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Gerotranscendence: a new approach to understanding successful ageing

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Gerotranscendence: a new approach to understanding successful ageing. *Age and gender peculiarities of gerotranscendence have been studied. The results of the study allow us to talk about the heterogeneous and non-linear dynamics in gerotranscendence formation. Gerotranscendence increases with age, which corresponds to the formation of positive attitude to aging, understanding that each age stage is unique, giving its own advantages in the development of personality. At the same time gender features of gerotranscendence have shown that women in general are more ready to accept age changes and themselves. The obtained results can be used in gerontopsychology and gerontopedagogy.*

Keywords: *gerotranscendence, gerotranscendent changes, maturity, old age.*

In the last decade, the term gerotranscendence has been used with increasing frequency in psychological literature devoted to the study of personality functioning in the later stages of ontogenesis. The word was introduced into the thesaurus of psychology by the Swedish scientist Lars Tornstam and is a combination of "... the prefix gero – as a reflection of connection with gerontology and the suffix transcendence as going beyond the life experience of the individual"[6, P. 168].

Gerotranscendence in L. T *Tornstam's* understanding lies in the paradigm shift with regard to perceptions of ageing and the self in the context of ageing.

The theory of gerotranscendence assumes that personal development takes place throughout life, including old age. Aging is seen as development, as natural stage in person's development, as a transition to wisdom. Gerotranscendence is associated not only with personal development, but with personal maturity, wisdom, identity, the ability to cope with difficulties as well; with qualities that ensure life satisfaction and psychological well-being of an individual [3].

Paradigm shifts occur in three spheres: at the level of Self, at the level of social and personal relationships, and at the cosmic level. The cosmic level reflects changes at the level of worldview and is related to understanding of Self in the context of life as a phenomenon of being [6].

Numerous foreign studies carried out within the theory of gerotranscendence have shown that people with a higher level of gerotranscendence have better control over their own social activity and are more satisfied with life [4]. It has been shown that the formation and development of gerotranscendence is based on person's life experience, maturity and wisdom [4, 7]. However, not all seniors achieve a high level of gerotranscendence [6, 7].

Studies note that cultural and social norms and the dominant ideology in society determine the peculiarities of person's development towards gerotranscendence [3, 5].

Domestic studies conducted mainly by O.Yu. Strizhitskaya focus on the factors and conditions of gerotranscendence formation[1,2].

The objective of the research is to study the age and gender peculiarities of gerotranscendence on Russian sample.

Methods

Participants

The study involved 120 people ageing 22 to 85 years. Thus, the range

was 63 years. A total of 73 women and 47 men participated in the survey. Most of the respondents had higher education (92% of the sample). Among the respondents were those with two or more higher education degrees. By means of cluster analysis, all respondents were divided into six age groups in approximate increments of 10 years. The distribution of respondents by age groups is presented in Table 1.

Table 1.
Distribution of respondents by age group

Group number	Mean age	Proportion in the sample, %
1	24	17,5
2	36	15,8
3	45	18,3
4	59	21,7
5	71	16,7
6	82	10

The data presented in the table show a fairly even distribution of respondents by age group. Some exceptions are in the oldest age group (average age – 82 years); they are 10% of the sample, which, however, corresponds to the demographic picture as a whole.

Methodology

The peculiarities of the respondents' gerotranscendence were measured by the Gerotranscendence Questionnaire worked out by O. Strizhitskaya (Strizhitskaya, 2018). The questionnaire measures the characteristics of understanding ageing and understanding oneself in the context of ageing.

High scores on the scale reflect the individual's acceptance of aging, the attitude to this period as a special life period the shift in the perception of reality from the position of an adult to the position of an elderly and old person. High scores on the scale are evidence of successful adaptation to age-related changes. Low scores on the scale, depending on age, may be evidence of an initial level of gerotranscendence formation (50-60 years old) or maladaptive personal development (80 and older) (Strizhitskaya, 2018).

The questionnaire consists of 34 statements united by three subscales. The Personal Dimension scale consists of 13 items describing understanding and acceptance of oneself as a subject of one's own life and

includes statements such as: "I think everyone should take care of their health, but within reasonable limits", "Sometimes I do not behave in the way that I think is right", "Looking back on my life, I can say that I have not lived my life in vain".

The scale of "social dimension" assesses the nature of person's social and emotional connections with the world around him, consists of 11 items and includes statements such as "I think it is very important to have a lot of social contacts", "I like to go shopping, to the theatre, to museums", "Now I can afford to communicate only with those with whom I like".

The "generalised view of the world" scale consists of 10 statements such as: "I now think more about the time of my life and time in general", "I realised a long time ago that one cannot imagine all the things that can happen to one", "I am afraid of not being able to do all the things I would like to do in the time I have left". The statements of this subscale are aimed at examining the features of self-perception in the context of Being in the existential sense of the term.

A score for each subscale is calculated as an indicator of trait expression, as well as an overall summary indicator, called by the author as overall gerotranscendence index.

The results and its analysis

Comparative analysis of gerotranscendence by age

A non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis Test was used for comparative analysis. Multiple range test was used to clarify the significance of differences between groups.

Personal dimension

The results of the comparative analysis are presented in Figure 1.

The value of Kruskal-Wallis Test (Test statistic = 8.99427 P-Value = 0.109293) does not indicate statistically significant changes in the variable reflecting the specifics of attitude towards oneself as a subject of one's own life. However, a pairwise comparison of the degree of expression of the trait across the groups suggests statistically significant differences between the group of 36-year-old respondents and the groups of respondents in early adulthood (age 24), late adulthood (age 59) and old age (age 82). All of these differences are statistically significant at $\alpha < 0.05$ significance level.

The results of the comparative analysis allow us to talk about a certain dynamics of this indicator. The highest values are characteristic

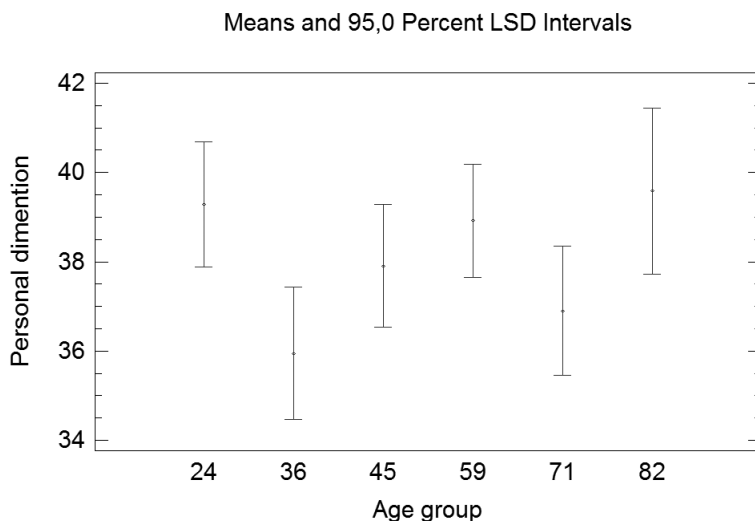


Fig. 1. Mean scores on the *Personality dimension* scale

of the groups with an average age of 24, 59 and 82 years, while the lowest values are characteristic of the group with an average age of 36 years. Respondents in this group are characterised by dissatisfaction with themselves, non-acceptance of themselves as subjects of their own lives and a fear of deviating from certain rules. This deviation is perceived as an opportunity to make mistakes.

On the whole, the following dynamics of the variable can be observed: at the stage of early adulthood, also known as the maturity stage, respondents are completely satisfied with themselves, accept them as they are and perceive themselves as a unique personality, a subject of their own life. With age, these perceptions change, dissatisfaction with them grows; they do not fully accept themselves and their own life and try to find some “ideal” version of their life path. With age, this tendency moves away in the direction of greater self-acceptance and the perception of oneself as a subject of one’s own life. Some decrease in personality dimension indicator can be observed in the group of respondents, with an average age of 71, at an age when the personality is faced with the task of adapting to increasing age-related changes. However, as our study shows, by the stage of late adulthood (old age) a person adapts to his/her age, accepts his/her positive as well as negative sides, also accepts

those decisions that were made during life, understands that he/she is a unique individual.

Social dimension

On the social dimension scale, a scale that assesses the nature of connections with the outside world, our study did not reveal any statistically significant differences in the degree of expression of the attribute in different age groups. The scores in all age groups fall within the range of 34-36 points, which, according to the questionnaire's author, corresponds to the average values. In general, the data obtained reflect the fact that respondents in all age groups are dependent on their social environment and are willing to accept the existing social climate, even if it is detrimental to the physical or mental health of the individual.

Generalised view of the world

A comparative analysis of the variable revealed statistically significant differences between the groups. Kruskal-Wallis Test value = 11.112, P-Value<0.05. The mean values of the *Generalised view of the world* indicator increased consistently with age (Figure 2).

The results strongly suggest that philosophical attitudes towards the

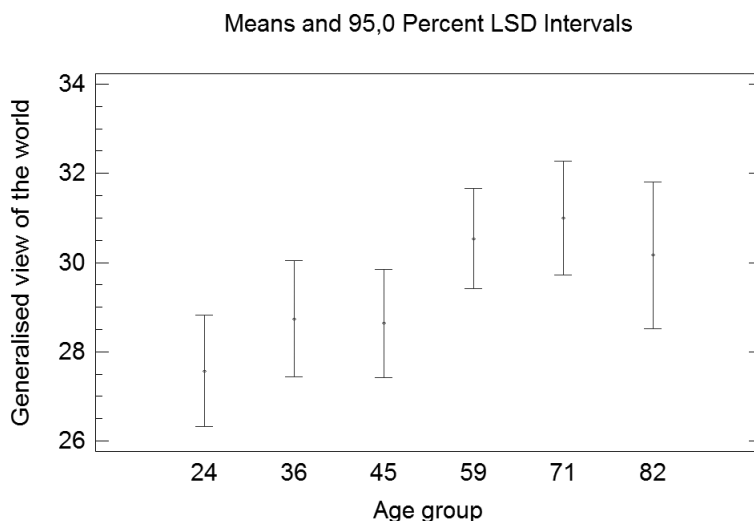


Fig. 2. Average scores on the scale of *Generalised view of the world*

world around and oneself in this world are shaped with the age of the individual. At the stage of entering maturity (24 years old) the individual

does not yet consider himself/herself to be an integral part of mankind, time and life are finite, the perspective of life is limited to his/her own life. However, with age (statistically significant differences between the groups are observed from the age of 59), a sense of connection with the whole world, with other generations emerges, and one's own life begins to be perceived as part of something larger and more meaningful. Death is perceived as a natural part of life.

The general index of gerotranscendence

The results of the comparative analysis of gerotranscendence are presented in Fig. 3.

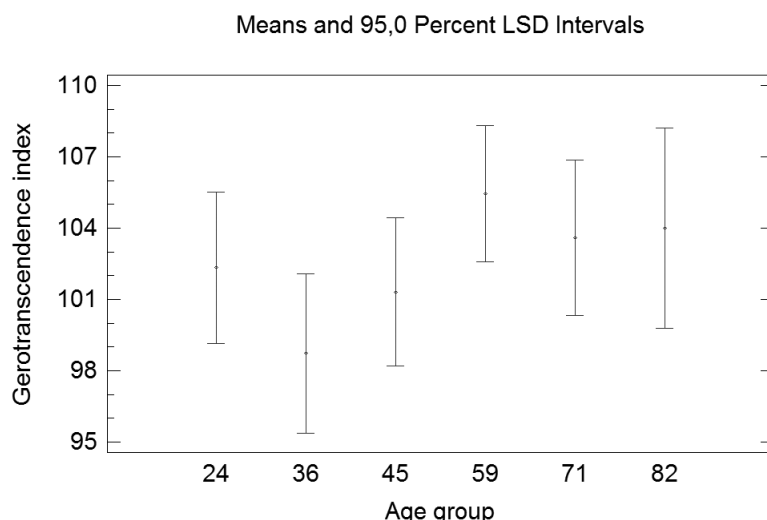


Fig. 3. Mean values of the overall index of gerotranscendence

Statistical analysis of the gerotranscendence index using the Kruskal-Wallis Test showed no statistically significant trend in the values of the index across the groups. However, a multiple comparison test showed that there were statistically significant differences between the groups with a mean age of 36 and 59 years. The lowest indicator is characteristic of the middle-aged group (36 years), indicating a weak degree of formation of gerotranscendence. The acceptance of one's age as not only an inevitable stage in the life of an individual, but also as a unique period providing new opportunities for personal development, in our study begins to be

fixed from the age of 59, but the indicator does not reach absolute high values in any age group.

A two-factor analysis of variance was conducted to clarify the results obtained and to identify gender-specific features of gerotranscendence, with age and gender as factors.

Personal dimension

Variance analysis of the personality dimension variable revealed a main effect for the group age variable ($F=2.78$, $p\text{-value}=0.0210$) and no main effect for the gender variable ($F=0,87$, $p\text{-value}=0.3539$). There is no statistically significant interaction between the factors, but for clarity, the results of the analysis of variance are presented in Figure 4.

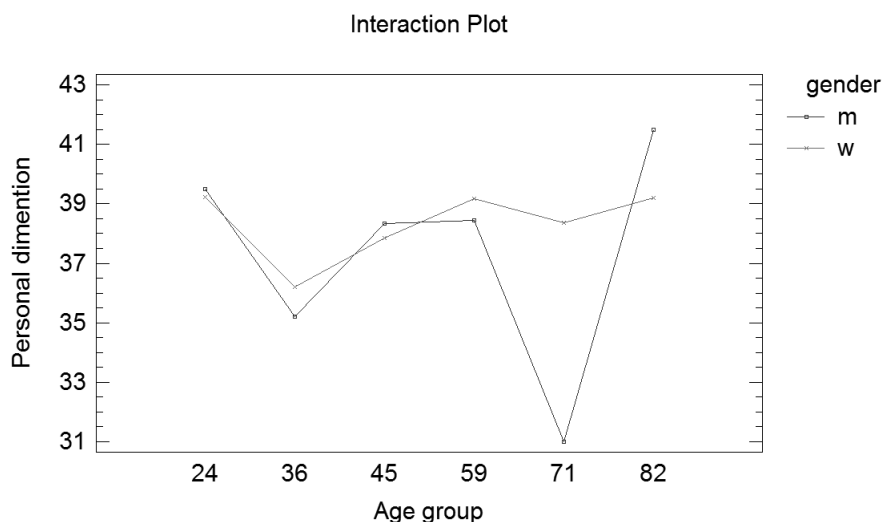


Fig. 4. The influence of age and gender factors on personal dimension

Analysis of the graph in Fig. 4 shows that women are more accepting of themselves as they are, with no abrupt changes in their understanding of themselves as subjects of their own lives, which distinguishes them from men. The results show that men at the age of 70, at an age when physical, social, psychological changes become visible, experience a crisis of acceptance of themselves and their own responsibility for their lives. However, with increasing age there is a reassessment of one's own life towards a positive attitude towards both its positive and negative aspects, acceptance of those decisions that have been made in life - personal congruence increases.

Social dimension

For the variable assessing the nature of connections with the outside world, the analysis of variance revealed no main effect for the variable age ($F=1.42$, $p\text{-value}=0.2219$). However, a main effect was found for the variable gender ($F=8.69$, $p\text{-value}=0.0039$). Fig. 5 presents graphically the results of the analysis.

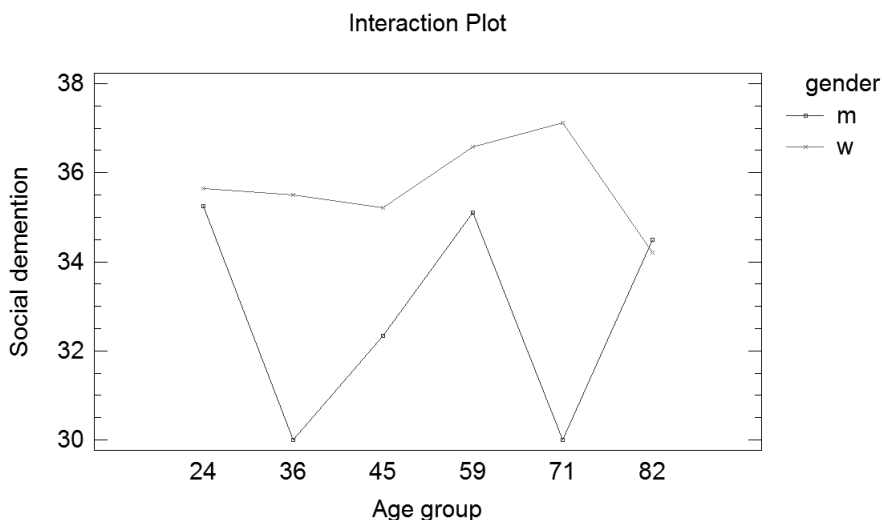


Fig. 5. The influence of the factors age and gender on the social dimension variable

Analysis of graph (Figure 5) and the results of analysis of variance suggests that women are more inclined to be comfortable with social interaction, listen to how they feel about the interaction and are not inclined to tolerate an unfavourable social climate. At the same time, men demonstrate their dependence on their social environment and their inability to regulate their interactions with others. This is particularly characteristic of the age group, with an average age of 36 and 71. However, attention should be drawn to a multidirectional tendency in the 82-year-old age group. The ability to build social relationships and the ability to enjoy them is increasing for men, while for women this ability is decreasing and they are becoming less tolerant and oriented towards their social environment.

Generalised view of the world

For the variable characterizing the philosophical attitude towards the Being personality, the analysis of variance revealed no main effect for the variable age ($F=1.67$, $p\text{-value}=0.1487$), while it (main effect) was revealed for the variable gender ($F=4.05$, $p\text{-value}=0.0468$). Graphically, the results are presented in Fig. 6.

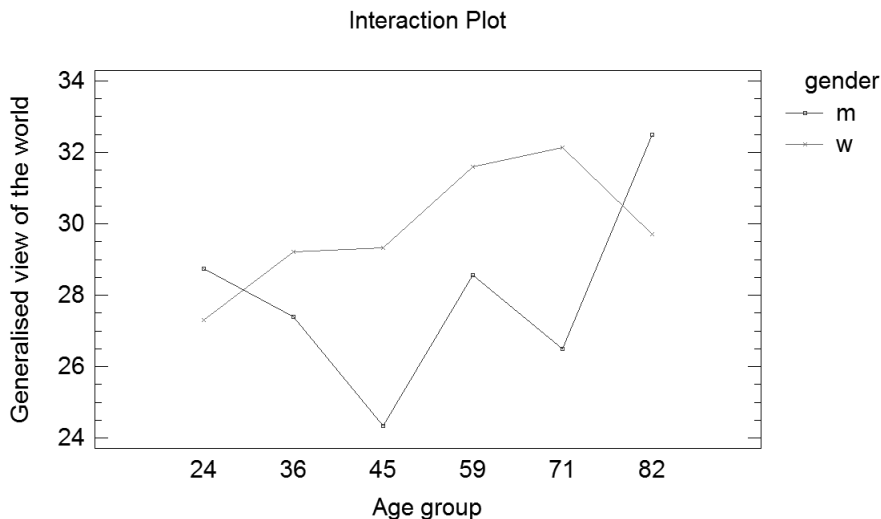


Fig. 6. The influence of the factors age and gender on *Generalised view of the world* variable

The graph reflects the different age dynamics for women and men. The generalization of women's perception of the world gradually increases with age: more smoothly during adulthood, increasing towards the beginning of the ageing period, but falling after the age of 70. For men, the formation of philosophical attitudes towards the world and existence is of a heterogeneous nature. The indicator drops sharply at the age of 45, the age of middle adulthood, which, we may assume, is evidence of a mid-life crisis when the personality's semantic system is being restructured and his or her place in the world is being reassessed. By the age of late adulthood, men, as the survey results show, cope with this crisis, but by the age of 70 the reassessment of the system of values begins again, and a change of attitude towards the surrounding reality takes place. However, it is worth mentioning that those of men who reach the age of old age or the fourth

(unfortunately, according to statistics, the average life expectancy of men in Moscow is 71.5 years) begin to take a more philosophical view of the surrounding world, their surroundings, and their own place and role in this world. Their views are shifting towards a holistic and meaningful understanding and perception of the world and man's place in it.

The general index of gerotranscendence

The results of the analysis of the influence of age and gender factors on the characteristics of the understanding of aging and the acceptance of the self in the context of aging are presented in Figure 7.

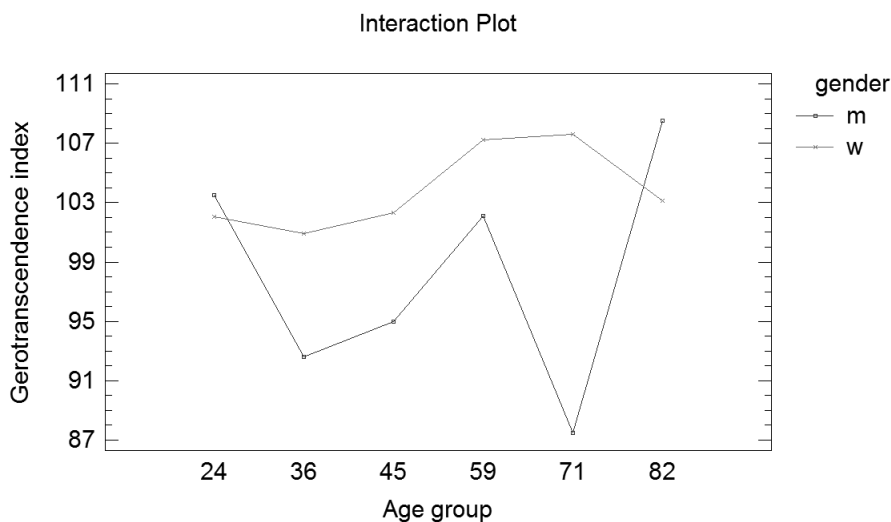


Fig. 7. The influence of age and gender factors on gerotranscendence index

Analysis of variance revealed no main effect for the variable age ($F=2.02$, $p\text{-value}=0.0815$); however, a statistically significant main effect was revealed for the variable gender ($F=5.81$, $p\text{-value}=0.0176$). It should be noted that a statistically significant second-order interaction between the factors age and gender ($F=2.37$, $p\text{-value}=0.04621$) was detected for this variable. The presence of the interaction suggests that men and women understand and relate to the aging process differently at different ages. This is shown graphically in Figure 8, where the variable gender is plotted along the x-axis.

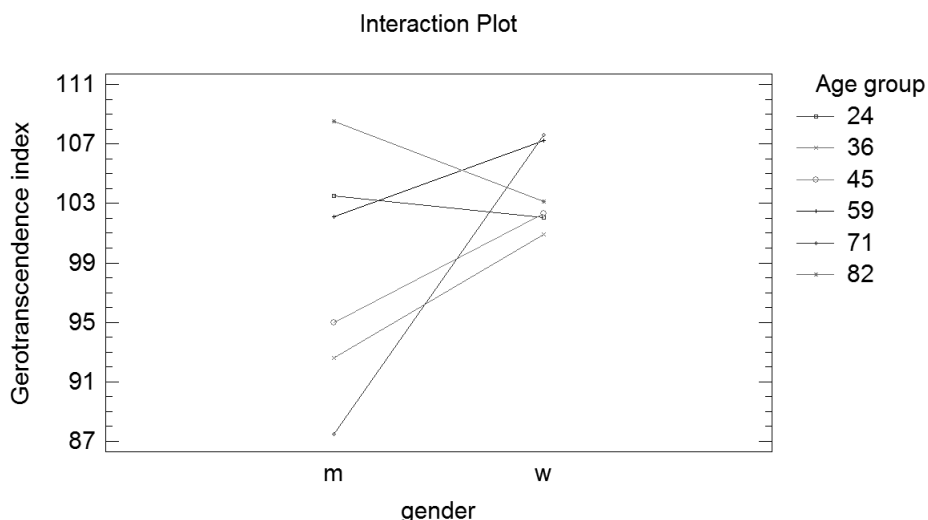


Fig. 8. The influence of the factors age and gender on gerotranscendence index

The data in Figure 8 allow us to clarify the correlation between the gerotranscendence index for men and women in different age groups. Thus, at the age of 24, at the stage of entering adulthood (curve 1), both men and women perceive the process of future ageing in approximately the same way. At the stage of early maturity (age group 36 - curve 2), middle maturity (age group 45 - curve 3), late maturity (age group 59 - curve 4) and in old age (age group 71 - curve 5) the prevalence of the index of gerontology is observed for women - higher than for men in all age groups. Men demonstrate an unpreparedness to accept the process of ageing and old age as a natural stage in personal development and are not ready for age-related transformations. Women in this sense are more tolerant of the changes associated with age, and are more ready to accept the period of ageing and the changes that are associated with it.

The exception already noted in the analysis of the individual subscales is the oldest age group, the group with an average age of 82. In this group, men show a higher level of gerotranscendence (curve 6) compared to women. One possible explanation for the pattern noted in the study is the fact that the meanings that supported women in previous stages of life have been lost. Not only children, but also grandchildren and often great-grandchildren have already grown up at this age.

Thus, the study has shown that the dynamics of the formation of personality gerotranscendence are heterogeneous and non-linear. The minimum values of the indicators of gerotranscendence – the unreadiness of a person to perceive himself/herself as an inevitably aging member of the family - are observed in the age group, with an average value of 36 years, at the stage of middle adulthood. Hero-transcendence increases with age, which corresponds to the formation of a positive attitude towards ageing, the understanding that each age stage is unique, giving its own advantages in personal development. Along with age specifics, the study revealed gender peculiarities in the formation of gerotranscendence. It is shown that women in general are more relaxed and tolerant of ageing than men. For men the self-acceptance in the context of aging is heterogeneous, and as a rule two crises in the formation of gerotranscendence are observed - one at the stage of middle adulthood (36-45 years old), the second one in old age (70 years old). It is noteworthy that in old age (82 years in the study), the level of gerotranscendence increases in men, while it decreases in women. We hypothesised that this is due to socio-cultural factors and needs to be investigated further.

Limitations

The authors are aware that this study has some limitations due to the fact that it is cross-sectional in nature, and features of personal hero-transcendence are considered in the context of its (hero-transcendence) characteristics at the age at which each individual took part in the study.

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Abstracts

ОЛЕНА БЕЛОВОЛ, ЗЛАТА БОЙКО, ОЛЕНА ШУРУПОВА. **Геротрансценденція: новий підхід до розуміння успішного старіння.** Досліджено вікові та гендерні особливості геротрансценденції. Результати дослідження дозволяють говорити про гетерогенну та нелінійну динаміку формування геротрансцендентності. Геротрансцендентність зростає з віком, що відповідає формуванню

позитивного ставлення до старіння, розуміння того, що кожен віковий етап унікальний, дає свої переваги в розвитку особистості. У той же час гендерні особливості геротрансценденції показали, що жінки в цілому більш готові сприймати вікові зміни та себе. Отримані результати можуть бути використані в геронтопсихології та геронтопедагогії.

Ключові слова: геротрансцендентність, геротрансцендентні зміни, зрілість, старість.

ЕЛЕНА БЕЛОВОЛ, ЗЛАТА БОЙКО, ЕЛЕНА ШУРУПОВА. **Геротрансцендентность: новый подход к пониманию успешного старения.** Изучены возрастные и гендерные особенности геротрансценденции. Результаты исследования позволяют говорить о неоднородной и нелинейной динамике формирования геротрансцендентности. Геротрансцендентность увеличивается с возрастом, что соответствует формированию позитивного отношения к старению, понимания того, что каждый возрастной этап уникален, дает свои преимущества в развитии личности. В то же время гендерные особенности геротрансценденции показали, что женщины в целом более готовы принять возрастные изменения и себя. Полученные результаты могут быть использованы в геронтопсихологии и геронтопедагогике.

Ключевые слова: геротрансцендентность, геротрансцендентные изменения, зрелость, старость.

OŁENA BEŁOWOŁ, ZŁATA BOJKO, OŁENA SZURUPOWA. **Gerotranscendencia: nowe podejście do zrozumienia pozytywnego starzenia się.** Zbadano cechy gerotranscendencji związane z wiekiem i płcią. Wyniki badań pozwalają mówić o heterogenicznej i nieliniowej dynamice powstawania gerotranscendencji. Gerotranscendencia wzrasta wraz z wiekiem, co odpowiada kształtowaniu pozytywnego nastawienia do starzenia się, rozumiejąc, że każdy etap wieku jest wyjątkowy oraz daje swoje korzyści w rozwoju osobowości. Jednocześnie osobliwości płciowe transcendencji wykazały, że ogólnie kobiety są bardziej skłonne zaakceptować zmiany wiekowe i siebie. Uzyskane wyniki mogą być wykorzystane w gerontopsychologii i gerontopedagogice.

Słowa kluczowe: gerotranscendencia, zmiany gerotranscendentalne, dojrzałość, starość.