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STEREOTYPES OF MAINTAINING STABILITY: A SIMPLIFICATION OF REALITY

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Abstract

The mindset of a person to accept the complexity of the world or to build its simplified picture is considered to be related with the readiness to (self) changes. The inclination to build a simplified picture of the world is considered to be an indicator of a person's commitment to the stereotypes of ordinary consciousness that reflect the ways of interpreting reality. The purpose of the study was to investigate the traditional stereotypes commitment and the factors that influence it in the ordinary consciousness. The Stereotype Questionnaire was developed as the main research method. Sample: 488 persons (119 males, 369 females), age 18-65 years. The respondents were divided into three groups on the basis of cities population: (1) residents of megapolises - 247 people, (2) residents of cities of regional significance - 175 people, (3) residents of the city with remoteness from the center - 66 people. The results of the study showed that the point of residence has an impact on the degree of stereotype commitment. In all groups commitment to stereotypes reflecting the desire for constancy, the search for stability is higher than the agreement with traditional ideas of a common nature. A comparison of groups by gender shows no differences in the degree of commitment to stereotypes, but the stereotypes chosen by men and women are different. The degree of acceptance of stereotypes increases with age. This suggests that the need for change being initiated by changes in contemporary reality, potentially causes the greatest resistance.

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Keywords: Commitment to stereotypes, ordinary consciousness, personal change, readiness to change, cognitive attitudes toward change.



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1. Introduction

The topic of changes is considered in connection with changes in a life conditions of people, their relations with the outside world and with personal changes. The topic of variability-stability of personality has been discussed in psychology for decades (Heatherton & Weinberger, 1994; Fajkowska & Kreitler, 2018); in this case, the subject of discussion are two main issues - the limits of variability and its factors.

The dynamic nature of personality has actually been reduced to the variability of personal characteristics and differences in the individual profiles of people. Traditionally, the stability and variability of an individual were considered as oppositional characteristics. However, modern psychology refuses this interpretation. In conditions of a changing reality, the preservation of stability, integrativeness, personal identity is associated with its constant changes, and stability is impossible without change (Taleb, 2012). Thus, the ability of an individual to change in modern conditions is being regarded as a resource with a value for survival.

Awareness of personality itself and its activity in changes becomes a powerful direction of scientific researches in modern psychology — the study of self-processes. We are experiencing an increase in research, where personality changes are not so much the result of certain events or changes in social roles, but occur due to the active role of the individual itself (Caspi, Roberts, & Shiner, 2005; Hudson & Fraley, 2015; McCrae et al., 2002), in contrast to classical psychology, in which personality changes were considered as the result of internal dynamics or as a result of direct influence of external sources in the spirit of environmental stimuli.

At one time, the work of Lyotard attracted the attention to the hypothesis that in response to the growing complexity and uncertainty of the surrounding world, the differentiation of people into those who are ready to perceive the complexity of the world and those who are inclined to simplify reality will increase. Therefore, accepting a challenge to the surrounding world means willingness (at least potential) to act in accordance with this challenge, and the tendency to simplify reality can reinforce habitual patterns of behavior.

The mindset of a person to accept the complexity of the world or to build its' simplified picture is at the same time an attitude towards changes related to an increasingly complex reality, or an attitude towards stability. We proceed from a procedural nature of a person's changes - from a person's willingness to understand the challenges of situation and the need for change, to accept the possibility and need for change to the willingness to act in accordance with perceived challenges. At the initial stages of this process, the cognitive orientation of the individual to change or to stay permanent plays an important role (Dweck, 1999, 2008).

The subject of a previous stage of our study was an implicit concept of personality's variability as a factor determining a person's attitude toward change. This implicit concept includes both a general idea of the possibility of fundamental changes in a person's life and himself, as well as an idea of the possibility of his own personal change. The results indicate a connection between a person's readiness for change and his personal implicit concept, as well as his ideas about the fundamental possibility of change in a person's life (Grishina, Avanesyan, Manukyan, & Murtazina, 2018). The subject of the present study

is a further factor that we suppose to be related with the commitment of a person to change or stay permanent – the tendency of a person to accept the complexity of this world or to simplify it.

2. Problem Statement

The stereotypes of ordinary consciousness is a system of judgments that reflect the ways of interpreting the surrounding reality, accepted and shared by the community. At the same time, the content of stereotypes is a kind of simplified picture of the world, a typed, simplistic reflection of reality, to which the individual consciousness of person is more or less committed. We assume inclination to build a simplified picture of the world as an indicator of a person's commitment to the stereotypes of ordinary consciousness.

3. Research Questions

What stereotypes are common to ordinary consciousness?

Are there differences in traditional stereotypes commitment depend on residence in different regions?

Does gender affect the commitment to traditional stereotypes?

Does age factor affect the commitment to traditional stereotypes?

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to investigate the traditional stereotypes embedded in ordinary consciousness, and factors influence the stereotypes commitment. In accordance with the purpose of the study, the following objectives were set:

- 1) to describe the representation of traditional stereotypes in ordinary consciousness;
- 2) to compare the commitment to the traditional stereotypes in people living in the urban culture of the megapolis, the regional centre and a small provincial city;
- 3) to identify gender differences in traditional stereotypes commitment;
- 4) to identify the effect of age factor on traditional stereotypes commitment.

5. Research Methods

5.1. Procedure and materials

The Stereotype Questionnaire was developed as the main research method. It is a set of 22 stereotypical judgments. Half of them reflects the desire for permanence, the search for stability in the main areas of life (work, family and friendship) (the first group of stereotypes), the remaining 11 judgments relate to stereotypes in the field of interpersonal relations (the second group of stereotypes). The first half of the statements is directly related to the study of a person's willingness to change, the second allows to judge the individual's commitment to traditional ideas. The respondent expressed his/her agreement with the judgments on a 5-point scale from "totally agree" to "totally disagree". In addition, it was used a set of questions related to real changes in the respondents' lives.

5.2. The Sample

A total of 488 persons (119 males, 369 females) took part, age from 18 to 65 years. In accordance with the objectives of the study, the respondents were divided into three groups on the basis of cities population: (1) residents of megacities (Moscow and St. Petersburg) - 247 people (66 males, 181 females), (2) residents of cities of regional significance (Syktyvkar, Perm, etc.) - 175 people (48 males, 127 females), (3) residents of the city with remoteness from the centre (Yoshkar-Ola) - 66 people (51 males, 61 females).

6. Findings

1. *Commitment to stereotypes, reflecting human desire for permanence, constancy and search for stability in the main areas of life, is higher than the intensity of traditional ideas in the general issues of human relations and life.*

For all three groups, there was confirmed the hypothesis that the average value for the first group of stereotypes is higher than for the second one (the higher the rank value, the higher the commitment to the stereotypes of this group) (Table 01).

Table 01. Comparison of residence on commitment to the I and II group stereotypes

Residence	I group of stereotypes average score/ average rank	II group stereotypes average score/ average rank
Megapolis	3,14 / 9,91	2,97 / 12,20
Big city	3,29 / 8,18	2,87 / 12,60
Small city	3,76 / 9,25	3,52 / 11,75

Thus, for all three groups of participants there is a tendency to greater commitment to the 1st group of stereotypes (reflecting the desire for constancy and the search for stability), and these indicators reach lower values in metropolis and the highest is in a small city.

Analysis of the most common stereotypes (occupying the first 10 top positions in the rankings) shows that in a sample of respondents from megacities (group M) 8 out of 10 stereotypes belong to the sphere of family and personal relations. In a sample of big cities (group B) - the same belonging has 8 out of 10 stereotypes, in a sample of a small city (group S) - 9 out of 10. The content of these stereotypes reflects the desire for stability, that dominates in all groups of respondents (groups M and B - 70%, S - 60%). These data indicate that in all groups of participants, the desire of stability and consistency is associated primarily with the sphere of family and interpersonal relations. In all three groups of respondents, regardless of where they live, there is a coincidence in the preferred, most popular stereotypes (Table 02).

Table 02. The most popular stereotypes in three groups of residents

Place of residence	I group of stereotypes (average score / average rank)	II group of stereotypes (average score / average rank)
Megapolis	3,14 / 9,91	2,97 / 12,20
Big city	3,29 / 8,18	2,87 / 12,60
Small city	3,76 / 9,25	3,52 / 11,75

2. Commitment to stereotypes is associated with a place of residence: there are significant differences in commitment between residents of megalopolises, cities of regional significance and a small city more distant from the center.

To test this hypothesis, a comparison was made between the female part of the sample (group S did not include a sufficient number of men for comparison in both groups). There were found significant differences between average scores of commitment to stereotypes that occupy the first (from 1 to 3) and the last ranking places in all groups (Table 03). There is a trend towards an increase in commitment to stereotypes among women living in regional centers and in a small city compared to women living in megapolises.

Table 03. The distribution of the most popular stereotypes in three groups of women residents

Stereotypes	Women (M)			Women (B)			Women (S)		
	N=181			N=127			N=61		
	M	SD	rank	M	SD	rank	M	SD	rank
My home is my castle	4,17	0,963	1	4,37	0,815	1	4,63	,712	1
Happiness is when you feeling understood	3,86	1,239	2	4,09	0,895	3	4,50	,624	2
In today's troubled world a constant and reliable family is an important source of stability	3,71	1,218	3	4,29	0,865	2	4,27	,806	3
Where you was born, there you came in handy	2,36	1,192	19	2,49	1,221	18	2,93	1,063	19
Teach your grandmother to suck eggs	2,32	1,177	20	2,36	1,132	20	2,95	1,024	18

Comparison of indicators of different groups by separate stereotypes showed the significant differences between women living in megapolises and large cities in commitment to such judgments as: "In the modern troubled world, permanent work is the main source of stability" ($p=0.009$) and "In today's troubled world, a constant and reliable family is the main source of stability" ($p=0.000$). Thus, the only, but indicative, difference concerns the search for vital support and constancy – in the professional and family spheres. There are found significant differences in commitment to the overwhelming majority of stereotypes in comparing the answers of women living in a small city far from the regional centre (S), with data from other groups (with women from megapolises in 13 stereotypes, from big cities - in 17). The most dramatic differences are manifested in the commitment to the traditional views on family and close relationships.

3. Commitment to stereotypes is associated with a gender factor: there are significant differences in the susceptibility to stereotypes between groups of men and women.

Comparative analysis of men and women - residents of megapolises and big cities (group S - residents of a small cities – does not have enough population to be separated by gender) showed that there are no significant differences between them by the degree of commitment to stereotypical judgments (both in the I and in II group of stereotypes) (with persistent differences between respondents from different cities) (Table 04).

Table 04. Differences in I and II group of stereotypes commitment in men and women from different residence groups

Participants	Group M	Group B
I group of stereotypes		
Men	3, 141	3,285
Women	3,138	3,285
II group of stereotypes		
Men	3,02	2,993
Women	2,95	2,867

At the same time, the differences between men and women are manifested in the content of stereotypes. In the group of respondents from megapolises, the only statistically significant difference between men and women was in the judgment “In the modern trouble world, permanent work is the main source of stability” ($p=0.010$). There are significantly more differences for a number of stereotypes between men and women living in big cities (group B): “My home is my castle”, “It would be good if a woman had the opportunity to devote herself entirely to family and children and did not work at all”, “Do not praise yourself, let others praise”, “Happiness is when you feeling understood”, “True friends are friends since childhood”, “In a family, the husband should be the main one” ($0.001 \leq p \leq 0.05$). It can be argued that men living in big cities, more than women, tend to be susceptible to traditional stereotypes regarding the distribution of roles in the family (a woman should be ready to devote herself to family and children whenever possible, and a man should be a head of family, income generating) and stability in friendship. Women tend to rely more on stereotypes related to finding support in reliable relationships (a wo/man’s house is her/his castle, and happiness is when a person is feeling understood).

Thus, the hypothesis about the influence of gender on the commitment to stereotypes is partially confirmed. On the one hand, there are no differences in the degree of this commitment; on the other hand, there are differences in separate stereotypes that are more or less shared among men and women. Interestingly, these differences are almost not inherent in the residents of megapolises, whose culture erases the traditional gender differences, but continue to dominate among the residents of cities of regional importance.

4. Commitment to stereotypes is associated with the age factor: the groups of people of different ages have significant differences in adherence to stereotypes.

The data show that in a number of stereotypes, the degree of their adoption is indeed noticeably higher in older persons. In the content of these stereotypes some differences were found between the residents of metropolis and cities of regional significance.

In the group of residents of metropolis, the age of the persons positively correlates with such stereotypical judgments as “Where you was born, there you came in handy”, “Civil marriage is more reliable than common-law marriage”, “In today's troubled world, a constant and reliable family is the main source of stability”, “It would be good if a woman had the opportunity to devote herself entirely to family and children and not to work at all”, “The profession is chosen once and forever”, “Single people are unhappy”, “Don't teach your grandmother to suck egg”, “True friends are friends since childhood”, “In the family husband should be the main” ($0.001 \leq r \leq 0.05$). Thus, older people are characterized by orientation toward stereotypes associated with the separation of the roles of men and women in marriage,

stability in the sphere of companionship, the conviction that common-law marriage is more reliable than common-law marriage, that the younger generation should listen to the older one. Only one stereotype - "Profession is chosen once and forever" refers to the professional sphere.

The fragment of our research was devoted to the study of changes in the life of respondents. The data obtained confirm the trends described above. The younger a person is, the more often s/he feels the need to change something in his/her life and him/herself (0.208, $p<0,01$), and the more positive feelings s/he experiences when s/he is the beginning of a journey (joy and enthusiasm as opposed to anxiety). On the contrary, the feeling that some changes in life had already been over is related with agreement with commitment such stereotypes as "My home is my castle" (0.213, $p<0,01$), "For the well-being of the family, it is important that the husband earns more than his wife"; "It is better if the husband is older than the wife"; "Happiness is when you feeling understood" (0.16, $p<0,05$). In the group of residents of big cities, it was found that the age of the subjects positively correlates with such stereotypes as: "Well, if a person has the opportunity to work all his/her life in one place", "In the modern troubled world, permanent work is the main source of stability", "The profession is chosen once and forever", "In today's troubled world, a permanent and reliable family is an important source of stability", "Single people are unhappy", "Do not praise yourself, let others praise", "You can not jump over your head", "Teach your grandmother to suck eggs" ($0.001\leq p\leq 0.05$). In this group, with age, the tendency to search for stability and consistency in professional activity is clearly manifested - work in one place, have a permanent job and a profession.

In the group of residents of big cities (B), it is found that the subjects' age positively correlates with stereotypes: "It's good if a person has the opportunity to work all his life in one place", "In a modern trouble world, permanent work is the main source of stability", "Profession is chosen once and forever", "In a modern troubled world, a constant and reliable family is an important source of stability", "Single people are unhappy", "Do not praise yourself, let others praise", "You can't jump over your head" (fall over oneself), "Teach your grandmother to suck eggs" ($0.001\leq p\leq 0.05$). In this group the tendency to search for stability and consistency in professional activity is evidently increase with age - to work in one place, to have a permanent job and a profession.

7. Conclusion

We consider the main result of our research to be the fact of significant differences in the content of stereotypes and the degree of commitment to them among people living in different regions - metropolitan areas, cities of regional significance, and a small city far from the center. Residents of megapolises less than others are susceptible to stereotypes, while the culture of megacities largely eliminates gender differences in the adoption of stereotypes. Another important result of our study is that commitment to stereotypes, reflecting a person's desire for permanence, constancy, the search for stability, is higher than the manifestation of traditional ideas about human relationships and life. This suggests that the need for change, initiated by changes in contemporary reality, potentially causes the greatest resistance. A significant role in a person's willingness to change is played by cognitive attitudes, including the result of a person's commitment to stereotypes that limit his/her activity towards change.

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