

**PERCEPTION OF THE OTHER AND SOCIAL-PSYCHOLOGICAL
PROCESSES OF PERSONAL AGING**

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Abstract

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This article is aimed at revealing the perception of a stranger in the context of the socio-psychological processes of aging.

Age-related features of personality development have always been at the center of the study of psychologists. Along with the development of the psychological discipline, comprehensive psychological studies of aging and the aging process of a person are also being carried out. The concept of "old age" is an ambiguous concept, and it is closely related (and even identified) with elderly and old-age people. Usually, old age means the last period of age development, which follows the stage of maturity and is accompanied in one way or another by the extinction of vital functions. From this point of view, it is important to reveal the manifestations of perceptions of alienation of a person in the socio-psychological processes of aging and the mechanisms of adaptation of a person in this age period.

Keywords and phrases:

perception of the other, aging, social needs, self-perception of the other, heterochronism of aging.

**ВОСПРИЯТИЕ ЧУЖОГО И СОЦИАЛЬНО-ПСИХОЛОГИЧЕСКИЕ
ПРОЦЕССЫ СТАРЕНИЯ ЛИЧНОСТИ**

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Аннотация

Данная статья направлена на раскрытие восприятия отчуждения в контексте социально-психологических процессов старения.

Возрастные особенности развития личности всегда находились в центре внимания психологов. Наряду с развитием психологической дисциплины, проводятся также комплексные психологические исследования старения и процесса старения человека. Понятие «старость» является неоднозначным и тесно связано (и даже отождествляется) с пожилыми и престарелыми людьми. Обычно под старостью понимается последний период возрастного развития, следующий за стадией зрелости и сопровождающийся тем или иным образом угасанием жизненных функций. С этой точки зрения важно раскрыть проявления восприятия отчуждения человека в социально-психологических процессах старения и механизмы адаптации человека к этому возрастному периоду.

Ключевые слова и фразы:

Восприятие чужого, старение, социальные потребности, самовосприятие чужого, гетерохронизм старения.

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ՏԱԹԵՎԻԿ ՎԱԹՅԱՆ**

Գիտակրթական միջազգային կենտրոն, Հայաստանի Հանրապետության
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Համառոտագիր

Այս հոդվածն ուղղված է օտարի ընկալման բացահայտմանը անձի ծերացման
սոցիալ-հոգեբանական գործընթացների համատեքստում:

Անձի զարգացման տարիքային առանձնահատկությունները մշտապես եղել են հոգեբանների ուսումնասիրության կենտրոնում: Հոգեբանական գիտակարգի զարգացման հետ մեկտեղ իրականացվում են նաև ծերության և անձի ծերացման գործընթացի բազմաբովանդակ հոգեբանական ուսումնասիրություններ: «Ծերություն» հասկացությունը երկիմաստ հասկացություն է, և այն սերտորեն կապված է (և նույնիսկ նույնացվում է) տարեց և ծեր տարիքի մարդկանց հետ: Սովորաբար, ծերություն նշանակում է տարիքային զարգացման վերջին շրջանը, որը հաջորդում է հասունության փուլին և այս կամ այն կերպ ուղեկցվում է կենսական գործառույթների մարումով: Այս տեսանկյունից կարևորություն է ներկայացնում ծերացման սոցիալ-հոգեբանական գործընթացներում անձի օտարման ընկալումների դրսևորումների և տարիքային այդ շրջափուլում անձի հարմարման մեխանիզմների վերհանումը:

Բանալի բառեր և բառակապակցություններ՝

Օտարի ընկալում, ծերացում, սոցիալական կարիքներ, օտարի ինքնաընկալում, ծերացման հետերոքրոնիզմ:

Introduction

Aging, which is associated with specific changes in the organism and living conditions, is not a static state, but a dynamic process. Therefore, aging is most often viewed as a process of changes in the body during life, which leads to a decrease in the body's adaptability and increases the likelihood of death. However, the term aging has not yet received a generally accepted explanation.

The historical development of aging theories is represented by gerontology, the science of the aging process and late life. It includes psychological, sociological, social and many other aspects of aging.

Among the above aspects, special importance is attached to the study of changes in the structure of I-images of a person in the aging period, the disclosure of the processes of alienation of one's own body and the disclosure of adaptive mechanisms of a person leading to the extinction of social isolation. From this point of view, it is necessary to consider the manifestations and features of the perception of the other in the aging period.

Theoretical-methodological bases

Gerontology, as the “science of aging”, has deep roots centuries ago and is associated not only with the development of scientific thinking, but also with the philosophy of life, the social mentality of a given society and the cultural characteristics that build its social values on them. Gradually, the age limit of the concept of “old age” was determined, the main needs and requirements of older people were formulated as priority tasks of the state [1; 2]. Currently, there are a huge number of scientific works that define the period of old age as a long period, a stage of human development following youth and maturity, with age-related problems and opportunities for self-realization [4; 9]. In the world, in general, gerontology as a science emerged in the second half of the 20th century. At the end of the 20th century, a system of theoretical and applied knowledge was formed regarding the essence and significance of the last stage of the life cycle of humans living on Earth. The debate continues to this day as to whether gerontology is an independent subject, since it consists of a number of sciences, each of which has its own methodological and scientific apparatus (biology, psychology, medicine, jurisprudence, theology, literature, economics, etc.).

Biological gerontology. According to biological theory, aging is a natural process, genetically programmed [7].

Biological gerontology mainly studies the biological and physiological causes of aging: that is, why and how a person changes over time. The answer to the main question in this direction still remains unresolved in a number of schools.

Aging is an innate degenerative process that occurs after a person reaches the peak of his functional abilities. Aging is the sum of pathological internal conditions, and the human life cycle is a trajectory during which an individual reaches the maximum level of functional abilities in adulthood. Then, since the internal “plan” is incomplete and

programmed for self-destruction, functional abilities begin to deteriorate until the person is unable to cope with the destruction of his life and dies.

An alternative approach assumes the existence of normal aging processes as an increase in the body's inability or inefficiency and a decrease in its ability to adapt according to the following criteria [7]:

1. Multidimensionality – aging is inherent in every person,
2. Conditionality of the process – changes in the body occur continuously and objectively, they do not depend on external causes,
3. Progressivity – changes occur over time, have a cumulative effect, that is, it is a progressive continuous process.
4. Degeneration or degeneration – the process has a harmful and fatal effect on the person. Degenerative changes accompany a person throughout his life.

Thus, aging is defined as a fading process, that is, it is not development, but involution, which excludes any possible potential of an aging person to develop his personality, develop abilities in any area of life, or adapt to new circumstances.

Biological theories of aging attempt to explain why the human body changes biologically with age. Sometimes the theories are divided into two groups: the theory of programmed aging and the theory of body wear and tear (the so-called stochastic theories) [11].

Thus, the differences in the average life expectancy of men and women cannot be explained by biological reasons.

In biological gerontology, the following propositions are developed [7].

- The study of aging mechanisms is possible only from the point of view of a systematic approach.
- Aging is an obligatory link in age-related development,
- During aging, along with a decrease in the activity of survival and metabolic functions, important adaptive mechanisms are mobilized.
- Aging is the result of a violation of self-regulation mechanisms at various levels of the body's vital activity.

The development of these propositions made it possible to propose an adaptive-regulatory theory of age-related development, which explains the mechanisms of age-related changes as an adaptive process of the organism.

Psychological gerontology. Most references on age psychology and developmental psychology have not included the period of aging and senility for some time. To a greater extent, psychology has studied the development of children and young people rather than adults and the elderly or the aging process.

The decline in some psychological functions of the elderly was mainly explained by the processes of biological degradation.

Thus, the view of psychologists about aging as a “psychological deterioration” first of all borrowed the negative view of aging from biologists and doctors, and secondly, made a certain contribution to the negative attitude towards the elderly.

It is obvious that theories of psychological deterioration are culture-dependent. They arise in a particular society, where negative stereotypes of the elderly and disabled are widespread: these are: “creating problems for others”, “someone's burden”, “old age is a period of widowhood and both physical and social deterioration”, etc. Theories that characterize aging as development, not degeneration, suggest a staged approach. According to the American scientist E. Erikson, any individual passes through psychological stages during his life (eight stages in total). Each of these stages involves a psychological conflict, the successful resolution of which is important in determining how the individual is able to perceive problems and conflicts in the following stages of life. The activity of each stage is the implementation of specific developmental tasks that will be necessary in the following stages of life and later. The main divisions of Erikson's scheme are made in the stages of childhood life. He also pointed out the importance of the final stages, each of which shows the individual in the potential for development and growth of his own problems [2].

The stages do not indicate a specific chronological age, but are a continuation of the

previous one. The result of resolving the crisis of the first stage affects further experience and resolution. The main problem in adulthood is “generativity” – the ability to pass on experience to future generations, to maintain the foundations of life (household, family, home). The opposite problem of generativity is “stagnation”, in which the individual remains focused on himself. The final task of life, according to Erikson, is to achieve “ego-integration”, when a person is able to overestimate and accept his life experience, reliability, value and significance. However, this does not mean that he should see his life as “successful”, but rather that he should accept all his achievements and failures as a unique personal experience [13].

There are three specific principles in this approach, each of which is important for understanding aging [7].

- aging is theoretically related to the early life of the individual. It is not distinguished from others as a stage with qualitative characteristics.

- the importance of the influence of social factors is emphasized. The degree of resolution of the crisis of the life stages that a person is able to achieve depends on the circumstances, his individual psychological characteristics and the harmful, destructive effects of conditions or opportunities.

- the resolution of conflict and the problems of development and achievement affect the individual’s “self” and his environment. Therefore, each individual moves from one stage to another with different levels of success and, accordingly, a different level of readiness.

However, other sources of human diversity, such as gender, nationality, social class or disability, were not discussed by either Erikson or his followers.

However, aging processes do not occur independently of each other. Indeed, changes in the physical state of the body (in particular, the brain or central nervous system) affect the psychological functioning of an individual.

The authors of numerous theories and studies of mental aging, especially among the younger generation, have instilled in society that “the human organism deteriorates with age.” From this definition it follows that “a lower position with age is inevitable.” Therefore, despite the efforts of social gerontologists and social and age psychologists who are trying to create a more positive image of “successful” aging, the model of “deterioration with age” is widespread [22].

M. V. Ermolaeva, who studied the theory of emotional aging, identifies its two main strategies [8]. The first assumes the possibility of further personal growth, the second is aimed at preserving oneself, first of all as an individual, that is, for biological survival. But the result, according to the criterion of survival, is, as a rule, always the opposite. That is, when a person, choosing the second strategy, tries to preserve himself as much as possible, he is constantly subjected to “failures”, since he is not able to turn back time, and an insufficient emotional state aimed at preserving himself is tantamount to pessimism and emotional extinction.

Subjectively, this attitude is expressed in a feeling of emptiness and uselessness.

O.V. Krasnova identified three variants of the manifestation of age-situational depression [9].

1. Hypochondriacal affirmation for senile diseases. A person “remains dependent” on his diseases and methods of treatment, while he is unaware of the connection between the external manifestations of his disease and aging and seeks practical treatment.

2. Delusional thoughts about oppression. He feels rejected by his environment and considers his social attitude to be extremely unfair. He thinks that his relatives are harassing him, the absence of which cannot be proven by an elderly person due to his confidence in his own justice.

3. Images of his own significance. A person tells or invents selected episodes from life, trying to “fill” the social and psychological gap in social relations.

A person’s value orientations are a person’s ideas about the main goals of life and the main ways to achieve these goals. Wurm and Schafer note that the system of value orientations is ideological in nature, it is formed on the basis of the highest social needs for inclusion in the social environment and in accordance with social conditions that

represent the possibility of realizing certain social and individual values [6].

Value orientations of older people reflect a variety of needs that are characteristic of both middle-aged and young people:

- 1) social needs – socially significant activities,
- 2) socio-psychological needs – the need for communication and care,
- 3) the need to maintain health [5].

In the aging process, mental and psychological changes are observed, which are associated with the processes of involution of the central nervous system (CNS) [7].

Based on the above, we concluded that gerontology, as the “science of aging”, studies the entire historical development of theories of aging. It is associated with specific changes in the organism and living conditions, which lead to a decrease in the body’s adaptability, the final distortion of biological functions and an increase in the likelihood of death. A number of authors, studying the period of old age, divide the entire above-mentioned group into: elderly people – 60–90 years old, as well as long-livers – over 90 years old. The age classification of old age was addressed by many researchers [2; 5; 7; 10].

Research methods

The perception of the other is studied among elderly persons of 65–85 years old (N=100, men: N=50, women: N=50). The study is aimed to reveal heterochronism of aging, depending on the differences of perceptions of the other.

The research methods are the following:

- self-perception questionnaire of the other
- biographical method
- case analysis

The participants of the study filled out the author's questionnaire and questions designed using the biographical method. Based on the nature and characteristics of the responses, a case analysis was conducted, during which the respondents provided detailed biographical data. The results were analyzed based on the principles of heterochronism of aging.

Results

The quantitative results obtained from the author's questionnaire revealing perceptions of the other are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Quantitative variables revealing perceptions of the other

Statements	Men	Women
I am not like other people.	32	35
The other people can never understand me.	34	48
Nobody knows my needs and expectations.	40	49
If I do not exist, there will be no aliens.	18	23
I cannot communicate like others	29	25
All people are my enemies.	20	22

As the results of the biographical method showed, those respondents who were living alone at the time of the survey recorded the extreme responses indicated in Table 1 regarding the perceptions of other. It also became clear that among the elderly women living alone, the self-perception of other is more pronounced compared to the elderly men. The results of the biographical method also revealed that about 7 % of the elderly living alone had previously held leadership positions. The responses of all these elderly people emphasized manifestations of the self-perception of other.

Conclusions

The results of the study showed that the self-perception of the other is emphasized among the elderly. They often have a feeling of alienation, abandonment, which is expressed through misunderstanding by the external social environment. The study also revealed a manifestation of heterochronism of kindness, which highlighted the most pronounced manifestations of self-perception of the other among the elderly who previously held leadership positions, and among female elderly people by gender.

The perception of the other can be formed or rooted as a result of socio-psychological and physiological heterochronism, in which case some representatives of the native environment are involved in the processes of alienation.

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