existing historical research on the issue of stress, pointing both to its important findings and its problematic tendency of describing stress as typical exclusively of what is seen as Western-type modernity.

A number of studies have treated stress in the context of what Lutz Raphael has termed the “scientization of the social” in the 20th century. In this process, by which the advising, counselling and norm-setting activity of experts increasingly turned to psychological and social phenomena of everyday life, stress became one of their key issues of interest.¹² Historians of Germany have convincingly linked the preoccupation with stress in the FRG that began in the 1970s to the so-called “Psycho-Boom” and “therapeutization”, that is, to the processes whereby ever larger parts of society began to make use of psychotherapy and psychological coaching and to practice relaxation techniques such as yoga and autogenic training.¹³

To explain the growing concern for stress in Western societies beginning in the 1970s, historians have also pointed to widespread perceptions of crisis, that came as a consequence of deindustrialization, the oil crises and a growing awareness of environmental problems. The rising social concern for stress, in this view, was a symptom of a post-fordist development towards neoliberal flexibility and the increasing complexity of a globalized world.¹⁴

knowledge in form and content. While this is an aspect of knowledge dissemination that is well worth exploring, it has not been my primary focus in the research for this article. See, for example, Topham, *Rethinking the History of Science Popularization*.

- 12 L. Raphael, *Die Verwissenschaftlichung des Sozialen als methodische und konzeptionelle Herausforderung für eine Sozialgeschichte des 20. Jahrhunderts*, in: *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 22 (1996) 2, pp. 165–193; B. Bernet et al., “Auf den ersten Blick quer”: Stress als flexible Regulierung und die Dis-Kontinuitäten des 20. Jahrhunderts, in: *Zeithistorische Forschungen* 11 (2014), pp. 444–461. For a broader perspective on psychological knowledge as an example of “Verwissenschaftlichung des Sozialen”, see M. Tändler/U. Jensen, *Psychowissen, Politik und das Selbst: Eine neue Forschungsperspektive auf die Geschichte des Politischen im 20. Jahrhundert*, in: M. Tändler/U. Jensen (eds.), *Das Selbst zwischen Anpassung und Befreiung. Psychowissen und Politik im 20. Jahrhundert*, Göttingen 2012, pp. 9–35, especially 11.
- 13 P. Kury, *Selbsttechniken zwischen Tradition und Innovation: Die ersten deutschsprachigen Stressratgeber der 1970er Jahre*, in: S. Maasen et al. (eds.), *Das beratene Selbst. Zur Genealogie der Therapeutisierung in den “langen” Siebziger*, Bielefeld 2011, pp. 139–158; S. Maasen, *Das beratene Selbst: Zur Genealogie der Therapeutisierung in den “langen” Siebziger. Eine Perspektivierung*, *ibid.*, pp. 7–34; M. Tändler, *Das therapeutische Jahrzehnt. Der Psychoboom in den siebziger Jahren*, Göttingen 2016.
- 14 Older labour regimes such as Taylorism and Fordism were in decline as the concept of stress gained currency in the 1970s. It is up to future scholars to explore, with a broader diachronic approach, which concepts were used to make sense of work strain before “stress” gained currency. See Kury, *Der überforderte Mensch*, pp. 223–266; Hofer, *Labor, Klinik, Gesellschaft*, pp. 397–404. On perceptions of crises in Western societies in the 1970s, see A. Doering-Manteuffel/L. Raphael, *Nach dem Boom. Perspektiven auf die Zeitgeschichte nach 1970*, Göttingen 2012; K. H. Jarausch (ed.), *Das Ende der Zuversicht? Die siebziger Jahre als Geschichte*, Göttingen 2008; N. Ferguson et al. (eds.), *The Shock of the Global. The 1970s in Perspective*, Cambridge, Mass. 2010.

The existing historical studies, for the most part, depict stress as inherently linked to what they see as Western-style capitalist and neoliberalist lifestyles. Mark Jackson, for example, sees stress as “linked historically to the processes, patterns, and preoccupations of advanced Western societies”.¹⁵ Similarly, Lea Haller et al. consider the stress-related discourse they study as an “eminently Western phenomenon”.¹⁶

This, I argue, is problematic, as it contributes to a narrative of Western singularity that is insensitive to similar developments elsewhere. By implying that stress is essentially a Western phenomenon the cited studies provide support for the notion that the West is somehow profoundly different from other regions of the world, both in positive and in negative ways. This article, by contrast, shows how a study of the ways stress was perceived and framed on the Eastern side of the “Iron Curtain” can make visible cross-bloc similarities.

This study thus contributes to a growing body of scholarship which has pointed to similar developments on both sides of the “Iron Curtain”, as well as to convergences, transfers and entanglements, in the 1970s and 1980s.¹⁷ Quite a few of the trends that historians have associated with a rising social awareness of stress in Western societies can be shown to have existed, in their own form, in the socialist countries of Eastern and East-Central Europe. The Soviet Union of the 1970s and 1980s was a modern industrial state which underwent a multifaceted crisis that shared some traits with the contemporary crises of the Western world. Here, too, growing environmental degradation and technological change brought about an increasing awareness for questions of time management and health.¹⁸ As the next section shows, it made sense to Soviet contemporaries to reflect about stress in their own, non-capitalist social and political system.

Newspapers, Journalists, and their Sources of Knowledge

The texts analysed in this article were published in nation-wide Soviet newspapers that were, with differences in degree, all close to the ideological line of the Communist Party. They thus provide suitable material for a study of how the issue of stress was incorporated

15 Jackson, *The Age of Stress*, p. 2.

16 L. Haller/S. Höhler/H. Stoff, *Stress – Konjunkturen eines Konzepts*, in: *Zeithistorische Forschungen* 11 (2014) 3, pp. 359–381, 381.

17 See, for example, C. S. Maier, *Two Sorts of Crisis? The “long” 1970s in the West and the East*, in: H. G. Hockerts (ed.), *Koordinaten deutscher Geschichte in der Epoche des Ost-West-Konflikts*, München 2004, pp. 49–62; J. Arend, *Wider das “halbierte Bewusstsein”? Neuere Beiträge zu einer blockübergreifenden Perspektive auf das Jahr 1968*, in: *Bohemia. Zeitschrift für Geschichte und Kultur der böhmischen Länder* 49 (2009) 2, pp. 445–453; M. Schulze Wessel, *Konvergenzen und Divergenzen in der europäischen Geschichte vom Prager Frühling bis heute*, in: *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 43 (2017) 1, pp. 92–109.

18 M.-J. Calic/D. Neutatz/J. Obertreis, *Introduction*, in: M.-J. Calic/D. Neutatz/J. Obertreis (eds.), *The Crisis of Socialist Modernity. The Soviet Union and Yugoslavia in the 1970s*, Göttingen 2011, pp. 7–27. K. Gestwa, *Von der Stagnation zur Perestrojka: Der Wandel der Bedrohungskommunikation und das Ende der Sowjetunion*, in: B. Belge/M. Deuerlein (eds.), *Goldenes Zeitalter der Stagnation? Perspektiven auf die sowjetische Ordnung der Brežnev-Ära*, Tübingen 2014, pp. 253–312; B. Belge/M. Deuerlein, *Einführung: Neue Perspektiven auf die Brežnev-Ära*, *ibid.*, pp. 1–36, 16–18.

into official Soviet discourses. The Pravda, issued by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, was the ideological mouthpiece of the party. Izvestiia, the second newspaper analysed here, was published by the USSR government. With Pravda it had in common that it addressed a mass audience, and that its assigned task was to “educate” the Soviet people as a whole.¹⁹ Literaturnaia Gazeta, founded in the early nineteenth century by Aleksandr Pushkin among others, was the official public organ of the Soviet Writers Association. Originally concerned mainly with literary studies, in the years following 1968 it continually broadened its thematic scope and began to cover cultural, political and social questions for the educated strata of Soviet society. Although a state newspaper, it was less close to official ideology than Pravda and Izvestiia.²⁰ The authors of the newspaper articles analysed here were either journalists or scientists, in the latter case often coming from the fields of medicine and psychology. Quite often, they were both: journalists with a scientific education specializing in publishing on certain scientific topics. Their texts are often exemplary of the high prestige of scientific knowledge in Soviet official culture.²¹ Often the texts analysed here took the form of interviews, in which a journalist would present questions (sometimes allegedly coming from the letters of readers) to a scientist. This genre of “talks with scientists” (*besedy s uchenymi*) was commonly used in newspaper articles related to stress.²² Quite often, the texts claimed to represent the latest stage of research, citing both Western and Soviet scientific work.²³ But knowledge of stress could also be authorized by referring to the work of scientists from the more or less distant past. This would typically be Russian scientists, often representing a tradition going back to the times of Imperial Russia.²⁴

19 On the political functions assigned to newspapers in late Soviet socialism, see S. Lovell, *The Russian Reading Revolution: Print Culture in the Soviet and Post-Soviet Eras*, New York, 2000, pp. 100–104; T. C. Wolfe, *Governing Soviet Journalism. The Press and the Socialist Person After Stalin*, Bloomington 2005, pp. 104–106, 122–126, 163–175.

20 Lovell, *The Russian Reading Revolution*, p. 101.

21 Andrews, *An Evolving Scientific Public Sphere*.

22 See, for example, V. Mikhailov, “Nevroz: Bolezn’ veka ili nedug lichnosti?” *Besedy s uchenymi* [“Neurosis: Disease of Our Age or Disorder of Personality?” Talks with Scientists], in: *Literaturnaia Gazeta* 1973, February 7, p. 12; N. Fedotova, *Mozhno li oboit’s’ bez stressa?* [Can one get by without stress?], in: *Literaturnaia Gazeta* 1982, April 28, p. 12; Baranov, *Kogda khuliganiat gormony*.

23 In the mid-1970s a series of articles appeared in *Literaturnaia Gazeta* that informed the Soviet readers about the work of Hans Selye (1907–1982), a Hungarian-Canadian endocrinologist that published pioneering work on the biology and physiology of stress. It seems that his work was considered a most important source on the topic by Soviet experts. See *Bol’shoi gorod – ugroza stressa?* [Large Cities. Danger of Stress?], in: *Literaturnaia Gazeta* 1972, January 26; D. Valentei/I. Lisitsyi, *Nevernyi diagnoz – Plokhoe lekarstvo* [Wrong diagnosis, bad medication], in: *Literaturnaia Gazeta* 1972, January 26, p. 13; *Neskol’ko zamechanii ob „altruisticheskom egoizme”* [A few remarks on the topic of “altruistic egotism”], in: *Literaturnaia Gazeta* 1975, January 15, p. 13; *Mozhno li zhit’ bez stressa* [Can one live without stress?], in: *Literaturnaia Gazeta* 1975, January 15, p. 13. In 1983, Selye himself published an overview of his work in the newspaper. See G. Sel’e, *Kliuch k zdorov’iu: Begstvo ot stressa* [The key to a healthy life: avoiding stress], in: *Literaturnaia Gazeta* 1983, June 1, p. 14; G. Kositskii, *Retsept ne dlia sotsial’nykh nedugov* [A Prescription Not Suitable for Social Diseases], in: *Literaturnaia Gazeta* 1983, June 1, p. 14. On Selye, see Jackson, *The Age of Stress*, pp. 78–88; R. Viner, *Putting Stress in Life: Hans Selye and the Making of Stress Theory*, in: *Social Studies of Science* 29 (1999) 3, pp. 391–410.

24 See, for example, the reference to the Russian psychiatrist Vladimir Fëdorovich Chizh (1855–1922) in P. Zachepitskii, “Nervy, nervy...” [“Nerves, Nerves...”], in: *Literaturnaia Gazeta* 1986, November 12, p. 13. Another authority

There are also cases, however, where journalists writing on the topic of stress had an area of expertise that was not related to science, specializing in such diverse journalistic fields as, for example, tourism, family policy, primary education and astronautics.²⁵ The fact that stress was written about in such diverse contexts, indicates that, at the time, the issue was developing into a more broadly discussed social phenomenon that occupied minds beyond the expert niches. While science was the most often invoked source of stress-related knowledge in the articles analysed here, they also referred to other sources or traditions when writing about stress. Besides science, the authors drew on forms of Eastern spirituality, naturopathy, Russian popular traditions (such as Banya), as well as the arts and literature.²⁶

“Stress” – A New Term Enters Official Soviet Discourse

Before the mid-1960s, stress was hardly ever written about in Soviet state newspapers. Then, in the late 1960s, several articles that touched upon the issue appeared, but only in the early 1970s did stress become a much-debated issue in official Soviet newspapers. In the early phase, Soviet journalists and experts who wrote about stress shared an awareness of the fact that it was a concept an ordinary Soviet reader of newspapers would not necessarily be familiar with. In their texts, they treated the term as a concept that the Soviet public needed to be introduced to. Thus, V. Baranov, professor of medicine and member of the USSR Academy of Medical Sciences, introduced the term in an interview for *Literaturnaia Gazeta* in 1967 by first translating it: „Stress can be translated to Russian as tension, strain, and emphasis (*davlenie, napriazhenie, udarenie*)“.²⁷ Some writers,

frequently invoked was the eminent physician and physiologist Ivan Petrovich Pavlov (1849–1936). See, for example, Mikhailov, *Nevroz*. Also, see the reference to the neurologist and psychiatrist Vladimir Mikhailovich Bekhterev (1857–1927) in E. Manucharova, *Pozvoni na pomoshch' radost' [Make use of joy!]*, in: *Izvestiia* 1982, May 10, p. 3.

- 25 A. Lepikhov, *Na soiuzakh i Apollonakh [On the Soyuz and Apollo Spacecrafts]*, in: *Literaturnaia Gazeta* 1972, June 7, p. 12; *Zhizn' – v dvizhenii [Life consists of movement]*, in: *Izvestiia* 1975, March 10, p. 5; L. Ivchenko, *Kak pobedit' stress [How to master stress]*, in: *Izvestiia* 1983, October 25, p. 6; G. Alimov, *Beregite nas na rabote i doma [Treat us with care – at work and at home]*, in: *Izvestiia* 1988, March 7, p. 2; E. Bereznitskiy, *Deti drugie, a uchitel'?* *Otkrovenno ob avtoritete pedagoga [The children have changed, but what about the teachers? Frank comments on the authority of educators]*, in: *Pravda* 1987, September 23, p. 3.
- 26 For references to banya as a relaxation practice against stress, see: A. Ershova, *S goria – V bani... [Going to the Banya out of grief]*, in: *Literaturnaia Gazeta* 1982, April 28, p. 12; S. Tutorskaia, *Pregiradi stressu [Barriers against Stress]*, in: *Izvestiia* 1983, December 15, p. 3. Also, see the reference to hypnosis as an anti-stress treatment in: S. Tutorskaia, *Gipnoz bez chudes [Hypnosis without magic]*, in: *Izvestiia* 1988, April 16, p. 6. For references to Russian literature as a source of stress-related wisdom, see E. Manucharova, *Ulybnites', Kaskadery! Kak pobedit' stress [Smile, Stuntmen! How to overcome stress]*, in: *Izvestiia* 1986, November 27, p. 6. For references to Far-Eastern and Siberian herbal medicine, see M. Popovskii, *Apteka dlia zdorovykh [A drugstore for the healthy]*, in: *Pravda* 1969, November 16, p. 3; I. Zhigailov / V. Chebakov, *Istselit dar taezhnyi [The Healing Gift of the Taiga]*, in: *Pravda* 1981, March 17, p. 6.
- 27 Baranov, *Kogda khuliganiat gormony*. Another author, in 1979, referred to “what is now commonly referred to as stress”, thereby also betraying an awareness of the unfamiliarity of the term. E. Manucharova, *Chto my znaem o bioritmakh [What we know about biorhythms]*, in: *Izvestiia* 1979, July 7, p. 3. For more examples of this kind of introductory explanation of the term, see Popovskii, *Apteka dlia zdorovykh*; I. Chernichenko, *Proidennogo ne*

such as the film critic M. Turovskaia in an article published in 1973, explicitly commented on the novelty of the term. Turovskaia distanced herself from it, describing “stress” as a kind of fashionable and foreign concept that displaced a more easily understood Russian vocabulary: “They used to say ‘experience’, now they say ‘trauma’, they used to write ‘pangs of conscience’, now they write ‘stress’.”²⁸ Typically, in the early phase, the word would be put into quotation marks to signal that an unfamiliar, new term is being used.²⁹ What one can observe in the course of the 1970s and 1980s is a gradual process whereby “stress” becomes a much-used word, a term that the authors no longer feel the need to translate, put into quotation marks or explain. “Stress” becomes a normal term of the language of Soviet official newspapers. By 1985, P. Simonov, an expert with a background in neurophysiology, wrote in the *Pravda*: “This scientific term has now left behind the stage when it was mainly to be found in specialized literature. Nowadays one encounters it almost on a daily basis in newspapers, radio, TV, and in everyday conversations.”³⁰ If “stress” became normal on the level of official language, did this mean that the phenomenon was acknowledged as a reality of Soviet life? To answer this question, one must turn to the narratives of stress presented in Soviet newspapers.

What is Stress? And where is it? Three Narratives of Stress in Soviet State Newspapers

Beginning in the mid-1960s, when the first articles that touched upon the issue of stress appeared, three narratives of stress coexisted in Soviet state newspapers. They differed in many ways, were incompatible in some respects, and overlapped in others. The fact that three distinct versions of dealing with the issue can be observed testifies to the heterogeneous character of official discourse in late Soviet socialism. We are not dealing with a monolithic ideology but with a certain (limited) plurality of ways the phenomenon of stress was framed for the Soviet public. In the first narrative, stress was depicted as virtually non-existent in the USSR, while in a second narrative its existence was more or less explicitly acknowledged and linked to Soviet modernity. A third narrative highlighted the role of the individual person.

povtoriaia [Not repeating what has already been treated], in: *Pravda* 1973, May 6, p. 3; V. Mikhailov, *Mozhno li zhit' bez stressa?* [Can one live without stress?], in: *Literaturnaia Gazeta* 1975, January 15, p. 13.

28 M. Turovskaia, *Net, v soglasii c zamyslom fil'ma* [No – in agreement with the intention of the movie], in: *Literaturnaia Gazeta* 1973, March 7, p. 8. Note that stress in the sense of “pangs of conscience” is not encountered often in the newspaper articles studied here.

29 V. Bepaa'ko, *V Vuz – Bez ékzamenai* [Admission to Higher Education – Without an Exam!], in: *Literaturnaia Gazeta* 1971, October 6, p. 11; *Zhizn' – v dvizhenii*; M. Agafonov, *Est' takoe selo* [There is one such village], in: *Izvestiia* 1975, May 4, p. 5; P. Bogomolov, *Telepaty iz Léngli* [The Telepaths from Langley], in: *Pravda* 1982, September 18, p. 5. This use of quotation marks virtually disappears in the 1980s. For one of the rare exceptions, see A. Blinov, *Soslalis' na stress* [Their excuse was stress], in: *Izvestiia* 1988, August 4, p. 4.

30 P. Simonov, *Ne perezhivat', a deistvovat'* [Don't worry, do something!], in: *Pravda* 1985, February 12, p. 3.

*"In the West the consumption of tranquilizers has reached gigantic scales."*³¹

In the first newspapers articles on stress in the mid-1960s and the 1970s the predominant narrative located the phenomenon firmly outside the Soviet sphere. The authors depicted stress as a condition characteristic of life in the capitalist West. This narrative, thus, remained within the ideological framework of Soviet Cold War rhetoric.³² The USA, especially, were described as a veritable land of stress. In a number of texts of the mid-1970s, mostly written by Washington-based foreign correspondents of Soviet newspapers, a strong link is established between American capitalism, the contemporary crisis of US-economy in the years between 1973 and 1975, and stress. Unemployment figures among the most prominent causes of American stress that official Soviet newspapers referred to.³³

In this narrative, the Soviet Union (and the socialist sphere of influence at large) were described as a more or less stress-free space. A number of articles referred to the "humanism" of Soviet socialism and described it as an antidote to stress. For example, Z. Ianushkevichus of the USSR Academy of Medical Sciences pointed out in 1976, that Soviet socialism had established "protective mechanisms that heighten the ability of the Soviet people to resist stress". Exemplifying his point, Ianushkevichus listed such (alleged) features of Soviet life as the planned nature of work and leisure, the "caring" attitude of the Soviet government towards its citizens, the resolvedness of conflicts between the individual and society, and a close relationship of the Soviet people to nature.³⁴ While this first narrative, which more or less explicitly denied the possibility of stress in a socialist state, can be observed in individual articles right until the late 1980s, it was less frequently resorted to from the late 1970s onwards.³⁵

*"Negative effects of scientific-technological progress"*³⁶

From the mid-1960s onwards, a second narrative of stress began to establish itself in Soviet newspapers, becoming regularly invoked in the course of the 1970s and 1980s. The

31 A. Tolkunov, Stress bezrabotitsy [The Stress of Unemployment], in: Pravda 1982, September 12, p. 5.

32 A. M. Ball, *Imagining America: Influence and Images in Twentieth-Century Russia*, Lanham, Md., 2003, pp. 183–190.

33 A. Tolkunov cited the work of the American medical sociologist M. Harvey Brenner to provide evidence for links between the high incidence of stress-related diseases and economic crisis in American society. Tolkunov, Stress bezrabotitsy; M. H. Brenner, *Mental Illness and the Economy*, Cambridge, MA, 1973. For more examples, see Mikhailov, Nevroz; I. Barsukov, Épidemiia samoubiistv [An Epidemic of Suicides], in: Izvestiia 1975, October 27, p. 4. For a later example, see L. Santos, Pis'mo iz Ameriki [A Letter from America], in: Pravda 1983, February 18, p. 5. For another instance of reference to American expertise on stress matters, see a 1987 Izvestiia article by A. Blinov, which cited work by the American journalist and opinion polling expert Louis Harris (1906–1991) as it touched on the widespread perception of stress as a problem in American society. See Amerikantsy sami o sebe [Americans About Themselves], in: Izvestiia 1987, November 20, p. 5; L. Harris, *Inside America*, New York 1987.

34 Z. Ianushkevichus, Kak uberech'sia ot stressa: Uchites' vlastvovat' soboi [How to protect yourself from stress: learn to control yourself], in: Literaturnaia Gazeta 1976, September 1, p. 13. Also, see Fedotova, *Mozhno li oboitis' bez stressa?*.

35 For a late example of this narrative, see Blinov, Amerikantsy sami o sebe; A. Blinov, Rabota i stress [Work and Stress], in: Izvestiia 1987, January 29, p. 5.

36 Mikhailov, Nevroz.

main difference to the first narrative was that it assigned stress a different “place” – both geographically and culturally. Here, stress was no longer externalized from the Soviet sphere. Instead, the authors began locating stress vaguely in „the developed countries“, or – in an equally vague temporal variant of the narrative – in “industrial modernity”.³⁷ B. Karvasarskii from the Bekhterev Institute of psychoneurology in Leningrad described stress in 1973 as a phenomenon of “civilization”.³⁸ In a similar vein, P. Zachevitskii, also a scientist from the Bekhterev Institute, stated in 1986 that stress had become “a hallmark of the 20th century”. An article of 1976 referred simply to “contemporary man”, who “suffers from heightened psychological pressure, at work and at home”. This “contemporary man” was described here as an inhabitant of “modernity”.³⁹ However unclear the borders of this spatiotemporal location of stress were – it definitely included not only the “West”, but, first and foremost, the Soviet Union.

For a better understanding of this narrative of stress, it is useful to consider an analogous case. Historian of science and medicine Carsten Timmermann argues that medical experts in the GDR, when confronted in the 1960s with a rising incidence of cardiovascular disease in East Germany, actually nurtured ambivalent feelings. On the one hand, naturally, the increase in heart disease in the population was seen as a problem both in economic terms and with regard to health policy. However, Timmermann also detects “secret pride” in the reactions of East German medical experts to the rising incidence of cardiovascular illnesses in the GDR. “Did it not show that the government managed to maintain a level of affluence that was comparable to the West?”⁴⁰

I argue, that a similar “secret pride” can be detected in the newspaper articles analyzed here. Just like the increasing occurrence of cardiovascular diseases testified to the economic and welfare performance of socialism in the case studied by Timmermann, so did the existence of stress in the Soviet Union testify to the modernity of its society. The occurrence of stress implied that the USSR was part of “civilization”, “industrial modernity”, and Soviet man was a “contemporary man”. This was good news in the late socialist USSR, which faced the toughening economic competition with the West. Stress, in the logic of this narrative, was a bad thing that was a sign of a good thing.

*“A competent man is totally capable of regulating his emotions”*⁴¹

When studying Soviet newspaper narratives of stress, it is useful to be sensitive to the question of agency. Who was actually “doing” things in the stories about stress that were circulated by Soviet state newspapers? For one, in certain respect, modernity itself was

37 Fedotova, *Mozhno li oboitis' bez stressa?*; V. Mikhailov, *Polezno li serdtsu besserdechnost'?* [Is heartlessness good for the heart?], in: *Literaturnaia Gazeta* 1974, October 30, p. 13; M. Airapetiants, *Ot stressa – k nervozu* [From stress to neurosis], in: *Literaturnaia Gazeta* 1986, November 12, p. 13.

38 Mikhailov, *Nevroz*.

39 Zachevitskii, *Nervy, nervy...*; Ianushkevichus, *Kak uberech'sia ot stressa*.

40 C. Timmermann, *Appropriating Risk Factors: The Reception of an American Approach to Chronic Disease in the two German States, c. 1950–1990*, in: *Social History of Medicine* 25 (2012) 1, pp. 157–174, 165.

41 Manucharova, *Pozvoni na pomoshch' radost'*.

given agency in newspaper narratives of Soviet stress: Journalists and experts described it as a historical force that brought about stress.

Besides modernity, there was another prominent actor in newspaper narratives of Soviet stress: Perhaps surprisingly, given the predominance of collectivism in Soviet ideology, this actor was the individual person. In a large majority of the articles, stress was conceptualized as a phenomenon that concerned not so much society or politics, but the individual. Both the causes of stress and the resources of resistance to stress were located within the individual. In this context, the authors regularly referred to, for example, “individuality”, “certain personal characteristics”, “people of a certain psychological constitution” and “peculiarities of disposition and temper”.⁴² Stress was depicted as something that “some can live with, while others are broken by it”.⁴³ Those “broken” by stress, B. Karvasarskii held, were individuals “incapable of tackling the challenges life sets us”.⁴⁴ This narrative included strong appeals to individual responsibility in health matters. For example, in an interview of 1967, V. Baranov, endocrinologist and professor of medicine, reminded the readership of *Literaturnaia Gazeta*, that “it is important to learn to deal reasonably with one’s organism, to regulate one’s tone and vitality”.⁴⁵ With this emphasis on self-regulation (*samoupravlenie, samoregulirovanie*), Baranov set the tone for many Soviet experts, who, in the following two decades, advised the Soviet people how to deal with stress.⁴⁶ Z. Ianushkevichus, for example, called for “everybody to build their lives on healthy foundations”.⁴⁷ G. Kosickii, answering reader’s questions related to stress in an article for *Literaturnaia Gazeta* in 1982, argued: “The goal is to [learn to] regulate one’s relationship with the surrounding world and in so doing to calculate the degree of stress that will work ‘for’ you as opposed to against you. In this, I believe, lies the greatest wisdom in life”.⁴⁸

These calls for self-regulation were part of a distinctly ethical discourse that emphasized the responsibility of each person to deal with the stress of life in order to stay productive and fit for work and fulfil their duty vis-a-vis their fellow human beings.⁴⁹ Everyone, so the argument went, should confront the tasks life poses by “toughening one’s nervous system”.⁵⁰

This third narrative of individual responsibility was established well before Gorbachev set to reforming the country with his programme of *glasnost’* and *perestroika* in early

42 Dorogaia tsena [A High Price], in: *Literaturnaia Gazeta* 1968, September 4, p. 12; Mikhailov, Nevroz; Simonov, Ne perezhiivat’, a deistvovat’.

43 Manucharova, Ulybnites’, Kaskadery!

44 Mikhailov, Nevroz.

45 Baranov, Kogda khuliganiat gormony.

46 For articles advocating self-regulation, also see Tutorskaia, Pregrady stressu; Manucharova, Pozvoni na pomoshch’ radost’.

47 Ianushkevichus, Kak uberech’sia ot stressa.

48 Fedotova, Mozhno li oboitis’ bez stressa?.

49 R. Fedorov, Strasti 33-go dnia: Sluzhba zdorov’ia [The Horror of the 33rd day: First-Aid Service], in: *Pravda* 1980, September 18, p. 6.

50 Fedotova, Mozhno li oboitis’ bez stressa? On toughening (*zakalka*), also see Zachepitskii, Nervy, nervy....

1986. Overall, in the state newspapers studied here, the new transparency promised by the perestroika reformers did not bring about turnaround change with regard to the ways stress was written about. However, in some instances, the narrative of self-regulation was further explored and linked to the project of perestroika. Neurophysiologist P. Simonov, for example, in an interview for Pravda in 1987, stated:

*Our society is now undergoing perestroika. The psychological pressure on each of us has increased a great deal. The most difficult task is the perestroika of consciousness (perestroika soznaniia). To overcome stereotypes, to break with inherited ideas, even with worldviews, is always connected with negative emotions, with stress. [...] This is why everyone should take up an active position in life, why each and every one is called to face the challenges life poses.*⁵¹

Conclusion

Following Soviet journalists' and experts' writing on the subject of stress from the mid-1960s to the late 1980s, we see how stress, on the level of official Soviet discourse, came to be acknowledged as a phenomenon of life in the USSR. The term, treated as unfamiliar and in need of explanation in the early phase, gradually came to signify a phenomenon the existence of which in the Soviet world was taken for granted. The narrative which located stress outside of the sphere of socialism became muted in the course of the 1970s and 1980s.

And yet, in the writing of Soviet journalists and experts on the issue of stress one senses a lasting discomfort: Stress remained problematic for the socialist state, as it put into question the successes of socialist welfare policy at providing comfort and security to its citizens. The two narratives of stress that gradually replaced the older tale of denial, were both attempts at framing a familiar condition in ways that tended to decrease the potential for critique inherent in the concept of stress. In one of these narratives, stress was transformed into a marker of Soviet modernity, a sign of a certain equality of civilizational development with the West.

In the other narrative, stress was at the centre of a disciplining discourse that called for the individual – not the state – to take responsibility for his or her health and fitness. Historians have associated such appeals to the individual with the (neo)liberal tradition and noted that they became more frequent in Western societies since the 1980s. In this process, concepts such as physical “fitness” and “wellness” gained importance in the Western world and were increasingly seen as aspects of individual lifestyle.⁵² By con-

51 S. Bogatko, *Bienie mysliaščego serdtsa* [The Beat of a Thinking Heart], in: Pravda 1987, August 20, p. 6. Also, see A. Iudin, *Znat', chtoby ne bolet'* [Knowing Not to Suffer], in: Pravda 1989, May 10, p. 6.

52 Doering-Manteuffel / Raphael, *Nach dem Boom*, p. 11; S. Graf, *Leistungsfähig, attraktiv, erfolgreich, jung und gesund: Der fitte Körper in post-fordistischen Verhältnissen*, in: *Body Politics* 1 (2013) 1, pp. 139–157; S. Duttweiler, “Körper, Geist und Seele bepuscheln...” *Wellness als Technologie der Selbstführung*, in: B. Orland (ed.), *Artifizielle Körper – lebendige Technik. Technische Modellierungen des Körpers in historischer Perspektive*, Zürich 2005,

trast, state socialist regimes such as the Soviet Union are predominantly described in the research literature as paternalistic, as regimes that denied their citizens both the burden and the freedom of individual responsibility. One of the aspects often associated with Eastern European socialism is a paternalistic health policy that operated from above, bringing affordable, but medically unsophisticated health care to the people.⁵³

The findings presented here suggest something different: Appeals to personal responsibility for health (both mental and physical) were more common in late Soviet socialism than the existing literature acknowledges. My evidence supports the work of researchers such as Larisa Honey and Anna Paretskaya, who have pointed to the increase of individualist attitudes in late Soviet socialism.⁵⁴ Paretskaya points to what she calls “post-collectivist discourse” in political speeches and state newspaper articles in the Brezhnev era, a discourse “that promoted values of individuality, self-reliance, and privatism”.⁵⁵ While Paretskaya seems uncertain about the causes for the emergence of this post-collectivist discourse (she points to such explanations as Western influences and Enlightenment traditions), my findings suggest that it was a way the Soviet state began, by the 1970s, to outsource responsibility for the welfare of its citizens to the individual.

In sum, then, my findings point to two previously underexplored features of late Soviet socialism, both of which are suggestive of cross-bloc similarities with regard to understandings of emotions, health, and the body. First, like in the West, the issue of stress was broadly disseminated in the USSR of the 1970s and 1980s and official narratives were established which made sense of the phenomenon in a socialist context. Second, we see official Soviet newspapers propagate an individualist attitude towards questions of health and fitness, an attitude not unlike the one associated with Western (neo-)liberalism.

pp. 261–277; E. Martin, *Flexible bodies. Tracking Immunity in American Culture, From the Days of Polio to the Age of AIDS*, Boston 1994.

53 See, for example, R. Rose, How Much Does Social Capital Add to Individual Health? A Survey Study of Russians, in: *Social Science & Medicine* 51 (2000) 9, pp. 1421–1435.

54 L. Honey, *Pluralizing Practices in Late-Socialist Moscow: Russian Alternative Practitioners Reclaim and Redefine Individualism*, in: N. Klumbytë/G. Sharafutdinova (eds.), *Soviet Society in the Era of Late Socialism, 1964–1985*, Lanham 2014, pp. 117–142; A. Paretskaya, *A Middle Class without Capitalism? Socialist Ideology and Post-Collectivist Discourse in the Late-Soviet Era*, *ibid.*, pp. 43–66.

55 Paretskaya, *A Middle Class without Capitalism?*, p. 59.