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Psychology of Personality: Real and Virtual Context

TIME PERSPECTIVE OF PERSONALITY IN AGING: CLINICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL ASPECTS

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Abstract

The article analyzes the data of classical and modern studies on the psychology of aging. The author shows the ambiguity of age-related changes in the mental functions and personality during aging and analyzes the range of problems associated with the social status of old people. Special attention is paid to the perception and experience of time, as well as changes in the time perspective of the personality in later life. A number of differences in the nature of the temporal perspective in mentally healthy elderly and young people were revealed. The features of the time perspective in normal aging and late life depressions are discussed. The study of time perspective in different age groups was realized by means of a questionnaire on the time perspective of F. Zimbardo (ZTPI). It allows you to evaluate five main factors: the negative past, the hedonistic present, the future, the positive past, and the fatalistic present. The results were significantly different in some factors in the younger and older groups. On the "Hedonistic present" and "Positive past" scales, the results were similar in both age groups. According to the "Negative past" scale, young respondents were more likely to get low scores, while older respondents received high scores. According to the "Future" and "Fatalistic present" scales, the nature of shifts towards lower or higher scores differed among young and elderly people. This indicates that age affects the assessment of the significance of different periods of life.

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1. Introduction

1.1. The problem of old age in modern society

Old age is a paradoxical, complex, contradictory age. First of all, this is a biological phenomenon that is accompanied by serious and multidirectional psychological changes. Many researchers consider old age and aging as a complex of losses or losses (economic, social, individual, psychological). At the same time, this age can be the culmination of the accumulation of experience, knowledge and personal potential.

Old age in modern society often means a decrease in social status, the inability to continue professional activity with the same intensity. This leads to the perception of old age as a stage in the life cycle that is associated with liberation not only from work, but also from many other social functions and responsibilities. The spread of such views in society has a serious psychological impact not only on the elderly and old, but also on those members of society who are approaching the appropriate age limit. An increase in the total share of elderly and senile people in the population leads to the perception of aging as an extremely relevant social, medical, and psychological problem (Anurin, 2000). The problem of the value of old age, the ideal of old age and the ideals of the elderly becomes an essential element of the psychological climate of society, creating psychological comfort or discomfort for a significant part of the population.

In modern society, at the level of mass, everyday consciousness, the influence of gerontophobic attitudes towards old age and the elderly is noticeable (Saraliev & Saker, 1999). However, there is an opinion that activity aimed at achieving positive life goals (social or political activities, intellectual pursuits, creativity, communication with friends, relatives, youth, education and upbringing of the younger generation) can fill old age with meaning. It is possible that in the future ideal society, the concept of old age will disappear altogether, old age will become "a certain stage of maturity, acquiring its own balance and opening up numerous new opportunities for the individual" (Kalkova, 2003, p. 86).

1.2. Psychological features of aging

An important role in the quality of aging is played by the attitude of the person to their age. Good health, maintaining an active lifestyle, having a family, material wealth, past achievements, alas, do not guarantee the awareness of old age as an interesting, full-fledged period of life. An aging person can consider himself flawed, ill, poor, and unhappy without any objective reason.

Many Russian and foreign scientists (F. Giese, I. S. Con, E. S. Averbukh, L. I. Antsyferova, etc.) have turned to the analysis of various types of aging and their inherent personal changes. It is interesting that the described types of aging often use concepts related to time, its perception and experience. For example, they talk about the lack of interest in the future of immersion in memories of the past, realization in the current period, the goals, the achievement of which is not enough time in the past, negative evaluation of the present, about the interpretation in a negative way to its own past, about the positive setting for the future, etc. Even if you move away from scientific typologies, from the mouth of the elderly, we often hear the expression "how time flies", "how fast passed life", "it is not clear what has been spent so much time" "if there were a lot of time, I would...".

A well-known Russian psychiatrist, Shakhmatov (1996, 1998), writes that an elderly person is quite capable of being in agreement with their age, being able to highlight the positive aspects of their new life,

and experiencing joy. Studying the psychological characteristics of older people, he came to the conclusion that they have a tolerant or indifferent attitude to their physical ailments. The dynamics of the attitude to one's own death is also close to this. A positive assessment of aging involves establishing an acceptable framework and scope of daily activities, and life satisfaction is associated with a positive attitude to one's own aging as a time when it is possible, in accordance with internal needs, to rethink one's past life. The new is opened precisely through reinterpretation, and this, of course, carries a positive emotional charge (Shakhmatov, 1998).

1.3. Time perspective and personality changes in aging

All of these ideas demonstrate the importance of time perspective research for a deeper understanding of changes in personality and emotional sphere during aging. How does an aging person perceive and evaluate different periods of their life? There are different answers to this question. There is an opinion that those older people who positively assess aging are primarily focused on the present. They do not have a retrospective projection on the happy past, and they do not have plans for an active life for the future. An active life attitude to the present is the main thing that determines the entire structure of their mental life.

The nature of the time perspective may change depending on the stage of aging. Perhaps the most dramatic changes occur during retirement and adaptation to new social roles (Schneider, 2000). With the loss of everyday, automated behaviors, it becomes necessary to develop a new lifestyle and maintain a connection with the past.

Many researchers are of the opinion that one of the deepest psychosocial personality crises is associated with retirement, job loss; it is accompanied by depression, somatic diseases, or hypochondria. Others believe that retirement itself can not be assessed as a factor that negatively affects the psyche; it is not the cause of the crisis, but has a negative meaning only if there are certain personality traits, psychological unpreparedness for a change in life attitudes and values. What personality traits can we talk about in this case? This can be a decrease in self-esteem, self-doubt, self-dissatisfaction; fear of loneliness, of helplessness, of impoverishment. Unfortunately, among the pathological character traits that progress with aging, there is often a sullenness, irritability, and pessimism. There may be a decrease in interest in the new, grouching, selfishness, self-centeredness, a painful experience of uncertainty about the future, avarice, pedantry, conservatism. It may be difficult to acquire new knowledge and ideas, adapt to unforeseen circumstances, adapt to changes in motor activity, visual or auditory perception, inaccessible to control intensification of affective reactions (strong nervous excitement) with a tendency to unreasoning sadness, tearfulness, changes in character, hierarchy and strength of motives, attitude to life.

Of course, such a sad scenario is by no means universal. There are quite a few examples of harmonious, positive, creative aging. In addition, human development continues in old age (Krasnova & Leaders, 2002). Many of the psychological problems of elderly and old people can be prevented or relatively painlessly overcome by changing attitudes to the aging process in General. "If we do not understand that life and aging are a process of growth and progress, we will not understand the basic principles of life..." (Hanna, 1996, pp. 116-117).

For many people approaching the age of 60, it becomes obvious that they need to think about their life path in terms of evaluating its implementation and evaluating future prospects. So, E. Erikson

considered old age a stage of personality development, at which it is possible either to gain integrativity, integrity of the personality (ego-integrity), or to experience despair because life is almost over, but it is not lived the way you wanted and planned. When integrativity is achieved, the life path is accepted by the individual as the only proper one and does not need to be replaced; it acquires wisdom as a form of active relationship between a person and his life, which is characterized by maturity of mind, careful deliberation of judgments, deep comprehensive understanding.

As for the time perspective of the individual, of course, psychological time changes in old age, and now life in the present and memories of the past are more important than the future, although certain "threads" in the near, foreseeable future are still stretched. Due to causal and target relationships, past and future events of human life form a complex system - a "subjective picture of the life path". Some authors, studying the perception of time on a biographical scale, use the concept of time transpectivity (Borozdina & Spiridonova, 1998). This concept implies the interaction of the past, present and future, as well as "end-to-end" vision from the present to the past and future. The beginning of the time perspective shifts with age, while changing both its length and content. For example, children consider the beginning of a temporary perspective to be the moment of entering school, preschool age, etc. Older people usually choose youth as the beginning of a temporary perspective. The length of the time retrospective increases with age due to an increase in the time retrospective (Borozdina & Spiridonova, 1998). Over the course of a lifetime, time is accelerated and structured (vague, blurred plans become more real). Before adulthood, people are mostly focused on the future, in adulthood-on the present, in old age - on the past. The change of orientation is related to changes in the emotional sphere. With increasing age the contrast between the emotional attitude to the past, present and future increases (Borozdina & Spiridonova, 1998; Molchanova, 1999).

2. Problem Statement

The problem of age-related features of a personality's time perspective is the need to understand how the perception and experience of life periods changes in young and old age, as well as in normal and pathological aging.

3. Research Questions

The two main questions of the study are as follows.

- 3.1.** First, it is an analysis of qualitative and quantitative changes in the time perspective in normal aging (compared to young age).
- 3.2.** Second, it is a comparison of the time perspective of mentally healthy individuals of late age and elderly patients with depressive disorders.

4. Purpose of the Study

The psychological research of personality's time perspective for different types of aging.

5. Research Methods

In the study voluntarily participated 68 patients with depression (age of 50 to 80 years), who were treated in the clinic of the Scientific Center of Mental Health (Moscow). Among the patients in the clinical group, there were 41 men and 27 women. 44 people have completed higher education, and 24 have completed secondary or specialized secondary education. 26 patients they continued their work, 42 were retired. The group included 22 patients with recurrent depressive disorder, 13 patients with bipolar affective disorder, 10 patients with prolonged depressive episodes, 23 patients with persistent and chronic depressive disorders. Patients with apato-adyamic depression predominated among the patients. 26 mentally healthy persons aged 50 to 81 years (62 years on average) made up the first control group. There were 12 men and 14 women in this group. 23 people had higher education, 3-specialized secondary or secondary education. By the time of the study 21 people continued their work, and only 5 were retired. 27 mentally healthy persons aged 20 to 29 years (22 years on average) made up the second control group. There were 12 men and 15 women in this group. All the young participants in the study were students or have already completed higher education.

To study the peculiarities of time perception on a biographical scale, the study participants were offered a questionnaire on the time perspective of Zimbardo (Zimbardo Time Perspective Inventory, ZTPI) adapted for the Russian population (as cited in Syrtsova et al., 2008). The original version of ZTPI consists of 56 statements, each of which is offered to be evaluated on a scale from 1 to 5 points, where 1 point means "absolutely incorrect" and 5 points means "absolutely right" (Zimbardo & Boyd, 1999). It allows you to evaluate five main factors: the negative past, the hedonistic present, the future, the positive past, and the fatalistic present. High scores on these scales correspond to a high degree of orientation of the individual for a certain time period, the intensity of emotional attitude to it, and the high subjective value of this period. Low scores correspond to opposite trends. With the help of F. Zimbardo's Questionnaire, you can get an idea of the nature of the time perspective, find out which time period a person is more focused on, which of the time plans causes positive or negative emotions, has more or less subjective value. Statistical data processing was performed using the program "Statistica 8" and Microsoft Office Excel 2007.

6. Findings

6.1. Characteristics of the time perspective in mentally healthy persons of young and late age

Our comparison of the time perspective in mentally healthy young people (22 years on average) and the elderly (62 years on average) revealed the existence of age differences (Balashova & Mikeladze, 2013). The results of responses to the F. Zimbardo Questionnaire significantly differed in some factors in the younger and older groups. On the "Hedonistic present" and "Positive past" scales, the results were similar, with above-average scores prevailing in both age groups. On the "Negative past" scale, young respondents were more likely to get low scores (on average, 2.5), and older ones – high scores (on average, 3.3), but the differences did not reach the level of statistical significance. According to the "Future" and "Fatalistic present" scales, the nature of shifts towards lower or higher scores differed among young and elderly people. Thus, the majority of young people received high scores on the "Future" scale (an average score of 3.6), while all older people received low scores (an average score of 1.8) ($p=0.01$). On the contrary, the majority

of young respondents had low scores on the "Fatalistic present" scale (an average score of 2.2), while the majority of older people had high scores (an average score of 3.3) ($p=0.01$). This indicates that age affects the assessment of the significance of different periods of life. At a young age, the orientation towards the future was more pronounced. For older people, it did not have such a significant value, did not determine their worldview to such an extent. Younger respondents were more positive about their present; older people perceived it as a fact to be accepted and treated it fatalistically (Balashova & Mikeladze, 2013). These data confirm the assumption of Molchanova (1999) about an increase in the proportion of depressive experiences in older people.

6.2. Time perspective of depressive patients of late age

It should also be noted that in late-age depressions, a number of time-perspective characteristics characteristic of normal aging are accentuated (Balashova & Mikeladze, 2015). According to the results of the Zimbardo questionnaire, the average score for the "Negative past" factor was higher than average in the clinical group. This was different from the results of the control group, in which the average values for this factor prevailed. Significant differences were also shown in relation to the factor "Fatalistic present": healthy subjects showed low indicators of patients with depression are high.

The average scores for the factors "Hedonistic present", "Positive past" and "Future" were high in both groups, however, the shift towards positive values for the factors was more pronounced in the first control group. The results confirm the assumption that patients with depression have a tendency to pessimistic attitude to their own past, as well as to a fatalistic attitude to the present.

In late-life depressions, other aspects of the time perspective also change: the ability to enjoy current events and focus on the positive aspects of the present and future is reduced. In depressive patients, the role of negative emotions in the formation of a temporary perspective increases. In the difference from healthy late-aged people, who instead of "shift to the past» there is a "shift to the future", in patients with late-life depression there is no shift. The lack of future orientation identified by ZPTY is likely, reflects the lack of motivational component of mental activity and behavior during the late depression. The future is no longer perceived depressive patients in terms of possible personal activity; they are more focused on the negative events of the past.

7. Conclusion

The nature of the time perspective in mentally healthy persons of late age is fairly balanced. At the same time, there is a slight increase in the share of negative ratings (compared to young people). In general, a positive emotional attitude to the past, present and future prevails in normal aging.

In the perception of time in late depressions, there is an accentuation of a number of characteristics of the time perspective characteristic of normal aging. In patients with late-age depression, negative assessments of the past prevail in the time perspective, disbelief in the possibility of changing something in the present increases, a tendency to attribute responsibility for their own problems to fate or external forces, and an unwillingness to make plans for the future.

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