WCPCG-2011

Identity Structures dynamics in adults and elderly people

Cristian Vasile

*Department of Educational Sciences, Faculty of Letters and Sciences, Petroleum-Gas University of Ploieşti, Bd. Bucureşti 39, Ploieşti 100680, Romania

Abstract

Although the “identity” term is used mainly in social psychology, in the present approach the “Identity Structures” concept (IS) represents a set of seven structures that plays the role of interfaces between the individual internal psychological world (having as a core the Self) and the social environment. The paper presents data regarding Identity Structures dynamics in two groups: one composed of middle-aged adults, the other consisting of older adults. It is also discussed the relation between Identity Structures and mental health.

Keywords: Identity Structures, SPIS, age, self, psychological counselling

1. Introduction

Discussions about “self” and the “identity” concepts are generally classified as personality psychology sphere. In 1890 William James made the first known distinction between “I” and “me” in his paper “The Consciousness Self”. Since that time the self-concept was the basis of many theoretical approaches, but not always practical.

Self-concept is called in different ways too, as self-perspective, self-construction, self-schema and it is a multi-dimensional construct which relate the individual and environmental. This construct refers to one’s perception of “self” in relation to different characteristics (Bong & Clark, 1999; Byrne, 1984; Byrne & Worth, 1996; Shavelson & Bolus 1982). People have separate beliefs about emotional, physical, social etc. aspects of life (Vasile, 2007).

On the other hand the psychological “identity” relates to self-image, self-esteem and individuality. In cognitive psychology the “identity” refers to the capacity for self-reflection and the awareness of self (Leary & Tagney, 2003).

The present approach started from a model according to which the “self” represent a core of the individual personality in an integrative view (taking into account a number of theories, starting with psychoanalysis and continuing with cognitive approaches, humanistic views etc.) and this core interact with the environment through several interfaces called Identity Structures (IS). In a sense, the IS represents the individual “self” in its dynamics resulting from the interaction with the environment (Vasile, 2008). In this dynamic, the balance of the “self” system is necessary to maintain the personality continuity over time and the mental health.

As a result of different studies seven fundamental IS (or interfaces) were found as follows (Vasile, 2008): Physical Identity (own corporality, the bio-physical personal characteristics); Social Identity; Cultural Identity (identification with a particular culture and religion); Family Identity (identification as a member of a family with their own behavior patterns); Professional Identity (identification with a particular professional category and a

* Cristian Vasile. Tel.: +40723324169
E-mail address: clinical_psycho@yahoo.com

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Selection and/or peer-review under responsibility of the 2nd World Conference on Psychology, Counselling and Guidance.
certain job); Self-esteem (respect for the own person in terms of physical, social, professional, cultural and family); Behavior towards itself (how the person behaves towards itself, as a result of the self-esteem level). In order to measure the level of satisfaction on the IS, a scale was built and called SPIS - Scale of Perception and Fulfillment of the Self.

1.1. Purpose of the research

The purpose of this study was to: observe and capture the dynamics of the Identity Structures in two groups of adults; compare the IS dynamics between the two study groups (middle-aged adults and older adults); reflect through statistics different relations inside the IS system and between IS and other psychological items (like stress level, education level etc.). The present paper presents only a part of the results, taking into account the reduced space and the complexity of the theme.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

Two samples of adults participated in this research. The first one consist of 100 elders, 60 females and 40 males aged from 60 to 90 years old (M=69.00526) and the second consist of 67 adults, 35 females and 32 males, aged from 30 to 50 years old (M=39.64).

2.2. Instruments

As instrument SPIS was used. Scale of Perception and Fulfillment of the Self is a self-report instrument with 35 items, ranked from 1 to 5, 1 meaning total accord and 5 meaning total disagreement. The higher the score, the less balanced feels the subject (the higher is the unfulfillment feeling).

Statistical data were collected and processed.

2.3. Procedure

The instrument was administered by instructed operators, to small groups or individually, according to instructions. The subjects were told about the purpose of the research, and that the information they will provide will be secured and they are free to participate into the research.

2.4. Data analysis

Statistical analysis was conducted by SPSS 16.0 and Excel. Frequencies, descriptive statistics (mean, deviation) and specific correlations were calculated.

3. Results

SPIS reliability was calculated and Cronbach’s alpha coefficient was 0.8169, which indicates a very good reliability of the scale.

The scores frequencies related to IS were calculated for the elders sample and the results are shown in the Table 1.
Because of the limited space, we will present here only results regarding Social Identity (SI) and Family Identity (FI) variation by comparing elders with younger adults.

Figure 1 (a) and (b) represent the Social Identity variation in the two groups:

Fig. 1. (a)

![Social identity variation in elders](image)

Fig. 1. (b)

![Social identity variation in adults](image)

It can be observed at elders that SI varies in a dynamic manner by the age of 75 years, after which the variation is restricted. Also high scores can be observed frequent meaning the unfulfillment feeling on the social interface is stronger - Fig. 1(a). On the contrary, in younger adults, we can observe lower scores meaning the unfulfillment feeling on the social interface is not so strong. Also it can be observed an almost constant variation of the SI – Fig
1(b).

Figure 2 (a) and (b) represent the Family Identity variation in the two groups:

It is obvious from the Fig. 2(a) that after the age of 80, the elders are much more dissatisfied on this interface (they obtained a higher score). On the other hand the younger adults show an almost constant variation and much smaller scores (especially after 35 years old) meaning the fulfillment feeling on the family interface is stronger.

4. Discussion

The comparison between two groups IS variation could lead to practical findings and dynamic reflection of how adults at different ages relate themselves to the environment. Each of the seven IS was studied and comparisons were made between the two samples. We choose for this paper the SI and the FI interfaces because in these two areas important changes occur in the transition from adulthood to old age. From the SI view, the elder withdraw slowly from the social life, but it is also marginalized. The above presented variations of the SI by comparison to younger adults demonstrate this process.
Family Identity is continuous changing, yet it is more intense during the age 60-78. The decline coincides with changes in family life (children moves to their houses). Depending on the existing culture and family values, elders can be marginalized or valued.

The Self-esteem is another major interface or structure analyzed by this study. Even the statistical/graphical results are not presented here, we affirm (on a research basis) that the Self-esteem at the third age reach high scores in 60-78 years old, interval, meaning that self-esteem at elders is substantially lower.

All these data indicates the need for psychological counseling for elders so they can regain the psychological balance and the fulfillment feeling, the life satisfaction and a good mental health.

References


