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AGING IN THE PERCEPTION OF YOUNG PEOPLE - SELECTED CORRELATES OF PERSONALITY

Abstract

In the context of the demographic and psychosocial changes capturing the factors that are relevant to the process of perception of the aging process and their own old age becomes a significant problem. The article discusses the results of the study conducted on a group of 430 people on the factors determining the perception of old age by young people. Presented selected results relate to the personality correlates of perception of the aging process.

Keywords: perception of aging, old age, young people to old age

Abstrakt

W kontekście dokonujących się zmian demograficznych i psychospołecznych istotnym problemem staje się uchwycenie czynników, które mają znaczenie dla procesu spostrzegania procesu starzenia się i własnej starości. W artykule zostały omówione wyniki badań własnych przeprowadzonych na grupie 430 osób, na temat czynników warunkujących percepcję starości przez osoby młode. Prezentowane wybrane wyniki badań odnoszą się do osobowościowych korelatów percepcji procesu starzenia się.

Słowa kluczowe: percepcja starzenia się, starość, osoby młode wobec starości

Introduction

Changes and dynamics of social phenomena, which we are witnessing in recent years, amaze with their variety and pace. The issue of aging becomes an important research area, both in the demographic and psychosocial perspective.

The phenomenon of aging is currently more widely reported and analyzed both on scientific level and as to references in the field of practical work related to people entering a period of aging. From the perspective of research what is of interest it is the problem of the perception of aging by young people. This issue is interesting from the cognitive and practical perspective. Those that are currently in their early youth, in the future will work for the elderly, and in consequence will also experience late adulthood. It is very interesting from the cognitive perspective and it draws attention to the process of perception of old age by young people and the correlates of this process.

Periodization of late adulthood is characterized by considerable diversity. The World Health Organization suggests that old age begins at the age of 60 [Krzymiński 1993: 9–33]. For many authors, the age limit is 70 years of age [Straś-Romanowska 1993: 263–292]. The division of the late adulthood period also poses many difficulties. In the literature proposals are presented to distinguish a three-step approach: 60–75, 75–90, 90 and above (World Health Organization) or 65–74, 75 and above [Birch, Malim 1999: 146]. It's important to remember that many authors avoid splitting the period of late adulthood due to the fact that the psyche and behavior of an adult and the old have a significant individual variation [Straś-Romanowska 1993: 265]. Difficulties in establishing a clear threshold of old age and its divisions are the result of diverse image of old age, the individual pace of aging, and differences in the selection criteria of age. The main criteria of aging is the biological age, characterized by physiological changes in the body, socio-economic criterion – resulting in subordination of human life to sociological factors, both institutional and economic. These two criteria are the least contentious and possible to capture and characterize. While the third criterion

– the psychological, seems to be the least accurate. It includes a transformation of mental processes, personality and subjective experience. The difficult task is to isolate the psychological factors that indicate the beginning of the period of later adulthood. S. Steuden points out that the old age is a time of rapid transformation in the field of cognitive functions, personality, adaptability and social relationships [Steuden 2011: 48].

Results of the studies on the perception of aging suggest that aging as a process and the elderly are perceived by respondents in a positive way. Respondents declare the need and willingness of selfless help and support to the elderly. However, it is also to be noted that the elderly are not treated with respect [Kanasik, Kotyrba 2013: 18–22]. B. Krupa draws attention to the difficulties associated with the perception of old age, writing “the young perceive the problems arising from the need to provide comprehensive assistance, care and decent living conditions to the elderly. The young want to meet the imposed obligations, but at the same time are aware of the demographic problems and the related costs, and they don’t agree to increase the load in order to fund retirement benefits and support system– [Krupa 2012: 36].

In sociological studies of the area in question, attention is drawn to the attitude of the Poles towards the elderly. CBOS survey shows that 87% of Poles believe that the elderly are needed in society. They draw attention to the important role of the elderly in society, as old people have time for the grandchildren (97% of respondents), they have significant life experience and expertise that young people lack (95% of respondents), and they are good neighbors (92% of respondents). Almost every fourth respondent believes that people around him are friendly to the elderly (24%) and 57% noted moderate kindness. The test results relating to the vision of their own old age indicate that the respondents aged 18–24 are the least likely to think about their own old age. Almost a half of the respondents of this age do not wonder at the vision of their own age. Those most likely to think about old age are the women. When thinking about retirement, what the Poles fear the most are: diseases (68%), being a burden to others (50%), poor living conditions (36%), loneliness (34%), suffering (20%) and uncertainty (14%) [CBOS 2009: 1–11].

Similar results are indicated by the outcome of the research conducted among the young burdened with the congenital hearing defect. These young people more often recognize age in terms of physical changes, and they rarely see the positive side of aging [Lipińska-Loks 2010: 83]. Research of the professionals providing assistance to the elderly also showed a rather negative reference attitude towards aging. Almost half of the respondents described the old people only in negative terms: “assigning them grouchiness, a tendency to complain, malice, avarice, reduced mental and physical abilities” [Pakuła 2011: 390].

M. Kosior also stresses on the basis of its own research, that that for most of the young aging means mainly health problems and infirmity. Sometimes young people make a subconscious action to distance themselves from the elderly in fear of the irrational fear of a disease of old age [Kosior 2007: 250].

In the context of the research results presented below adolescence as a period of entering adulthood is of particular importance. It is a development time of the transition from childhood into the next important stage of life – early adulthood. The data contained in the literature indicate that this is an intensive time of changes aimed at shaping a coherent self-image and self-identity.

The research subject requires a brief highlight the theoretical model of the tool used. At the core of the study of personality dimensions through an established research tool lies the assumption of a multidimensional system of Murray’s human needs theory. He singled out 27 psychological needs, which became the basis for constructing an ACL research tool. In theory also it assumes that the system analyzed the declared features that can coexist with experienced anxiety. It can be assumed that a high level of anxiety will be moderated by the choices made and actions taken.

Research methodology

The study included 430 participants between 19–35 years of age. In this group there were 350 women and 80 men. They were mainly students of I, II and III degree studies, studying in Warsaw, Kraków, Lublin, Opole and Wrocław. After rejecting extreme results included in the analysis of 408 people. The group of extreme results were included in those that significantly differed from the average results in the analyzed area. It was decided that each extreme results could indicate the administration of the respondents random answers. Therefore, these results were not taken into account. Studies have been conducted in the period

from December 2014 through February 2015. Presented in the article are the results of a selected area of larger research project, which was carried out by the author of the article.

The aim of the research and analysis was the search for correlates of the perception of aging by young people. It is assumed to check what the differences in the perception of old age by young people are, and with what personality factors the perception of aging coincides. The intention was to try to isolate a specific way of perception of aging by young people. An attempt to bind to the psychological variables.

Perceived by young people, entering old age was considered significant because the analysis of the results of qualitative research showed that respondents differed significantly from each other in this regard. This makes it possible to isolate three groups (as the results of the following analysis). Group 1 consisted of persons who believed that men and women are beginning to age at the same age. Group 2 were the people who believed that it were the men who entered the period of aging later. While in Group 3 there were respondents who thought that it were the women who entered the period of aging later.

Research questions:

- How does the level of anxiety influences the perception of the beginning of old age by young people?
- How do the personality traits affect the perception of early aging?
- How does the gender modify the perception of the process of aging?

In order to gather data and find answers to such questions the standardized research tools were used:

◆ **a) List of adjectives: ACL by Harrison G. Gougha**

It is a tool meant for the study of young people and adults. It allows you to measure various features of personality. This scale seems to be a useful and effective tool for diagnosis.

ACL contains 300 adjectives that have been arranged in alphabetical order. They form a scale up 37 grades. All the adjectives and instructions are located on a single sheet of A4. Respondents are to choose the adjectives they consider the most relevant. Individual scales in the ACL: The total number of selected adjectives (No.Ckd), number of positive adjectives selected (Fav), number of selected negative adjectives (UnFav) Typical character (Com), need for achievement (Ach), need for domination (Dom), need for perseverance (End) the need for order (Ord), need to understand yourself and others (Int), you need to take care of (Nur), need for affiliation (Aff), need for heterosexual contact (Het), need for mental exhibitionism (Exh) the need for autonomy (Aut) the need for aggression (Agg) the need for change (Cha), need for experiencing care and support (Suc), need to humiliate themselves (Aba), need for subordination (Def), Ready to therapy (Crs), Self (S-Cn) trust in each other (S-Cfd), personal adaptation (P-Adj), I am perfect (Iss), creative Personality (Cps), Leadership (Mls), Masculinity (Mas), femininity (Fem), critical parent (CP) The caring parent (NP.), Adult (A), spontaneous child (FC), submissive child (AC), high originality, low intelligence (A-1), high originality, high intelligence (A-2) Low originality, Low intelligence (A-3), Low originality, high intelligence (A-4). The names of the scales in Polish are the result of the work of the Laboratory of Psychological Tests PTP, and shortcuts scales come from the original version [Martowska 2012: 8].

◆ **b) Inventory state and traits of anxiety (STAI)**

The questionnaire is designed for youth and adults. Its wide use is possible due to the short form, good psychometric properties and an easy test procedure. It can be used in both individual and group studies. It is a tool by which you can detect people with significantly low or high levels of anxiety definitely understood as a permanent internal disposition (feature). It also has wide application in experimental studies, because it gives you the ability to record changes in the severity of anxiety, understood as a condition that occurs in response to certain external factors [Wrześniewski 2011: 5]. This tool is highly reliable and has a low error measurement, and thanks to that it is a tool that can be successfully used in diagnostic studies and research. The questionnaire is in the form of two scales: X-1 scale used to test anxiety - state, and the scale of the X-2 for testing drug-properties. Each of them consists of 20 statements. Respondents are to answer them on a scale of 1–4. Each scale contains an instruction that tells you what the survey inventory is and how to fill it [Wrześniewski 2011: 10].

◆ **c) Questionnaire using the qualitative data collected, as well as information about the age at which old age begins, according to respondents**

The results of research

The following analysis of the results will refer to two areas: the search for correlates of perception of the old age in factors associated with anxiety and personality dispositions measured by the ACL Questionnaire.

Analysis of the data obtained in the field of co-occurrence of anxiety understood as a feature or as a state indicates a statistically insignificant results. Only at certain trends it can be concluded that it is possible to have a higher level of anxiety accompanied by the earlier perception of the early age by young people.

These results were observed in analyzing both raw results (Table 1) and the results converted into sten scores (Table 2).

Table 1. Correlations between anxiety and the perception of aging (raw results)

Correlations			Anxiety state	Anxiety feature
rho Spearmana	Age women	coefficient correlation	-0,048	-0,092
		The significance of (bilateral)	0,332	0,062
		N	415	415
	Age man	Coefficient correlation	-0,052	-0,085
		The significance of (bilateral)	0,29	0,084
		N	414	414

Source: own study.

Regardless of the group, that is, for the entire population studied occurrence of a negative correlation between anxiety as a trait is visible, or personality dispositions and perceived the beginning of old age.

Tab. 2. Correlations between anxiety and the perception of aging (sten scores) correlations

Correlations			Anxiety state	Anxiety feature
rho Spearmana	Age women	coefficient correlation	-0,055	-0,094
		The significance of (bilateral)	0,264	0,056
		N	415	415
	Age man	Coefficient correlation	-0,05	-0,081
		The significance of (bilateral)	0,306	0,099
		N	414	414

Source: own study

Regardless of whether we compare the raw results or the sten scale, the co-existence (at the level of the tendency) of anxiety and the beginning of old age is visible. It can be assumed that a person characterized by higher levels of anxiety understood as a feature, may be inclined to perceive the aging process earlier than people who do not reveal that kind of fear. Those more anxious are more likely to perceive their future less optimistically - earlier aging, earlier health problems, etc.

In the following analysis of the results there has been the execution of the comparison results in terms of personality traits measured by the ACL Questionnaire. The first group compared is the one were people believe that men more [earlier?] than women enter a period of aging. This group was compared with those who believe that men and women grow old at the same age. Comparisons made using the Mann-Whitney

U test showed no difference in terms of personality traits among respondents who believe that men are beginning to age later and those of both sexes are beginning to age at the same age.

The next stage of the analysis was to compare the groups in which respondents believed that men entered a period of aging later with the group, which included persons stating that women grow old later. In Table 3 statistically significant results are given. Respondents who thought that women are aging later have a higher need for autonomy than respondents according to which men are aging later. The average rank of (97.56 vs 128.89), higher levels of aggression needs of (average rank 94.00 vs 121.84) and a higher level of masculinity (mean rank 94.11 vs 121.21).

Interpretation of the results indicates that people who believe that women are aging later than men, are people more assertive, more willing to individualistic behavior, little sensitive to the needs of others. In addition, they are characterized by greater impulsiveness, susceptibility to competitive behavior and poor control of their own emotional reactions. These individuals also reveal the characteristics of the so-called male features. These individuals operate more independently, effectively and are willing to take independent initiatives. These results seem interesting. One can point to a property that would indicate that young people with the illustrated layout features, that is assertive, independent, competitive, do not always control their own emotions, and they are more likely to notice differences in the beginning of aging of men and women, for women, according to the respondents in this group are aging later. Due to the over-representation of women in the study group it can be assumed that the young, active, independent women, set the perspective of old age aside for "later".

Tab. 3. Comparison of personality traits in the groups in which respondents believe that men grow old later, with a group that believes that women age later

Selected scale of ACL	At Mann-Whitney	At Wilcoxon	Z	asymptotic significance (two-sided)
The need for autonomy	1473,000	15501,000	-3,136	,002
The need for aggression	1670,500	15698,500	-2,428	,015
Masculinity	1688,000	15716,000	-2,357	,018

Source: own study.

The next step in the analysis included a comparison of a group of people who believed that women grew old later, with the group of the respondents who believed that men and women enter a period of aging at the same developmental age. Selected, or statistically significant results are presented in Table 4. Because of the large amount of data in the questionnaire ACL, (which would form an extensive table), we decided to post only the relevant results of the analysis. The need for autonomy is significantly higher among respondents, according to which women are aging later compared with those for which the starting age for both sexes falls at the same age (mean rank 116.54 vs 154.95). Low originality and high intelligence assumes a slightly higher level ($p = 0.06$) among respondents who believe that both sexes are aging at the same age, compared with those who think that women are age later (average rank 124.78 vs 92.27).

When interpreting the results it should be noted that, as in the above-described results, the need for autonomy was a variable differentiating a group of people who believe that women are aging later from the respondents, according to whom women and men begin the process of aging in the same period. Interpretation of these results indicates that people who perceive that women age more [?] than men are more assertive, less sensitive to the needs of others than those by which men and women are aging at the same time. The factor that differentiated the two groups, for the benefit of people who do not differentiate the age of aging of women and men was low originality and high intelligence. The interpretation of this result indicates that individuals who are characterized by high intellectual abilities, self-discipline, rationality, but they are tense, are not willing to make differentiation in early old age for both sexes.

Tab. 4 Comparison of personality traits of people who believe that women later enter a period of aging with those by which F and M start aging in the same period

Selected scale of ACL	At Mann-Whitney	At Wilcoxon	Z	asymptotic significance (two-sided)
The need for autonomy	2031,500	24822,500	-2,746	,006
Low originality high intelligence	2177,500	2583,500	-2,323	,020

Source: own study

These results and analysis indicate that only four personality dispositions proved to be differentiating in relation to the applied division and analysis. In table 5, where the averages are included - standard deviation variables significantly different. Also the number of individuals is given, for the purposes of group analysis. In the group of people who believed that women and men enter a period of old age at the same time, there were 213 people. In the group of respondents who believed that men enter a period of aging later there were 167 people. The smallest, comprising only 28 people, was the group stating that women begin a period of aging later than men.

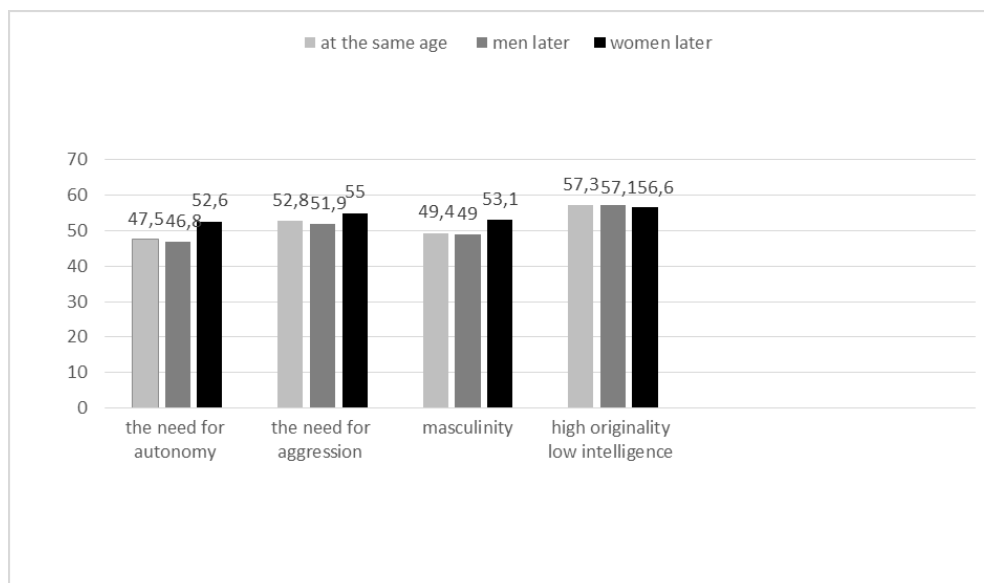
Tab. 5. Means and standard deviations for the variables that differentiate significantly

		N	Mean	Standard Deviation
The need for autonomy	At the same age	213	47,5352	8,32222
	Man later	167	46,7784	8,35897
	Women after	28	52,6429	10,22058
The need for aggression	At the same age	213	52,8122	5,30507
	Man later	167	51,9162	5,38115
	Women after	28	54,9643	6,91473
Masculinity	At the same age	213	49,4319	8,14962
	Man later	167	49,012	8,38816
	Women after	28	53,1071	8,44301
High originality of the low intelligence	At the same age	213	57,7559	8,17189
	Man later	167	57,1018	8,72998
	Women after	28	56,6071	7,68037

Source: own study.

Analyses allowed to show statistically significant differences between the groups. In summary, the only group located in a clear minority ($n = 28$), who considers that women are aging later, differs from the majority of respondents, it is characterized by a higher level of need for autonomy, aggression, higher level of features of masculinity and the relatively low level features of high originality and low intelligence. Comparison of the results obtained is shown in Table 6.

Tab. 6. A comparison of separate groups for analysis on selected personality traits



Source: own study.

Summary

Analysis of the results obtained in the study and the attempt of their interpretation suggests that there are certain personality correlates associated with the process of perception of old age, understood as perceived by young people beginning of the period of aging. The results suggest that one such factor is the fear understood as a person standing orders (characteristic), a tendency in some individuals to respond in an Anxiety Disorder in a variety of situations. The results indicate no statistically significant differences between the above variables, but you can infer the existence of a tendency toward this type of behavior.

Interesting results are obtained in terms of co-occurrence of personality prone to evaluate early age, as this which begins in the same period in women and men, as beginning later in men or that starts later in women. For purposes of analysis, a division of the subjects according to the above criteria was made. It turned out that there are four determinants of personality that differentiate these groups. These are: the need for autonomy, the need for aggression, masculinity, originality high – low intelligence. The results indicate that a group of people in which respondents perceive that women age more than men, have higher levels of the needs for autonomy and aggression, the higher the severity of the features from the masculinity and low score on a scale high originality - low intelligence. Separate group and the existence of the personality correlates indicate that these are people with high intellectual abilities, assertive, having leadership ability and willingness to compete and at the same time experiencing difficulties in controlling emotions. Presumably, we can formulate the hypothesis that we are dealing with young people characterized as above that set aside the perception of old age (including their own) for later, perhaps the very process of thinking about the prospect of old age.

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