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SOCIAL AND RELATIONAL ASPECTS ASSOCIATED TO THE MASSIVE USE OF SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES IN ADOLESCENCE

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Abstract

Objectives. The main purposes of this study were to explore: a) the relationships between massive use of Social Networks sites (SNs) in adolescence, school burnout levels and friendship quality; b) gender differences in massive and problematic use of SNs.

Material and methods. A number of 140 Italian high school students (M=72.9%) aged 16-18 years participated in the study. Students were asked to complete self-report questionnaires: an ad-hoc scale for investigating SNs use, The Generalized Pathological Internet Use Scale-2 (GPIUS-2; Caplan, 2010), The Parent and Peer attachment inventory for Friendship Quality (Armsden and Greenberg, 1987), The School Burnout Inventory (SBI; Samlela-Aro et al., 2009).

Results. Results showed positive relationships between massive SNs use and friendship quality (r = .30, p < .01); compulsive SNs (GPIUS-2) use and school burnout total score (r = .25, p < .01); massive SNs use and female gender (r = .17, p < .05), and finally a positive relationship between SNs use for mood regulation and school burnout total score (r = .20, p < .05). Moreover, significant difference emerged between females and males in SNs massive use, with higher levels reported by females (M=23.55, DS=3.614) in comparison to males (M=21.89, DS=4.261); t(138)= -2.13, p < .05.

Conclusions. Overall, this study highlighted different dimensions that could influence SNs massive and problematic use in adolescence, specifically school burnout and friendship quality. Structuring interventions in order to promote socio-relational skills among peers and to prevent school-related burnout could prevent problematic use of SNs in adolescence.

Keywords: social networks, school burnout, friendship quality, adolescence.

Introduction

Using social networks sites (SNs) in adolescence has been reported to be one of the most frequent Internet activity (Cerrato, Martin-Perpina and Vinas-Poch, 2018; Subrahmanyam and Greenfield, 2008) and over the years, the Internet and SNs have become an essential social context for adolescents. While there have been positive outcomes associated with SNs use, such as new opportunities for sociability, there were also been negative ones: research has shown that some adolescents tend to use Internet and SNs excessively or in a maladaptive way with negative consequences on different aspects of their life, such as school, relations with parents and peers and their psychological wellbeing (Ballarotto et al., 2018; Livingstone et al., 2011). Literature underlines that, in adolescence, girls show higher levels of massive Internet use than male peers, showing in association both higher levels of internalization and externalization problems. They also spend more time on SNs than boys and seem more interested in the relational aspects of SNs (Anderson, Steen and Stravropoulos, 2016). In this regard, studies show that girls use SNs primarily
to seek closer and more intimate relationships with their peers, to share emotions and personal problems, to keep in touch with peers from their offline lives and with friends they rarely see, to reinforce friendships, and to make plans with friends; on the other hand, boys reported using SNs to flirt and make new friends and are more interested in playing online games (Ballarotto et al., 2018). In adolescence, SNs' use leads at searching for autonomy, intimacy, identity and socialization (Borca et al., 2015). Specifically, communication with peers resulted as primary function of SNs. Studies showed that adolescents have a broader online friendship network than offline, although the majority of them perceived these online relationships as unsubstantial (Espinoza and Juvonen, 2011). Starting an online friendship exposes to fewer risks considering the possibility of asynchronous and anonymous online communications (Buote, Wood and Pratt, 2009). SNs could help in strengthening existing friendships, allowing adolescents to communicate with peers in a context where they appear more comfortable in sharing their feelings (Borca et al., 2015). For these reasons, online communication is perceived by adolescents as more effective than offline communication, also contributing to increasing perceived reciprocal confidence among peers (Valkenburg and Peter, 2007). During adolescence, pressures of schoolwork and responsibilities could affect students' stress levels, and this stress could result in burnout syndrome (Walburg, Mialhes and Moncla, 2016). Specifically, school-related burnout includes three significant dimensions: exhaustion at school, cynicism toward the meaning of school, and a sense of inadequacy at school (Salmela-Aro et al., 2009). High levels of school burnout seem to be associated with lower levels of school engagement and academic achievement (Salmela-Aro, Kiuru and Jokela, 2008). Moreover, school burnout could also be the result of a discrepancy between school expectations and high standards, and their real school results (Kiuru et al., 2008). For this reason, it could be possible that the students with higher levels of burnout would perceive a gap between whom they want to be and who they are with a consequent desire to escape from themselves, using, for example, SNs (Walburg, Mialhes and Moncla, 2016). Considering that SNs are particularly prevalent among adolescents, it could be interesting focusing on how stress situations such as school-related burnout could influence the massive use of SNs. The main aim of this study was to explore, in a group of adolescents, the relationships among SNs massive use, friendship quality and school burnout levels, in order to investigate risk and protective factors associated with a maladaptive use of SNs.

Material and methods

A number of 140 Italian high school students (M=72.9%) aged 16-18 years participated in the study. Considering the use of SNs, 82.1% of students used Instagram, and only 15% used Facebook. Furthermore, 2.9% reported not to use SNs. Students were asked to complete self-report questionnaires: An ad-hoc scale for investigating SNs use; the questionnaire was composed by seven items measured on a five-point Likert-scale (1= I never use it for this reason; 5= I always use it for this reason). Higher scores indicate massive SNs use. The Generalized Pathological Internet Use Scale-2 (GPIUS-2; Caplan, 2010); students' pathological Internet and SNs use were assessed with this 15 items-questionnaire, measured on a five-point Likert-scale (1=completely disagree; 5=completely agree). For this study, two subscales were used: Mood regulation and Compulsive Use. The Parent and Peer attachment inventory for Friendship Quality (Armsden and Greenberg, 1987); four items from the inventory were selected for this study to measure adolescents’ closeness to friends (Valkenburg and Peter, 2007) items were measured by a five-point Likert-scale (1=completely disagree; 5=completely agree). The selected items were "When my friends know that something is bothering me, they ask me about it," "I tell my friends about my problems and troubles," "My friends help me to understand myself better," and "When I am angry about something, my friends try to be understanding.". The School Burnout Inventory (SBI; Fiorilli et al., 2014; Salmela-Aro et al., 2009) assessed students’ school burnout, and it is composed of nine items
rated on a 6-points Likert scale (1=completely disagree; 6=completely agree). Higher scores indicate high school burnout.

Results

Intercorrelations among studied variables were measured by bivariate Pearson correlations and are displayed in Table 1. Results showed positive relationships between massive SNs use and friendship quality (r = .30, p < .01); compulsive SNs (GPIUS-2) use and school burnout total score (r = .25, p < .01); massive SNs use and female gender (r = .17, p < .05), and finally a positive relationship between SNs use for mood regulation and school burnout total score (r = .20, p < .05). An independent t-test was performed in order to investigate gender differences in SNs massive use. Results, displayed in Table 2, showed a significant difference between females and males in SNs massive use, with higher levels reported by females (M=23.55, DS=3.614) in comparison to males (M=21.89, DS=4.261); t(138)= -2.13, p < .05. Moreover, females reported higher levels of total school burnout (M_females=3.28, DS=1.041; M_males=2.78, DS=1.048); t(138)= -2.04, p < .05.

Table 1. Bivariate correlations among studied variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Massive SNs use</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.40**</td>
<td>.30**</td>
<td>.39**</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.17*</td>
<td>.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mood regulation</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendship quality</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compulsive use</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>-.12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Burnout</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>.25**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.27**</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.17*</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>-.13</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SNs Social Network sites; *p < .05 **p < .01

Table 2. t-test results comparing males and females on studied variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Males (N=102)</th>
<th>Females (N=38)</th>
<th>t-test</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Massive SNs use</td>
<td>21.89</td>
<td>23.55</td>
<td>.035*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mood regulation</td>
<td>1.88</td>
<td>1.89</td>
<td>.933</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compulsive use</td>
<td>1.95</td>
<td>2.13</td>
<td>.262</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Burnout</td>
<td>2.78</td>
<td>3.18</td>
<td>.044*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05

Discussions

The main aim of this study was to investigate, in a group of adolescents, existing relationships among SNs massive and problematic use, school burnout levels and friendship quality. Literature underlines significant associations between school burnout and problematic use of the Internet in adolescence (Salmela-Aro et al., 2017). From our results emerged a significant positive association between adolescents’ perceived school burnout and problematic SNs use: the more adolescents reported higher levels of burn-out, the more they massively use SNs. According to literature (Walburg, Mialhes and Moncla, 2016) higher levels of school-related stress perceived by students could induce them to use SNs, perceived as more reassuring and comfortable, in order to escape from reality. Moreover, from our results emerged a significant positive association between SNs massive use and perceived friendship quality: the more adolescents perceive their friendships
as supportive, the more they report using SNs. These results are in line with the literature (Espinoza and Juvonen, 2011; Borca et al. 2015). Some adolescents may use SNs in order to strengthen their friendships, perceiving online communication as deeper and close. Online emotional disclosure is perceived as more intimate and comfortable by adolescents and, for this reason, online communication as more effective than the offline (Valkenburg and Peter, 2007). When adolescents have an offline friendship network in which experience feelings of affiliation and trust, a higher SNs use will help them in maintaining closeness and support with the group (Espinoza and Juvonen, 2011). Finally, considering gender differences, our results underlined how girls reported higher massive use of SNs the boys. These data are in line with the literature (Anderson, Steen and Stravropoulos, 2016) and specifically, recent studies highlighted that girls, in comparison to boys, use SNs searching for more intimate and close relationships in order to share emotional and personal problems (Ballarotto et al., 2018).

Study Limitations

This study has potential limitations. First, our sample was mainly composed by males’ adolescents, consequently more heterogeneous samples should be used to test the generalizability of these findings in future investigations. Moreover, this research has a cross-sectional design and therefore it is not possible to draw causal inferences about relationships among variables; further longitudinal researchers are needed to examine and understand these relationships over time.

Conclusions

Overall, this study highlights different dimensions that could influence SNs massive and problematic use in adolescence, specifically school burnout and friendship quality. Structuring interventions in order to promote socio-relational skills among peers and to prevent school-related burnout could prevent problematic use of SNs in adolescence.

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CHALLENGES OF ONLINE HEALTH-RELATED INFORMATION FOR ROMANIAN SENIORS

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Abstract

Objectives. Research shows that older adults respond differently to mediated communication than younger adults. These age differences result from both generational differences and life-span development. Seniors face new challenges in the case of the present displacement in the study and practice of medical communication. The present study draws on the hypotheses related to health-related Internet use by seniors and try to validate them in a specific context - the Romanian society. The hypotheses of our study are: H1. Seniors use the Internet as a starting point for general information related to health but when it came to make informed decisions about health care they adhere to physician-centered care model (Campbell and Nolfi, 2005). H2: The more a senior as a patient learns from the Internet about her/his illness, the more likely she/he is to ask questions derived from Internet consumption to his/her physician (Frederikson and Bull, 1995).

Material and methods. The study used the interview as the main method of research. A sample of seniors was included in the analysis. The sample was made of fifteen persons aged +65 years old who used the Internet not only to obtain daily information and to socialise with their friends but also to search for health-related information.

Results. Only the first research hypothesis (H1) was validated by the data. The results showed that Romanian seniors still do not consider online health information to be as reliable as interpersonal communication with their General Practitioners (GPs). At the same time, Romanian older adults are overloaded with the sheer amount of information available on the net and tend to “simplify” it by checking that information with medical staff (e.g. GPs, nurses).

Conclusions. As our set of interviews showed, Romanian seniors we included in the sample have a lower desire to control their own health care by themselves and remain deeply dependent on the interpersonal medical communication with GPs, family, pharmacists and friends. A post-festum hypothesis is generated by the project: The e-health related consumptions for Romanian seniors could be conditioned by the level and degree of their active search of health-related information.

Keywords: seniors, online communication, interpersonal communication, health-related information.

Introduction

At present, the general image of the Romanian older adults is extremely fragmented and incomplete. The existing researches in Romania on seniors are mainly descriptive and made at a punctual level, being focused on specific factors affecting their lives (poverty or illness) (Bodogai and Cutler, 2014). The Romanian researchers (Bodogai and Cutler, 2014; Dascălu, Rodideal and
(Popa, 2018) outlined the fact that there is no data-basis about Romanian older adults available to the general public and the scarcity of the existing data made difficult even the secondary analyses on the basis of other researches.

As regards the seniors’ quality of life, the existing data showed that Romanians over 65 years old are generally living in poverty (73% say they do not have enough resources from one month to the other), and the three main factors influencing their quality of life are: health, family relationships and financial situation (Garoschy and Mihart, 2010; Consiliul Național al Persoanelor Vârstnice, 2014). In 2013, the Romanian Commercial Bank’s study (Banca Comercială Română, 2013) pointed out the fact that Romania increase in aging population connected with the decreasing number of active population (due to external migration and low fertility ration) will have a negative effect on economic situation at the level of economic and social development in the next decades (Banca Comercială Română, 2013).

At the level of seniors’ personal health, as the National Institute for Statistics (2014) had pointed out, from the total number of persons suffering from a chronic illness or disability, 38.1% of the persons aged 65-75 years and 66.7% of the persons over the age of 75 years old assessed that their health-state health is in a bad and very bad condition (Institutul Național de Statistică, 2014). In addition, 19.1% of seniors aged 65-74 years and 35.8% of those aged over 75 years had declared that their health had put a great degree a limit on their daily activities (Institutul Național de Statistică, 2014).

Meanwhile, the rate of adoption of new communication technologies by Romanian seniors remained very low. In 2017, only 68.6% Romans’ have Internet access at home, 64.3% within urban areas (Institutul Național de Statistică, 2017). According to the same set of data, there are some good predictive factors in Romania (same as worldwide) that influence digital devices possession and Internet access and the most important are the occupational status and the householder’s income (90.9 % of employees have access, compared with 42.2% pensioners) (Institutul Național de Statistică, 2017). The occupational status and the income of the householder influenced the ownership of the household computer equipment. Old people who live with younger relatives are most likely to use Internet than those who live alone and the use of the ICT decrease as the people get older (Institutul Național de Statistică, 2017).

Giving the low level of connection at the new communication means – especially, the Internet – the interest in analysing the relation between Romanian seniors and technology was rather small. Few data which exist showed (Ivan et al., 2017) that Romanian older adult population was not a homogeneous group in relation to the internet. Much more, computer anxiety had not always a linear negative effect on performance and certain level of anxiety could be functional in process of technology appropriation. The fact that it is a social need to better understand the everyday practice of Romanian seniors related to the Internet was recognised. Unfortunately, the attempts to understand more the role, meanings and utilities of different computer activities at the level of population aged over 65 years are extremely rare and inconsistent (Ivan et al., 2017).

The researches made about the Romanian seniors’ image in (central and local) mass media had revealed that they were a social group with small media coverage (Ministerul Muncii, Familiei și Protecției Sociale, 2009). Much more, Romanians over 65 years have a negative public image and a low media reputation (Ministerul Muncii, Familiei și Protecției Sociale, 2009). It is important to note that the cases in which the media covered an exclusive component of the image of older adults were those articles in which they were considered as a "burden" for the active people and where their standard of living was compared with that of the rest of the population (Ministerul Muncii, Familiei și Protecției Sociale, 2009). At the level of local media the coverage of Romanian seniors was limited only to the case of social risk situations (whether they are sick, retired or poor). Much more, if the Romanians seniors are presented in the press this had been made almost exclusively at the local level: 90% of the articles covering this social category were printed in local media and only 10% in Romanian central media (Ministerul Muncii, Familiei și Protecției Sociale,
At the opposite end of the communication process, when the image of seniors was assessed at the level of the population, one can notice that the existing studies (Consiliul National al Persoanelor Vârstnice, 2016) stressed the fact that limited access to medical facilities or medical treatment (21%), social and psychological vulnerabilities (31%), social isolation and loneliness (31%), the discrimination on the basis of age (39%) and the low level knowledge of their own rights (65%) were the main elements associated with people aged over 65 years in Romania (Consiliul National al Persoanelor Vârstnice, 2016). When they assessed in general the older adults the Romanians also associated them with the pension (62.9%), the incapacity to move (54.8%), the life-experience (51.6%), illness and disease (50%), loneliness (33.8%), addiction (29%), poverty (29%) and "being a burden for the others" (19.3%) (Consiliul National al Persoanelor Vârstnice, 2016).

Due to the fact that, compared to other age groups of population, seniors tend to be complex patients, the relation they have with Internet was assessed as beneficial when seeking health information online is at stake (Chaudhuri et al., 2013). At the same time, the existing literature pointed out the aims for which seniors used the Internet for health-related information. In their study, Macias and McMillan (2008) stressed the following reasons for which older adults use the Internet: to send mails to friends and family (e.g. "to socialise"), to read, to prepare for the visit to the doctor or to fill in the gaps left by doctors. In a different analysis, Sommerhalder et al. (2009) assessed that the proliferation of online health information available for the patients is controversial due to the fact that patients are overloaded with the sheer amount of information available on the net. But, as Wicks (2004) noticed, despite the fact the more and more medical and health-related information is available online seniors tend to look primarily to interpersonal sources (General Practitioners, family, pharmacists and friends) for answers related to their health.

The present study attempted to fill a gap in the existing literature in Romania by attempting to understand what is happening at the intersection of three elements: Romanian seniors, Internet use and health. From here, as the main objective of the research, there was the following:

RO1: To understand the ways in which Romanian seniors use the Internet for health-related issues.

Material and methods

The main method of research used in the present article is the semi-structured interview. The guide of interview included thirty-one questions on the topics of health-related Internet uses.

The set of data included in the analysis were collected in face-to-face interactions between January 2017 and June 2018 in Bucharest (Romania). The sample of seniors was made of fifteen persons (ten women and five men), aged over 65 years old, who used the Internet not only to obtain daily information and to socialise with their friends but also to search for health-related information.

Table 1. The structure of the sample of respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name/Initials of the name used in the analysis</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>L.D.</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>68 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A.G.</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>89 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I.D.</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>72 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M.G.</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>71 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I.S.</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>66 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D.P.</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>75 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L.S.</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>65 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P.F.</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>64 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The hypotheses of this study were the followings:

H1. Seniors use the Internet as a starting point for general information related to health, but when it came to make informed decisions about health care they adhere to physician-centered care model (Campbell and Nolfi, 2005).

H2: The more a senior as a patient learns from the Internet about her/his illness, the more likely she/he is to ask questions derived from Internet consumption to his/her physician (Frederikson and Bull, 1995).

Results

When they had been asked about the definition of the term "information" Romanian seniors had associated it with "knowing what is happening in the entire country" (MG) or "knowing what is happening in the entire world" (IS).

Among the mass media used by them, television came on the first place:
A.G.: First of all, I see and watch everything at the TV.

On the second place among information sources Romanian, older adults have placed the radio:
I.D.: I listen to it even when I went in my garden.
D.P.: News is really good at radio, it gives information. Radio also gives the programs that I am interested in, pleasant music, small competitions, only interesting things or the "Villages’ Antena". In short, it is so varied...

The newspapers and magazines came only on the third place among information sources for Romanian seniors.

Referring to the "traditional" media, our respondents noticed that they did not use all of them, mainly due to the high prices associate with printed press:
I.D.: I have ceased to buy newspapers many years ago, because what the information is the same as that offered by the TV stations. So, when I have to give up of something I give up the newspapers because they are really expensive for me.

The selection of the printed press’ titles by our respondents was based on their utility in their daily lives:
G.I.: I’m not buying newspapers until Friday. On that day I buy "Libertatea" because it has a TV program for all next week and on Thursday or Friday I buy "Formula AS" where I can find 30 pages of preventive medicine.

The Romanian seniors did not trust very much Romanian mass media, and they tended to be prudent in their assessments:
P.F.: I trust some of them but the great majority... well... they publish information and articles which made me angry. Of course, I read them, get angry and drop them. After a while, I came back, read them again and balance the information with what I found on TV or at the radio.
I.D.: I select them and if they fit with the ideas and opinions I already have, I remember them, if not, I move on, change the TV channel of radio program or even give up the newspaper.

Many times mass media was used for secondary purposes, as background information on
which the daily activities could be performed:
P.F.: I’m opening the TV if I have other things to do in my house.
D.P.: I’m opening the TV at 12.00-13.00 when I came home with my grandchildren and stay with it open until the evening.

The information from the media also has the role of bringing together people:
L.S.: I talk to my neighbors about what we hear on TV, we go out to the street, we meet, and we discuss "Look what they say..."
T.B.: I have two or three former work-colleagues with whom I meet when I hear a breaking-news report at TV. They call me or I call them and either we meet in person or we talk on the phone... until the next day we realize that there was nothing extraordinary with this news. It was simple information placed with buzz on a newspaper to sell it or to stay tuned on a TV or radio channel. By talking about this or this topic we only took the opportunity to meet and not to quarrel.

As regards the internet, our interviews showed that Romanian seniors had linked the beginning of its use to personal moments: the day when they received the computer or a tablet, the day in which their son or grand-daughter had showed for the first time how to use the internet:
E.V.: When my daughter came for the first time back from Italy, she bought me a computer. It was something very new for me. Although she showed me how to use it I did that only three years after. For me it was a device too new, I was afraid to do not break it.

When asked what they assess to be the advantages of using the Internet, Romanian seniors mentioned the possibility to get in touch with their relatives, especially with their children living abroad, or to reconnect with friends or former work-colleagues:
E.V.: I’m in touch with my daughter in Italy and my nephew. Or I read something on the internet.
P.F: Yes, I use to see what are doing my friends and, well, my relatives. I use it for emails and, of course, to watch movies, to listen to the music.

Our data showed that treatment of disease and illness’ symptoms were the main topics for which Romanian seniors had declared that they search for online information. The interest in other health-related information found on the Internet was low and limited to medical system (e.g. to find information about hospitals or doctors in general).
R.P.: Generally, I want to see what other people say about treatments or their illnesses, whether they are doctors who discuss about certain diseases, or if a new drug is now available on the market.
D.G.: I told you that I adhere at the naturalist [e.g. alternative] medicine and I take some medicines, such are those for the heart, for the liver. Since I’m insulin-dependent, I’m more sensitive at the changes in medication and after I’ve documented on the Internet and... I can tell you that for three years, I’m doing very well and I’m in a very healthy condition taking those naturalist medicines.
M.G.: First of all, if I don’t know a certain physician in a certain field, I’m starting to look online after him or her. I’m starting to look for best doctors in a certain medical field in Romania. I read about them, I’m looking for more sources. I want to see what would be the best way to approach him or her. Of course, I’m looking for the clinic or the hospital where he or she is working. I’m looking at their work-program and try to contact them.

When they describe the relation with their doctors, Romanian seniors stressed the trust they placed in the medical staff and the high status the doctors have in their eyes. From here, as the majority had declared, they avoid any discussion starting from the information related to health which could be find online. The main reason for this reluctance, and even avoidance, was their personal assessment that such subjects cannot be discussed in a doctor-patient meeting:
I.S.: He [e.g. the GP] told me what I had to take, that is, the reason for which he gave me the recipe. He is a doctor so I can’t take what medicine I want. It’s a very good thing this one because, you know, we, the elders, have to take that way, that’s the way in which we have been learned and that’s right, he’s right.
L.D.: I cannot discuss with him what I found on the internet. Even if I had tried to do that, he had told me that I didn’t know a lot and he was right, after all, he is the specialist.

It was obvious, from here, that, in the case of the hierarchy made between online and offline health-related information, the former took precedence. In other words, for Romanian seniors always the medical advice comes first and the information from other sources is secondary as relevance. As the respondents have declared, the most trustful advices they received related to health and illness, came from the medical staff.

I.V.: It has happened to tell him about some information of this kind [e.g. found on the Internet]. For example, I saw an advertisement that is easy found now on the Internet, with drugs for weight loss. I told her about that, but she recommended me to do more sports and live healthy and not to swallow some drugs I know nothing and which are only found on the internet. And she was right.

G.I: I have asked some doctors about some things about which I have read on the internet. Sometimes they approve and said that it could be something interesting but in general they said that is something stupid and had not to be taken into account. Well, after all, I think they know better.

When Romanian seniors acknowledged that they followed advices related to health found online they stressed that those were only alternative treatments, natural medicines and not allopathic drugs:

M.G: Yes, I found something on the website of "Forever" company and I used it. But I do not take into account everything I found on the Internet. If I heard about something interesting and I am somehow convinced, I go and take the information needed, in which I am interested, I didn’t intend to do things in other way, … , I do not know how to say. I try to be in line.

The use of Internet in doctor-patient communication is not common among Romanian seniors. In fact, when they did not go in person for the visit to their GP or the doctor, they use phone-calls only for appointments (and not for prescriptions or medical advices):

P.F.: Only once or maybe two times I called her to schedule me. In general I’m going straight to the cabinet.

I.S.: We called the doctor and then he made an appointment for us, not online, he schedules us and we go directly to him when he said that we can do that.

The general use of the feed-back was, as such, low in the online environment. In the case of our respondents only two persons had acknowledged that they have rated the medical services on the online website of the clinics:

D.P.: I once rated the doctor from the private hospital "Regina Maria" where I was for an abdominal ultrasound investigation.

**Discussions**

At present, the situation of older adults’ general education is worldwide of great interest for the researchers in education sciences. The first "University of the Third Age" has been set up in Toulouse, in 1972 by Pierre Vellas (Neculau, 2004). In 1975, New Hampshire University had the initiative to run an experiment in which, during the summer vacation, the students’ hostels were organised as seniors’ hotels. Older adults were involved in various activities, such as "educational programs, and physical, intellectual and leisure-related", the entire program taking, in fact, the shape of a true summer school (Neculau, 2004).

At the same time, one could notice the existence of specific projects centered on teaching the seniors the new skills needed in order to face the rapid changes brought by the technological progress. For example, the "ACT (Ageing + Communication + Technologies) Project" is a multi-methodological study centered on individuals and communities of the seniors in Canada (ACT, 2019). Experts working on this project are researchers, students and members of partner institutions that aim to integrate seniors in the digital and network-centered societies, and they suggest strategies for change and practical advices for the beneficial use of new media by the Canadian
seniors (ACT, 2019). Within the same segment of programs centered on the new social approach to seniors, one could notice the activities of "SeniorNet", a Nonprofit Organization which was established in 1986 in United States (SeniorNet, 2019). In time, the main aim of this organization has expanded from the initial ones related to understanding the importance of traditional media (TV, radio, print media) for the seniors well-being to more specific ones, such as is the case of understanding the digital skills specific to older adults and increasing seniors’ abilities in the fields of computer and Internet uses by encouraging them to have virtual friends, to enter various contacts and to share their lives experiences with others (SeniorNet, 2019). Another program worth-mentioning was "Silver Program" from UK which was focused on matching pairs of youth and seniors in order to help older adults to use (new and old) media information (Hobbs, 2010). The project aimed not only to teach seniors how to use the computer and the Internet as a new form of the media, but also to facilitate inter-generational (the youth vs. the older adults) discussions about classical media information (Hobbs, 2010).

In the case of the Internet use by the older adults, one could notice that this has developed as a research topic only in the last two decades (Chen and Persson, 2002; Czaja and Lee, 2007) and there are many aspects which are not yet in-depth analysed.

According to the registered data, the first research hypothesis was confirmed. The relation between Romanian seniors and the use of Internet for health-related information was secondary as importance, as compared with direct communication with medical staff.

In the meantime, our data did not lead to the confirmation of the second research hypothesis. The seniors did not discuss with their doctors the health-related information found on the internet.

**Conclusions**

The present study aimed to fill a gap in the existing literature in Romania. As our data showed Romanian seniors use the Internet as a starting point for general information related to health, but when it came to make informed decisions about health care they adhere to physician-centered care. Even if the seniors search the online sources for general information related to health, they always take their final decisions according to their doctors’ advices. As such, Romanian seniors adhered to physician-centered care model and acted according to Caress’ thesis (1997) who stipulated that, in general, seniors’ locus of control is external. The fact that this locus of control was external was obvious in our case: Romanian seniors assumed that some aspects of their lives (e.g. health) were controlled by powerful others (e.g. doctors). From here, they agreed that doctor’s advice was more reliable than online health-related information. The same set of data confirms Breemhaar, Visser and Kleijnen (1990) thesis which assessed that when their treatment was decided, the older patients are more likely to let their physicians to make the final decisions.

On the other hand, our data analysis did not allow us to assess in what degree the health-related information found on the internet were used by Romanian seniors in their communication with the doctors. Quite opposite to Mullen, Mains and Velez’s thesis (1992), in the case of Romanian seniors there is no direct relation between health-related online information and the degree of information requests from a patient. In fact, in Romania, the more a senior patient learns about her or his illness, the less willing she or he is to ask questions to his or her physician.

We can, as such, assess that a *post-festum* hypothesis which is generated by the project could be the following:

**H3:** The e-health related consumptions for Romanian seniors could be conditioned by the level and degree of their active search of health-related information.

Starting from this *post-festum* hypothesis, one can assume that a future direction of research could be the testing of it not only in Romania, but also in other Eastern European countries.
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EATING DISORDERS AND BODY IMAGE DISTURBANCE AMONG MALES AND FEMALES: FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF SIX THERAPISTS WITH DIFFERENT THERAPEUTIC ORIENTATION

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Abstract

Objectives. Nowadays, a culture of slimness and flawless outward appearance has been cultivated and individuals are constantly exposed to images of slender females and overly slim, muscular males. The percentage of individuals, both males and females, who struggle with Body Image Disturbance (BID) and therefore Eating Disorders (ED) has grown spectacularly. Although studies about eating disorders are affluent, research exploring counseling clients with body image disturbance and eating disorders is limited. This qualitative study provides a unique perspective of the therapeutic world by enlightening experiences of therapists with different therapeutic orientation when working with clients, both males and females, throughout the disordered eating spectrum.

Material and methods. Six experienced therapists from 4 psychotherapeutic orientations (Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy, Person-Centered Therapy, Family/Systemic Therapy and Integrative Therapy) participated in semi-structured interviews which were analyzed through Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis.

Results. Interviews provided rich and detailed data highlighting the greater percentage of female cases and problems in the family system as the main underlying factor responsible for eating disorders in both genders. Thought diary, role playing, family involvement and mirror exposure were some of the interventions found to be utilized while differences in the client’s response to therapy were attributed to personalities and individual characteristics. Bafflement, responsibility, anxiety and anger were the prevailing emotions that therapists presented.

Conclusions. Findings depict the complexity of the disorder and the corresponding emotional complexity of the therapeutic work with this specific clientele while they present an internal aspect of the therapeutic world. Independently of their psychotherapeutic orientation, therapists adapt their therapeutic plan on each individual employing interventions from other orientations and forming a flexible and integrative approach. Integration and flexibility are essential for a holistic and comprehensive intervention which can address challenges and benefit both clients and therapists.

Keywords: body image disturbance (BID), eating disorders (ED), therapeutic orientation, integration.

Introduction

Eating Disorders (ED) are compound mental disorders typified by maladjusted eating practices and severe affliction about body weight (Bryant-Waugh, 2000). Waller and Barnes (2002) defined body image disturbance (BID) as a misperception of actual body image (BI), an internal body shape and size. Conventional wisdom claims that BID/ED dominates the female population, but recent community studies suggest that a prodigious 26% of teen boys are displeased with their
appearance (Neumark-Sztainer et al., 2002). Studies focused on the deployment of healthy familial borders suggested that over-involved, rigid and perfectionist families favor the development of BID/ED (Monacis et al., 2017). Teenagers feel unable to meet their parents’ expectations and mold their own identity. Thus, they endeavor to obtain independence and autonomy by overruling their bodies (Park and Bernard, 2006).

Throughout the years, research has identified four fundamental therapeutic waves in the clinical treatment of BID and ED. The cognitive-behavioural approach (CBT) is widely accepted as the most efficient and principal treatment since it directly targets emotions, maladaptive behaviours and dysfunctional thoughts that conduce to a negative BI (Ogden, 2010). In spite of the promising outcomes, CBT presents undeniable limitations. Researchers claim that it may inadvertently supplant the emotional exploration and perpetuate the intellectualization of the disorder (Ogden, 2010). Further the person-centered approach (PCT), a non-directive approach which emphasizes on the therapist-client relationship where both coefficients collaborate with trust, empathy and acceptance (Teyber and McClure, 2011). Instead of being solution focused, therapists guide the therapeutic process with great flexibility and without interfering with the client’s self-discovery process. However, PCT has the tendency to be more supportive and less challenging. Thus, cognitive distortions are not challenged but rather they are amplified and concealed feelings are not surfaced favoring the secretive nature of BID/ED (Bryant-Waugh, 2000).

Additionally, the family-based approach (FBT) which acknowledges family as a unit of a larger system where impacts among members take place. Beside the structured therapeutic plan, its core difficulty is the family engagement, hence relationships remain unexplored and the causing factors are perpetuated (Jones-Smith, 2012). Lastly, the integrative therapy which intends to merge the strong components of the existing approaches. In recent years, the need for a creative approach which integrates concepts from multiple modalities that can respond to the complexities of the disorder is imperative. There is a variety of psychotherapeutic orientations but studies found that early life experiences and family issues shape theoretical orientation development, since therapists choose the approach that they are mostly sensitized to due to family origins issues (Bitar, Bean and Bermudez, 2007).

Working within ED community can be rewarding and challenging. During sessions, therapists have declared experiencing an emotional roller coaster which derives from the demanding management of both the disorder and the psychological co-morbidities often accompanied. Therapists have confessed that therapeutic work with these clients may entail risks, such as emotional burnout, physical fatigue, stress-related problems, compromised immunity, depression, and suicidal ideation (Strober et al., 2007). According to this research, the most vulnerable therapists are those who tend to empathize with their clients and show an enormous level of understanding.

Although BID and ED are widely studied, research about therapists’ experience is scarce and considerable difficulties were encountered sourcing related literature which ultimately provided an avenue for this study. The primary objective is to explore the experiences of therapists, who have been trained in different psychotherapeutic approaches, when working with BID or ED clients. In attempting to analyze their experiences and their therapeutic work, the utilized interventions, their effectiveness and the client’s subsequent behavioral responses will be explored. In this study, it is hypothesized that each approach has effective interventions but the integration of them can provide a more complete and efficient premise. Also, many studies do not report gender differences in the outcome of psychological treatment (Bachelor et al., 2007). Thus, the present study aims to make separations on gender hypothesizing that both gender and personality are factors affecting the therapeutic outcome. Finally, the study attempts to explore untouchable aspects of various therapeutic approaches from an inside point of view in order to benefit both clients and therapists.
Material and methods

The main objective was to explore the experiences of therapists from four psychotherapeutic approaches (Cognitive-Behavioural, Person-Centered, Family/Systemic, Integrative) and collect profitable but manageable data that can answer the research question. The sample had to meet three primary criterions: certification on one of the selected approaches, at least five years of professional experience and clinical experience with BID or ED clients, either males or females. Based on the objective of the study and the characteristics of the population needed, purposive sample seemed an appropriate method. The first participant was approached by the opportunity way of contact; other three therapists were approached by referral from the first participant and the rest of them by the snowballing method. Thus, a total of six therapists (two representatives of each psychotherapeutic approach) was gathered. Further, the concept of semi-structured interviews fitted appropriately with the project’s purpose and was adopted for the data collection. Interviews took place at each participant’s office as it was mutually agreed. The interview setting needed to be quiet, accommodating and physically comfortable for participants. Each participant was interviewed once between forty minutes and one hour and none of the interviews was disrupted.

At the end of the interview process, transcription produced descriptive qualitative data based on which a thematic analysis initiated. The analyzing process consisted of four stages and was grounded on the IPA framework (Smith and Osborn, 2003). The first stage started with constant reading and rereading of the transcribed files in order to become familiar with the content and look for emerging themes. The categories created were then reviewed so that possible connections and fusions among the themes could be achieved. After regular checks, the themes were clustered into those which could be grouped together (subthemes) and those which remained in a category alone (superordinate themes). Finally, the reorganized framework of themes from the previous stage composed the analysis segment where every theme had to be illustrated verbatim by the original, transcribed interviews.

Results

The themes emerged from the analyzing process are presented in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theme 1. Therapists’ Motive for Training</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Teacher’s Influence</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>b. Approaches Structure</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Randomly</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Theme 2. General Experience with BID/ED Clients</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Mostly Females</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Family Irregularities</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Secrecy</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Co-morbidity</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Acceptance and Understanding</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme 3. Interventions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Thought Diary</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Diet Diary</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Family Involvement</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Photo/Mirror Exposure</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Art</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Distractions</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. Role-playing</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g. Discussion</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h. Other Professionals</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i. Thought Challenge</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>j. Therapeutic Relationship</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>k. Observation</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Themes</td>
<td>Participants</td>
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<td>------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Theme 4. Differences at Responses</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Personality</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Gender</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Theme 5. Therapists’ Feelings</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>a. Bafflement</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>b. Responsibility</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Anxiety</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Anger</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Empathy</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. Personal Limits</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g. Burn out</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h. Relief</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme 6. Therapists’ Opinion about Integrative Therapy</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Meaningless</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Mandatory</td>
<td>6</td>
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<td>c. Effective</td>
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**Theme 1**

Based on the interviews, it was evident that teacher’s influence during training and the approach’s structure are the two main motives that lead therapists to choose their therapeutic approach. However, two participants claimed that randomly chose their approach. "All these things personalized at the face of a very good teacher... I met the appropriate person that mesmerized and attracted me".

"I could say that I started my training at CBT randomly and in the process of my training I started to fall in love with it"

**Theme 2**

All participants spoke about their general experiences when working with ED/BID clients and highlighted the fact that the majority of their cases are female clients whereas males constitute a scarce percentage. The sample unanimously reported that problems inside the family system are the underlying factors responsible for ED in both genders.

"Family relationships play an important role in eating disorders... either in a form of a strict control with relates to anorexia or in a form of a non-existent control that relates to bulimia and constitutes the feeling of freedom".

Also, two participants acknowledged that BID/ED clients are characterized by secrecy and seek for acceptance and understanding:

"People who suffer from ED especially the first period desire to keep it a secret... Also, I have noticed that issues such as ED, still are a taboo issue in small cities".

"Someone that can understand him...someone on whom they can rely on... You work as his antio-anxiolytic".

Most of the participants reported that ED usually co-exist with other disorders such as anxiety, depression and phobias. When interplay between ED and other disorders exists, most participants reported to address initially ED and then the rest of the symptoms:

"So many disorders... Yes... it’s like a cluster... It’s a puzzle that composes an image and every piece of it warns for something else... I have to work with this symptom, with the behaviour that has been established and not with anxiety"

**Theme 3**

Regarding the interventions used, thought and diet diaries were considered primary interventions with the thought diary mentioned as one of the most effective:

"In that case we made a thought diary and we identified cognitions so that she can check if her cognitions impact the way she behaves and ultimately if they are helpful or not... This helped her understand some of her distorted cognitions about food"

It was crucial for four of the participants to get the clients’ family involved and ask for
their assistance. Therapists request their physical appearance but if they are not willing to attend, they use other alternatives for their involvement in the therapeutic process:

"I strongly believe that change happens inside the family... so I usually do circular questions even if the family is not here... For example I place the family imaginary inside the room... The parental cooperation after a period of time was crucial."

Two participants attempted the photo/mirror exposure but both of them highlighted the negative impact:

"On spot I can say that the mirror exposure and photo exposure was useless... high level of anxiety, distorted body image... I can say that I regretted using it... I thought that it will help but on the contrary, it deteriorated her thought process."

Working safely with the simultaneous help of other professionals such as a nutritionist, was highlighted as an essential element while behavioral experiments in a form of a distraction, role-playing, challenging thoughts through discussions and incorporating art such as drawing and playing were mentioned too:

"I also asked for a dietitian's help... I could see that as long as she was losing weight... she would feed her anorexia. When she remained steady at her weight, it was easier to work and make her acknowledge a few things."

"There was a time that she didn’t want to talk... she felt pressure and I asked her to imprint everything on the paper... draw... feelings, people, thoughts."

The establishment of a therapeutic relationship and the importance of observing, becoming aware of what cues the body is giving, were noted by participants as important steps of acknowledging how the disorder operates:

"My primary goal was to establish a trustworthy relationship. Because I could tell that if she didn’t trust... we wouldn’t be able to do anything."

**Theme 4**

Differences in responses were attributed to personalities and individual characteristics with no reference to gender by three participants. However, the rest of the sample mentioned due to gender constructions, for instance females seem more responsive, expressive and willing to talk whereas males are negative in doing tasks and opening up emotionally, thus they have lower pace of development.

"Women seem to be more responsive or consistent to the interventions. This is the impression that I have. Men are negative in doing homework."

It was, also, mentioned that therapists feel the compulsion to be careful with their words and their interpretations with male clients and that the lack of emotional connection with them is apparent:

"In my sessions with him I feel that I have to be very careful with what I say... In their speech you can identify phrases such as 'as you have said previously or compared to what you said in our last session'.

"I feel that it is very difficult to get connected with the male."

**Theme 5**

Throughout interviews, the commutation of emotions and the personal difficulties that therapists face were evident. Bafflement, responsibility and anxiety were the main emotions reported by all participants.

"Huge bafflement... I started questioning my abilities as a therapist... Why this doesn’t work? I’ve tried it again... 'Am I doing something wrong?'"

In a number of occasions, the internal conflicts presenting during the therapeutic relationship through feelings of anger and empathy were demonstrated.

"She couldn’t change her thoughts... rigid thoughts... I’d feel anger sometimes because she couldn’t understand the obvious... angry with her resistance."

"From the day that I became a mother, my emotions changed... I take the place of this mother and
this child respectively... I try harder to help”.

A personal and professional need for limits unfolded by two participants to describe the intricacy of their work while difficulties that lie when working with ED clients such as pressure and influences on personal or professional functionality, were highlighted in the following emotions, relief and burnout:

"The weight of responsibility was so heavy for me... I chose to never have ED cases again. People have called me but I referred them to the public clinic".

"There were times that I felt that this was impacting on my life, on my work... I don’t know if I can call it a burnout".

"I cannot hide the fact that I felt relief. It was like a huge weight on my shoulder that left".

**Theme 6**

Therapists were familiar with integration and the conviction that integrative therapy should not be separated from the rest of the approaches was reported by two participants:

"I don’t think that this approach must have a different name, a different existence... it’s good to be trained at a specific approach when you attempt to use interventions. Every therapist should have a basis".

Integrative therapy was an essential and effective part of their work not only with ED clients but with all of their cases in a multi-faced and client-orientated form:

"It is mandatory... to combine different approaches for a more affective outcome... It brings quicker results when you work with it".

It is crucial for therapists to have multiple alternatives which they can utilize through the guidance of their supervisor:

"I have more alternatives... if an intervention doesn’t work... I don’t feel that I may... lose the battle... I feel safe".

**Discussions**

Within therapy, therapeutic orientation provides a framework and it is evident that when therapists are asked to explain their therapeutic work, they tend to refer to their orientation (Lyddon and Bradford, 1995). Teachers during training years and the approach’s structure were found to be the main factors influencing the choice of approach. Thus far, research indicates that not mere exposure to certain theoretical orientations contributes to the selection of a therapeutic approach, but rather the interaction of two main types of factors, the external-professional (training) and the internal-personal factors (personality) (Buckman and Baker, 2010). Low levels of openness to experience, emotional expression, consciousness, optimism and commitment to logicality and objectivity were found to typify CBT therapists whereas humanistic therapists were more open (Poznanski and McLennan, 2003).

Interviews confirmed that the majority of the cases are about females whereas males either seek for male therapists or deal with BID/ED with lower frequency. Although males are physically larger than females, they are commonly more content with their bodies (Lawler and Nixon, 2011). Moreover, family functioning was unanimously found to be the underlying factor responsible for developing BID/ED in both genders confirming that not only genetics, personality traits and cognitive deficits are responsible for BID/ED. Also, BID/ED clients were found to present comorbidity such as anxiety, depression and phobias. The initial treatment level and the interventions that therapists pursue are determined by the severity of ED and any co-occurring disorders. The majority of the sample employs diet journals to record daily consumption and thought diary to reframe and restructure dysfunctional cognitions at the heart of the attitudinal component. Key finding of the research was that thought diary is considered an effective CBT technique whereas food journal was negatively mentioned. Unlike with this, literature supports that food journals provide insight into the bigger picture and are pertinent to monitor changes and progress (Dubord,
Also, interviews emphasized on the negative repercussions mirror/photo exposure had on clients’ behaviors. In clinical trials, mirror/photo exposure was shown to reduce distress, negative thoughts, body dissatisfaction and, in few trials, it even improved unhealthy eating behavior (Griffen, Naumann and Hildebrandt, 2018). Though mirror exposure appears to be effective in some groups of patients (e.g. those with ED), its efficacy remains to be proven in other groups.

Further, family involvement was found to be an important asset in ED treatment. Parents are regarded fatal informants in the initial assessment, particularly since clinical cases tend to minimize and deny the symptoms (Couturier and Van Blyderveen, 2012). Within therapists’ accounts, the implementation of art therapy in a form of drawing or playing had positive impacts in relaxing clients and facilitating their emotional expression. This may be explained by the fact that art therapy encourages individuals to freely enunciate emotions through art, rather than demonstrating a ‘perfect’ image (Hindmarch, 2000).

Simultaneously, participants have come to see the role of therapist and that of other experts such as nutritionists as extremely unlike but yet supplementary, and both critical to a felicitous remission. In line with this, research has shown that an inclusive team of professionals can address the multi-faceted and varying entanglements such as medical complexities involved while offering an effective and integrated treatment (Setnick, 2007). Additionally, role-playing, thought challenge and behavioral experiments were found to alter emotional state. Apart from the interventions used, therapeutic alliance with a client-therapist feedback was remarkably mentioned for the therapeutic effectiveness. Considering that the dropout rates for ED patients are remarkably high and that ED are principally disorders of connection, the healing energy within the success of any treatment methodology occurs within the context of the therapeutic relationship.

This study notably suggests that both gender and personality traits can implicate diverse aspects of therapy which are relevant to precognition, interventions, therapeutic alliance, motivation and devotion confirming the initial hypothesis. Past studies found that client’s symptomatology, motivational level and competence in forming interpersonal relationships can have a decisive impact on the therapeutic process (Bachelor et al., 2007). Limited research confirms that males are less likely to seek professional help and that they are less responsive due to the fact that they seek solution-focused help, hence they are not attracted by the emotion-focused treatments that are being offered. It has, also, been observed that clients have alternative starting points (‘ports of entry’) which impact their desire to talk and their interaction with their therapist. Correspondingly, male therapists who treat male clients may consent with the masculine norm of avoiding topics that can be emotional whereas female therapists may unconsciously label them as less emotionally devoted or sophisticated (Bunnell, 2016).

Furthermore, bafflement, anger and high levels of anxiety and responsibility were found to be the most prevalent feelings throughout treatment. Consistent with literature, therapists, with males more likely than females, express feelings of bafflement and inefficiency when treating BID/ED clients. After clinical interviews, therapists reported feelings of disengagement, helplessness and overwhelming criticism towards patients with a diagnosis of Cluster B (dramatic), whereas a more patronizing side surfaced towards patients with Cluster C (anxious) diagnosis (Betan et al., 2005). The accumulated negative experiences with them may reinforce their reluctance, especially from male therapists, to treat this specific clientele and may have contributed to the observed shortage of therapists treating these disorders (Thompson-Brenner and Westen, 2005). Research signalize that the percentage of male therapists who express reluctance to treat BID/ED clients is significantly higher (Satir et al., 2009). Intense discussions about BI issues, overprotective mothering and experiences of sexual abuse can often make male therapists feel intrusive. Apart from reluctance, literature supports that therapists, more particularly males, experience higher levels of anger and frustration when treating ED clients due to the high morbidity and the medical complications that often occur. Also, males feel more open to endorse this aggression and channel it usefully in the session whereas female therapists feel guilty and perceive
their aggression as a blemish in their self-control (Eagly, Wood and Diekman, 2000).

Additionally, burnout with crucial influences in therapists’ personal lives and professional productiveness was identified. This is consistent with previous studies that have found strong counter-transferential responses, alterations in their eating patterns or self-image and decline in productivity (DeLucia-Waack, 1999; Satir et al., 2009). However, empathy and anger were other two emotions found to be linked with therapists’ emotions. Literature notes that empathy and potential similarities in therapists, especially early-career female professionals, can lead either to identification or over-identification. On the one hand, identification may profit the therapeutic alliance whilst over-identification may impoverish the therapeutic process since therapists act overly nurturing towards clients, are condescending and obviate collision (DeLucia-Waack, 1999).

A strong point of this study is that all therapists’ upmost purpose is to offer an individualized therapeutic plan that can fit the client’s needs. Commonly, therapists decide to be trained at one theoretical approach and during practice they reform a flexible and integrative model. However, an increasing number of therapists deny labeling themselves with a single approach and prefer to identify themselves as integrative or eclectic (Feixas and Botella, 2004). In a recent survey, the proportion of therapists that practice only one theoretical approach in their sessions was only 15%, whereas the median number of approaches found to be used was four (Tasca et al., 2015). When conceptual and practical weaknesses of their approach arise, they are in need of complementary directions. There is a growing agreement that a single therapeutic approach is inadequate to treat all patients and respond to all problems.

Despite the novel findings reported in the study, certain limitations should be acknowledged. Most notably, the small sample size inevitably restricts the findings and does not allow generalizations to the larger population. However, IPA studies suggest a small sample size and while sample size is important, the depth of data is significant too and the quality of data collected considered being rich and fertile for interpretations. Additionally, the majority of the participants had a small number of male cases or even none, creating an imbalance in the study’s findings among the information gathered for female and male clients. Nonetheless, this fact along with the existing literature was managed as a significant data that could explain behaviors and provide details about male population. Apart from sample size, the qualitative methodology, the exploration of participants’ work and its effectiveness may enclose risks due to the fact that qualitative research is grounded on personal perspectives hence the rigidity of the information collected is difficult to be proven.

Conclusions

Research findings demonstrated a number of coefficients that could be beneficial for therapists and other professionals that work with this specific clientele. A unique insight into the therapeutic world and ED is offered as this research presents factual experiences. The nature and the etiology of the disorder along with other parameters that coexist are displayed in combination with the measures taken to limit the unhelpful behaviors and the feelings engaged. Despite the fact that it brings further knowledge to counseling and therapeutic field, current programs training therapists or offering professional services to individuals with BID/ED could enhance or modify their practice. In parallel, therapists who also work with these clients could be helped and incorporate methods that may reinforce the process of change. Further, this research could also be helpful for individuals who struggle with these disorders and might not have been diagnosed within any ED category. Most of the literature about ED focuses on the ethical rules and the effectiveness of each approach without giving information about how these approaches are applied whereas this study made an exertion to enrich the existing literature by providing realistic information. Hence, clients have the potential to get familiar with each approach, the way that it is applied and choose which suits their personality.
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References


BETWEEN EXCLUSION AND INTEGRATION: ANTHROPOLOGICAL RESEARCH ON CHILDCARE IN ROMANIAN HOSPITALS

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Abstract

Objectives. This article aims to anthropologically investigate a space where abandoned children in Romania live. The space appears as a result of exclusion of the children from family and following lives in hospital where they are, nonetheless, included in Romanian society. Through examination of Romanian abandoned children, there were critically analysed conceptual dichotomy of social exclusion and inclusion.

Material and methods. To achieve the objective above, there were used both qualitative and quantitative data. Qualitative data was collected as a result of the author’s own fieldwork in Romania in May 2012, and as qualitative data, the study regards some statistical data provided by the Romanian government and international organisations. For fieldwork, there were conducted semi-structured interviews to social workers, NGO staffs and governmental officers in a county office and a city hall. In addition to this demarche, there was carried out the observation in hospitals where the social workers and NGO staffs worked.

Results. Consequently, abandoned children were not excluded from the society and actually were included from legal and societal points of view. However, there was found that these children were not integrated or related to their families as well as the society. This unrelatedness seems to lead them to vulnerability in physical, psychological and spiritual meanings.

Conclusions. Eventually, it can be described the space where the children lived as a space between exclusion and integration, insisting on the fact that these children need to be examined by a three-layer concept of exclusion, inclusion and integration.

Keyword: social exclusion, relatedness, abandoned children, Romania.

Introduction

“I don’t want a rich family with an expensive car in a big garden, but I want somebody who supports me” (fieldnotes, 9th November 2019).

This is a description of himself by one of the interlocutors. After we finished our meeting, the director of an NGO who had supported the interlocutor for more than 20 years described him as a person who “doesn’t have base of him” (ibid.). The interlocutor was in his 40s and had been abandoned by his parents. He had spent his life in some institutions until 18 years old and was not adopted by any families. He did not have a full-time job and lived alone. Even though there is divergence in lives of abandoned children, it can be said that his life history is one of typical figures of abandoned children in Romania.

His story and feeling of insecurity portrayed in 2019 are likely to be related to a scenery, which appeared in another fieldwork carried out in 2012, of a maternity ward in a Romanian
hospital. In an interview to an NGO staff working at a hospital in Brasov, an in-situ visit revealed a childcare unit of 20 abandoned infants who were relinquished just after their birth. As a result, these infants were taken care of by the NGO and the hospital until their parent(s) would agree with taking the infants to home, otherwise they would be sent to public childcare system.

This article aims to examine abandoned children in Romania and the space where they are not excluded either integrated. The analysis is based on a fieldwork in Brasov, Romania for one month from the end of April in 2012. The fieldwork consisted of observation and semi-structured interviews to people working for the children. The observation took place in two hospitals in the city, and the interviews were carried out with social workers, NGO staffs and governmental officers.

To achieve the purpose, this article follows discourse of social exclusion and anthropological concept of relatedness. At first, in next chapter, there is a brief outline how the discourse of social exclusion has been discussed and developed in anthropology and sociology.

**Social Exclusion and Inclusion**

When social exclusion has been mentioned in anthropology, its analysis sometimes mentioned or started from Erving Goffman. Goffman carried out his research on some types of institutions such as psychiatric hospital and identified them as "total institution" (Goffman, 1961). Because of the book’s title, the total institutions are also called asylum. In asylum, inmates were segregated from outer societies, stripped their belongings, relations to outside and social identities, and trained to go back to normal societies (ibid.).

Following Goffman, Naito (2012) introduced his concept of "asylum space" to investigate space where people were segregated from major societies. The author emphasised the importance of investigating both people who were excluded and the way these people were identified and targeted to be included again (ibid.). In fact, he pointed out that those who were excluded lived in a space where inclusion and exclusion were intertwined (Naito, 2014). As a result, "asylum space" became a theoretical framework which appeared as a result of connection between a space of exclusion and that of adjustment to re-include these people (Naito, 2012). In anthropology, exclusion is not phenomenon which happens in a segregated space but which exists as a mixture of exclusion and inclusion.

Young (2007) also mentioned these institutions as a function for inclusion because inmates were corrected and trained to be included again. Nonetheless, the author suggested that the institution for inclusion was peculiar to modern societies, and contemporary post-modern societies changed to exclusive societies. According to him (ibid.), the end of grand narrative and relative deprivation, people lose social identities. Consequently, people intended to construct their social identities through labelling those who were different as the evil.

If one connect his notion of the aforementioned space where inclusion and exclusion are meshed, in contemporary (or late-modern, if following Young’s term) societies, groups of people segregate (and are segregated) each other and build their social identities at the same time, function of adjustment starts to work to include them into broader contexts as a society and/or a country. However, if people live in such a space, how does the exclusion affect people? Why is it considered so problematic? Thus, it is necessary to investigate the way exclusion has influence to human beings.

**Social Exclusion and Deprivation**

When social exclusion and its effects are investigated, this article, firstly, follows Silver’s discussion about social exclusion. According to Silver (1994), the exclusion became a topic of social discussion in France in 1960s, and then, the term expanded its meaning from living in
poverty. The author differentiated three paradigms in discussion of social exclusion; Solidarity, Specialisation and Monopoly. First of all, the paradigm of solidarity can be realised as a lack of social bond, i.e. a connection between individual and society. Silver (1994) actually described historical aspects of the terminology and identified social exclusion as a term which "referred not only to the rise in long-term and recurrent unemployment, but also to the growing instability of social bonds" (ibid., p.533) in French Republican meaning as a matter of solidarity. Secondly, the specialisation paradigm occurred as a result of "social differentiation, the economic division of labour and the separation of spheres" (ibid., p.542). Therefore, this type of exclusion is not necessarily negative. It can have unfavourable results only if it works excessively. Thirdly, in monopoly, exclusion appears due to "interplay of class, status and political power" (ibid., p. 543).

In a historical process of change in terminology, the term social exclusion had contained multiple meanings and application. What Silver (1994) did is in fact to disassemble the term and to make it analytical concept. Sen (2000) employed social exclusion as the first paradigm and combined it with his capability approach. For this researcher, poverty firmly connected to free will to choose one’s activity in society. Because of this lack of choice, poverty became capability deprivation, and, subsequently, social exclusion, which meant lack of access to the society where people belonged, could be “constitutive components of the idea of poverty” (ibid., p.5).

If these two discussions of social exclusion by Silver (1994) and Sen (2000) are combined, social exclusion can be identified as a mixture of both a process of lack of social bonds and a following result of capability deprivation which leads the excluded person to poverty. Nevertheless, it does not mean that people in poverty have no social bonds in their lives. Paugam (2016) maintained that there were four types of social bond which poor people still had; bond of family, bond of selective participation, bond of basic participation and bond of citizenship. Therefore, poverty as a consequence of social exclusion and capability deprivation means circumstance where people can obtain less access to other parts of societies although they still have some bonds.

**Relatedness**

In terms of social bond, how is it constructed and how does it work? In order to examine the questions, anthropological study of relatedness may give a hint. Relatedness is an analytical concept which Carsten (1995) employed. This concept appeared as a consequence of discussion about substance (Olabarria, 2018). Olabarria summarised how new kinship studies rose starting from Schneider’s study of kinship in American society as well as his notion of substance. According to her (ibid.), Carsten inherited and developed the discussion to reach her concept of relatedness.

With her ethnography of Malay people in Pulau Langkawi, Carsten insisted of importance of food/feeding in kinship among indigenous people and concluded that "kinship itself is a process of becoming" (Carsten, 1995, p.223). That is, kinship is not only mean a biological tie between parent(s) and child(ren) but also a social tie which continues and renews through their lives through sharing substance. Eventually, Carsten called this life-long relationship relatedness. This concept of relatedness does not only mean connection between parent(s) and child(ren) but also the relationship between husband and wife due to the fact that they share the substance through food from same hearth (ibid.).

What needs to be emphasised here is that the way substance relates people depends on and, thus, are different from each society. In fact, Nakazora and Taguchi (2016) summarised discourses about two types of social conceptualisation and connection of substance and code; Indian model and Melanesian model. Nonetheless, substance and relatedness are likely advantageous concepts to examine human relationship and social bond because relationship among people is not static or inherent but variable in interaction with/through substance.

If this dynamic construction of relationship by substance is applicable for discussion of
social bond, it seems possible to say that social bond is also tied through sharing and/or exchanging substance even though what kind of substance can build the relatedness is variable in each society.

Material and methods

Following theoretical introduction, this chapter will describe material which is investigated in this article. As mentioned in Introduction, qualitative data comes from the fieldwork in Romania. The fieldwork lasted for a month from the end of April 2012 in Brasov. Six organisations and two hospitals in Brasov were the setting for semi-structured interviews and observations. Among the organisations, three of them were NGOs, two of them were public offices (county office and city hall) and one was a private company which ran programmes of volunteer tourism. Generally, there was no opportunity to communicate with their beneficiaries including children, that is, the interviewees were only social workers, NGO staffs and officers who worked in child welfare. Interviews were conducted in English. When some interviewees did not understand English, one or some of them who could understand English translated the questions and what the other interviewees said. For their confidentiality, their names will be referred with pseudonyms and will not mention their organisations’ names.

In addition to the fieldwork, some quantitative data from governmental and international institutions such as the Romanian government, Eurostat and UNICEF is presented. In general, the quantitative data is shown to depict overall image of circumstance which Romanian abandoned children have been placed and of historical struggles.

Results

Historical and Social Background

The background information about Romanian child welfare is likely to make it easier to realise the context in which the interviewees talked about the children.

According to Eurostat (2019), 37.9% of children younger than 16 years old faced risk of poverty and social exclusion in 2018. Moreover, it is said that there were 60,000 children in child protection system in 2014 (Stănculescu et al., 2017). Actually, Ministry of Labour and Social Justice published data about the number of children in the system and it indicated that 54,960 children were in care in 2018 (Ministerul Muncii si Justitiei Sociale [Ministry of Labour and Social Protection], 2018).

When child welfare in Romania is talked about, we cannot avoid past communist Romania, especially that under the Ceausescu regime. It may be able to say that a root of misery in Romanian orphanages was constructed by Romanian pronatalist policy and by economic recession in 1980s. Notorious Decree 770 was implemented in 1966 under the Ceausescu regime, which illegalised abortion with some exceptions; (1) abortion was the only method to save a woman’s life from any dangers by pregnancy, (2) a parent inherited chronical disease, otherwise malformation of new-born baby was predictable, (3) the mother was older than 45, (4) the mother had already had more than 4 children and (5) the pregnancy happened as a result of rape or incest (Kligman, 1998).

Decree 770 was introduced as a reaction to a drop in fertility rates. A report which was submitted by National Authority for Child Protection and Family (NACPA) and UNICEF reported that the percentage decreased by about 35% i.e. from 89.9% in 1956 to 55.7% in 1966 (NACPA and UNICEF, 2004). As the regime intended, illegalisation of abortion rocketed up Romanian fertility rate from 1.9 in 1966 to 3.66 in 1967 (World Bank, 2019) even though the phenomenon could not continue so long.

Due to the implementation of the decree and economic recession, a certain number of
parents became unable to raise their child(ren) and consequently child abandonment occurred more frequently. The governmental response to the situation was to promote child institutionalisation. In 1970 the Law 3/1970 which intended to protect minors was introduced, and its initial purpose was to institutionalise those abandoned children rather than to prevent the abandonment or encourage parental responsibility on their child (NACPA and UNICEF, 2004). Under the circumstance, as Tomescu-Dubrow points out, "[f]amilies unable or unwilling to raise their children could easily give them up to state care" (2005, p.64). Eventually, some poor people tended to keep a mind-set that the government had ultimate responsibility in child care (ibid).

After the revolution in 1989, which removed and executed the communist dictator Nicolae Ceausescu, the new government abrogated the decree immediately. In addition, the government has struggled to improve environmental condition for abandoned children (Rus et al., 2011). In fact, orphans were a topic for Romanian participation process to EU. For example, EU Committee on Foreign Affairs, Security and Defence Policy (1998) pointed out insufficiency of improvement in childcare, and it indicated that progress in child welfare was one of criteria for EU membership.

Eventually, Romania acquired membership of EU in 2007, however, the country has still got some struggles for abandoned children. One of points which has got impact on child welfare in Romania is governmental policy on adoption, especially international adoption, because the Romanian government has strictly controlled international adoption. For instance, UNICEF TransMonEE (2015) shows that Romania had 14 and 3 international adoptions in 2013 and 2014 respectively following no international adoption from 2006 to 2012. This policy was a reaction to criticism for "market in children" or "laundering of children" (Bainham, 2009, p.530). This happened when western mass media sensationaly reported Romanian institutionalised children. Then, those who lived in western countries intended to rescue these children from the awful environment. UNICEF reported more than 10,000 children from Romania were internationally adopted from January 1990 to July 1991 (UNICEF, 1997), and there is also a study which indicated that the number of adopted children from Romania occupied one-third of international adoption in 1990 (Kligman, 1992). As a result, there was a situation that marketized children and some poor families sold their children in the name of adoption (ibid.). Following these historical background, Romanian government still hesitates to loosen its strict control on international adoption even now.

At the same time, Romanian government introduced alternative care rather than large-institution care for abandoned children. Consequently, as NACPA and UNICEF (2004) mentioned in their report, the number of institutionalised children decreased by 40% from 2000 to 2004. This is because of the closure of old-style institutions and of enforcement of child protection in families or familial environment, for example, protection by extended families or by foster parents (ibid.). In fact, the number of children in family-based care increased from 30,829 in 2001 to 47,723 in 2005, on the other hand, the number of those in institutional care decreased from 57,060 in 2001 to 28,786 in 2005 (Chou and Browne, 2016). Although there were still institutionalised children, the institutions were refurbished in order to contain less children and to take care of them better. NACPA and UNICEF (2004) reported the number of institutions with less than 50 inmates doubled from 2000 to 2003.

The Romanian government accelerated alternative care system from 2005 onward. The National Authority for the Protection and Child’s Rights (NAPCR) launched in 2005 and they put priority on 2 points, that is, (1) promotion of child’s rights and (2) prevention of child’s separation from their parent(s) (Rus et al., 2011). Since then, NAPCR has developed and promoted alternative care such as smaller-scale institutionalisation, family type, residential and day care services (ibid.). As a result of these struggles, as Stănculescu et al. (2017) showed, 66% of children in protection, which counts 34,300 children in number, could be in family type care services in 2014.
Discussions

When abandoned children in hospitals are examined, it can be said that, as Dumitrescu (2016, p.205) described, “the journey begins from birth, when it is clear that the mother cannot take care of the new-born child”. However, it does not mean that they are completely excluded from any kinds of societies in Romania. Actually, the Romanian government has attempted to include or re-include abandoned children into families or quasi-familial environments such as foster care, residential care and domestic adoption. This policy was implemented because no or little attachment from family, especially parents, exposed them a risk of cognitive underdevelopment (Zeanah, Smyke and Koga, 2005).

Aforementioned children in Introduction, who were relinquished in the hospital, were exactly those who started “the journey” since they were born. In a conversation with a psychologist, Maria, she said, “they (parents) go away without the child” and “parents say they don’t want children” (fieldnotes, 14th May 2012). While supporting social care for children, Maria and her colleagues talked with the parents to persuade them to accept their child(ren). At that moment, they worked with local authorities such as police and city hall. Nonetheless, according to her, only two-fifth of parents changed their minds. Then, the rest would be in longer-term hospitalisation and finally be sent to child protection process.

This is not the case only for new-born. In another hospital one of the NGO staffs, Diana, described the situation and said, "children come to hospital because parents cannot buy food", therefore, "they (parents) hospitalise children and never come back" (fieldnotes, 5th May 2012). In the hospital, almost all of them came from poor family and parents sometimes left them in the hospital because the parents cannot pay fees. Diana also said that medium of stay was about a month, but even if parents took children, they came back in next three or four days (ibid.). Hospital was not a place for social care, nevertheless, the NGO worked there and took care of them.

Under the circumstance, as Naito (2014) pointed out, children seem to live in a space where inclusion and exclusion are meshed. It is possible to insist that the children were excluded from their own family but included in NGO’s support, hospital and Romanian legal system. However, if social exclusion is investigated from perspective of Silver (1994), can we consider the situation as a space where children have social bond with family or society including NGOs? From her point of view, the antonym of the social exclusion is not inclusion but "integration” or "insertion" (ibid.), so that, mere inclusion is not enough to reconcile abandoned children with both family and wider society.

This is the reason for inserting the discussion of relatedness in order to examine how integration is constructed. Even poor people have four types of social bonds including bond of family (Paugam, 2016). If we consider this bond of family as relatedness between children and parent(s), can we think that the abandoned children in Romanian hospitals had such a bond of family? In Carsten’s argument (1995), feeding is an essential factor to transmit substance from parent to child. From this perspective, parents of the abandoned children did not feed them and left children in the hospital, therefore, they might not have any paths of substance from parent to child. If so, children and parents were not related with each other even though they were biologically parents and children as well as though the children were included in childcare system. In fact, feeding is possibly perceived as a key factor to promote integration of children into family in Romania as well. Diana, aforementioned social worker, mentioned an abandoned child’s mother who said that she would accept her baby if Diana gave her a milk to raise the baby (fieldnotes, 5th May 2012). In addition, one of the Romanian friends of the author described Romanian food as a source for her foster child to get "energy" and "force" as a Romanian man (fieldnotes, 6th November 2019). These two narratives seem to indicate two possibility; (1) For family, especially mothers of abandoned children, whether they can feed children or not becomes one of criteria to accept their children into their familial space, and (2) Romanian food is a substance which makes a
person Romanian in wider social context. That is to say, in Romania, eating/feeding is a possible path of substance which becomes a medium to relate children with family as well as society.

Furthermore, if this argument will be connected to that of the sacred and the profane by Mircea Eliade, these children also lose the relatedness to the sacred, that it, feeling of security in spirituality due to the lack of the house. Because he argued that the house was "the universe that man constructs for himself by imitating the paradigmatic creation of the gods, the cosmogony" (italic in original, Eliade, 1987, p.56). Although children themselves do not build their own houses, the fact that they do not belong to a specific house possibly escalates their spiritual vulnerability as well. Maria, the psychologist, also said that "they (doctors and nurses) work with body, and I work with mind or soul" (fieldnotes, 14th May 2012). Her notion of care hints that the abandoned children also need compensation for their loss in spirituality.

To sum, it can be said that abandoned children are in a space which exists between exclusion and integration in physical, psychological and spiritual meanings even if they are included in the society. What they seem not to obtain is social bond of family, that is, relatedness with parents and other family members. In addition, this lack of relatedness is a beginning of the "journey" to poverty and vulnerability, and they may also lose capability to some extent due to the fact that loss of attachment as a result of abandonment leads them to cognitive underdevelopment.

Conclusions

This article discusses the space where abandoned children exist and live. It is a space where these children are included but not integrated. This disintegration from both/either family and society seems a reason why they found themselves in vulnerability and insecurity even after they get older. In addition, the vulnerability and insecurity are not limited in social aspects, but those who are abandoned may find their fragility in physical and spiritual ways. The fieldwork reveals that there may be a possibility that anthropological discussion is also applicable to Romanian society when investigating their conception and behaviour toward eating/feeding from a perspective of substance. Furthermore, this eating/feeding attitude is possibly a point in which anthropological discussion may show its applicability to promote further integration of abandoned children into family and wider society for their welfare.

This article has a lot of limitation. First of all, the qualitative data employed was collected in 2012 with short-term fieldwork. There may be huge possibility that long-term fieldwork will indicate other perspectives on abandoned children. In addition, the discussion does not assess the contemporary situation. For example, soon after the moment of the research, the Romanian government approved the 2014-2020 National Strategy for Protecting and Promoting the Rights of the Child and the 2014-2016 National Strategy for Protecting and Promoting the Rights of the Child by Government Decision no. 1113/2014 in 2014. With these strategies, the government also intended to promote further integration of abandoned children. Therefore, further examination will be required also from legal points of view. There is not, by far, a full description of the way Romanian family actually relate with each other and what kind of substance, if any, mediates the relatedness in Romanian society from anthropological perspective. Therefore, it is necessary to continue ethnographical research on the way to construct child-parent relationship in Romanian society.

However, as a tentative conclusion, this research, through its findings, aims to stress the necessity of a discussion on whether dichotomous concepts of exclusion and inclusion or any other theoretical framework rooting on the dichotomy is appropriate to investigate people who are socially excluded. Considering the case of Romanian children, at least, abandoned children are included in the society. Thus, to examine them more appropriately, integration or relatedness seems to become a point to see. From this perspective, for the case of the abandoned children in Romania, if the children are perceived from three-layer conception of exclusion, inclusion and integration, it
can be said that eating/feeding habit investigated from anthropological discussion of substance is one of factors to realise how Romanian children, especially abandoned children, can be integrated into family and society.

References


RELEVANT PSYCHO-SOCIO-MEDICAL ASPECTS IN CROHN'S DISEASE. THE NEED OF PSYCHOTHERAPY. CASE STUDY

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Abstract

Objectives. Crohn’s disease (CD) and Ulcerative colitis (UC), the main Inflammatory Bowel Diseases (IBD), need surgery in many cases, despite the treatment. This study aims to extend the knowledge regarding the psychological component of IBD.

Material and methods. In 2015, eight questionnaires were filled in and deep psychosocial anamnesis, semi-structured interview and observation were performed, to reconstitute the biography and critical incidents of a patient suffering from IBD since 1978.

Results. During the analysed period, the patient was under the impact of five main negative stressors: death of a close relative, illnesses, marriage, changes of the eating habits, and difficulties in her own personal achievement which were experienced as catastrophic and humiliating. The patient’s life story indicates perfectionism as an irrational self-defeating belief. The anxiety was slightly elevated according to Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale. By Woodworth-Mathews Personal Data Sheet, except for the score from instability that was normal, scales limit scores were recorded for the other 7. Scores to Aggression Questionnaire were medium at the physical one and high at the verbal one. Jenkins Activity Survey has revealed that the patient is never late, is too active and acts immediately under stress.

Conclusions. The treatment strategy for IBD patients should be based on a multidisciplinary approach involving the gastroenterologist, nutritionist, surgeon, family doctor, and the psychologist. The psychologist should explore the lifestyle, existential major events, perceived stress, coping mechanisms, etc. of which might draw conclusions regarding the onset and the progression of the disease.

Keywords: Crohn's disease, Inflammatory bowel disease, personality traits, psychosomatic, stress.

Introduction

Crohn’s disease (CD) and Ulcerative colitis (UC) (sometimes called ulcer-hemorrhagic rectocolitis – RCUH in the Romanian medical literature), the main Inflammatory Bowel Disease (IBD) are chronic inflammatory bowel disorders characterized by alternating periods of remission and periods of inflammatory activity and symptoms. Common symptoms are: diarrhea, weight loss, abdominal pain, and sometimes gastrointestinal bleeding. Diagnosis is established based on corroborating clinical data, biological, imaging, endoscopic and histological results (Gheonea et al., 2010). CD can affect any segment of the digestive tract: the favourite location is the ileocecal area. Inflammation in the affected segment involves all layers of the wall,
and sometimes extends to the tissues or organs in the neighborhoods (Hendy and Hart, 2013; World Gastroenterology Organisation, 2015).

The study "Romanians, lifestyle and gastrointestinal diseases" ("Românii, stilul de viață și bolile gastrointestinale") conducted by online interview (or CAWI: Computer Assisted Web Interviewing) in May 2015, on a sample of 3,166 respondents aged over 18, urban Internet users, has revealed that over 81% considered IBD as "serious and very serious" and that over 83% said that the need to use the toilet up to 20 times affects the personal and professional life "much" and "very much" (Association of People with inflammatory bowel diseases in Romania, 2015).

The defects of Paneth cells, which mediate immunity and maintain the small intestinal epithelium, have been observed in high proportions of patients with CD, and are associated with a more aggressive CD phenotype (Stappenbeck and McGovern, 2017). A correlation between Paneth cell phenotypes, microbiome, and transcriptome profiles were observed in IBD patients (Liu et al., 2016).

Gut bacteria, fungi, and viruses mediate mucosal homeostasis via their composite genes (metagenome) and metabolic products (metabolome); under conditions of dysbiosis, alterations to their profiles and functions contribute to inflammation and effector immune responses in IBD (Sartor and Wu, 2017).

The risk of IBD in genetically susceptible individuals continues to increase especially in industrialized societies as a consequence of diets and environments which affect the intestinal microbiome (Kaplan and Ng, 2017).

Improving the sanitary conditions has reduced exposure to microorganisms, especially in industrialized countries, and increased immune reactivity which lead to autoimmune and allergic diseases (Okada et al., 2010).

A factor in the pathogenesis of IBD is an alteration of the intestinal microbiome, and the Anti-Inflammatory diet could be an adjuvant in reducing inflammation (Olendzki et al., 2014). Besides the studies regarding the role of the genetic predisposition in IBD, more and more numerous are the studies concerning the environmental factors involved in the autoimmune diseases. Vitamin D deficiency affects the antibacterial response, regulation of adaptive and innate immunity (Ardesia, Ferlazzo and Fries, 2015).

Correlations between CD and smoking have been established (Karczewski et al., 2014) and between CD and obesity (Harper and Zisman, 2016).

Inherited genetic variants may also explain disease location, differential side effect rates and response to therapy (Cleynen et al., 2016). In fact, recent data shows the influence of antiTNF treatment on mucosal gene expression profiles in IBD (Milanesi et al., 2019).

Helminths (parasitic worms) may modulate the bacterial composition of intestinal flora and have suggested the benefit of helminth therapy in IBD (Versini et al., 2015).

In Crohn's disease over time intestinal complications occur (Thia et al., 2010). After the first surgery, almost half of the patients can develop intestinal complications requiring new bowel resections (Fiorino et al., 2016). CD surgical indications are represented by complications such as stenosis or fistulae in the digestive segments and anoperineal region. The types of surgery depend on the type of complication, and may be required resections of segments, with ileostomy or colostomy which can be temporary to relieve the local inflammation before applying anastomosis, or sometimes definitive when digestive continuity cannot be provided because of severe injuries which do not allow digestive anastomoses (Hwang and Varma, 2008).

The irreversible deterioration in CD is due to fibrosis, elucidating its development mechanisms could be possibly leading to the implementation of antifibrotic therapies as in liver disease (Rockey, 2008; Colombel and Mahadevan, 2017).

Under these circumstances becomes essential the early diagnosis a better control of the disease aiming at obtaining sustained deep remission (Danese et al., 2014). For these reasons, the
collaboration between gastroenterologist and surgeon is essential for the therapeutic success of such patients (Mihai et al., 2010).

There are two types of therapeutic approaches reported for the IBD patients: step-up approach and top-down approach. The first refers to progressive escalation of the potency of the used drugs according to the loss of response to certain molecules. The second consists of a potent active intervention from the start with the most effective molecules to induce faster remission and to limit the damage produced at the intestinal level by the active inflammation. Mainly for economical reasons, step-up approach is used, including in Romania (Rogler, 2013).

Little has been written about the psychosocial aspects of IBD which might have an important effect on the patient management outcome (Husain and Triadafilopoulos, 2004; Gracie et al., 2017).

This study analyses the relationship between psychosocial factors, on the one hand, and the pathogenesis, clinical manifestations and response to the treatment on the other hand of a CD patient.

**Methodology**

Starting from the hypothesis that the debut of the disease, the flare-ups and the symptoms are closely related to the bio-psycho-social factors, during 2013 and 2015, 33 patients with IBD completed eight questionnaires as follows.

An Omnibus survey was created and used, with open and closed questions, divided into four sections: 1. Socio-demographic data, 2. Sex, Sexuality, Gender, 3. Relationships, Family, 4. Health. Then, there were applied the following psychological questionnaires: echogram of communication style that assesses the use of the ego states (De Graaf and Kunt, 2010), Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale (Zigmond and Snaith, 1983), Woodworth-Mathews Personal Data Sheet with 76 items (Dafinoiu, 2016), the Aggression Questionnaire (Buss and Perry, 1992) the Schmieschek Questionnaire for accentuated personality traits with 88 items (Rada and Ispas, 2016), 13 items from the Jenkins Activity Survey (Jenkins, Zyzanski and Rosenman, 1971) and the Family Adaptability and Cohesion Scale III (Rada and Olson, 2016).

The qualitative assessment was performed by anamnesis, semi-structured interview (based on an interview guide) and observation, with the aim to reconstitute biography, to analyze the social and educational conditioning of the personality, to reveal attitudes, conflicts, feelings, critical incidents of the environmental conditions, the subject’s own way of communication, the effects of past experience and their influence on presence, as well as the objective somatic changes.

The questionnaires were handed out by the doctor to the patients during hospitalization for diagnostic and evaluation. The qualitative assessments were carried out by the psychologist-psychotherapist in the psychology department.

Written informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study. These evaluations were carried out on a voluntary basis for all the involved parties. The subjects were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any stage, and they were ensured of confidentiality.

All procedures performed in the study were in accordance with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards and was approved by the Ethics Commission of "Francisc I. Rainer" Anthropological Institute of the Romanian Academy No 2/26.04.2013.

This article examines some psychosocial elements, the role of the psycho-emotional stress in initiating and maintaining mucosal inflammation in a patient with CD. These interview sequences are published with the patient's consent.
Case presentation

The history of the patient's disease

After 3 months of severe diarrhea (10-20 stools per day with blood), fever, gastrointestinal and urinary tract infection, 8 kg weight loss, a female patient (CPR) is hospitalized in 1978 and is diagnosed with ulcero-hemorrhagic rectocolitis. The prognosis is reserved; the patient is fed exclusively parenteral for about a week. After three months of hospitalization, she responds to the treatment with antibiotics, prednisone, sulfasalazine, B vitamins. Subsequently, she undergoes a treatment with corticotherapy for one month, with sulfasalazine for 3 years and eats mainly mashed food. Between 1981 and 1996, she has no Inflammatory bowel disease problems at all, and does not take medication. In 1996, a gastrointestinal and urinary tract infection occurs and the colonic inflammatory disease relapses; since then the remissions have been short and never like those in the fifteen-year interval. Because of the great pain at colonoscopy the investigation can only be done up to 20 cm from anus. In 1998, the patient has a severe flare-up with similar manifestations to those at the beginning that required hospitalization. The colonoscopy, performed up to 30 cm of anus and the histopathological examination showed nonspecific chronic inflammation, edema areas and exulceration. Since that year, the colonoscopy has been done under deep anaesthesia. In 1999, 2001, 2004 the patient has other flare-ups, with about 10 loose stools daily, low grade fever, abdominal pain, arthralgia. The colonoscopies have led to the diagnosis of pancolitis, colonic Crohn’s disease (infiltrative pattern, anal prolapse, ulceration, polyps). The treatments were represented by corticotherapy - for about 2-3 months, sulfasalazine, mesalazine, ciprofloxacin, metronidazole, iron. By 2008, the patient has around 5 stools, bloating, and moderate, recurrent, prolonged abdominal pain. In 2008, the patient needs hospitalization for a feverish state, diffuse sensitivity to palpation abdomen, bloating, flatulence, severe abdominal pain and semi-consistent 5-6 stools. The colonoscopy revealed continuous lesions for 70 cm from the anal verge with luminal narrowing. The diagnosis is of idiopathic inflammatory colonic disease, probably ulcerative colitis, extended to the left colon. In addition, to tablets of mesalazine, rectal suppositories and suspension, Azathioprine is introduced into the scheme of treatment. Until 2011, she takes mesalazine and azathioprine. Her condition improves, but three months after the end of treatment in 2012, CPR has a severe flare-up with a weight loss of 12 kg (38 kg at 152 cm) and modified stool pattern consisting of difficulty in defeocation with bouts of diarrhea on an infectious background of E coli. The treatment consists of mesalazine and Sinergin™ (a prebiotic containing oligofructose-enriched inulin). In 2013, major difficulties arise at defeocation, with painful bloating, and occasional vomiting. The colonoscopy indicates erythema and ulceration, and 20 cm far from anus a tight stenosis does not allow any further investigation. The histological analysis of the biopsies from the colonic stenosis reveals no malignancy criteria. The computed tomography (CT) shows changes with infiltrated appearance to the junction with the descending colon. The treatment (micro enemas with budesonide for one month) leads to medium improvements. The diagnosis of Crohn’s disease with colonic stenosis and suboclusive syndrome is made, and the doctors recommend surgical intervention. The treatment consists of rifaximin, inulin, trimebutine maleate. The blood tests show a strong biological inflammatory syndrome. The surgery is postponed and initiation of corticosteroid therapy and surgical consult are prescribed.

The patient continues to have difficulties in defeocation, acute abdomen, severe abdominal pain, and can only eliminate the stool if this is very soft. In 2014, the Nuclear Magnetic Resonance indicates stenotic lesions on the sigmoid colon and the descending colon from about 15 cm from anus with a length of about 13 cm. The treatment consists of corticosteroids, antibiotics, azathioprine, prebiotics, probiotics and analgesics and antispasmodics when necessary.

In 2015, a biological treatment with adalimumab is introduced, but after the second dose feverish state, arthralgia, difficult stool evacuation and diarrhea, a rash on the arms and in the
perineal appear. The lack of clinical and biological response leads to the interruption of the treatment and surgical consult is recommended.

In 2015, the attempt to dilate the rectal and sigmoid stenosis fails because of the active deep ulcers, and the active inflammation of the lining: 12 cm from anus a tight stenosis is detected. A treatment with infliximabum starts. The pediatric colonoscope cannot get further than 15 cm from anus. The abdominal and pelvic magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) with contrast agent, conducted after the fourth administration of Infliximabum shows a parietal circumferential thickening narrowing the anal canal, with a maximum thickness of 7 mm located in the superior rectum and sigmoid stretching over a distance of 11 cm, and a mild thickening of the descending colon. The surgeon’s recommendation is a rectocolonic resection of the lesions, with rectum amputation and permanent colostomy, which the patient postpones. Currently CPR is on the ninth dose of Remicade. Analyses show that the patient responds clinically and biologically to the treatment with Infliximabum in combination with azathioprine, she has gained some weight, she has not had any other obstructive symptoms and she manages the intestinal transit by the means of pre/probiotics and alimentation. Tumour markers have normal values. There are signs of colonic stenosis, but the patient postpones the surgical intervention.

Socio-demographic data

When she was interviewed, CPR was 58 years old, with higher education, was living in the urban area with her husband whom she married when she was 31 years old and did not have any children. The average income of family per month was between 600 and 1000 euro. She considers that she has a good relationship with her husbands, even if in the beginning their relationships were quite tensed.

The description of the manifestations and the assessment of CD impact on the patient

CPR considers that in the past her disease greatly affected her work, family life and to some extent her sexual life and that currently is still affecting her work and family life. The following passage from the interview highlights the physical and psychological stress experienced by the patient during the active period of the disease:

I do not want to think about how terrible it was to go at least 10 times a day to the toilet. All those terrible abdominal pains that I had...When I got sick for the first time I was 21 and I could not enjoy anything from the common pleasures of that age and I used to watch sadly all those vivid people around me.

I look in the file with the history of my illness and I wonder how I have not lost my mind for so much suffering. This disease has incapacitated me and I have fought hard not to get out of the race and lead a life comparable to those people in my category. During the day, going to work was a real problem as the imperious need to go to the toilet could occur anytime and I could not have found a place to go. The worst thing was when the night sleep was interrupted several times for defecation. I remember that in the last two years of college when I had to go to examinations I could not eat before, I was anxious to be performant, I was suffering because of my belly and I was thinking of my duties at the job that I had to solve quickly as nobody replaced me during that free week that I could afford. At work it was a problem because I had to interrupt my work at least 6 times during the day, moreover, the toilet might have been occupied. Sometimes during meetings or while teaching to the students I had to stop in order to go to the toilet. I always had tampons, two pairs of underpants on me to help me in case I stained myself. My daily main concern was to identify the places where I could go to the toilet and the shortest ways of access.

I wanted so much to keep up with my fellows and I made efforts to attend conferences abroad at least twice a year. A few days before and during the journey I used to eat scarcely and only mint
tea with stale bread. Every time I returned stumbling as I was very weak. I could not share the hotel room with any colleague because I bothered them as I had to go often to the toilet. I remember the delegation in Paris in 2005 when my colleagues went sightseeing, enjoyed what they saw and I had to suffer from diarrhea, abdominal pain, although I was on prednisone. And so were all the departures. It seems that I decompensated stronger on the road, but I could not give up totally that activity so necessary to my CV. Any departure outside my residence city, even the holiday, created me anxiety because of diarrhea and pain. For 15 years I have been eating and drinking anything that helped me to be constipated and now I have to take care not to be very constipated because of the danger of an intestinal occlusion. Except for the 15 years when I was healthy, the rest involved mostly suffering and running.

Relevant psycho-socio-medical aspects for the disease; the stress

The interview has revealed that in the period before the onset of the disease and in the period of disease flare-up, around 1978 and about the beginning of 1996, the patient CPR felt stress because of several causes and for a longer period of time as follows:

a. The failures to college admission that preceded the disease: the emotions and the interpretations of this situation are described briefly in the following sequence of interview:

As my mother was a paediatrician, the idea to attend the Faculty of Medicine came naturally. When I failed the exam, with the shameful score that slightly exceeded 7, it was a disaster. At the time, for the admission to the Faculty of Medicine, there were around 25 candidates per place, the last admission score was about over 9.50. Out of my graduation fellows, only six were not admitted to faculty. When I failed to pass the faculty admission exam, in our family was a real mourning. I spent a year at home to study, then I got a job and I failed for the second time and for the third time. My father resigned. My mother started to tell me how ashamed she was when she went to the hospital and was asked about me, to say that I was not admitted to university college. I had become a sort of black sheep of the family, in comparison with my cousins who followed the usual route – graduated a higher education, got married, had children. An oppressive atmosphere was in the house, the discussions with my mother were always reproachful, she made apropos remarks that the students came home on vacation. Finally, we understood that I should have taken some private lessons to prepare for the admission exam... but I had got tired because I was afraid of a fourth failure. Until 1994, when I decided to try again to enter to a university college, I had obtained a lot of qualifications, I had graduated from post-secondary schools, far from my hometown, and all were insufficient for my mother’s standard, but also for mine. The jobs of barman-waiter and cook-confectioner caused me a lot of troubles.

b. Leaving her parents and her provincial hometown for a big city to attend some schools and the emotional suffering related to that period are captured by the following account:

After the three failures to enter the college I left home (a provincial mountain town) to attend three-year school of public food service and one of hospitality. They were serious international schools, I was studying two foreign languages, I had escaped from that provincial town where everyone knew my failures. However, it was not very good; I was not satisfied with the environment in which I moved: waiters, cooks, and bartenders. When at a conference at which I had to serve I met a former teacher that I knew as a family acquaintance, I felt like fainting because of shame. Two years of study had already passed and I could not give up because I would have had to pay for my schooling.

After a while, I began to have diarrhea and a strong infection that was not cured by antibiotics. The doctors told me it was because of the water. I lasted for 3 months: I had atrocious abdominal pain, I could not retain the stool, I could hardly eat anything, and it was really difficult to attend classes. I was 21 and instead of having fun, and enjoying life, I was lying in the hospital for 3 months. My father told me that the doctor did not want to receive the financial gift saying that
he could not guarantee my life. My mother never came to see me because she had some health problems and went to stay at her mother for a while. Finally, I managed to pass all the exams and to graduate from that school. I worked in a big restaurant, earning better than my father and mother, but I had an internal suffering related to my professional pride that came from my mother. I felt uncomfortable because of my work environment and sometimes I was crying all night long. A big problem was that I slept for a long time in a sitting position in the armchair, I had big pain and painful erythematous nodules on the calves. With interventions I managed to get some approvals to work only in hotels, an activity that I and my parents, especially my mother, succeeded to accept.

c. Treatments against infections, acne, and for fertility are presented below:

> Up to 12 years in winter, I almost always used to suffer from pultaceous tonsillitis with high fever. At that time, the antibiotic was penicillin. The injections hurt so bad that I started to refuse to stay still for the treatment so that my mother had to immobilize me with her leg. The kidneys and the heart were affected so tonsillectomy was necessary. Then, I was given a three-year treatment with moldamin for Sokolski-Bouillaud rheumatism.

After two years of marriage we decided to have a child, but I could not get pregnant. At that time, there were no treatments like today, and the recommended treatment was diclofenac. I took it for about a year and we struggled, especially I, with some grease. Finally, I had two miscarriages at 3 and 4 months. In fact, we were both almost sterile. In my case, it was because of the drugs I had to take for my colon disease and in his case, from a varicocele. Then, I suffered from acne with pustules like furuncles for which I took antibiotics; I was treated with autovaccine for long.

d. Her efforts for the career, her frustrations and the health consequences are captured in the next interview excerpt.

> My mother in law always reminded me that her son had college and I did not. To fill my time, to get over my sadness, but especially to fulfill my "mother’s dream", in 1994, I entered a college and 14 years later I defended a PhD (for confidentiality we specify only that both are in a field related to medicine). As it was part-time, the faculty lasted for six years. It was hard because I had a job where I could not take a continuous leave for more than one week. I studied enormously so that I pass all the exams because at 37 years I could not afford to re-examination. Out of fear of making mistakes, I was studying till exhaustion, and my social life almost inexistent. For that ambition, I graduated as a valedictorian, but also sick for life. In the penultimate year of college, in the summer of 1996, I was in session and after I found out that I was the only one of that year of study who had managed to obtain the highest mark (10) at the most severe professor who had made more than half of my classmates fail, I "rewarded" myself with an ice-cream from the dispenser, which triggered a urinary infection and colon infection. Thus, I resumed the ordeal with the disease.

On the main routes to home or to where I had to go, I was familiar with all the possible toilet places. Anyway, I reduced to minimum any outgoings, except for those required by the job, because of diarrhea that ceased only for a little while. I had a draconian regime and only the prednisone helped me overcome the crises. I was obsessed with cleaning because of possible infections which I used to catch easily. I had many treatments with antibiotics. I followed my treatment and my diet strictly, but it was in vain.

For quite long I had three jobs where I fulfilled my tasks with maximum conscientiousness. I always had the feeling I was not good enough, that I always had to add things in my CV. I lived dramatically the injustices at work and scarcely could I tolerate those who did not match the performance required by the professional pace. At one point, I started to have a fluttering throat, hair fall and other symptoms that made me have my thyroid investigated. Because my thyroid hormones were in good parameters and the doctor had told me that I had nothing, I insisted and asked her several times what she believed to be my problem. She told me irritated: "madam, can’t you see that your cortisol is as big as China, take it easier".

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During 2011-2013, I won a scholarship in a competition which involved spending three months abroad. It should have been a bless, but for me it was an ordeal because of diarrhea. My belly was like that of a 9 month pregnant, and I did not eat in order to go less to toilet. I returned to Romania with 38 kg when I saw myself naked in a large mirror I burst into tears.

I always hated to go to the hospital and I avoid as much as possible to be hospitalized as this provokes me fear, sadness, concern, which is why I try to fix everything as an outpatient. When one of the gastroenterologists told me reproachfully that I neglected my health, as if I were somehow guilty that I did not react well to the treatment he had prescribed me, I wanted to tell him to his face... I had been having a correct lifestyle, I had quitted smoking for over 15 years, I had been followed precisely all the treatments, I had tried all the complementary treatments ... what more could I have been done? Now, I realize the only one thing I have not done: I have never rested in the real sense of the word. I have been carrying with me, in me, all my career ambitions.

Last month, I was looking in my files with documents for a diploma I needed to participate in a competition for promotion. I experienced an ambivalent attitude: on the one hand the pride of so many schools, masters, scholarships, and on the other hand, the revelation that if I had to get this part out of my life, it would not remain much to enjoy.

Asked about the saddest events in her life, CPR said that these were her mother’s lung cancer in 1998, the death of her father in 2000 and of her mother in 2002. Here is the short description of these events the patient provided.

My mother’s diagnosis of lung cancer came as a thunderbolt. Not smoking, not drinking, not working in a toxic environment, she lived in the mountain fresh air, she was a person who did not upset anybody on purpose.... For a year, my father and my mother came from the province, for 120 Km to the hospital, for my mother’s chemotherapy. Everything took place in the most silent and discrete way as possible so that they did not disturb me. After a while my father died in sleep, because of a cardiac arrest. With my dad I used to talk on the phone every day, I held counsel with him in everything. When I found the news out I yelled, I mourned with words. It was a shock as if I had lost my mind. When I arrived to prepare funeral duties, I lay next to him in bed to warm him up. The main provider of care, affection, and dialogue was and remains my father. My mother was a colder person, probably bored of the children in the hospital where she worked. Then my mother did not want to live without my father any more, refused any treatment and entered a sort of hunger strike; she died in my arms.

Emotional feelings, the need of psychotherapist

When asked how she feels, how she normally reacts when someone violates her boundaries, contradicts her, and does not appreciate her, she answered that she feels upset and angry. An excerpt of the interview is below:

Now I've got over it a little bit, but before, I was always on a defense position, losing much energy to prove I’m right in the most elegant possible, although I was boiling inside myself; I felt like throwing something in the head of that person that had done me an injustice.

The patient was asked what she thought to have triggered her disease and she answered:

I think my main enemy was my pride that my mother instilled and my emotionalism. At the transition from middle school to high school, at the graduation exam in high school, I had diarrhea and I vomited. That time, my mother reproached me that I had eaten apples and green apricots and those had made me sick.

CPR confesses that several times some series of individual or group therapy helped her become more confident, and calm down.
Significant results from questionnaires

CPR’s echogram of communication style has revealed that the patient uses mostly Critical Parent ego state. Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale did not indicate depression, but anxiety was slightly elevated. By Woodworth-Mathews Personal Data Sheet, except for the score from instability that was normal, at all the other 7 scales were recorded limit scores which indicate neurotic tendencies, the tendency to develop emotional, obsessive (psychasthenia), schizoid, paranoid, depressive, hypochondriac, antisocial, impulsive and epileptic behavior. Scores to Aggression Questionnaire were medium at the physical one and high at the verbal one. The scores to The Schmieschek Questionnaire for accentuated personality traits were normal. Of the 13 items from the Jenkins Activity Survey, was identified the following: when under stress pressure CPR, does something immediately, she is never late, the world and her partner tend to perceive her as authoritarian and competitive, her spouse considers her too active and says she would need to take it easier, she thinks she is more precise than the others and generally takes life more seriously. The scores to FACES III indicate a balanced family type, with average scores for cohesion and flexibility.

Discussions

CPR had recurrent infections and treatments with antibiotics were administered to her many times and for long periods, repeatedly. Studies have highlighted that a cause of dysbiosis may be exposure to antibiotics especially at an early age (Becattini, Taur and Pamer, 2016; Zeissig and Blumberg, 2014).

Perturbation of the microbiota increases the risk of allergic disorders, secondary infections, spread of drug-resistant pathogens, intestinal inflammations, obesity, and could affect the physiology of most host organs, even the brain (Caballero and Pamer, 2015; Luna and Foster, 2015).

In addition, CPR had for a long time a treatment with Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, which may have been involved in the formation of lesions in the colon.

One aspect that requires further exploration and much attention regards the fact that the treatment was totally discontinued and we cannot know whether this might have contributed to the reappearance of the intense symptoms of the disease.

CPR engaged in obtaining a university degree about 18 years later than usually and entered in a race to recover this deficit of time. The difficulties, the obstacles in achieving school performance experienced by the patient as catastrophically and humiliating, as well as the high standards, perhaps too high at that time, regarding her career, were the main elements which she had to face during the disease. It should be noticed that the suspension of excessive activities has led to a longer period of remission. It also might be deduced that the departure from her parents, the change of the environmental factors, from the fresh mountain air to pollution, and the water change were not favorable to the patient. In addition, it is possible that the patient should have had a biological terrain, perhaps a genetic predisposition, with a sensitivity at the level of the colon taking into account the fact that, since childhood, she had experienced digestive disorders when changing environment, when traveling or when experiencing high emotions.

The common emotion of the patient was anger, and the inner negative dialogues were connected to the performance anxiety, to the fear of failure.

Analysing the case of CPR from the perspective of Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy taking into account ABC(DE) Model (Dryden and Branch, 2008), the following conclusions have been identified. (A) The activating event was almost each time a challenge connected to performance, a real exam or a problem considered as an exam. The trigger of CPR was any risk that might have damaged her image in front of others. (B) The beliefs regarding the event or her
capacity were most often irrational. In the patient’s accounts can be identified all the basic forms of the irrational beliefs: rigid expectations from herself, from the others and from the world and the derived forms of irrational beliefs: catastrophic thinking, intolerance to frustration, overall negative evaluation and the patterns of thinking like "everything or nothing", "always or never". (C) Consequences – emotions as a result of beliefs were in most situations of a dysfunctional type, namely: anxiety, anger, guilt, feelings of hurt and shame. The behaviour of overloading and over involvement was also dysfunctional. The Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy would be useful. Thus, after identifying the aforementioned ABC, would follow (D): disputing irrational thoughts and beliefs (for instance, is it correct and logical the belief that things must always be the way I want?) and (E): effects, effective new emotions and behaviours that result from the replacement of the irrational beliefs with some reasonable alternatives (for example, breaking these personal rules is to some extent acceptable and allows me to feel disappointed sometimes, I do not like it, but I can stand it (Ellis, 1977, pp. 3-34; Ellis and Dryden, 2007).

The studies have shown that depressed mood and anxiety associated with the deterioration of health-related quality of life are factors negatively impacting the development of IBD (Mittermaier et al., 2004).

This was also identified in this research: CPR included in the causes of her disease her pride and emotivity. Moreover, the chronic illnesses, such as CD, induce changes in emotions, behaviour, and influence personality. Moreover, the disease is a stressor that can perpetuate itself.

The results at the questionnaire, her story of existential events, depressive, anxious, aggressive feelings, as well as shyness can indicate neuroticism (Costa and Mc Crae, 1991).

This study has identified formulations of the patient’s life story that indicate perfectionism as an irrational, self-defeating belief, characterized by an absolutist must to obtain success in getting what she wants, minimal disapproval of other people whom she considers important. These aspects can lead to problems such as anxiety sensitivity, hypercompetitiveness, and stress (Ellis, 2002, p. 217-29).

In the analysed period, the patient CPR was under the impact of five main negative stressors death of a close relative, illnesses, marriage, changes of the eating habits, and difficulties in her own personal achievement (Holmes and Rahe, 1967).

Furthermore, the challenges of the workplace had a negative impact on patient. They were lived with intense negative emotions that could have triggered the disease and small remissions.

Between life stress and illness a relationship exists. Life situations cannot be changed, most often they are not under our control, so it matters how we defend against stressors and more important is what the person thinks about that life situation (Rahe and Arthur, 1987).

The patient CPR told that blood tests indicated that the cortisol was high and this aspect should not be considered accidental. IBD pathogenesis involves immune molecules Cytokines. The stress alters their profile and the production of hormones such as cortisol and serotonin, which can contribute to IBD pathophysiology (Bamias, Kaltsa and Ladas, 2011). In the case of CPR and in others presented in two previous articles (Rada et al., 2017a; Rada et al., 2017b), the following behaviour drivers were identified: Be strong, Be perfect, Please others. From the perspective of the transactional analysis The psychotherapeutic intervention by offering corresponding permissive messages: show what you feel, you are good enough and especially it is OK to please yourself, to make yourself content would help the patients re-evaluate these strategies of survival from childhood, these counterproductive mottos (Kahler and Capers, 1974; Kahler, 1975).

The presence of these drivers make the patient deny the need for rest, so medical leave when there are flare-ups, even if moderate, should not be a mere option, but a necessity for efficient recovery.

One of the major acquisitions of the children of 2-4 years is the control of the anal sphincter – the retention or the expulsion of feces, which gives them great satisfaction. It is the first conquest in their social life and, at the same time, the first way to please the beloved adult. For each

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success, they are gratified. Diarrhea is very difficult to control even in healthy individuals who have an episode of food intolerance or infection. In the case of the patients with IBD, for whom diarrhea seems never-ending, recurs, anxiety can reach the peak. The imperative sensation of defecation, which is extremely difficult to control, makes the patients feel they are regressing to the anal stage. In this context, the doctor-patient relationship is crucial in IBD, both in terms of the needed information, but especially emotionally: empathy, acceptance, warmth and active listening. The patients need a secure attachment in which they feel that the doctor is a secure base, a reference person with the role of "safe territory". The distant relationship is perceived negatively by a patient in need of consolation and support.

The limit of this study is that it is based only on a single case. However, this highlights the need for a multidisciplinary approach of patients with inflammatory bowel disease, the role of the psychologist being very important.

Conclusions

The studies regarding the influence of psychotherapy on decreasing the frequency of the flare-ups and the improvement of the life quality are not unitary in conclusions. Some showed that there were no significant improvements, but only mild tendencies of amelioration (Keller et al., 2004). Others suggest that the affective component plays a role in IBD pathogenesis (Kovács and Kovács, 2007), aspect which could support the positive role of psychotherapy. A very recent clinical review published by American College of Gastroenterology, concluded that further researches in psychosocial interventions for IBD are necessary (Ballou and Keefer, 2017).

Pain management becomes important on IBD patients. Studies show that as the pain becomes chronic pain management is more and more difficult because of impaired brain circuits. Mind–body therapies with their cognitive and emotional components induce emotions and positive cognitions and help patients to control their chronic pain and even interrupt it (Bushnell, Čeko and Low, 2013).

The adaptation to a chronic illness is another potentially stressful event for both the patient and the family and, therefore, a reason to consider psychotherapy helpful, as the patient from this case study has stated.

The patient behaved as if mourning, trapped in one of the three parts of the mourning phases: separation, void, and integration into another system. She experienced shock, denial, overloading and confusion manifested by anger, hatred, fear, despair, insecurity, vulnerability, anxiety, pessimism, bargaining, depression, and she seems to accept to a certain extent the reality of this debilitating diseases. Psychotherapy may help the patients with CD to reassess their priorities, to recover, and to reconcile with the past.

In addition to the classical medical anamnesis, a psychological-anthropological-medical anamnesis would be useful. This should be done by a clinical psychologist, psychotherapist to explore in depth the lifestyle, environmental factors, family environment, existential major events, perceived stress, coping mechanisms, etc. from which conclusions can be drawn regarding the onset and the progression of the disease. It is it is necessary to extend the knowledge regarding the psychological component of CD, enabling in the future the creation of a psychotherapy plan.

The treatment scheme for the patients with IBD should be based on multidisciplinary approaches which should involve the gastroenterologist, nutritionist (dietologist), surgeon, the family doctor, and the psychologist.

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The contribution of authors

The key person responsible for the article is the author of the correspondence who conceptualized the scope of this paper, performed all analyses and wrote the manuscript. Equally the authors have provided specific knowledge, critically revised the draft manuscript. The authors have read and approved the final version of the article.

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References


SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC DIFFERENCES IN INTEREST IN ONE’S LOOKS

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Abstract

Objectives. It is important to study the interest in one’s appearance because it may influence on health status and social functioning. The objectives of this study were to be determined the degree of manifested interest in one’s appearance and the impact of sociodemographic variables on the interest in one’s appearance.

Material and methods. A self-report scale was constructed by using seven items of a questionnaire focused on narcissism, because narcissism expresses an excessive interest in oneself and one's physical appearance. This scale measuring the interest in one’s appearance had good psychometric properties among 528 participants.

Results. Medium/moderate interest in one’s appearance prevailed, followed by low interest, and then high interest in one’s appearance. Extremely low interest in one’s appearance was very rare. None participant manifested extremely high interest in one’s appearance. The family status and age differentiated the answers on some items of the scale (p < .05). The interest in one’s appearance slightly diminished in the cases of more own children, a longer period of work experience, and among the male participants (p < .05).

Conclusions. The people in the social roles of female, youth, recent worker, or a beloved seem to express stronger interest in one’s appearance that may be followed by behaviour directed to maintenance of a positive body image and attractiveness to others. The most vulnerable social-demographic groups for neglecting the care of one’s overall outlook by reason of extremely low interest in one’s appearance seemed to be the workers with very long work experience, and more advanced in age.

Keywords: appearance, attitude, gender, interest, need.

Introduction

Body image consists of personal perceptions, thoughts, beliefs, and feelings about own appearance (Carcieri, 2018). Appearance may be considered as the way that someone looks, and the impression given by him/her (English Oxford Living Dictionaries, 2019a). It is important to study the interest in one’s appearance, because it may express the need for self-knowledge, positive attitude towards oneself and emotional attractiveness of one’s body image.

The interest expresses some realized needs (Stefanov, 1988). The interest is an emotional manifestation of human need for knowledge (Maklakov, 2001). People should strive to accumulate knowledge about their appearance if they are interested in it.

The interest indicates a specific attitude towards an object that is emotionally attractive, and this object could satisfy the need for knowledge (Ivanova, 1976). The interest expresses the positive attitude towards some kinds of activity, object or knowledge (Vasilev and Merdzhanova,
It is expected the interest in one’s appearance to express the positive attitude towards overall appearance as an aspect of body image. Appearance and emotions are related (Comfort Keepers, 2017). One’s appearance should provoke strong feelings in order to direct the interest. The interest is a pleasant feeling that is created by a new impression appearing in the mind (Izard, 1977). Every change in one’s appearance should increase the interest in it.

The interest acts as a motive because of realized significance and emotional attractiveness of an object (Rubinstein, 2000). The interest guides individual behaviour in some sphere of social activity (Yadov, 1975). The interest in one’s looks is related to eating behaviour and physical activity (Alexandrova-Karamanova, 2018). Greater interest in how we look is related to social communication and frequent social contacts (Comfort Keepers, 2017). The impressions based on facial appearance influence social communication (Gheorghiu, Callan and Skylark, 2017). Physically attractive people may benefit more from their social contacts (Nerdlove, 2014). The interest in one’s appearance may guide individual behaviour in human communications in family and society.

American college students made their negative appearance comments most often in reference to their body weight/shape/size and they made their positive appearance comments most often in reference to their overall appearance (Park et al., 2009) that means one’s overall appearance should be estimated mainly positively and should provoke mainly positive emotions.

Contemporary men show greater interest in their appearance than men in the past (IANS, 2017). Bulgarian men from 18 to 29 years old seem interested in their appearance in order to be healthy, to feel good, to achieve high self-esteem, to be attractive, to avoid being teased by others, to be able to defend themselves physically, and for professional development in sport (Alexandrova-Karamanova, 2018). Bulgarian women from 23 to 59 years old attach great importance to the way they look, pay attention to their appearance and engage in behaviours aimed at improving their appearance (Bonev, 2018). Appearance is very important for females because of socialization practices (Devon, 2017) and for elderly people because of maintaining purpose in life (Comfort Keepers, 2017). These findings imply some social-demographic differences in the interest in one’s appearance, especially gender and age differences.

It is important to study the interest in one’s appearance because it may influence on health status and social functioning. When it comes to college-age individuals, appearance is more important than health (University of Missouri-Columbia, 2012). Consistent exposure to the body and beauty ideals presented in the media may result in some discontentment with one’s appearance and body image (Carcieri, 2018). Body Obsession is a conviction that one’s appearance is severely flawed related to extreme body image dissatisfaction and preoccupation with own physical appearance (Butterfly Foundation for Eating Disorder, n.d.). People who have Body Dysmorphic Disorder, i.e., a body-image disorder, are preoccupied with some defects in their appearance that may cause severe emotional distress and problems in social functioning (Anxiety and Depression Association of America, 2018). This type of disorder is a negative body image, marked by an intense preoccupation with a flaw in own physical appearance (Butterfly Foundation for Eating Disorders, n.d.), it is characterized by preoccupation with one’s appearance and perceived deficits in one’s appearance even if they are not observable by others (Carcieri, 2018). This disease often develops in adolescents and teens, and it affects men and women almost equally (Anxiety and Depression Association of America, 2018). These findings suggest age differences in interest in one’s appearance, but not any gender differences.

European American adolescents who were less satisfied with their appearance at age 10 reported declines in self-esteem from age 10 to age 14, but adolescents with lower global self-esteem at age 10 did not decline in appearance satisfaction (Barker and Bornstein, 2009) that means appearance satisfaction determined global self-esteem, but global self-esteem did not reflect mainly appearance satisfaction. The relation between self-esteem and appearance satisfaction was the reason for choosing a self-report method based on self-assessment for measuring the interest in
one’s appearance.

The objectives of this study were to determine the degree of manifested interest in one’s appearance and the impact of sociodemographic variables on the interest in one’s appearance. One hypothesis stated that the moderate interest in one’s appearance would prevail over low and high interest in one’s appearance. Another hypothesis supposed some sociodemographic differences in the interest in one’s appearance, such as gender and age differences - it was expected women to be more interested in their appearance than men (based on the findings and assumptions by Bonev, 2018; Devon, 2017), as well as younger people to be more interested in their appearance than older participants based on specialists’ findings and assumptions (Anxiety and Depression Association of America, 2018; University of Missouri-Columbia, 2012).

**Material and methods**

Narcissism may be interpreted as an excessive interest in oneself and one’s physical appearance, admiration of oneself and a need for admiration by others, a sense of entitlement, selfishness, self-centredness, and a lack of empathy (English Oxford Living Dictionaries, 2019b). That is why seven items from Shamshikova and Klepikova (2010)’s "Narcissistic personality traits" questionnaire were used in a study of interests in one’s appearance - I think I take good care of my appearance; There are times when I like to capture the admired glances that are directed at me; In principle, I like to look good and get compliments about it; It would be nice if my picture decorated the cover of a fashion magazine; I like to be different from the others with my way of dressing; There are times when I love to dress sexy; Any shortcoming in my appearance spoils my mood. The answers were given on a 5-point scale from 1 - completely disagree to 5 - completely agree.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1. Reliability indexes for the scale used for data collection</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Type of reliability index</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cronbach’s alpha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean inter-item correlation coefficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guttman split-half reliability coefficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spearman-Brown split-half reliability coefficient</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 reveals that the items formed a scale whose Cronbach’s alpha indicated marginal reliability, according to Wigdor and Green (1991, p.118). The positive correlation coefficients between all the items in the scale (the minimum inter-item correlation coefficient was 0.084, and the maximum inter-item correlation coefficient was 0.351) also indicated its homogeneity (Stoyanova, 2007). Its split – half reliability was high enough (it was found dividing the items into two halves of the scale – the first half consisted of the items "There are times when I love to dress sexy", "Any shortcoming in my appearance spoils my mood", "I think I take good care of my appearance", and "There are times when I like to capture the admired glances that are directed at me"; the second half consisted of the items "In principle, I like to look good and get compliments about it", "It would be nice if my picture decorated the cover of a fashion magazine", "I like to be different from the others with my way of dressing").

Factor analysis (Principal component analysis with Varimax rotation) extracted one-factor solution that explained 34.164% of variance on the answers given to the items in the scale. This factor solution deserved to be interpreted, because Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy = .795, Bartlett's Test of Sphericity = 389.952, df = 21, p< .001. The item loadings on the extracted factor varied between .468 (for the item "Any shortcoming in my appearance spoils my mood") and .712 (for the item "In principle, I like to look good and get compliments about it"). The extracted factor was named "Interest in one’s appearance" based on the content of its items. In the original "Narcissistic personality traits" questionnaire by Shamshikova and Klepikova (2010), these
items were part of two scales - "Need for constant attention and admiration" and "Immersion in phantasies".

The participants in the study were selected to be adults, not minor youth, neither pensioners. The sample size followed the recommendations by Guadagnoli and Velicer (1988) for a minimum of 400 participants when applying factor analysis. More than 400 participants were asked to fill in the questionnaire, because they participated voluntarily and could refuse doing it. All the subjects who volunteered to participate in the study were 528 participants. They were studied from 2015 to 2018 in different Bulgarian cities. Their mean age was 29.31 years old, $SD = 9.17$ years. One hundred and twenty participants informed about their working experience. Their average period of working experience was 79.22 months (approximately 6 years and a half), $SD = 114.98$ months (approximately 9 years and a half), and their working experience lasted from 1 month to 456 months (approximately 38 years). The female participants, the participants living alone without children, and the subjects graduated from higher education prevailed in the sample (Table 2).

**Table 2. Sociodemographic description of the studied sample**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sociodemographic categories</th>
<th>Sociodemographic sub-categories</th>
<th>Number of participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>418</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Missing answers</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family status</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Widowed</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cohabitation</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Missing answers</td>
<td>395</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of own children</td>
<td>Without children</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>One child</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Two children</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Three children</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Missing answers</td>
<td>395</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational level</td>
<td>Primary education</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Secondary education</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Higher education</td>
<td>213</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PhD degree</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Missing answers</td>
<td>233</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Because of the small number of the participants in some compared groups (Table 2), the non-parametric method of Kruskal-Wallis was used for group comparisons concerning family status and educational levels. The non-parametric method of Mann-Whitney U was applied for gender comparisons of the responses on the items because of data distribution. Independent Samples T Test was used for gender comparison of total scores on the scale. Chi square analysis was performed for group comparisons of the levels of expression of interest in one’s appearance. Statistical analysis was performed by means of SPSS 20. Some effect sizes were calculated – Cohen’s d for Independent samples T-test (Vasilev, 2014; Stangroom, 2019), Phi for chi-square analysis (Zaiontz, 2019), r for Mann-Whitney U (Vasilev, 2014; Lenhard and Lenhard, 2016), eta-squared for Kruskal - Wallis test (Tomczak and Tomczak, 2014; Lenhard and Lenhard, 2016).
Results

The participants’ average score on the scale "Interest in one’s appearance" was 25.831, $SD = 4.785$, $N = 498$, with 30 missing answers. The participants’ scores on the scale were normally distributed (skewness = -0.228, standard error of skewness = 0.109, kurtosis = -0.437, standard error of kurtosis = 0.218). The average score indicated the participants’ interests in their appearance, because it was above the medium score on the scale (the total score varied from 7 to 35 with a medium score of 21).

The interest in how one looks was expressed mainly in the form of taking good care of their appearance and liking to capture the admired glances that were directed at them. Then the participants liked to be different from the others with their way of dressing, liked to look good and get compliments about it, sometimes loved to dress sexy, and considered that any shortcoming in their appearance spoiled their mood. The preference for decorating the cover of a fashion magazine with their picture was the weakest form of expression of interest in one’s appearance (Table 3).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items of the scale</th>
<th>Median</th>
<th>Mode</th>
<th>Range</th>
<th>Number of given responses</th>
<th>Number of missing responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>They took good care of their appearance</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>525</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They liked to capture the admired glances that were directed at them</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>525</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They liked to be different from the others with their way of dressing</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>527</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They liked to look good and get compliments about it</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>526</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They sometimes loved to dress sexy</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>507</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They considered that any shortcoming in their appearance spoiled their mood</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>503</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They preferred that their picture decorated the cover of a fashion magazine</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>526</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The interests in one’s appearance reflected the participants’ satisfaction with their overall appearance, their positive attitude towards their overall appearance as an aspect of body image, because most participants considered that they took good care of their appearance (86.9%), they liked to look good and get compliments about it (83.9%), they liked to capture the admired glances that were directed at them (80.5%), they liked to be different from the others with their way of dressing (58.5%), they sometimes loved to dress sexy (58%), they considered that any shortcoming in their appearance spoiled their mood (55.1%), and almost a half of the participants (44.3%) preferred that their picture decorated the cover of a fashion magazine.

Low interest in their appearance (below the mean score on the scale minus one standard deviation) characterized 94 participants (17.8%), and 16 out of them (3%) manifested extremely low interest in one’s appearance (below the mean score on the scale minus two standard deviations). Medium/moderate interest in their appearance was typical for 313 participants (59.3%). High interest in their appearance (above the mean score on the scale plus one standard deviation) was expressed by 91 participants (17.2%), and no one manifested extremely high interest in one’s appearance (above the mean score on the scale plus two standard deviations). 30 participants (5.7%) did not answer all the items of the scale and their interest in one’s appearance was not assessed. Most participants expressed their interest in their overall appearance.
The participants who thought that they took good care of their appearance also liked to look good and get compliments about it (Spearman’s rho = 0.309, \( p < .001 \), \( N = 526 \)). The participants who liked to capture the admired glances that were directed at them also liked to look good and get compliments about it (Spearman’s rho = 0.442, \( p < .001 \), \( N = 526 \)), and preferred for decorating the cover of a fashion magazine with their picture (Spearman’s rho = 0.327, \( p < .001 \), \( N = 527 \)). The participants who liked to look good and get compliments about it also preferred their picture to decorate the cover of a fashion magazine (Spearman’s rho = 0.328, \( p < .001 \), \( N = 527 \)), and they loved to dress sexy (Spearman’s rho = 0.304, \( p < .001 \), \( N = 508 \)).

The female participants were more interested in their appearance than the male participants, as resulted from the statistics: \( t(495) = 3.402, p = .001 \), Cohen’s \( d = 0.401 \) as computed, according to Stangroom (2019), i.e. intermediate effect size, according to Lenhard and Lenhard (2016) (Table 4).

Table 4. Average values and standard deviations of gender scores on the scale measuring the interest in one’s appearance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender category</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Mean value</th>
<th>Standard deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>24.347</td>
<td>4.334</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>402</td>
<td>26.187</td>
<td>4.828</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

More male participants than expected had low interest in their appearance, and more female participants than expected had high interest in their appearance (Table 5). Statistics showed that \( \chi^2 (N = 497, df = 2) = 13.025, p = .001 \), Phi = 0.162, i.e. small effect size, according to Zaiontz (2019).

Table 5. Gender differences in the levels of interest in how one looks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender belonging</th>
<th>Levels of interest in one’s appearance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Low interest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>Empirical count</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% within men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>Empirical count</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% within women</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The female participants more often than the male participants (Table 6) liked to capture the admired glances that were directed at them (Mann-Whitney \( U = 19207.000 \), \( p = .010 \), \( r = 0.112 \), i.e. small effect size, according to Lenhard and Lenhard, 2016), liked to look good and get compliments about it (Mann-Whitney \( U = 18772.000 \), \( p = .002 \), \( r = 0.133 \), i.e. small effect size, according to Lenhard and Lenhard, 2016), liked to be different from the others with their way of dressing (Mann-Whitney \( U = 20044.000 \), \( p = .045 \), \( r = 0.087 \), i.e. small effect size, according to Lenhard and Lenhard, 2016), loved to dress sexy (Mann-Whitney \( U = 13616.500 \), \( p < .001 \), \( r = 0.236 \), i.e. intermediate effect size, according to Lenhard and Lenhard, 2016), considered that any shortcoming in their appearance spoiled their mood (Mann-Whitney \( U = 17381.500 \), \( p = .044 \), \( r = 0.088 \), i.e. small effect size, according to Lenhard and Lenhard, 2016).
Table 6. Mean ranks of male and female’s answers to the items of the scale measuring interest in one’s appearance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They liked to capture the admired glances that were directed at them</td>
<td>232.34</td>
<td>271.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They liked to look good and get compliments about it</td>
<td>227.22</td>
<td>272.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They liked to be different from the others with their way of dressing</td>
<td>238.89</td>
<td>270.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They loved to dress sexy</td>
<td>185.82</td>
<td>270.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They considered that any shortcoming in their appearance spoiled their mood</td>
<td>226.86</td>
<td>258.69</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The family status did not differentiate the participants’ interest in their appearance (Kruskal Wallis Test = 2.253, df = 4, p = .689) measured with the total score on the scale. However, the family status differentiates the answers on some items of the scale. The family status differentiated the participants who liked to be different from the others with their way of dressing (Kruskal Wallis Test = 10.674, df = 4, p = .03, eta-squared $\eta^2 = 0.052$, i.e. small effect size, according to Lenhard and Lenhard, 2016). The studied cohabitating people most preferred being different from the others with their way of dressing (mean rank = 80.48), followed by the married participants (mean rank = 67.38), then by the single participants (mean rank = 66.61), the widowed participants (mean rank = 47.67), and the divorced participants least preferred being different from the others with their way of dressing (mean rank = 30.93).

The educational level did not differentiate the participants’ interests in their appearance (Kruskal Wallis Test = 1.849, df = 3, p = .604). There were not any significant educational differences in the answers on the items of the scale regarding interest in one’s appearance ($p>.05$).

The interest in one’s appearance slightly diminished with more own children (Pearson correlation coefficient = -0.236, $p = .006$, N = 132) and with a longer period of work experience (Pearson correlation coefficient = -0.204, $p = .026$, N = 119). The workers with longer work experience liked less to be different from the others with their way of dressing (Spearman's rho = -0.195, $p = .033$, N = 120), and loved less to dress sexy (Spearman's rho = -0.251, $p = .006$, N = 120) – the correlational coefficients expressed a weak, but significant relationship between the studied variables. The participants with more children loved less to dress sexy (Spearman's rho = -0.194, $p = .025$, N = 133), less preferred their picture to decorate the cover of a fashion magazine (Spearman's rho = -0.213, $p = .014$, N = 133), and less liked to look good and get compliments about it (Spearman's rho = -0.183, $p = .035$, N = 133).

Interest in one’s appearance (measured with the total score on the scale) was not significantly related to age (Pearson correlation coefficient = 0.049, $p = .589$, N = 124). Age correlated significantly, but weakly, only with the answers on the item "It would be nice if my picture decorated the cover of a fashion magazine" (Spearman's rho = -0.193, $p = .001$, N = 308). Younger participants preferred more than older participants their picture to decorate the cover of a fashion magazine.

Discussions

Interest in one’s appearance may be considered a positive attitude towards oneself, because of taking good care of one’s appearance, and striving to receive social recognition in the forms of admiration and compliments for one’s appearance. Interest in one’s appearance was expressed also as a positive feeling provoked by looking differently from the others in the way of dressing, being sexy, the lack of shortcomings in one’s appearance, even readiness to decorate the cover of a
fashion magazine with one’s picture. More than a half of the participants expressed their interest in their overall appearance.

The results relevant to the objective of this study to determine the degree of manifested interest in one’s appearance supported the hypothesis that the moderate interest in one’s appearance would prevail over low and high interest in one’s appearance. A limitation of this study could be that the items were modified from a questionnaire measuring narcissism, and no one participant revealed to be diagnosed with Narcissistic Personality disorder that could explain the lack of extremely high interest in one’s appearance.

The results relevant to the objective of this study to determine the impact of sociodemographic variables on the interest in one’s appearance supported the hypothesis that some sociodemographic differences would exist in the interest in one’s appearance, such as gender and age differences. A limitation of this study concerned the small and uneven number of the participants in some compared social groups, such as for example the prevalence of female participants in the sample, and the small number of divorced and widowed participants. The small number of the participants in some compared social groups does not permit generalisability of results concerning family status differences and educational differences in the interest in one’s appearance.

Some social-demographic differences were found in the interest in one’s appearance such as gender differences, differences related to the number of own children and time of work experience. The participants who were most interested in their appearance were found to be the women without children whose work experience was shorter. As some authors (Devon, 2017) state, appearance is very important for females. Socialization practices emphasize on the importance of female appearance for attracting a partner (Argyle and Henderson, 1989) that could explain female high interest in their appearance. The women without children should have more time to take care of themselves than the women with own children that may explain the differences in their interest in their appearance. Besides the shortage of time, the women with own children have already attracted their partner and have implemented their main biological programming task (i.e., birth-giving) together with their partner that may diminished their interest in one’s appearance and their motivation in this regard may drop down. The decreased frequency of intimate contacts in lasting intimate relationships may also be related to weaker interest in one’s appearance.

Shorter time of work experience may characterize a young person who puts more efforts to build one’s favourable image at workplace than an experienced worker who has already established his/her favourable image and only maintains it. The differences related to age and family status concerned only the answers on some items measuring some components of the interest in one’s appearance. Younger participants, as suggested also by "Anxiety and Depression Association of America" (2018) and the participants who had an intimate partner expressed more interest in one’s appearance. The efforts put for being attractive contribute to retaining the partner in the relationship.

Conclusions

A new scale was constructed for measuring the interest in one’s appearance based on combining several items from two scales of the questionnaire "Narcissistic personality traits" by Shamshikova and Klepikova (2010). Its total score can be used for the purpose of measuring the interest in one’s appearance, as well as its items separately. This scale has high enough reliability and proven construct validity based on the theoretical model of expected differences between some social-demographic groups’ interest in one’s appearance. The lack of cases with extremely high interest in one’s appearance indicated minimal risk for developing body image disorder among the individuals participating in the study. All participants were not diagnosed with such a disorder that also proved the construct validity of the scale. The small percentage of participants with extremely
low interest in one’s appearance indicated small risk for neglecting the care of one’s outlook. The most widespread was the medium interest in one’s appearance that was necessary for motivating the maintenance of positive body image by taking cares of oneself. Besides developing a new scale for measuring the interest in one’s appearance, this study contributes to the scientific knowledge about interests and body image in relation to social functioning. The established sociodemographic differences in the interest in one’s looks reveal that the social roles of female, recent worker, youth, or a beloved seem to function by means of expressing stronger interest in one’s appearance that may be followed by more frequent behavioural acts directed to maintenance of a positive body image and attractiveness to others. The most vulnerable social-demographic groups for neglecting the care of one’s overall outlook seemed to be the workers with very long work experience, more advanced in age, because they expressed extremely low interest in their appearance. Interest in their own appearance may be stimulated by means of support in this regard by significant others at home and in the workplace, as well as by awareness of relationship between health status and one’s outlook.

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References


EMOTION REGULATION AND COGNITIVE COPING STRATEGIES FOR COUPLE PARTNERS. A CORRELATIONAL STUDY

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Abstract

Objectives. The present study aims to explore correlations between coping and emotion regulation strategies of the partners engaged in romantic relationships and to identify the emotional and cognitive coping patterns that occur most frequently within the couple.

Material and methods. The correlational design of the study has used data provided by two dependent samples of 50 male and 50 female participants, partners in heterosexual couples. The instruments used for data gathering were: the Cognitive Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (CERQ) and the Strategic Approach to Coping Scale (SACS), translated and adapted for Romanian population. An omnibus survey has been used to gather information on demographic variables (such as age, gender, education level etc.) as well as the relationship history.

Results. On a first level, the statistical analysis of the data provided by the participants has established several emotional and cognitive coping strategies for female and male partners in the couple. As a group, women report significantly higher (p<.05) mean scores in rumination and catastrophizing as emotion regulation strategies. A second level of analysis has explored the correlations between the main coping strategies and emotion regulation measures of partners within the couple, revealing significant associations for avoidance, indirect action and social joining.

Conclusions. The correlations between partners’ coping strategies suggest that there are patterns of processing and reaction specific to the couple, but these patterns do not necessarily relay on similarity and covariance. Further studies are necessary in order to establish whether these patterns are a result of learned behaviors and roles or a matter of inherent complementarity.

Keywords: emotional coping, cognitive coping, couple conflict, coping strategies.

Introduction

Chronic stress and conflict afflicting couple relationships have proved to be aggravating factors that lead to deterioration of marital interaction (Bodenmann et al., 2010; Bodenmann, 1995), increase the probability of separation and divorce (Bodenmann, Pihet and Kayser, 2006). Because of all the strains on couple relationships, it is vital for the partners to employ and develop functional coping strategies that are able to help them face both internal and external adversities, such as illness (Schokker et al., 2010; Green, Wells and Laakso, 2011), domestic violence (Rada, 2014; Ronan et al, 2004) or immigration (Falconier, Nussbeck and Bodenmann, 2013).

Studies aiming to understand how couples cope with different stressful situations (individually and as a dyad) are valuable since functional coping skills have proved to have a valuable impact on relationship quality (Papp and Witt, 2010) which, in its turn, is positively
associated with secure attachment patterns, greater satisfaction with life, emotional wellbeing and physical health (Waldinger et al., 2015), especially for long-term relationships (Landis et al., 2013). Some studies suggest that these correlations are stronger for women than men (Bodenmann, Pihet and Kayser, 2006). Still, both men and women, who are partners in a securely attached couple, report less negative affect and less depressive symptomatology (Waldinger et al., 2015). At large, the influence of the couples’ coping strategies extend to the children’s wellbeing and socializing skills (Rada and Turcu, 2012).

When facing with stressful situations, especially ones that generate conflict, both partners of a couple engage in different actions and responses meant to help them adapt, to reduce tension and to reach personal or shared objectives. Two relevant concepts for these actions are emotion regulations and coping strategies. A simple review of the relevant literature will show overlapping definitions of the two concepts. Still, there are specific differences that distinguish emotional and cognitive coping from emotion regulation.

Emotion regulation can be defined as the sum of conscious and subconscious processes through which people modify their emotions in order to adapt to the environment. They deploy regulatory strategies in order to change the intensity or the type of their emotion. This process is qualitatively different from the ones that initially generate the emotion (Aldao, Nolen-Hoeksema and Schweizer, 2010). The concept of emotion regulation includes, according to Gross’ analysis (2014), three core features: activation of the goal to modify the emotion-generative process, engagement of the processes that are responsible for altering the emotion trajectory and the impact on emotion dynamics, which consists of latency, rise time, magnitude, duration, and offset of experiential, behavioral, or physiological responses.

Over time, the most often deployed strategies become part of the emotion – regulatory style of an individual. The more adaptive the strategies that comprise individuals’ style, the greater their capacity to tolerate and manage negative affect while maintaining connection and intimacy in relevant relationship. On the other side, the strategies that result in repression and avoidance of negative emotions lead to a reduced capacity to ask for help and connect with people who can provide it (Waldinger and Schulz, 2016). More than that, some emotion regulation strategies, such as rumination, catastrophizing and self-blame correlate with psychological symptoms for depression and anxiety (Garnefsk and Kraaij, 2007).

Richards, Butler and Gross (2003) distinguish between antecedent-focused emotion regulation, which is elicited in order to prevent undesired responses from arising and response-focused emotion regulation, aimed at reducing or tempering already triggered emotional responses. Another relevant distinction refers to intrinsic emotion regulation (in self) versus extrinsic emotion regulation, which consists in the efforts to regulate the emotion in another (Gross, 2014). The latter is often considered a part of emotion co-regulation, a process defined by the conscious and subconscious oscillating emotional patterns of interdependence that occur in a relationship (Butler and Randall, 2013). Co-regulation of emotions has been studied mostly in parent-child dyads, though the concept has been applied to couples as well. Touch, as a co-regulation strategy was associated with enhanced affect in the partner and long-term psychological wellbeing (Debrot et al., 2013).

Coping, in its widest meaning is considered a response to stress, a sum of actions and strategies meant to help the individual overcome troubling situations. Gross (2014) emphasizes two main differences between coping and emotion regulation: the former is focused on decreasing negative emotions, while spreading over larger periods of time. Because of that, the impact of different coping strategies over time is significant for individuals’ emotional health. While maladaptive appraisal processes are thought to be at the core of depression and anxiety (Horn and Maercker, 2016), positive reappraisal and problem solving are two of the most adaptive coping strategies, that promote stress reduction and wellbeing (Aldao, Nolen-Hoeksema and Schweizer, 2010).
For couples engaged in romantic relationships, coping strategies can be analyzed from a dual perspective: dyadic coping and similarity of coping styles. Introduced by Bodenmann (1995), dyadic coping refers to partners’ responses to stress and consists of both distress signals of one partner that elicit coping responses of the other partner, and joint efforts to reduce stress and negative effect. Dyadic coping strategies/styles include: stress communication, supportive, delegated, collaborative common, controlling, hostile/ambivalent, overprotection, protective buffering, and uninvolved (Falconier et al., 2015).

A meta-analysis conducted by Falconier et al. (2015) has revealed several theoretical models of coping strategies in the couple: the Congruence Model of functional coping, which focuses on the good fit between partners’ coping styles; the Relationship-Focused Coping Model, that creates a typology of responses to a partner’s stress experience (active engagement, empathic responding, overprotection, protective buffering); the Systemic-Transactional Model, that combines partners’ communication of stress, their support actions and conjoint strategies used to face common stressors; the Developmental-Contextual Coping Model, that introduces developmental and contextual variables related to partners’ coping styles.

Supporting the Congruence Model, research studies have shown that partners’ coping strategies covary (Bodenmann et al., 2004) yet, their perceived similarity is just as relevant as the actual responses to stress (Iafrate, Bertoni and Donato, 2012).

The present study examines the correlations between coping and emotion regulation strategies of the partners engaged in romantic relationships, in order to establish whether their respective individual styles are congruent and which emotional and cognitive coping patterns occur most frequently within the couple. Based on the Congruence Model, it was expected that measures of different emotion regulation factors as well as coping strategies would correlate significantly within the couple.

Material and methods

The research was designed based on a quantitative correlational approach, using data provided by 50 couples, recruited through online and offline announcements in the capital and three adjacent Romanian counties. The selection criterion was that participants be in a committed romantic relationship for more than a year (so that the relationship would get past the dating phase and become stable). Informed written consent was obtained from each participant at the time of recruitment. The study was approved by the Ethics Committee.

The resulting sample of couples reported relationship lengths between 1 and 45 years, with an average of 16.28 years. Most of the couples were married (N=44), residing in urban areas (N=32) and had at least one child (N=36). Male and female participants’ ages averaged 44.58 years and 40.48 years respectively. Most participants were high school graduates (N male =46, N female = 44); N male = 23 and N female = 27 participants reported having additionally a university degree (bachelor or higher).

Each partner has completed a set of surveys and psychological tests regarding their coping and emotion regulating behaviors and an omnibus survey designed to gather information on demographic variables (such as age, gender, education level, family size, housing situation etc.) as well as the relationship history. The instruments used for assessing emotion regulation and coping strategies were: the Cognitive Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (CERQ) and the Strategic Approach to Coping Scale (SACS), both translated and adapted for Romanian population (Perte and Miclea, 2011; Budău et al., 2011). Both instruments consist of items describing reactions to negative emotions and stressful situations. Participants were required to rate them on a scale from 1 (never/strongly disagree) to 5 (always/strongly agree). Negatively-worded items were rescored, then items were summed to calculate ‘males’ and females’ scores of cognitive emotion regulation (CERQ) subscales (self-blame, acceptance, rumination, positive refocusing, refocus on planning,
positive reappraisal, putting into perspective, catastrophizing, blaming others) and strategic approach to coping (SACS) factors (assertive action, social joining, seeking social support, cautious action, instinctive action, avoidance, indirect action, antisocial action, aggressive action).

Statistical analyses of the data provided by the participants have been conducted on two levels. The first one, a preliminary descriptive level, was focused on emotion regulation measures and coping strategies for the male and female participants, considered individually. Additionally, a comparison (using Paired Samples T-tests) between gender based groups has completed the analysis at this level. The second level has explored the correlations between all measures for emotion regulation and coping strategies of partners within the couple.

**Results**

Means and standard deviations for emotion regulation measures (CERQ scores) are presented in of Table 1 for both male and female partners. As a group, women reported significantly higher mean scores in rumination ($t(98)=2.35\ p=.020$) and catastrophizing ($t(98)=2.26\ p=.026$). The significance threshold was set at .05.

**Table 1. Emotion regulation measures – descriptive statistics (N=50)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CERQ Scores</th>
<th>Male partners</th>
<th></th>
<th>Female partners</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>Median</td>
<td>Std. Deviation</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>Median</td>
<td>Std. Deviation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-blame</td>
<td>10.68</td>
<td>11.00</td>
<td>3.347</td>
<td>10.40</td>
<td>10.00</td>
<td>2.587</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acceptance</td>
<td>11.92</td>
<td>12.00</td>
<td>3.225</td>
<td>12.06</td>
<td>12.00</td>
<td>2.917</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rumination</td>
<td>11.90</td>
<td>12.00</td>
<td>3.507</td>
<td>13.62</td>
<td>14.50</td>
<td>3.784</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive refocusing</td>
<td>11.42</td>
<td>11.00</td>
<td>4.371</td>
<td>11.68</td>
<td>11.00</td>
<td>4.414</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refocus on planning</td>
<td>15.62</td>
<td>16.00</td>
<td>3.410</td>
<td>15.96</td>
<td>17.00</td>
<td>3.270</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive reappraisal</td>
<td>14.66</td>
<td>15.00</td>
<td>3.734</td>
<td>14.90</td>
<td>14.00</td>
<td>3.105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Putting into perspective</td>
<td>13.20</td>
<td>13.50</td>
<td>3.546</td>
<td>14.00</td>
<td>14.00</td>
<td>3.709</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catastrophizing</td>
<td>8.02</td>
<td>8.00</td>
<td>3.605</td>
<td>9.60</td>
<td>9.00</td>
<td>3.870</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blaming others</td>
<td>7.32</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>2.903</td>
<td>7.84</td>
<td>8.00</td>
<td>2.652</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Means and standard deviations for coping strategies (SACS scores) are presented in Table 2 for both male and female partners. There were no significant differences between average scores of men and women for any of the coping strategies measures.

**Table 2. Coping strategies – descriptive statistics (N=50)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SACS Scores</th>
<th>Male partners</th>
<th></th>
<th>Female partners</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>Median</td>
<td>Std. Deviation</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>Median</td>
<td>Std. Deviation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assertive Action</td>
<td>31.86</td>
<td>31.00</td>
<td>4.721</td>
<td>32.62</td>
<td>33.00</td>
<td>5.050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Joining</td>
<td>18.66</td>
<td>19.00</td>
<td>4.104</td>
<td>18.08</td>
<td>18.00</td>
<td>4.095</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeking Social Support</td>
<td>21.64</td>
<td>22.50</td>
<td>5.539</td>
<td>23.48</td>
<td>24.00</td>
<td>5.104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cautious Action</td>
<td>17.66</td>
<td>18.00</td>
<td>4.168</td>
<td>18.04</td>
<td>18.00</td>
<td>3.374</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The second level of analysis has revealed only three of the eighteen variables included in the analysis correlate significantly with the same measures of the couple partners: avoidance ($r(50)=.299 \ p=.035$), indirect action ($r(50)=.408 \ p=.003$) and social joining ($r(50)=.323 \ p=.022$).

Additional significant positive correlations were observed between women’s positive reappraisal and men’s acceptance ($r(50)=.323 \ p=.022$), women’s blaming others scores and men’s catastrophizing ($r(50)=.299 \ p=.035$), and women’s instinctive action and men’s catastrophizing ($r(50)=.296 \ p=.037$). Women’s social joining correlates positively with men’s positive refocusing ($r(50)=.317 \ p=.025$) and refocus on planning ($r(50)=.341 \ p=.015$). Also, female partners’ cautious action positively correlates with their male partners’ rumination ($r(50)=.357 \ p=.011$), refocus on planning ($r(50)=.312 \ p=.028$), and social joining ($r(50)=.353 \ p=.012$). Another set of positive correlations associate women’s instinctive action with men’s catastrophizing ($r(50)=.296 \ p=.037$) and avoidance ($r(50)=.288 \ p=.043$). Another set of positive correlations associate female partners’ avoidance with their male partners’ positive reappraisal ($r(50)=.281 \ p=.048$) and catastrophizing ($r(50)=.390 \ p=.005$). Only three sets of variables correlated negatively: men’s putting into perspective with women’s self-blame ($r(50)=-.318 \ p=.024$), men’s social joining and women’s self-blame ($r(50)=-.333 \ p=.018$), as well as men’s avoidance with women’s rumination ($r(50)=-.296 \ p=.037$).

The complete set of correlations between female and male couple partners’ scores for all variables included in the analysis is presented in Table 3a and Table 3b.

### Table 3a. Correlations between female couple partners’ emotion regulation strategies and male couple partners’ measures for emotion regulation and coping strategies (N=50)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>MAN</th>
<th>WOMAN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Self-blame</td>
<td>Acceptance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-blame</td>
<td>r 0.070</td>
<td>0.153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>p 0.633</td>
<td>0.290</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acceptance</td>
<td>r -0.162</td>
<td>0.189</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>p 0.260</td>
<td>0.188</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruminating</td>
<td>r 0.040</td>
<td>0.232</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>p 0.780</td>
<td>0.105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive refocusing</td>
<td>r -0.107</td>
<td>-0.084</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>p 0.459</td>
<td>0.564</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refocus on planning</td>
<td>r -0.080</td>
<td>-0.067</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>p 0.583</td>
<td>0.642</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive reappraisal</td>
<td>r -0.144</td>
<td>-0.058</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>p 0.318</td>
<td>0.689</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3b. Correlations between female couple partners’ emotion regulation strategies and male couple partners’ measures for emotion regulation and coping strategies (N=50)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MAN</th>
<th>Self-blame</th>
<th>Acceptance</th>
<th>Rumination</th>
<th>Positive refoicing</th>
<th>Refocus on planning</th>
<th>Positive reappraisal</th>
<th>Putting into perspective</th>
<th>Catastrophizing</th>
<th>Blaming others</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Putting into perspective</td>
<td>r</td>
<td>-.318*</td>
<td>0.019</td>
<td>-0.218</td>
<td>-0.108</td>
<td>-0.096</td>
<td>-0.054</td>
<td>0.037</td>
<td>0.260</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>p</td>
<td>0.024</td>
<td>0.898</td>
<td>0.129</td>
<td>0.456</td>
<td>0.507</td>
<td>0.711</td>
<td>0.797</td>
<td>0.068</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catastrophizing</td>
<td>r</td>
<td>-0.187</td>
<td>0.050</td>
<td>-0.074</td>
<td>0.023</td>
<td>0.140</td>
<td>-0.069</td>
<td>0.136</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>p</td>
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<td>0.728</td>
<td>0.609</td>
<td>0.871</td>
<td>0.331</td>
<td>0.634</td>
<td>0.347</td>
<td>0.175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blaming others</td>
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<td>0.080</td>
<td>0.058</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>p</td>
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<td>0.582</td>
<td>0.690</td>
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<td>0.981</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assertive Action</td>
<td>r</td>
<td>-.333*</td>
<td>-0.176</td>
<td>-0.227</td>
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<td>-0.012</td>
<td>-0.099</td>
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<td>0.021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>p</td>
<td>0.018</td>
<td>0.223</td>
<td>0.114</td>
<td>0.979</td>
<td>0.932</td>
<td>0.493</td>
<td>0.819</td>
<td>0.884</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Joining</td>
<td>r</td>
<td>-0.051</td>
<td>-0.030</td>
<td>-0.094</td>
<td>-0.120</td>
<td>-0.061</td>
<td>-0.223</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>p</td>
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<td>0.835</td>
<td>0.515</td>
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<td>0.673</td>
<td>0.120</td>
<td>0.951</td>
<td>0.573</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cautious Action</td>
<td>r</td>
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<td>-0.087</td>
<td>-0.055</td>
<td>-0.002</td>
<td>-0.079</td>
<td>-0.041</td>
<td>0.021</td>
<td>0.053</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>p</td>
<td>0.379</td>
<td>0.547</td>
<td>0.705</td>
<td>0.991</td>
<td>0.586</td>
<td>0.780</td>
<td>0.884</td>
<td>0.713</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instinctive Action</td>
<td>r</td>
<td>-0.094</td>
<td>0.025</td>
<td>-0.035</td>
<td>0.028</td>
<td>0.155</td>
<td>0.061</td>
<td>0.078</td>
<td>-0.061</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>p</td>
<td>0.515</td>
<td>0.862</td>
<td>0.809</td>
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<td>0.283</td>
<td>0.675</td>
<td>0.590</td>
<td>0.674</td>
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<td>Avoidance</td>
<td>r</td>
<td>-0.278</td>
<td>-0.244</td>
<td>-0.296</td>
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<td>-0.152</td>
<td>-0.124</td>
<td>-0.181</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>p</td>
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<td>0.037</td>
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<td>0.392</td>
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<tr>
<td>Indirect Action</td>
<td>r</td>
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<td>-0.109</td>
<td>-0.056</td>
<td>0.091</td>
<td>0.012</td>
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<td>p</td>
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<td>0.932</td>
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<td>0.870</td>
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<tr>
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<td>r</td>
<td>-0.016</td>
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<td>0.016</td>
<td>0.067</td>
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<td>-0.022</td>
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<td>-0.015</td>
<td>0.046</td>
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<td>0.717</td>
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<td>0.916</td>
<td>0.748</td>
<td>0.992</td>
<td>0.139</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).
** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MAN</th>
<th>MAN</th>
<th>Social Joining</th>
<th>Seeking Social Support</th>
<th>Cautious Action</th>
<th>Instinctive Action</th>
<th>Avoidance</th>
<th>Indirect Action</th>
<th>Antisocial Action</th>
<th>Aggressive Action</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>p</td>
<td>0.439</td>
<td>0.107</td>
<td>0.466</td>
<td>0.011</td>
<td>0.879</td>
<td>0.305</td>
<td>0.989</td>
<td>0.601</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>r</td>
<td>0.093</td>
<td>.317*</td>
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<td>0.027</td>
<td>0.072</td>
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<td>Positive refocusing</td>
<td>p</td>
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<td>0.025</td>
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<tr>
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<td>p</td>
<td>0.131</td>
<td>0.015</td>
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<td>0.657</td>
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<td>0.048</td>
<td>0.867</td>
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<tr>
<td>Putting into perspective</td>
<td>p</td>
<td>0.936</td>
<td>0.133</td>
<td>0.653</td>
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<td>0.107</td>
<td>0.812</td>
<td>0.537</td>
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<tr>
<td>Catastrophizing</td>
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<td>0.815</td>
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<td>0.005</td>
<td>0.454</td>
<td>0.210</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blaming others</td>
<td>p</td>
<td>0.298</td>
<td>0.101</td>
<td>0.405</td>
<td>0.631</td>
<td>0.674</td>
<td>0.480</td>
<td>0.155</td>
<td>0.664</td>
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<td>p</td>
<td>0.138</td>
<td>0.221</td>
<td>0.124</td>
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<td>0.003</td>
<td>-0.143</td>
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<td>0.045</td>
<td>.355*</td>
<td>0.083</td>
<td>0.070</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>0.069</td>
<td>0.022</td>
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<td>0.565</td>
<td>0.628</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instinctive Action</td>
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<td>0.109</td>
<td>0.188</td>
<td>0.236</td>
<td>0.274</td>
<td>0.169</td>
<td>0.037</td>
<td>-0.173</td>
<td>-0.083</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoidance</td>
<td>p</td>
<td>0.452</td>
<td>0.190</td>
<td>0.099</td>
<td>0.054</td>
<td>0.242</td>
<td>0.796</td>
<td>0.230</td>
<td>0.567</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indirect Action</td>
<td>p</td>
<td>0.110</td>
<td>0.067</td>
<td>-0.109</td>
<td>0.184</td>
<td>0.086</td>
<td>0.145</td>
<td>-0.094</td>
<td>-0.006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antisocial Action</td>
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<td>0.642</td>
<td>0.450</td>
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<td>0.316</td>
<td>0.516</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aggressive Action</td>
<td>p</td>
<td>0.053</td>
<td>0.153</td>
<td>0.031</td>
<td>0.145</td>
<td>0.258</td>
<td>0.256</td>
<td>0.276</td>
<td>0.158</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| * Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). 

**Discussions**

The research results presented in this study have been focused on individual emotion regulation and coping strategies frequently used by couple partners. Although, as a group, women reported a higher mean score for rumination and catastrophizing, no other differences were significant between women and men in order to justify gender profiling of cognitive and emotional responses to stress.

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All variables included in the analysis have been approached as individual, self-reported measures, but the correlational data has been applied to the couple. Very few results from the correlational analysis have supported the Congruence Model of Functional Coping within the couple. Avoidance, indirect action and social joining are the three coping strategies that correlate between couple partners. It is noteworthy that the three strategies correspond to the most common and widespread studied coping mechanisms: avoidance, passive-aggressive behaviors and connection. In-depth, longitudinal research is needed in order to understand whether these correlated coping strategies result from the initial attraction of individuals who already have these coping styles or, the congruence of coping strategies is a result of long-term interaction within couple relationships.

No such correlations resulted between similar emotion regulating strategies. One possible explanation is that, in order for emotion co-regulation to occur, partners need to play different roles, so that they can support each other and offer the mirroring and validation they need. Activating similar emotion regulation strategies might lead to the escalation of negative emotions and conflict.

The correlations between different emotional regulation and coping strategies variable corresponding to couple partners reveal a pattern of association based on complementarity rather than congruence, while the functional/dysfunctional core of the dyads of variables remains the same. Thus, functional emotion regulation responses, such as women’s positive reappraisal and men’s acceptance or women’s social joining and men’s positive refocusing significantly correlate. Such results support other studies emphasizing the value of dyadic coping strategies as a prime indicator of functional adaptation to daily stress in marital context (Landis et al., 2013).

The same correlational pattern has emerged for dysfunctional coping strategies and/or emotional regulation responses. For example, women’s blaming others and men’s catastrophizing significantly correlate. The same significant correlations appear between female partners’ avoidance and their male partners’ catastrophizing. These types of emotion regulation strategies can contribute to marital conflict escalation.

An interesting set of results negatively correlates women’s self-blame with men’s putting into perspective and men’s social joining. The more engaged are male partners into functional coping strategies that offer and receive support, the less likely are their female partners to manifest self-blame when confronted with stressful situations. These results are aligned with Gottman’s model (2015) of emotion interaction within the couple that emphasizes men’s role in couples’ emotion regulation by exposure and support for their partner’s negative feelings.

While providing valuable insights on correlation between actual couple partners rather than comparisons between unrelated samples of men and women, the study presents some limitations that require consideration. The research design has relied on a small convenience sample of couples. Self-reported data on coping strategies and emotion regulation requires a level of introspection that not all participants are used to and it relies on subjective self-evaluations rather than measures taken during the process. Future studies including more comprehensive views of individual coping, longitudinal methods and larger samples of participants will expand the research topic beyond its present limits.

Conclusions

The study has explored couple partners’ coping and emotion regulation strategies, in order to establish whether their respective individual styles correlate and which emotional and cognitive coping patterns occur most frequently within the couple. The correlations between partners’ coping strategies suggest that there are patterns of processing and reaction to stress specific to the couple, but these patterns do not necessarily rely on similarity and covariance. Positive correlations were recorded between male and female couple partners’ scores regarding avoidance, indirect action and social joining as coping strategies. No such correlations resulted between similar emotion
regulating strategies. Correlations between different emotion regulating and coping strategies of couple partners have revealed that complementary functional strategies associate within the couple. The same applies to dysfunctional emotion regulation and coping strategies. Each of those associations is relevant for a pattern of coping that can be related to co-regulation or dyadic coping strategies. Further research is needed in order to better understand how individual coping strategies and emotion regulation responses interact within the couple.

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References


THE ROLE OF THE FAMILY FOR THE PSYCHOLOGICAL STATUS OF A PERSON IN OLD AGE

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Abstract

Objectives. This article aims to research the influence of the family on some basic psychological phenomena in old age, its ability to influence, stabilize and delay the psychological changes typical of old age. To this end, a number of research papers on this issue were checked, all being elaborated by authors working on such topics.

Material and methods. An extensive analysis of the literary sources on this topic from the last few years has been made. Articles, papers and books showing the role of the family for the psychological functioning of old people have been checked by hand. A search on keywords and phrases in the specialised databases was done.

Results. The analysis that was done showed some already expected tendencies. During the various stages of human life there are different relationships that predominate. When it comes to old age, these are companionship, care for the other, sharing, spiritual communication, etc. The family proves to be the main source of communication for the elders. The old person can most fully develop his repertoire of roles in it, and can optimally satisfy both his basic and higher order needs.

Conclusions. The family has a unique role for the psychological functioning of the aging people. Attention, respect and warmth are needed for being calm in elderly people. Taking care of the old person is an expression of care and faithfulness, and being around them really matters for them and contributes to their psychological balance.

Keywords: emotional balance, family, family environment, old age, psychological functioning.

Introduction

Many definitions of the category family have been proposed, ranging from the simple ‘main cell of society’ to some general and ideologically loaded terms. The common thing for all of them is that the family unit is seen as a free union of personalities that can interact among themselves on the basis of their personal wishes and needs. Therefore, the family should not be seen as a static institution but as a dynamic environment subjected to the influence of various influences and stimuli, something that allows the individuals to develop within the particular community (Lee, 2010). It is generally accepted that the family is an interdependent unit - the intrapsychological organisation of each family member is part of the psychosocial structure of the family itself, and the structure of the family always has the intrapsychological organisation of its individual members (Todorova, 1988). The family has an incredibly well developed ability to adapt not only to the changes in society but also to those changes that take place within the family members. For this reason, the relationships within the family are considered one of the most long-lasting human relationships (Ilieva, 1980).
Theories for family roles and their swapping are used to explain the dynamics of family relationships. The most common hypothesis is the one that these roles are the link between the interpersonal and the sociocultural, and that the personality has the potential ability to form them (Dragneva, 1990). On the one hand, this mediator function explains how, by using family roles, some very personal traits are shown in family communication, and, on the other, it explains how the family environment generates personal differences. Role is usually considered a component of the Self-concept and a crucial determinant of family relationships (Dragneva, 1990). Yankova (1979) researches the situations in the family which lead to family issues and conflicts by considering the theories of role swapping, and she points out that the understanding of social roles has a key role for the description and analysis of interpersonal relationships.

Very important for dialogic communication are the cultural level of development, the ideas, the ideals, the socio-cultural values and the moral system of each family member. These factors contribute to the formation of stereotypical I-concepts, roles, patterns and habits. It is generally accepted that these roles become one whole with the personality, they become an indivisible part of it and they modify its whole nature (Dragneva, 1990). They become a internal regulator of behaviour that works within the personality. In the family, the personality plays his roles in view of the circumstances and it tries to come out of the situation as clean as possible. As Dragneva (1990) claims, the crucial factors to improve family relationships are improving the understanding of family roles, understanding behaviour stereotypes and moral.

Material and methods

An extensive analysis of the literary sources on this topic from the last few years was made. A search on keywords and phrases in the specialized databases was done. The content of the articles, papers and books showing the role of the family for the psychological functioning of old people was analyzed qualitatively and classified. The information obtained was interpreted and structured logically and by topics. The method that was used was qualitative inductive content analysis of the materials related to old age and the topics that were extracted emerged from the content of the materials that were examined and compared. Some initial assumptions on the importance of family for the right psychological functioning of the elderly were confirmed by a number of research papers such as the one issued by Rada (2018), according to which the main support comes from the children and parents (around 80%), and from the partner (around 60%).

Results and discussions

It has been established that during the various stages of family life there are different relationships that predominate. For the period of old age these are companionship, care for one another, sharing, spiritual communication, among others, that form the vitality of the family unit. It acts as a mediator in the interpersonal relationships, on the basis of an image of the other that has already been formed. This image is quite constant in the period of old age and it is formed on the basis of combining cultural values, role expectations and the whole experience from one mutually covered life path for many years. The ability of different family members to appreciate this experience plays a crucial role for the personal interactions within the family. The family is the main core of psychological support for old people and when they get approval from other people, this contributes to the optimization of their I-concept. Rogers (1980) specifies the connection between the family environment and the personality’s I-concept. As a result of the pressure that the family environment has put on individuals in the course of years, they aim to be considered as its family members more than as independent personalities.

The old person satisfies his basic needs within the family environment, and to be deprived of it will negatively affect his personality. Within the family environment he develops and
accomplishes himself, he gets security, intimacy and love, he asserts himself by instilling respect in people, and he gets noticed. The results of a research made in Bulgaria at the end of the previous century support this idea. The research shows that 43.9% of women and 44.7% of men claim that it is their partner who understands them as no one else does. A significant percentage of the respondents have also pointed out that their family helps them grow as personalities (Kyuranov, 1987). It becomes clear from the same research that in families with family members at a more advanced age, the grown up children appear to be the factor to stimulate and consolidate mutual bonds and mutual love.

The family calls for personal qualities like faithfulness, sincerity, self-control, responsibility, dignity and a sense of duty, the lack of which can make it very difficult for a person to cope with difficult situations in life and within the family. The richer and more versatile the relationship between the spouses is, the more likely it is to produce a new combination out of their manifestations. That would allow for a person to slowly enter the calm age of ‘restored trust’ (Ilieva, 1980). The question of how to stabilize and develop the family relationships as people age needs to be discussed. Being able to age with dignity, without capitulating to old age, appears to be a daunting task. To this end, it would help to accept the involuntary processes as natural. To be able to age with dignity depends on the personal qualities of the aging person and on the ability of the spouses to activate those qualities of their personalities that successfully neutralize and hide the growing number of deficits in them (Svetlik et al., 2005).

As people age, family life and the family-related relationships get increasingly more affective importance for the personality. Aging causes spouses to bond more and the importance of family roles increases at the expense of the social roles outside the family. The high emotional importance of the family environment becomes very obvious when dramatic events like the loss of a family member or being accommodated in a home for elderly people take place. The old person often experiences a nervous breakdown in such situations. The death of a spouse has its complex consequences starting from some financial difficulties and continuing until the person experiences loneliness and a feeling of being useless (Craig and Pham, 2006; Brandon and Flury, 2009; Havighurst, 1972).

Vachon (1976) regards widowing as a factor that can potentially accelerate the social disadaptation and cause serious somatic and psychological diseases. Alexandrova (2006) describes the crisis caused by the loss of a long-loved family partner as follows: "When the loved one is gone... Then life becomes terrible. You have been with this person for the most part of your waking life, your energy fields are as intertwined as if there is one soul in two bodies. You have lived in one room, you have been breathing one and the same air, you have shared one bed, and you have become one whole. And now one part of this whole has gone forever. Suffering is what is left for the other. No reasonable arguments can persuade the surviving person who feels cut in half, mutilated and half-dead, that this is a natural act..." (Alexandrova, 2006, p. 276)

The unity of emotions and feelings is at the core of the mutual understanding and harmony not only of the dyadic relationships (that of spouses) but of the relationship with children and grandchildren. The contact with the next generations is a necessary condition to successfully adapt to the new situation, as the circle of social interactions becomes narrower every day. As parents age, they start to depend on their children more and to reduce the number of their contacts outside their family. To the majority of them, the family is a cardinal value, a centre of their interests and a most important field of activity. By receiving the help from their children, they attribute meaning to their old age, they evade the fear of loneliness that is typical of old age and the depressing feeling that they are no longer needed to the environment where they have spent most of their lives (Kyuranov, 1987). The old person can still be useful in a home full of children and grandchildren. In fact, he is now entering an interesting and fruitful in its own way period of his life - that of reevaluation of everything and sharing the fruits of this life experience with those people who have sprouted from his root. He stays away from his bad thoughts in the company of his children and grandchildren.
because life thrives around him all the time (Dinkova, 1976).

Aging people enjoying a full family status (marriage partners, children and grandchildren) usually have greater self-esteem compared to aging loners who feel insecurity and anxiety about their future (Terry, 2006). Nothings warms the heart of the old person like the presence of strong, well educated and hardworking children and grandchildren around him. A research made among retired people in Sofia shows that they see meaning in their lives when they try to be financially and morally useful to their successors (Iolov, 1982). They also link the most successful events in their lives with their children and marital partners which confirms the exceptional importance of the family for the retired people.

Topalova (as cited in Spasovska, 1985) studies the dynamics of the system of values in different life periods and she finds out that the happiness within the family is a primary value for the people not older than 65. In the following age periods it will be preserved as a primary value but then health and vital activity become important as well.

Despite the ever increasing popularity of the nuclear family, the extended family of three generations has preserved its activity in certain social environments. Bengtson’s research (1975) among the population of various countries shows the positive influence of the populous patriarchal family for the psychological development of old people. It turns out that thanks to the populous patriarchal family some of the main family functions can be materialized, for example: reaching optimal organization of the consumption of goods; satisfying the emotional needs of the family members; developing a system of values; reaching spiritual continuity; supporting the family members; developing norms, prescripts and samples to regulate the behaviour of each family member.

Georgiev (2003) describes in detail the role of the old person in the family by emphasizing its significance in the past. The author points out that the patriarchal image of the old person determines his status as head of the family and root of the physical reproduction for the next generations. Along with this, he is directly responsible for the psychological continuity of his successors as he has to educate them, bring them up, and provide them with his experience and culture. It is often the case when all the movable and immovable property for long-term use by the whole family is owed to the old person. His contribution to everyday activities like going shopping, paying the expenses, cleaning and tidying up, looking after the grandchildren, etc, is also significant. The aging person is also responsible for developing criteria for the family members’ actions and for evaluating them by pointing out which of them are acceptable and useful for the family community. He has the role of a mediator who regulates the attitude of the different family members and who terminates all conflicts. He also controls their behaviour and coordinates their efforts as they do various activities. The contact with grandchildren appears to be an endless source of positive emotions for both parties. The positive opinions expressed by the relatives also have a consolidating influence on the mind. The aging personality lives under the impression that he has preserved himself, that he is active and he expects to receive confirmation of this. Georgiev points out that ‘the old man feels well among his relatives who respect him and provide him with enough attention and warmth. They let the old person join them on holidays, they give him presents and thus not only do they prove their love and respect to him but they indirectly suggest to him their faith in him that he shall live on and shall use or wear the presents’ (Georgiev, 2003, p. 149).

Dinkova (1976) summarizes the advantages of the extended family consisting of three generations compared to the other family types by pointing out that because of the multi-sided and flexible help among family members, the extended family of three generations creates the best conditions to raise and educate the growing children. Parallel to this, the process of aging is more enriching, more diverse, more safe and more useful. In their majority, old people are good-natured and they preserve their energy and clear mind till very old age. They are usually able to adapt to a certain degree to the requirements and to the worldviews of the young people. Such wise people with great life experience are a real blessing. They make other people instinctively respect them
only with their presence. An indisputable advantage of living together is that it allows for help between different generations, it provides a better control over the growing children and it helps to prevent alienation from taking place. Well-meaning relationships have a stabilizing effect on the family and they sustain its social balance. The emotional solidarity finds expression in various forms of lively communication, gifts, spending free time together, etc. All these aspects have a positive effect on the old person’s personality. The good mood, the increased vital tone, the raised spirits, the emotional fulfillment and the feeling of being useful, all make the old person happy and allow him to bear his old age with dignity and little efforts. Despite the obvious advantages for the old person, such a living hides a number of potential dangers. For example, if different generations don’t understand one another well, that could worsen the microclimate within the family and make old age more difficult to bear.

Between 2011 and 2012, in a sample of 1215 subjects, aged between 18-74 years old, from Romania, Rada (2014) found that more than 50% of children have helped "a lot" their parents. Also, "Over 70% of respondents have offered help to their grandparents and received help from their grandparents. The main problem facing intergenerational support is care giving for elderly people. Their health conditions and ability to contribute to the household economy influences the intensity of support offered. Lonely elderly are most likely to be the receivers of support Here, there is no question of a lower intergenerational solidarity, but rather, it is an intergenerational participation issue caused by cycles of family life, income and marital status" (Rada, 2014, p. 301). Between 2016 and 2017, in a sample of 601 subjects from Romania, aged between 55-93 years old, Rada (2018, p. 142) found that "the most vulnerable elderly are those with health and low income issues, and these aspects are mentioned by most respondents. At the same time, the accounts have emphasized the fact that people with bidirectional support, with a sense of usefulness, with a positive view on life, the extraverts and the sociable ones have a better life".

In the last few years, some historical changes have taken place in the family structure that seriously affect the old person’s status and functioning. The power and authority of the old generation have been limited, and the traditional relationships between the generations have been weakened. The patriarchal feeling of veneration of the old people is exterminated but this feeling is not always replaced with natural, deep feelings of love and respect. Sometimes the feelings to old people are measured in terms of a material equivalent and they are addressed to that old person who provides young people with more finances. Tufan (2010) sees one of the main conflicts between the generations in the concentration of material gains in the old generation at the expense of young people who get more and more educated. Spasova (1980) points out in this connection that it is not uncommon when young people start to exploit their old parents in a predatory fashion, under the presumption that they have already had their good days and now it is their children’s turn. This can lead to feelings of being overstressed so that these selfless old helpers live the rest of their days very depressed. At another place in her paper, Spasovska (1985, p. 91, 92) points out that "The pathology of the connection between generations is such that it can reach the point where some children who have forgotten about their origin - some upstarts or predatory pragmatics - feel ashamed of their ‘simple and uneducated’ parents".

The same author describes in detail the different reactions of the elderly people to such attitudes directed at them. Some react with resignation and even tend to blame themselves for a million of reasons. They feel guilty for not being able to satisfy the ever growing demands and pretensions of their children. Many of them even feel that they are a burden to their children which puts them under even more pressure, misbalancing their internal homeostasis. These processes are even more painful when such a person has widowed while still young but managed to raise his children without any help. Children accept their parent’s decision to remain alone as something natural, and sometimes they eliminate the danger of a second marriage while it is still a thought in progress. Some of them don’t even realise that they have doomed their parent to be lonely because marriage in old age provides the vital need to communicate and it protects the personality from
social isolation. Having sacrificed their life in the name of their children, the disappointment from such demonstrations of hostile behaviour in such a sensitive age period is complete. Spasovska’s description of this disappointment (1985, p. 92) is remarkable: "The old man, being with an easily hurt mentality by default, suffers, becomes despondent, and isolates himself, but he patiently carries his burden, he is usually reserved and does not argue with the young people, even if seriously offended". Even when they are in need, old people do not complain, they quietly accept the blows of life because they do not want to worsen the condition of their children. They are well prepared for an uneven requital from their children and don’t expect to be looked after.

Others react in a protectionist fashion, defending their personal interests and freedom. Each intervention receives some counterarguments. What is more, sometimes the old generation brutally intervenes in the lives of young people with their never ending reprimands, rebukes and preaches. It is not uncommon when they make a parallel between their lives in the past and the relationship between the young family’s members today. The conflicts between parents and their married children assume a different image during each stage of aging. As this process continues, the psychological features of old age start to show more and the states of heavy depression that are so typical of it (Chiang et al., 2010).

The aging person is likely to lapse into a psychological disadaptation under the influence of ‘role swappin”. The once fragile child has unnoticeably become an independent person, a financially and socially more significant member of the family, and the parent has assumed the position of a more dependent and helpless person. The psychotraumatic consequences of the reversal of roles in the family are most discernible in the early period of aging. The feelings of being robbed, of weakness and inferiority can sometimes lead to a compensatory hyperactivity and manifestations of authoritarism (Petrov, 1978). In these cases, old age shows its most negative traits: increased irritability; discontent; endless murmuring for everything that cannot be approved by the old system of morals; making biting remarks, etc. The conflicts between daughters-in-law and mothers-in-law have become proverbial and have become part of the history in literary works like that of Karaslavov Tatul and Snaha, as well as being part of the national literary heritage. Hadzhiiski described these relationships in the following way: "One of the great joys of old women is to sit under the sun and their daughters-in-law to start exterminating the lice in their hair. Sometimes they fall asleep under the sounds of this brutal extermination of lice. The greatest praise and the greatest reproach for the daughter-in-law at this age is whether she is checking the old lady’s head or she hasn’t covered her nails with blood in the old lady’s hair yet" (Hadzhiiski, 1974, p. 52).

The words of Haytov are indicative of the disruption between the generations: Haytov: "If we listen to the voice of young age, we shall hear another thing: Old people are backward, old-fashioned, fossilized, slow; they don’t understand us, they don’t respect our juvenile feelings and aspirations...". This age-old battling between the generations has been witnessed by the walls of each home and each public building. It used to be heard in the streets, including the main street (Haytov, 1969, p. 3).

Brown (1974) discusses in detail the problem of the reasons for the conflicts between the generations. They are most often caused by the battling for power in the family, by the lack of tactfulness, restrain, responsibility and tolerance in conditions of a stressful and dynamic daily life. The primary cause can be looked for in factors like deformations in upbringing, character incompatibility, mismatch of worldviews, asserting one’s own I-concept, incorrect adaptation, bad personal example, etc. Regardless of their genesis, such situations that bring about conflicts and crises have a deforming role upon communication within the family, and the family is the main core of communication in the early period of aging, as it is more important than the company of friends, relatives and neighbours. These deformations can have a different expression, for example, inadequate attitude, lack of sober judgment for certain events (overstating or neglecting things), lies, egocentrism, alienation, utilitarianism, etc. Brown (1974) points out that old people do not
withdraw from their children even when they are not satisfied with their mutual relationships. They prefer to be in a state of conflict than not to be committed to anything. When they have to choose between total absence of contacts and contacts that do not satisfy them, they choose the latter.

Porshnev (1986) points out that the presence of certain self-regulating mechanisms of stereotypical and role behaviour in the aging personality make it easier for it to become balanced in the process of interpersonal communication and in important life situations. Such balance could be achieved more easily in a family environment free of conflicts and contradictions. The states of stress and crises at this age affect the personality stronger and for longer periods of time, they often lead to erroneous steps when solving family problems and complex cases in life. They often co-occur with symptoms like increased criticism, apathy, aggression, euphoric states, depression, fear, anxiety, alcohol abuse and even suicidal intentions.

It is generally accepted that personality and its mechanisms are directed towards the search for good, truth and happiness. Despite this disposition, family conflicts often cannot be dealt with successfully and, as a result, people reach extremes. There are a significant number of cases when sons and daughters sue their parents so as to get their properties and then send them to a home for elderly people. As Semov (1979, p. 264) points out "The judicial proceedings and the homes for the elderly are the most monstrous and the most evil result of this excessive care. They are neither the typical, nor the mass thing that a person can see on our beautiful land. But it exists. It is before our eyes. It is a deep, horrific pain, the worst and the most powerful pain that nature could ever create - the pain experienced by a mother and a father".

It is still generally accepted that sending one’s parents to an elderly people’s home is an act of immorality and cruelty, that it is a demonstration of unfulfilled duty. There are cases when sons and daughters, after they dump their parents, don’t go to visit them in the elderly people’s home at all and they start to think about them only after they have passed away, and sometimes they don’t even attend their parents’ funeral. The society accepts this as something unnatural, as some kind of punishment and moral humiliation. There is no more natural scenario than that in which the sunset of one’s life takes place in one’s home, in a family environment and among relatives. The elderly should fly away at the place where they feel best (Kim, Cho and June, 2006).

Choi, Ransom and Wylli (2008) focus their attention on the effect that a home for elderly people has on the personality of an old person as they enter it. As they are admitted in this social institution, old people come across a completely new environment. The great disadvantage of these institutions is that they accommodate many aging people at one place, people who are isolated from their contacts with other age groups and, most of all, isolated from their family. The way of life is often different and does not coincide with the way of life that these people have had so far. The new daily regime, the new environment and some restrictions for the retired people frustrate them. The aging personality is a representative of other times, temperament and understanding that do not coincide with that of the much younger staff. Something more, such institutions are anything but clubs on the basis of certain interests. Clients are admitted at random and finding a suitable company for communication can be very difficult.

All these things make the elderly person retreat and be lonely. "Loneliness is not only the lack of an opportunity to communicate with relatives and friends but also a condition of being forgotten and disinterested" (Vasilyieva, 1975, p. 151). "Being lonely for a long time leads the person to heavy psychological states of depression, melancholy, reclusiveness, bitterness and even aggression. These states lead old people to social isolation and passivity, to insecurity when it comes to their future, and even to fear of the inevitable when the inevitable is about to happen. Loneliness is also the result of that depressing feeling that you are no longer useful neither to the society, nor to your relatives" (Spasovska, 1985, p. 97). The depression that comes as a result of loneliness is a scourge for the mentality of the aging person. It is the saddest balance of human life and its most desperate result (Graneheim and Lundman, 2010). The study also had some limitations. The survey showed that the influence of the family on mental functioning has been
studied mainly in younger persons. There are not many empirical studies that trace its influence in the elderly. This opens the field for future scientific research in this direction.

Conclusions

Studies have shown that the fullest reduction of loneliness and its complex impact on the psychological activity of the aging personality can be reached in a family environment, which is also the most wanted environment (Paul, Salma and Shah, 2006). There is no question that the family has a unique role for the aging people because, despite the good conditions and the specialised care provided, the homes for elderly people remain an unwanted place to be. Attention, respect and warmth are needed for being calm in old age. Taking care of the old person at home is an expression of care and faithfulness, and being around this person really matters for them (Georgiev, 2003). It’s an illusion for young people to hope that they can change completely old people’s opinions and habits and this most likely isn’t necessary. It is just that old people have to be accepted for who they are. What can be deducted from these findings is that the administered tendencies and the findings and conclusions that have ultimately gained ground are one and the same for all developed societies. It turns out that family environment has some universal reductive features when it comes to negative psychological tendencies and it ensures optimal psychological state in old age.

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RELIGIOUS BELIEFS, SELF-ESTEEM, ANXIETY, AND DEPRESSION AMONG GREEK ORTHODOX ELDERS

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Abstract

Objectives. The purpose of this preliminary study is to determine the relationship between religious beliefs, self-esteem, anxiety, and depression in Greek elders.

Material and methods. Thirty healthy older adults, all members of the Greek Orthodox Church, participated voluntarily in this research. Participants completed four relevant self-report questionnaires: 1) Beck Depression Inventory, 2) State -Trait Anxiety Inventory, 3) The Royal Free Questionnaire for Religious and Spiritual Beliefs, and 4) Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale.

Results. Results indicated no significant differences on the basis of gender (p > 0.05). The vast majority of the participants (n = 25) stated a strong religious and/or a spiritual belief, as measured by the Royal Free Questionnaire for Religious and Spiritual Beliefs. High scores on the Royal Free Questionnaire for Religious and Spiritual Beliefs were moderately and positively correlated with increased self-esteem, as measured by the total scores in the Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale (p < 0.05). In addition to that, the Royal Free Questionnaire for Religious and Spiritual Beliefs scores were negatively correlated with depression, as measured by the Beck Depression Inventory (p < 0.05). The Royal Free Questionnaire for Religious and Spiritual Beliefs scores were negatively correlated with state anxiety (p < 0.05), as well as anxiety, as personality trait (p < 0.05), both measured by the State and Trait subscales of the Anxiety Inventory.

Conclusions. This study shows that there is a number of statistically moderate correlations between religious beliefs and other mental health variables in older adults living in Greece. The findings indicated a need for further research in this field.

Keywords: elderly, religious beliefs, self-esteem, anxiety, depression.

Introduction

The meaning of faith is central to the Orthodox Church (Ware, 1979). Despite numerous studies, mainly in Catholic and Protestant individuals, supporting that religious or spiritual beliefs are conductive to better physical health and psychological well-being (AbdAleati, Zaharim and Mydin, 2016; Ahrenfeldt et al., 2017; Ahrenfeldt et al., 2018; Vitorino et al., 2018), religious and spiritual beliefs have been little investigated in Greek Orthodox older adults, in relation to health-related behaviors and mortality rates (Chliaoutakis et al., 2002; Darviri et al., 2016). Between 2011-2012, in a sample of 1215 subjects aged between 18-74 years old from Romania, was found that "84% of the subjects pray, meditate or take part in similar activities outside the church. In reference to the church as institution, the respondents stated it responded first to people’s spiritual needs. Half of the respondents considered that church had an important role in the individual’s and the family’s morality. The lowest results the church obtained refer to its capacity of resolving the social
problems throughout the country, more than ¾ stating that church did not offer answers to these problems” (Rada, 2013, p. 339). Studies mainly in the U.S.A. have found that there is no significantly important relationship between religiousness and depression or self-esteem in older nursing home residents (Commerford and Reznikoff, 1996), while other researchers have found that religious participation significantly increases self-esteem, but no significant effect has been found on depression among older individuals who are suddenly bereaved (Sherkat and Reed, 1992), and that religious involvement and self-esteem, especially in older adults, may be influenced by the belief in a supportive higher power- "divine support" (Schieman et al., 2017). In addition to that, caregivers of dementia patients, who participated more in religious activities and used religion as positive coping, reported less caregiver burden and depression (Shin et al., 2017). In cancer family caregivers, the finding of an association between attendance at religious services and depressive symptoms, despite no association between prayer and depressive symptoms, indicates the hidden importance of social factors that may contribute to the association (Williams et al., 2015). Other researchers support that spirituality in older adults, seeking outpatient mental health treatment, attenuates the association between depression symptom severity and meaning in life (Bamonti et al., 2016), and also religious affiliation has a protective effect on suicide rates in older age (Lawrence, Oquendo and Stanley, 2016; Nisbet et al., 2000; Norko et al., 2017). In older women, higher frequency of religious service attendance has been found to decrease the risk of incident depression, while women with a diagnosis of depression were less likely to subsequently attend services (Li et al., 2016). Finally, frequency of religious attendance and the belief in an afterlife are inversely associated with feelings of anxiety and positively associated with feelings of tranquility (Ellison, Burdette and Hill, 2009; Shreve-Neiger and Edelstein, 2004).

More specifically, although spirituality and religiousness are increasingly gaining attention as old age research variables, especially related to physical health and health problems/diseases (Cheadle and Dunkel Schetter, 2017; Miller and Thoresen, 2003), there are no extensive research attempts regarding the connection that there may exist between psychological variables and religiousness-spirituality when concurrently examined (Underwood, 2006) not in older individuals with diagnosed chronic health problems and their caregivers (Giannoulis and Giannouli, in press, 2020; Lucette et al., 2016), but in physically healthy older adults. Additionally, different features not only of national, but also of cultural contexts may strengthen or attenuate the relationship of religion and spirituality with subjective well-being (Bond, Lun and Li, 2012; Diener, Tay and Myers, 2011; Giannouli, 2017a; Giannouli, 2017b), but also with other psychological variables and the relationship between them (Stoyanova, Giannouli and Gergov, 2017). Thus, based on the findings of a previous study on students that stated a strong religious and/or a spiritual belief strongly positively correlated with increased self-esteem and negatively correlated with depression, current stress, and stress as personality trait (Papazisis et al., 2014), the specific objective of this study is to determine the relationship between religious beliefs, self-esteem, anxiety, and depression in physically healthy older adults living in Greece. Therefore, it was expected to find on the one hand strong positive correlations for religious/spiritual beliefs and self-esteem, and on the other hand strong negative correlations of the abovementioned variables with anxiety and depression. In addition to that, it was examined whether the gender of the participants could differentiate the above variables - depression, state anxiety, trait anxiety, and religious/spiritual beliefs -, as the religious-spiritual beliefs are very little investigated in Orthodox Greek elders (Giannoulis and Giannouli, in press).
Material and methods

Participants

Thirty healthy older adults (15 females), all members of the Greek Orthodox Church, participated voluntarily in this research. The sample size for this preliminary and exploratory study was sufficient (minimum n = 30 rule of thumb) (Hogg, Tanis and Zimmerman, 1977). All participants came from a specific city in Northern Greece and the examination was completed in one session in 2018. Participants were recruited through printed advertisements on notice boards at various city sites. Their mean age was 75.58 years (SD = 7.50, range 61-90 years old), and level of education 15.47 years (SD = 3.82). There were no statistically significant differences regarding age and education between males and females (p > .05). 15 participants were married, 10 were widowers, and 5 were divorced. All participants received information about the study prior to participating, and signed the informed consent form. In addition to that, participants were given the opportunity to ask questions about the study, and were informed that participation in the study was voluntary. They were also informed that they could withdraw at any time without any repercussions.

Inclusion criteria were: age 65 years and older, no previous or current diagnosis of chronic physical illness based on recent (not more than 3 months) medical tests - as this is a crucial point in this study - to focus only on individuals free from diseases, no diagnosis of neurological diseases and psychiatric disorders, and taking no medication regarding any physical disease. Exclusion criteria were: being a member of any other Christian Church other than the Greek Orthodox Christian, being younger than 65 years old at the time of recruitment, not speaking adequately the Greek language or present cognitive and especially even mild language impairments, not having a permanent residence in Greece, and not giving a response to all the questions from the administered questionnaires.

Instruments

Participants completed four self-report questionnaires (all previously translated and validated in Greece), which are easy to complete by elderly: 1) Beck Depression Inventory - a multiple-choice self-report inventory, 2) State and Trait Anxiety Inventory - a psychological inventory based on a 4-point Likert scale which consists of 40 questions on a self-report basis, used to measure trait and state anxiety, 3) The Royal Free Questionnaire for Religious and Spiritual Beliefs - an instrument which has the form of a self-report questionnaire, and 4) Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale - a widely used self-esteem measure.

1) Beck Depression Inventory: The Beck Depression Inventory (BDI) is used to measure depression as it examines somatic as well as cognitive aspects of depression not only in young adults, but also in older adults (Segal et al., 2008). The BDI is a 21-item scale that has been used as a self-report instrument, which apart from its original purpose (assessment of the severity of known depression), for screening purposes (Michopoulos et al., 2008). The Greek version has been translated, validated, and widely used to date (Jemos, 1984).

2) State and Trait Anxiety Inventory: The State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI) –is a brief self-rating scale for the assessment of state and trait anxiety, standardized and used mainly in adults (Spielberger, 1970). “State anxiety refers to the subjective and transitory feeling of tension, nervousness, worry and may be characterized by activation of the autonomous nervous system, at a given moment. Trait anxiety refers to relatively stable individual differences in anxiety proneness as a personality trait, that is, in the tendency to perceive and respond to stressful situations with elevations in the intensity of state anxiety reactions” (Fountoulakis et al., 2006). STAI consists of 40 self-report items (20 state and 20 trait) pertaining to anxiety symptoms, which are scored on 4-
point Likert-type response scale, and scores range from 20 to 80, with higher scores suggesting greater levels of anxiety. According to Spielberger's criteria, a score of 40 or higher reflects clinically relevant symptoms of anxiety. STAI is reported to be reliable and valid and has been used extensively in research and clinical practice in diverse populations (Giannouli and Stoyanova, 2018).

3) The Royal Free Questionnaire for Religious and Spiritual Beliefs: This is a questionnaire that can take also the form of an interview designed to measure religious and spiritual belief by examining various aspects of religiousness as well as spirituality (King, Speck and Thomas, 2001). In addition to that, it is brief and simple to complete in the Greek population (Sapountzi-Krepia et al., 2005). High scores (from 0 to 10 points to specific closed-ended questions) in this questionnaire indicate that respondents hold strongly to their beliefs, and that these beliefs have a major role in their everyday lives.

4) Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale: Self-esteem is the positive or negative attitude toward self (Rosenberg, 1979). This specific scale consists of 10 questions rated on a Likert scale from 1 – 4, having 1 = strongly disagree to 4 = strongly agree, as shown in a previous large-scale study in Greece (Galanou et al., 2014). A scale of 0-30 is used, where a score less than 15 may indicate a problematic low self-esteem (Rosenberg, 1979).

Procedure

Participants first answered demographic questions about gender, age, and their health status. Then, they completed the Beck Depression Inventory, the State and Trait Anxiety Inventory, the Royal Free Questionnaire for Religious and Spiritual Beliefs, and the Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale. The collected data was first processed in Excel, and then in SPSS. In order to control confounding, that is a variable or variables whose presence may affect the variables being studied so that the results do not reflect the actual relationship, matching was used, which involves selection of participants with respect to the distribution of one or more potential confounders (in our case age, gender, social, economic, health and family status of the first 15 participants, so the rest formed a homogeneous identical comparison group). Independent samples t-tests were used to compare the scores in all the above mentioned questionnaires, when gender (male/female) was used an independent variable. In addition to that, Pearson's correlation coefficient was used to assess associations between the four questionnaires. A statistical significant level was considered for p < 0.05.

Results

Results indicated no significant differences on the basis of gender regarding depression (t (28) = 3.790, p = .870), state anxiety (t (28) = 2.355, p = .300), trait anxiety (t (28) = 1.345, p = .206), religious-spiritual beliefs (t (28) = 1.417, p = .841), and self-esteem (t (28) = .032, p = .322) (Table 1). The majority of the participants had scores over 50/70 and stated a strong religious and/or a spiritual belief (close to the maximum10 points), as measured by the Royal Free Questionnaire for Religious and Spiritual Belief (n = 25).

Table 1. Mean and Standard Deviations for the Scales

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scales</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>S.D.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beck Depression Inventory</td>
<td>men</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>7.80</td>
<td>3.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>women</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2.73</td>
<td>3.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Anxiety</td>
<td>men</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>24.40</td>
<td>2.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>women</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>23.80</td>
<td>3.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trait Anxiety</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>S.D.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>men</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>26.00</td>
<td>2.59</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>women</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>24.53</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scales</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>S.D.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Royal Free Religious and Spiritual Beliefs</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>53.46</td>
<td>14.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>women</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>60.66</td>
<td>12.74</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale</td>
<td>men</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>34.73</td>
<td>6.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>women</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>34.80</td>
<td>5.40</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

High scores on the Royal Free Questionnaire for Religious and Spiritual Beliefs were moderately correlated with increased self-esteem as measured by the total scores in the Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale ($r = .429$, $p = .018$). In addition to that, the Royal Free Questionnaire for Religious and Spiritual Beliefs scores were negatively correlated with depression, as measured by the Beck Depression Inventory ($r = -.430$, $p = .018$). Finally, the Royal Free Questionnaire for Religious and Spiritual Beliefs was negatively correlated with state anxiety ($r = -.553$, $p = .002$), as well as anxiety as personality trait ($r = -.469$, $p = .009$), both measured by the State and Trait subscales of the Anxiety Inventory.

**Discussions**

Religiousness and spirituality have been defined variously in the literature something that may play the role of an obstacle in research (Chatters, 2000; Hill and Pargament, 2003; Koenig, 2008; Oman, 2013). In contrast to this theory gap, most of the empirical research use specific self-assessment measures of religiosity and spirituality that include parameters such as service attendance, prayer, Scripture reading, mediation, spiritual experience, and specific beliefs (Hill and Hood, 1999; Idler et al., 2003).

Given that multiple studies focus only on the relationship between religious involvement and depression (one of the most widespread problems in mental healthcare in the 21st century) (Koenig et al., 2012), while several yield either no association or a positive correlation (Paine and Sandage, 2017; Smith, McCullough and Poll, 2003), and although there is still debate as to the importance of religiousness and spirituality in healthcare, this study includes the measurement of additional psychological variables in healthy older adults, and confirms previous findings coming from a study on students (Papazisis et al., 2014). A number of statistically moderate correlations were found between religious beliefs and other mental health variables in older adults who live during a time period characterized by the financial crisis and social changes in Greece. The research indicated a need for further research in this field as simultaneous testing of psychological constructs in healthy elders is not thoroughly examined so far (Tillich, 1958), and may support future interventions in old age that focus on improving psychological-emotional life by taking into account aspects of religious life.

The study had some shortcomings which could be eliminated in future studies. The main limitation of this research is concerned with the sample size, which impedes generalisability of the results and which is not representative for the Greek population. Of course, the results of this preliminary study should be interpreted in light of giving directions for a future large-scale research. In addition to that, self-report questionnaires may be subject to response bias, something that must be taken into account and checked with reliable sources of information (e.g. the opinion that others have regarding the expressed emotions and behavior of the individuals) (Giannouli, 2017c). Finally, the study could be repeated on a clinical sample of people with health problems and people with psychiatric diagnoses, and be compared to a general non-clinical sample, in future cross-cultural studies (Giannouli, Stamovlasis and Tsolaki, 2018).
Conclusions

In conclusion, this research contributes in a theoretical and methodological way in the understanding of a growing body of evidence about religious beliefs, self-esteem, anxiety, and depression in Greek elders. This preliminary study supports that positive dimensions of psychology, such as self-esteem and low levels of depression and anxiety, especially in older individuals, may be linked to their religious and spiritual beliefs, therefore, rendering necessary in future research attempts the reconsideration of the simultaneous inclusion and examination of these variables (Eichhorn, 2011), while the beliefs about the statistical relationships of these variables in healthcare professionals and in the elders themselves could be also examined (Giannouli et al., 2019).

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FORMS OF ADAPTATION IN ROMANIAN PENITENTIARY

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Abstract

Objectives. The objective of this study was to explore defense mechanisms and the self-efficacy that inmates in Romania developed in their deprivation of freedom

Material and methods. Data were obtained from 111 adult respondents divided into 3 groups depending on the severity of the punishment. First group (N = 28) with prison sentences from one month to 3 years, second group (N = 45) with prison sentences from 3 to 5 years and the third group (N = 38) with sentences with more than 5 years of prison detention. Three concepts were studied by using the following questionnaires or scales: SES – for self-efficacy; DSQ-60 – for defense mechanisms.

Results. 107 individual had an average level of personal beliefs about their capacities to mobilize their cognitive resources onto the stress that they face in the closed environment, self-efficacy also influences the resources allocated into solving a task. Even though it seems that there were no significant differences between the 30 defense mechanisms and the severity of the punishment of the three groups (p = 0.008).

Conclusions. The enclosed environment has a hidden role. And this affiliation to the "community" of the penitentiary can be explained by the immediate assumption of the captive role. Altruism is the main defense mechanism used by detainees from this research and this could come from their integration to the penitentiary environment. Most of the participants were recidivists and this may establish their attachment to the prison culture.

Keywords: defense mechanism, self-efficacy, penitentiary, inmates groups, DSQ-60, self-efficacy scale, adaptation.

Introduction

The issues faced by the individual in the situation of the deprivation of liberty are often ignored; the interest is only on the removal of the perpetrator from the society. The way an individual accepts of doesn’t accept, adapts or does not adapt (Rada and Ispas, 2016) to the new stressful situation plays a decisive role in his future development. Society’s fear of delinquency can lead to ignorance and social exclusion. Social labelling is a strict reaction of society to crime (Zamfir, 1994) and applies them exclusively to those who violate social norms being qualified as offenders (Butoi and Butoi, 2006). Detainees who develop effective adaptation mechanisms are able to achieve and maintain a psychological optimum over a long period of time. They have a strong sense of identity, build healthy relationships with family and friends, have the ability to use the challenges of life as opportunities for personal development. Detainees with effective adaptation
mechanisms are more socially active, more readily accepting the restrictive rules of the penitentiary environment, and cooperate more effectively with the penitentiary administration.

Firstly, in the existing literature there are no articles that address this type of organized population in relation to the three levels of gravity of punishment. Romanian literature takes over the terms of foreign literature, and the differences may be consistent. Many psycho-social mechanisms have been proven to have universalist inclinations, but the mode of operation and operation is heavily culturally imprinted. Therefore, this research attempts to capture the cultural specificity through different ways of articulation of the self from the Romanian social environment in general and from the penitentiary environment, in particular, operating with the original concepts.

Secondly, at the theoretical level, research seeks to make potential contributions by focusing on this environment, and especially on how defense mechanisms, self-construal and self-efficacy interact with each other (a descriptive-analytical analysis). At the same time, in the same analysis, it will also indicate the specific ways in which these constructs operate, depending on the different categories of crime (treated in terms of penalties applied by the Criminal Code, the three categories of penalty severity).

The benefit is significant, as when and what mechanisms are best suited to dealing with a stressful environment. This can also help develop offenders’ ability to adapt more easily to the outside environment. This can also restructure the hypothesis that if a person has a high level of adaptation to the penitentiary environment, he has a low level of adaptation to the outside environment, because adaptation is a continuous process that is restructured according to the stressful event at which the individual takes part.

This study aims to examine the dynamics of relations between defense mechanisms, self-efficacy and self-construal in the Romanian prisons. The present research involves an exploratory study in order to identify the mechanisms of adaptation and self-construal that prisoners in Romania develop in the prison, which are corroborated with self-efficacy from the detainees’ perspective. This design involves quantitative methodology based on self-administrated psychological testing in groups and individual. The objective of the study regards the identification of adaptation mechanisms for all three groups involved in the research.

Material and methods

A battery of psychological tests was used in the study. The questionnaires were structured over seven pages starting with the Defense Style Questionnaire (60 items), followed by a "resting" session involving the Self-Efficacy Scale (10 items) and finally the 72 items of self-construal scale. In order to achieve this time structure, the level of frustration that the individual can feel when viewing and consciousness the large number of items (142 in this research) was being taken into account, so the aspect of the scales (font, text, response method) has been changed. Respondents were assured that the scrutiny time would be reasonable and were encouraged to ask questions when they would encounter problems of contextual understanding.

DSQ-60 Defensive Style Questionnaire (Thygesen, Drapeau and Trijsburg, 2008) – is a self-assessment tool that evaluates defense mechanisms. The questionnaire is an abridged version of the original version of the questionnaire built by Bond (2004). The questionnaire has a number of 60 items and identifies 30 defense mechanisms, each mechanism having a number of 2 items. Over time, DSQ has experienced many forms (with 40, 42, 81 or even 88 items), but the DSQ-60 is the latest version of the tool. Some authors (Bond, 2004) consider the DSQ to be one of the most used tools for analyzing defensive psychological mechanisms being included in the Psychiatric Measurement Manual. The DSQ-60 questionnaire in Romanian version contains a nine-step Likert scale, and the subject should encircle the response that indicates the extent to which the affirmation applies to its state. There are no reversed items.
The SES Self-Efficacy Scale (Schwarzer and Jerusalem, 1995) – measures self-esteem, respectively, the belief that one’s own actions are responsive for the success of a particular activity. The scale contains 10 items, with a Likert rating scale of 1 to 4, where 1 means "totally untrue as far as I am concerned" and 4 means "perfectly true as far as I am concerned". Self-efficacy is defined as the individual’s belief in his ability to achieve certain achievements (Bandura, 1999), so the individual is more likely to use them in a challenging situation, such as school, in a new stressful and punitive environment (penitentiary). For example, self-efficacy has proven to be important in choosing a professional trainee. Betz and Hackett (1981; Pintrich and Schunk, 1996) have demonstrated that self-efficacy mediates the impact of social and structural factors in choosing careers.

In addition to choosing the behaviors in which an individual will engage, self-efficacy also influences the resources assigned to the service of solving a task (Bandura, 1977). Individuals with a high level of self-efficacy will optimally allocate resources if they face difficult situations and will persist longer than those who have a low level of self-efficacy, as their skills are similar. The deeper processing of information by individuals with a higher level of self-efficacy has also been demonstrated (Pintrich and Schunk, 1996). It is essential to distinguish between self-esteem and self-efficacy. If self-efficacy aims to perceiving one’s own abilities to achieve a certain purpose, self-esteem is rather about the overall perception of one’s own value.

The participants (N=111) in this research were adults, over the age of 18, divided into three groups according to the severity of the penalty. The first group of subjects were with sentences from one to three years, the second group of participants were with sentences of three to five years and the last group were with sentences that had more than 5 years of imprisonment.

The first category of participants (0-3 years penalty) includes detainees for a short period of time, those on whom the penitentiary’s impact is a pregnant one, within the Mioveni Penitentiary there are 33 subjects with this criteria (28 included in the study), if in this category can be included those whom have just distanced themselves from a social norm, not the same can be said about the other two categories.

Into the second group are included those with medium punishments (from three to five years of imprisonment) whose facts are considered (by the Penal Code) more dangerous than those in the first category, from the selected penitentiary their number is 81 (and are included 45 into this analysis).

The latter category, detainees with bigger punishments, authors of some facts that have horrified the public opinion, so they were ostracized from the social environment, in the selected penitentiary 236 (100 of them accepted to be included into this research), also none of them is at first offense. It is worth mentioning here that in this category are included those whom are with life punishment. Lifetime detainees are a special category among the criminals in Romania because, for at least 10 years, Romania has adhered to the European conviction that a punishment should not be for life, but that it must express the guilt of the person as accurately as possible, according to the first article of Criminal Procedure Code.
Participants received 3 credits for participation (in Romanian penitentiary system, the detainees receive credits for participating in studies or development programs, and when they reach a certain number of credits, they receive allowances, the right to receive an extra package or visits in addition and even a reduced sentence), enrolling on a voluntary basis. Prior to participation, each person signed a double participation consent (one from the penitentiary on which the credit was assigned and one from the researchers) and was informed that they could withdraw whenever he wanted without repercussions of no kind. At the same time, the confidentiality of the personal data and that the results or on the group level and that individual responses could not be traced. Participants’ risks involving physical or mental integrity were inexistent in the present study.

The first stage consisted in identifying the Romanian penitentiary that could satisfy the population criterion after the duration of the conviction (participants for each of the three groups). After this stage was completed and the Mioveni Penitentiary was identified, Argeș County, the collaboration protocol was completed and accepted by the penitentiary administration. Detainees were invited, from every room in the detention facilities, by the researcher conjunctively with one of the penitentiary psychologists to accept being part in the assessment sessions.

Each administration was conducted between 9:00 am to 11:30 am and from 1:30 pm to 3:00 pm, without interfering in any way with the strict schedule that detainees have in the penitentiary (appeal, lunch break, educational projects, intermissions or other recreational or educational activities). Administration sessions were conducted in groups of two to thirty people in the society club assigned to each section of detainees. The groups were randomly formed (in the
case of detainees with a penalty of 0-3 and 3-5 years) and only with the third category of detainees (on the maximum safety section, the inclusion criterion is according to the danger the individual represents to the society).

At the beginning of the sessions is explained the goal of this research, the duration of the meetings, the importance of being involved in the task at hand, the significance of honesty, and the possibility of withdrawing at any time from the research. The session coordinator provided information on his status, his affiliation to the Doctoral School, data confidentiality, and that the results would be presented at group level rather than individually. Further information was provided, the situational adaptation of the items to the environment and the population in the penitentiary where it was imposed.

All the needed criteria of administration were satisfied (a safe and rattling-free environment, all participants were rested, adequate illumination, the existence of the furniture required for the writing, the space for deployment to provide the comfort of the examined persons). Each test session was conducted over a period of 30 to 60 minutes, with small variations depending on the participants’ involvement.

**Results**

One might expect that denial or rationalization will be the primordial mechanisms that are present in individuals in the penitentiary environment, given the discomfort that the situation may provide and these two defensive responses are like a mask that hides feelings and emotions. Our research reveals surprising data. The psychological profile of the 111 respondents deprived of liberty is specifically articulates being characterized by *altruism* (\(M = 14.46, SD = 3.5337\)) as a defense mechanism. This means that individuals perceive the existing situation as being an anxious one and understand that they are not alone, other individuals share the same status. They turn their attention to the other individuals in the penitentiary environment who are unitarian in the purpose and event. The 111 participants use altruism as a possibility to diffuse their daily life in prison and may also be consider a positive way of adaptation to prison.

The second in line defense mechanism is *self-assertion* (\(M = 14.42, SD = 3.4126\)). This result may come from the relevance that they give to their own opinions, but being in the negative sphere of defense mechanisms, the fact that our participants have a high score can indicate and predict the occurrence of certain problems in the penitentiary environment when their own wishes and requests are not fulfilled. By putting above others their own opinions, rights and desires one might consider that what he has done is not wrong, although, by being in prison, the fact that they have done exactly that may have brought them into the current situation.

Being listed as the third mechanism used in the custodial environment, *anticipation* (\(M = 13.49, SD = 3.63\)), shows that the individuals who are there had their judgement unbroken. They knew what awaited them and they’ve been mentally preparing for it. This means that they have rehearsed this possible outcome and this could indicate a high level of adaptation (in the case of ones that have been multiple times in the penitentiary) or special preparation for this environment.

Least used defense mechanisms by the participants in this research are *devaluation* (\(M = 6.98, SD = 4.3921\)). Being a subconscious protection system most often associated with borderline personality disorder, and for our research, considering that self-assertion is among most used defense mechanisms, is almost rational that his mechanism by which individuals disregard themselves to be at the bottom of our results. This could also mean that our respondents do not consider themselves as having multiple negative qualities and it’s a place to work from.

The second least used is *passive aggression* (\(M = 7.26, SD = 4.2377\)), which could also mean that the subjects of this research have understood their punishment and they’ve received it as a justified end (Butoi and Butoi, 2006). This result could be determined by the fact that there is no remaining hidden energy that might be driving them into other aggressions and that they are
cooperation persons in solving their duties and other tasks that they receive.

And another least used defense mechanism is *fantasy* \( M = 7.88 \), \( SD = 5.3287 \). This could indicate that individuals in the penitentiary environment are strongly anchored in reality, that they do not use strategies to escape their daily lives, that they do not expect something from someone. This could also mean that they are not unhappy with their current status, because fantasies can help an individual to explore alternatives to the situation that he not happy with. But this can also help them to somehow not achieve certain unrealistic expectations that they could set.

**Table 1. Means and standard deviations of participants defense mechanisms**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Defense Mechanism</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Altruism</td>
<td>111</td>
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<td>3.53378</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Assertion</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>14.4234</td>
<td>3.41268</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anticipation</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>13.4955</td>
<td>3.63036</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Observation</td>
<td>111</td>
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<td>4.11364</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rationalization</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reaction Formation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Suppression</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sublimation</td>
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<td>Refusal of Aid accompanied by Lamentation</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>9.8739</td>
<td>4.58876</td>
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<tr>
<td>Displacement</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>9.2252</td>
<td>4.27399</td>
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<tr>
<td>Splitting Self</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>8.8649</td>
<td>3.93928</td>
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<tr>
<td>Acting-Out</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>8.3243</td>
<td>4.71586</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fantasy</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>7.8829</td>
<td>5.32872</td>
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<tr>
<td>Passive-Aggressive</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>7.2613</td>
<td>4.23773</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Devaluation</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>6.9820</td>
<td>4.39210</td>
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Regarding their self-efficacy in the penitentiary all respondents have a "low" level (M = 31.08, SD = 5.856). This result show that our subjects are not well-accustomed to the carceral detention and from this may come a lot of tension. This could mean that given time they might become uncooperative in carrying out their tasks because they can’t handle them. They might also deliberately ignore someone when spoken to and might collectively adopt a negative view of their situation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2. Means and standard deviation of self-efficacy</th>
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<td>Descriptive Statistics</td>
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We also performed an in-depth analysis regarding the similarity or differences of incarcerated individuals by groups and the results show that there are no significant differences between our three groups. This indicative can mean that regardless of the nature for which they are in the penitentiary environment and especially regardless of the period that they spent imprisoned the self-efficacy of individuals is low. Although an individual who spends more time in prison is better adapted to that environment, there were not obtain significant differences between these groups.

In concern with the first group (N=28) we can see that their self-efficacy in the penitentiary is also at level II "low" level (M = 31.14). The second group (N=45) has a self-efficacy of level II also (M = 31.00, SD = 5.673), and the third group (N=38) has a self-efficacy of the same low level (M = 31.32, SD = 5.969).

Discussions

Researches in the field of defense mechanisms has a history of three decades in the penitentiary environment and this study comes as an innovation from the perspective of accurate identification of defense mechanisms, their self-efficacy and the dominant dimensions of the self in the deprivation of freedom. Their identification and the problems posed by the conditions of the carceral environment are useful not only for the individual, but also for the society in particular. The institution of the penitentiary, however well-regulated and systematized, cannot reach all the individual problems of men, since it is organized to support those who cannot conform to social norms.

One of the major outcomes is that it was identified the propensity for certain defense mechanisms for each of the three groups. Altruism seems to be the main defense mechanism that individuals use in the penitentiary environment. The penitentiary space has a hidden role, to place individuals in the same environment with the same social notion. And this affiliation to the penitentiary "community" can be explained by the immediate assumption of the captive role. This affiliation has its beginnings from the first moments of entry into the prison and it seems to persist regardless of the period of time spent in the penitentiary and regardless the severity of the punishment they received. It also seems that in the penitentiary environment there is a system of values, it seems that individuals who have carried out acts of rape are stigmatized by the other inmates. The waiting was described by Minkowski (1933), as a suspension of activity or even of life. It does not start from the present to predict the future, but the future makes the present to tense: "the moment that comes to dominate the whole situation" (Minkowski, 1933), and given that the strongest desire of any individual is liberty, this waiting is felt as the worst burden, paralyzing any activity. The right vision of the future belongs to Bertainos: "do not bear your own future, but you
do it” (Sutter and Berta, 1991) is paradoxical in the case of detainees because their current status (as of detained) will exist after their release (as being once a detainee).

This study relates to how each detainee has dealt with the problem of atonement. Mitrofan, Zdrenghea and Butoi (2000) argued that “when a punishment is assessed to be the measure of the act, the daily condition expresses an acceptance subject to all rigors, when the punishment is seen to be more severe than the offense committed, the prisoner considers it to have been made an injustice and suffer an unjustified sanction”. From this perspective it would be interesting to study the predisposition towards shame or guilt. Studies show that the predisposition to guilt decreases with the severity of punishment, because individuals know very well what they have done (usually a very serious deed) and are not guilty of doing so (Milcu, 2006). This is explained by the low result of the defense mechanism of self-devaluation, they do not perceive it as being lower than other social groups, on the contrary it seems that the self-esteem increases the worse the deed. Within the framework of this study, detainees with life punishment were also identified as an interesting aspect given that these punishments have not been applied in Romania since 2006, and those who have previously received a life sentence could have appealed and the sentence would have been changed. This case is an atypical one (Richards, 1978) from the point of view of the fact that the individual seems either to have renounced the possibility of being introduced into society, or that he prefers lifetime status, increasing (in his perception) the value of the environment deprivation of liberty.

Taken all together, the present findings can provide some tentative suggestions for interventions when working with prisoners.

The results of the study should be analyzed in the limitative context of this research. First of all, the instruments did not have demographic questions, nor could comparisons be made before and after the self-efficacy. It is important to have information about the participants in the study because it could have had at least the effects on the level of self-efficacy. Secondly, the research focused on general self-efficacy. For this reason, it can’t be know exactly which respondents have a higher level of trust. Others believe that feelings of self-efficacy in a field (for example, the ability to communicate effectively with others about academic subjects) are not inherently correlated with self-efficacy in other areas (Bond, 2004). Indeed, Bond (2004) states that "most motivational constructs contain specific domain components". Thus, it is recommended for the future studies to introduce a more in-depth measure of self-efficacy (on levels of comprehensiveness, background issues) to explore self-efficacy on a large scale.

Conclusions

First of all, this research was performed in a single penitentiary out of an existing number of 44 in the whole country, and if we refer to the number of people in the deprived environment, our number of participants in this study represents about 0.5%. Of the total number of detainees of the Mioveni Penitentiary, our participants represent about 25% and this is not only the main limit of our research, but it can also signify the level of reluctance of those in the penitentiary environment to external factors.

Secondly, altruism is the main defense mechanism used by detainees from this research and this result could come from their integration to the penitentiary environment. Most of the participants were recidivists and this may establish their attachment to the prison culture. In such conditions, their altruism may also be related to the people that live in the same environment, being also a second explanation their reluctance towards the outside. Of course, this finding should not be overlooked, because this aspect demonstrates that there are existing virtues in the penitentiary environment and that the culture of this environment is similar to many others of the world. Moreover, the theory of psychological selfishness that those in prison seem to be the main subject of, that the detainees are permanently motivated by personal interest, seems to be confirmed if the answers given by them were only based on the motivation of a personal benefit.
Thirdly, the defense with the lowest result is devaluation. This may mean that the respondents of this study have either a high self-esteem or an exaggerated narcissism. The second possibility opens the discussion of an existing of a narcissistic personality disorder or even an antisocial personality disorder. And future studies will propose to evoke and elucidate this aspect.

Regarding the low score of self-efficacy, the present study has no data on how they deal with their daily activities, with the results obtained in the existing programs in the penitentiary environment or with the proposals of the commissions of conditional release. The main reason of this lack of details would be the secrecy of this information (it’s not a public information), but that does not mean that our results cannot be strengthen with these aspects known in the enclosed environment in order to increase the level of self-efficacy.

Last but not least, the possibility of unknown variables should be discussed. This aspect is difficult to control, such as the desire of individuals to be seen as others want them to look like. Often prisons are "noisy, chaotic and violent" (Kuhlman and Ruddell, 2005), conditions of stress and threats to a personal well-being are unparalleled in the outer world (Vega and Silverman, 1988).

This research focuses especially on the unconscious sphere, on defense mechanisms and although being expected to identify other mechanisms with the highest results (such as devaluation of others or denial), it seems that the situation is not exactly like one would imagine. Our results must be related to this environment, to this situation, to the individuals who are behind bars, to the specific culture of the penitentiary environment and our research shows that there is an existing process much more complex, more hidden in the endeavor of adaptation to the enclosed environment. In the context of a culture specific to the penitentiary, the challenges that can prevent their self-efficacy are of a different form and may have a different significance from those encountered in other social environments. Moreover, our research needs to be extended to an even larger number of inmates, to know precisely if this study is confirmed or not. Our results are necessary for the personnel working in the penitentiary environment, mainly for the psychologists there. The fact that altruism is a primordial mechanism tells how essential are group work programs or team-based psychotherapy. Also, the results obtained on the self-efficacy scale demonstrate the need for strategies based no mindfulness, on increasing resilience in the deprived environment, on the necessity of psychotherapy focused on reducing stress levels and on improving emotion regulation which reduces impulsiveness, or on strategies regarding empathy and respect (of course based on the reason for their imprisonment).

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References


INTERCULTURAL BRIDGES: A CASE STUDY OF A PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEER IN MOLDOVA

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Abstract

Objectives. This study is a case study on narrated intercultural experiences of a Romanian-American Peace Corps volunteer in the Republic of Moldova. It seeks to understand in depth the participant’s viewpoint on the role of cultural dimensions of individualism and collectivism in creating bridges of understanding between people, as well as hindering communication.

Material and methods. The method used is a case study based on 5 formal in-depth interviews over the course of 2 years. The interviewee is a Romanian-American male in his 40s who served as a Peace Corps volunteer in the Republic of Moldova between June 1st, 2017 and June 1st, 2019. The topics of the interviews were: the participant’s experiences of adjustment to the Moldovan culture, the nonverbal communication of Moldovans, and the participant’s strategies of building communicative bridges with Moldovans.

Results. The themes that emerged from the participant’s narrative were: the change from stranger to insider; the Russian influence on Moldovans’ non-verbal communication; and the use of code switching as a "third" language. The results are interpreted through the lenses of intercultural communication concepts of individualism-collectivism.

Conclusions. This study adds to the literature of intercultural communication and non-verbal communication by highlighting the process of personal adaptation to a new culture. This case study, although based on only one participant, discusses limitations and offers suggestions for future studies on building intercultural trust in an era of globalization.

Keywords: individualism, collectivism, non-verbal communication, code switching.

Introduction

Living in a culture other than the one of your birth has become a norm for an increasing number of people in the past decade. The reasons, too numerous to list, range from emigrating for personal, family, or work to short terms travels. Volunteering in another country, either for work or religious purposes is also common. Volunteering with Peace Corps, an American government association, offers American citizens the opportunity to experience another culture through a two-year assignment. Usually, the countries that Peace Corps works with are developing countries. This study focuses on understanding a few elements of the Moldovan culture through the lived experience of a returned Peace Corps volunteer, who served there for 2 years, between 2017 and 2019. More specifically, the interest was to see how one person who was born into a collectivistic culture but spent most of his adult years in an individualistic culture, negotiates the realities of another collectivistic culture; how his perceptions were influenced by his previous life experiences, and how successful he was at resolving potential tensions between his expectations and the reality he encountered. From a theoretical standpoint, the intention was to see how Hofstede’s cultural
dimension of individualism-collectivism played out through a one-person case study.

The intercultural communication literature is dominated by social scientific studies, especially surveys (Hofstede and Hofstede, 2005), and sometimes case studies of cultures (Saint-Jacques, 2015). It was noticed that the lived experience of individuals who interact with "others" is not reflected in the literature. There is value in understanding this lived experience for practical purposes, as well as scientific purposes. From a practical standpoint, individual reflections, values, and ways of communicating are the factors that drive the intercultural interactions. Peaceful or hateful relations with others are mostly the result of how members of a culture think and feel about others different than themselves. From a scientific standpoint, studying the lived experiences of a returned Peace Corps volunteer adds a fresh perspective and a deeper and possibly more accurate understanding to the intercultural communication literature on code switching and cultural dimensions (Hofstede and Hofstede, 2005), especially individualism-collectivism, in-group versus out-group, and self-construal. In the following section, these concepts will be defined, before going into the explanation of the method.

Definitions of Terms: Individualism-Collectivism

Individualism-Collectivism is one of the 5 cultural dimensions proposed by Geert Hofstede (Hofstede and Hofstede, 2005) to explain cultural variability. Mostly, in individualistic cultures, the major values are self-sufficiency and self-expression, whereas in collectivistic cultures, the major values are social harmony and tradition. When it comes to communication, Triandis (1988) argues that the presence of in-groups in collectivist cultures is a major factor that differentiates how members communicate. In-groups are groups that are important to a person and for which individuals will make sacrifices. Whereas members of individualistic cultures have many in-groups (e.g., families, religions, social clubs, professions, etc.), members of collectivist cultures have only a few (e.g., families, work groups). The influence of just a few groups on an individual’s behaviour is greater than the influence of numerous groups. To put it another way, if people have only their family and their church to give them advice, they’d likely have two major voices to listen to. However, if they are also involved with social and sports clubs or professional organizations, the message of the family or church diminishes in importance with the competing voices for their attention. In addition, in-groups have different rank orders of importance in different cultures. For instance, the company (work group) is considered the primary in-group in Japan (Nakane, 1970), the community is the primary in-group throughout Africa, and the family tends to be the primary in-group in Asian and Latin collectivist cultures. Moldova, although not surveyed in Hofstede’s studies, is placed at the intersections of three cultures, Romanian, Ukrainian, and Russian, and there is reason to believe that historically, it has been influenced by all three. All three cultures score relatively high on collectivism, so it is reasonable to assume that Moldova is a rather collectivist culture, where people belong to a few in-groups that exercise a strong influence on their behaviour.

Individualism-Collectivism concept is used widely to explain communication across cultures. When it comes to communication, members of the collectivist cultures are more concerned with avoiding hurting others’ feelings and not imposing on others than are members of individualistic cultures (Kim, 2015). Also, effectiveness in conversation is not a paramount value in collectivist cultures. Therefore, clarity and direct requests are not sought after. Other findings related to communication indicate that members of collectivist cultures communicate more intimately with in-group members than out-group members, they synchronize their communication better, and they communicate more easily with in-group members than with out-groups members (Hofstede and Hofstede, 2005).

While the above description of this cultural dimension is theoretical, in real life it is possible to find differences in behaviour among members of either collectivist or individualistic cultures. Individual socialization is a mediating factor in individualism-collectivism’s influence on members’ behaviour. Three individual-level characteristics mediate this relationship: individual personality, individual values, and individual self-construal. For instance, idiocentric individuals

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(focused on their own’s goals) in collectivistic cultures are less sensitive to others’ rejection and are more willing to be unique, as opposed to allocentric individuals (focused on groups’ goals) in collectivistic cultures. Gudykunst et al. (1996) used individual-level individualistic and collectivistic values to assess communication styles and they found that individualistic values predicted the use of dramatic style of communication, the use of feelings to guide behaviour, and openness and preciseness in communication, whereas the use of collectivistic values predicted tendency to use indirect communication and being interpersonally sensitive. Lastly, self-construals or the way members of a culture conceive of themselves, influence people’s communication style as following: the interdependent self-construal is associated with concern for others’ feelings, whereas independent self-construal is associated with concern for clarity in conversations.

Material and methods

The participant to this case-study is a very close person of the author, making it easy to establish a rapport with him. Establishing a trusting rapport with the participant(s) is not only a common practice in all ethnographic research, but it is the most important way of getting valid data. This case study’s participant is a 46 years old male, who took the opportunity to serve as a volunteer in Peace Corps in the Republic of Moldova from June 1st, 2017 to May 31st, 2019. Throughout the study, to protect his identity, he will be mentioned with the initial L. In the following section, the method will be described, starting with a background on Peace Corps, the organization that he worked with, in order to understand the set-up of his job and his goal during his service.

Peace Corps was established on March 1st, 1961, as a result of an executive order of President John F. Kennedy. Since then, more than 220,000 volunteers have served in 140 countries around the world (National Peace Corps Association, 2019). As of 2017, this government agency had an annual budget of $410 million (National Peace Corps Association, 2019). Peace Corps volunteers go through a rigorous application process before being sent to serve in a developing country for 2 years in one of the following sectors: agriculture, environment, community economic development, health, education, and youth in development. They undergo an intensive 3 months training at the site, including language training, cultural training, safety training, and skills training. After the training, they are placed with a host family, in underdeveloped communities in rural areas, where they work in schools, dispensaries, or with community leaders, as teachers and liaisons for the duration of their service. Most of the volunteers are in their early to mid 20s, recent college graduates, although older volunteers, as well as retired individuals serve, too. Peace Corps’ mission is: “to promote world peace and friendship by fulfilling three goals”: helping people from developing countries in the areas of health, entrepreneurship, English language, and community development; helping people from outside the U.S. understand the Americans better; and helping Americans understanding the people from developing countries better.

Over the duration of his service in Peace Corps Moldova, L. shared his experiences almost daily during his conversations with the researcher. However, I conducted 5 formal in-depth interviews with him, each lasting approximately one hour. The first interview took place 3 months after his arrival in the country, on September 1st, 2017. The second, third, and fourth interviews were spread out throughout his service as follows: the second interview was after six months in Moldova, the third, after one year in Moldova, and the fourth, after one and a half year. The last interview was done one month after he arrived to the U.S., on June 15th. All of the interviews, except the first, were conducted face-to-face. The first interview was done using the application WhatsApp because he was in Moldova, while I was in the U.S. For the second and third interviews I traveled to Moldova, for the fourth interview he visited the U.S., and for the fifth interview, he was already in the U.S., after finishing his service. All interviews were semi-structured. This means that there was a general topic for each interview, and all the questions were adapted to the
conversation. The topics of the interviews were: the participant’s experiences of culture shock and adjustment to the Moldovan culture (interviews 1 and 2), the nonverbal communication of Moldovans (interview 3), and the participant’s strategies of building communicative bridges with Moldovans (interviews 4 and 5).

Results

Several themes emerged from the participant’s narrative: from stranger to accepted member of the community; Moldovans’ non-verbal communication heavily influenced by the Russian’s serious and reserved demeanour; and constant code switching as a "third" language is both an oddity and an opportunity for intercultural bridges. The results are interpreted through the lens of intercultural communication concepts of individualism-collectivism.

Theme 1: From Stranger to Accepted Member of the Community

One of the themes that stood out from the numerous conversations with L. was the change from being a stranger to becoming a member of the Moldovan community in which he worked. This change was noticed first in the language that he used throughout the interviews. In the first interview, his language was more distant: he mainly referred to his co-teachers as "they" and he made constant comparisons between Moldovans and Romanians and Americans. He always emphasized how the Moldovans "lacked" something that was readily available either in Romania or the U.S. For instance, during the first interview, most of his comments were on the "lack of freedom" and the fact that he "needed to report every step he took" to the higher-ups in Peace Corps. They were told that it was for security reasons, given that they were foreigners in a foreign country. However, when analyzing his interview answers, it was noticed that he did have expectations of managing his free time and of being more independent than what he experienced at that time. By the time of the third and fourth interviews, it was observed how his attitude changed. He didn’t complain about having to report his travels within the country. On the contrary, he accepted the Peace Corps’ directive and even found it "normal". By the second interview, he told stories about how he was invited by the locals to their homes. This was an important step in being accepted into the community. In one instance, he described how he participated in grapes picking with a Moldovan family. He volunteered to help them pick up grapes from their local vineyard, just 4 months after his arrival at his site. For two days, he worked with the family and they treated him as one of their own. Later on, during a visit six months after his arrival in the country, the family was very welcoming. They invited both of us for dinner and talked about how L. was "like part of our family". A similar story involved a local music teacher who took a liking to L. and invited him to spend New Year’s and Russian Christmas with the family. L. discovered that, once he got close to the first local family, others started to approach him more easily. He reasoned that it was because, in that small community, people relied on each other’s perceptions in order to decide whether to trust or not to trust a stranger. By the time of the last interview, L. spoke about his Moldovan friends with affection. The two-year bonds he formed there ensured him a place in the local community. He already used the pronoun "we" when referring to Moldovans. He seemed to have been fully integrated and accepted in Moldova.

Theme 2: Moldovans’ Non-Verbal Communication Heavily Influenced by the Russians’ Serious and Reserved Demeanour

Non-verbal communication includes the use of touch, space, movement, time, and body to communicate. During the discussions to L., it was interesting to learn about his perceptions of differences and similarities between Moldova and the U.S. or Romania when it came to non-verbal
messages. Two observations stood out from his descriptions: the use of movement (gestures and facial expressions of emotions) and the dress code. A particularity of the Moldovans was their calm and composed demeanour in public places. In his 2 years serving in a small community near Kishinev, L. never witnessed episodes of conflict or even simple emotional interactions in public. He described the Moldovans as being "reserved", not using their hands to gesture, and not showing emotions on their faces. They considered gesturing and being emotional as "inappropriate" behaviours in a community. The few incidents L. noticed as being somewhat close to a conflict were in school, when teachers would raise their voices to discipline the students, or in a supermarket, when a frustrated customer would call on a manager to open an extra cash register. A very important interactional behaviour that further exemplifies the composed public demeanour in L.’s community was the greeting. Students would always greet their teachers, no matter where they saw them outside the school and colleagues would greet one another, closely observing their rank. The greeting signified, according to L., that the right amount of respect was shown and, overall, the relationship was in good standing. In spite of the importance of greetings, L. noticed a peculiar lack of smiling, something that he got accustomed to during his 20 years of living in the U.S. Moldovans do not smile when they greet one another, as opposed to Americans. They do not smile too much in public situations in general. Whereas in America the smile signifies friendliness, in Moldova, friendliness was either already assumed to have existed (and there was no need to make it obvious) or it was not the most important message that they wanted to transmit through a greeting.

Another element of non-verbal communication was the dress code. L.'s first observations were that dress code was "normal". This can be explained by the fact that he wasn’t able to perceive differences in dressing in his first stages of his service there because he mostly interacted with teachers in a school setting and with his supervisors in the Peace Corps office. However, after some prompting, he was able to describe the formal dress of his female teachers. "They were always dressed professionally and put together". He also noticed the importance of the traditional dress on public holidays or whenever Moldovans felt a need to show pride in who they were. For instance, at the swearing in ceremony held at the Peace Corps' headquarters in the beginning of their service, all Peace Corps volunteers wore the traditional Moldovan dress and many of them learned and performed the traditional songs and dances. However, during regular functions, modern dress was worn by both males and females, although it was not as casual as in the U.S. Moldovans followed the "dress up" rule used in Europe and Russia whenever they went out, even if it was just to go to the grocery store. Therefore, men wore a shirt and business pants and many of them wore a tie, whereas women wore dresses, with very few wearing business pants.

**Theme 3: Constant Code Switching as a "Third" Language is Both an Oddity and an Opportunity for Intercultural Bridges**

One of the characteristics of the Moldovan culture that L. found the easiest to adapt to was the code switching. Code switching refers to the practice of using two or more languages in a conversation and switching back and forth between them. From the first interviews, he revealed that almost everybody in Moldova knows Russian. Even though not all of them speak it as their first language and even though very few public signs are in Russian, most people would greet him in Russian and when he started to speak Romanian, they would easily switch to Romanian. He described an incident at the local open market, where a thin, energetic, and self-deprecating woman selling apricots asked him if he was speaking Romanian from Romania. When he confirmed it, she said: "Noi, vorbim și noi, da’ noi vorbim, vorbim, până începem să grăim". In translation: "We speak it [Romanian], too, but we speak and speak until we start to talk [in vernacular]".

Many countries in the world have populations who speak multiple languages. The multi-linguistic fluency develops for different reasons: a colonial history, strong regional loyalties, or unavoidable cultural influences of a nearby superpower. In the case of Moldova, the strong regional
loyalty to Russia and its unavoidable cultural influence contributed to their code switching skills. L. told several stories of Moldovans he befriended, who showed attachment to the Russian culture and language. Many of them have children working in Russia or Western Europe who send their own children to Moldova to spend their summer vacation with their grandparents. These children bring with them a variety of languages, such as Russian, Italian, French or Romanian. It seemed much easier for Moldovans to pick up the foreign languages, because they already are familiar with the Russian-Romanian code switching. L. described another incident that showed the loyalty of some Moldovans to their powerful neighbour to the East. As a co-teacher, he had the opportunity to prepare a lesson plan with Mr. Vasili, a local teacher (name changed to protect the participant). L. proposed to the class to listen to a song and to discuss it afterwards. The song was the hymn of the former U.S.S.R. L. was surprised to see the look of reverence on Mr. Vasili’s face and the one of confusion but respect on the pupils' faces. He was convinced that the Russian influence was still very strong, at least with some parts of the Moldovan population.

Another good example of the Russian influence on Moldovan’s language was the use of Russian names. Moldovan children usually have two given names, and at least one of them is Russian-influenced. L. read the list of 280 students registered for classes in his high-school, and discovered that the majority of them had one of the given names Russian, such as: Vladimir, Veaceslav, Tania, Katia, Ludmila, Tatiana, Vadim, Vitalie, Anastasia, Liuba, or Iulia. Also, many family names are formed following the Russian style. If the father’s name is Constantin, the son is usually called "given name + Constantinovici" (Constantin’s son). The same goes for women: "given name + Constantinova" (Constantina’s daughter). Language in this case, is an indicator of people’s perceptions of themselves as part of a close group.

Luckily for L., he has an affinity for languages. He loves paying attention to the nuances of pronunciation and grammar and this was one of the things that he used to make friends and integrate into the community. As a Peace Corps volunteer, he benefitted from 3 months of training, including language training. Fortunately or unfortunately, the language was Romanian, as this was the official language of the country and he already knew Romanian as a native speaker. Hence, he tried to learn Russian independently, so he could integrate easily. He always tried to pronounce Russian words and ask people to correct his pronunciation. As expected, people were more than happy to comply and this gave L. an opportunity to engage in small talk with them about language use. In a different situation, he set up an American Culture and Civilization club for high school students. Interested students would come and talk about different aspects of the American culture in English. This way, they could practice their English language as well. In the beginning, L. noticed that the students were reluctant to come. Then he realized that he could ask them to teach him Russian in the beginning of the club meetings. This way, they would be more comfortable to open up and start asking questions about America. The strategy worked well. In the last interview, he considered this as a great tool that helped him to build the bridge between cultures.

**Discussions**

This case study is an illustration of how cultural dimensions such as individualism and collectivism are perceived and acted upon by a stranger to the culture. The study started with the general question about how individualistic and collectivistic cultural expectations will play out in the lived experience of a Peace Corps volunteer. Through five in-depth interviews, it can be concluded that going back and forth between individualistic and collectivistic cultures is not impossible. People can adapt their cultural expectations and this can be seen in the language they use to refer to others (changing from complaints about a perceived "lack" of freedom, to the use of the inclusive pronoun "we"); the change in their perception and understanding of non-verbal messages (perceiving friendliness through other non-verbal signs, not necessarily just smiles), and the recognition and acceptance of cultural influences, such as the use of code switching and the
formation of names that show strong family bonds.

Limitations: This is a case study based on one participant’s answers to semi-structured interviews. Therefore, it has inherent limitations that are common to any case studies. First, while the themes found provide very interesting and rich insights into the lived experiences of a Peace Corps volunteer, the results are not generalizable to other individuals or populations. Second, despite the attempt to interview him at different key points in time, those periods of time are indicative but not entirely representative of his life of two years in Moldova. Many of the daily decisions or encounters that might have been interesting from a researcher’s perspective were probably not shared in the interviews.

Future Directions: This study turned out to be an excellent starting point into the research on Peace Corps volunteers’ lives outside the U.S. and after their return to the U.S. There are several avenues of research that this study opens up. A very interesting one is to look into reverse culture shock (Kim, 2015) of returned Peace Corps volunteers, with the multitude of sub-topics that might derive from it (e.g., adaptation, cultural identity, intercultural ethics). Peace Corps does an excellent job at training people to adjust to their temporary home country. However, there are few studies on their re-entry into the U.S. and re-adjustment to their life back home (Cushner, 2007; Piercy, Cheek and Teemant, 2010; Sussman, 2000; Sussman, 2002). Some of the conclusions of the above studies, as well as anecdotal evidence suggest that at least some returned Peace Corps volunteers go through a veritable re-entry shock as they come from a developing to a developed world.

Another interesting path is to look into the scope and impact of international volunteerism. The research on the long-term effect on the international work experience on careers is even sparser (Suutari et al., 2017; Sherraden, Lough and McBride, 2008). What we know is that volunteer work is associated with self-efficacy (Cross, 1998), psychological growth, and a meaningful life (Piercey et al., 2010). What is less known is how returning volunteers negotiate their identities and cope with the big changes over a short span of time (Elmoudden, 2013). According to the National and Community Service Corporation, volunteer work in the state of New Jersey alone is in decline since 2003 and below the national average (National and Community Service, 2019). National average in the U.S. for volunteer work is relatively low. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, volunteer work is lowest among 20-24 year olds (18.4%) in the year ending in September 2015 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019). Kramer and Bisel (2017) argue that communication during anticipatory socialization influence volunteers’ roles. This means that, the more exposed people are to conversations about volunteering during their formative years, the more likely they are to take up volunteer work. Future research should look into the possible changes in family and school conversations to explore the influences on the motivation to volunteer (Niehaus, 2017; Wilson, 1993).

Interviewing returned Peace Corps volunteers (RPCVs) on the significance of their experience abroad and on their ways to adjust to the life home will give us an in-depth understanding of the changes that they went through, as well as the challenges, including communication challenges that they face on their return. This insight will be relevant to others who travel into foreign countries for extensive periods of time. It would also be interesting to see the types of cultural resources these RPCVs tap into to help them get through the reverse culture shock when they return home (the complex psychological, physical, and physiological process of reintegrating into the home culture).

Conclusions

This study is a qualitative attempt at understanding the inner and communicated experiences of one person, as he lived, worked, and interacted with Moldovans in professional and social settings. It adds to the literature of intercultural communication and non-verbal cross-cultural communication by providing a glimpse into a rarely studied society, Moldova, through the eyes of
an American born in Eastern Europe. It shows the Moldovan culture as a natural linguistic experiment of language blending that provides an unusual openness toward intercultural communication. It also highlights the slow and difficult process of personal adaptation to a new culture in order to be accepted as a full member of the community. This case study, although based on only one participant, offers suggestions for future studies on bilingualism and intercultural tolerance, and building intercultural trust in an era of globalization. It encourages researchers to study the "sandwich" cultures, those at the intersection of two strong cultures (like Russian and Romanian, in the case of Moldova) in order to understand the lessons of survival and intercultural openness that they can teach us.

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DIGITIZATION OF SOCIETY AND CHALLENGES TO CHILDREN’S BEHAVIOR ONLINE

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Abstract

Objectives. This article aims to analyze the digitization of the society and some changes that occur in the family upbringing process when digital devices enter, such as: computers, tablets, internet, mobile phones.

Material and methods. The analysis focuses on the challenges of online child behavior and some of its negative effects, such as: aggression, high anxiety, insecurity and emotional discomfort. The paper is based on results obtained through qualitative methods in the course of research project "Digital Media Literacy in the context of "Knowledge Society"; state and challenges" (KPI-06-H25/4, with team leader V. Milenkova). The main methods for obtaining information were in-depth interviews (30) and focus groups (2) with parents in Blagoevgrad.

Results. This study reveals the positive aspects of digitization as well as it focuses on the problems that accompany digitization in social processes and people's personal lives, especially children's contact with digital tools and their protection against the different risks of online communication. Another consequence is the fact that long online time does not make children more digital and media literate. In this sense, parents have to seriously reconsider their children's access to digital devices, which affects children's personal potential and psychological comfort.

Conclusions. The participation in modern digital environment includes access to different e-resources, devices and information products and services. It should be taken into account that the acquiring of digital skills for work in interactive environment improves their efficiency with respect to creativity and innovatively pursuing education activity.

Keywords: digitization, online behavior, online risks, parental support.

Introduction

This paper analyzes some changes that occur in the family upbringing processes when entering the digital devices, like: computers, tablets, Internet, mobile phones in the modern environment. In the modern world, digital media are everywhere, they participate in education, in the profession, in everyday contacts - in communicating with people of different ages and with different social status. In this digital environment, children are also an active participant, and often they come across inappropriate characters or content that is inconsistent with their age and knowledge. Parents are concerned about the normal mental development of their children in the digital world, which carries various risks.

The main research questions of the article are: What are the positive and negative effects of global digitization? Do parents believe that the children could be protected from a variety of
negative effects associated with aggression, high anxiety, uncertainty and emotional discomfort related to digital media socialization? The analysis focuses on the support that the children receive from parents in the context of mass digitization. Parents are the ones with whom children can discuss different topics, events, shows or movies viewed in the media as well as issues requiring further information or clarification from the parents (Genner and Suss, 2017: 1).

The new environment requires the development of digital skills that enable effective information management and the proper use of ICT (Milenkova, Peichev and Marinov, 2018; Cartelli, 2013; Tzvetkov, 2016). Digitization, interactivity and virtuality are constantly opening up new possibilities and extending the boundaries of learning (Rosengren, 2014).

Digital technologies have already changed the world, they have great potential to broaden the range of information they are handling, so they constantly adapt and become an integral part of the lives of modern people. The internet and new technologies create prerequisites being part of the global network, linked to the upgrading and dynamic flow of information, fast communication and easy access to various institutions (Frau-Meigs and Hibbard, 2016).

Digital media connect people to various social environments. Connected children and young people express their views through blogs, videos, social media, cartoons, hashtags, podcasts and other forms. They recognize the potential of digital resources to help them access information and seek solutions to problems affecting their communities. Young people (aged 15-24) are the most closely related age group. Globally, 71% of them are online, compared to 48% of the total population. Digital technologies provide opportunities for training and education for children. They also allow children to access information on issues that affect their communities and can provide them with a role to play in solving them (UNICEF, 2017).

Material and methods

The methodology that provides empirical material of this article includes qualitative methods: interviews and focus groups carried out under the project: "Digital Media Literacy in the context of "Knowledge Society": state and challenges" (KП-06-H25/4), with team leader V. Milenkova. The fieldwork was conducted between March and May 2019 in different settlements of Southwest Bulgaria randomly selected.

The choice of methods followed the understanding that qualitative methods allow a deeper rationalizing different issues and a free sharing of views by respondents on the topics discussed. A total of 30 in-depth interviews with university and school lecturers, researchers from scientific organizations, representatives of the non-government sector, politics, parents were held, following the methodological requirements laid down in the project.

The idea was to form a constellation of digitization and digital literacy shared by the respondents, as well as to trace the differentiating influence of the professional and activity engagement of the surveyed persons.

Description of the sample:
- By gender: interviewed are: 19 women and 11 men;
- By age, the respondents followed the following groups: up to 35: 5 persons; 36 - 45: 9 respondents; 46-55: 6 persons; 56-65: 8 respondents; over 65: 2 persons;
- By "education", the respondents are divided into: Master degree - 15 persons; Doctoral degree - 15 persons;
- By "professional field", the interviewees are representatives of: Social sciences - 9 persons, Humanities - 9 persons, Computer and information activities - 7 persons, Law - 5 persons.

The following topics were discussed:
- The essence of digitization: main features and contribution to society;
- "Digital skills and digital literacy": interaction with technologies, specific dimensions and connotations;
Does modern education stimulate digital literacy?
What is the digitization of modern education?
Positive and "negative" aspects of digitization.

The other method used was focus group. There were carried out 2 focus groups with parents. One focus group includes 8 parents of children aged 7 to 11 years. The second focus group included parents of children aged 12 to 16. The parents in the focus groups range from 37-50 years. The gender distribution is 53.3% female and 46.7% male. All parents are from Sofia. The topics that were discussed in the group discussions included: benefits and risks from the digitalisation of society; the dangers that can accompany web browsing, how children should use digital media, what role the family plays in the process of accessing digital media, what is the role of school and education in the process of digitization.

Results

According to our respondents (in conducted in-depth interviews), digitization has actively penetrated people's lives, both in the personal, professional and social areas. It has become a very important part of the activities of institutions at different levels and in different fields. The data show that business, public and non-governmental sectors use systematically various digital assets and services in their activities.

This means that digitization is ubiquitous and global, it changes generations and their thinking, attitudes and qualities; it affects and reformats social structures and relationships, imposing them on digital technology requirements. Here are several opinions as evidence.

The digitization of society is expressed in:
"...use of new technologies in all spheres of personal, social, political, cultural, scientific life. The digitization of society, however, is more - in fact, it expresses the degree of maturity, progressiveness and entrepreneur of its individual members. Acceptance or rejection, duration of use and time to adapt to the implication of digitization is a testimony of whether a system is conservative or adaptable and open to novelties" (female, 34, PR in a public organization).

"It is not only personal access to digital devices but also a wide and publicly accessible application" (female, 43, researcher at a research institute).

"People is linked to digital data because digital technology has become an important and somewhat indispensable part of his life. Every business process is somehow connected to "new" technologies - access to internet and digital devices are needed. According to NSI, 84% of businesses in Bulgaria have access to the Internet in 2018 and this trend has grown over the years" (female, 38, university lecturer).

The digitization of society is an indisputable fact and this is definitely a prerequisite for social development because it means providing new opportunities for institution development as well as for forming new skills and qualities. At the same time, there are communities that are hard to digitize, and this creates serious divisions in an age, ethnic, educational aspect. Often times, the availability of digital literacy and skills can be combined with low general culture, insufficient social skills, which means that these states need to be carefully considered and ways to deal with these divisions are sought.

Here are some answers to the question: "Does digitization and digital literacy contribute to the development of society?"

"Certainly, because they require the formation of a new type of abilities - skills for working with information and communication technologies, skills for using digital platforms and media for a variety of purposes and in a wide variety of contexts, searching, verifying and disseminating information, skills to critically evaluate media content. The development of these abilities leads to rethinking education and citizenship - we talk about digital education and digital citizenship" (male, 59, university professor).
"The process of digitization should not make us slaves of technology, but should be designed to help and facilitate us in our day-to-day work and professional, as well as in our interaction with institutions and public services" (female, 43, representative of NGO).

"Digitization is an inevitable and fundamental prerequisite for the development of the knowledge society, because it extends the possibilities of knowledge, the possibilities for passing on, learning and finding it. In practice, it is not possible to achieve a knowledge society without the digitization of the activities, without the digital competences of the people and without their connection with the institutions and the social networks" (female, 56, researcher at a scientific institute, BAS).

The development of digital skills and literacy among young people depends to a large extent on the participation of education (Marinov, 2015). At school, technology is present in abundance. Teachers assign homework that requires online research, and use software applications to manage these homework assignments. There are a number of examples in this direction that indicate digital technologies are entering and changing existing methods of teaching and learning in educational institutions. But education is a conservative environment that affects not only the material conditions, but also the teachers themselves and their methods of work; which means that sometimes there may be a lag in the attitudes of teachers on the inclusion of innovative approaches and digital content acquisition, digital literacy and literacy in students (Grusec and Hastings, 2014).

"Examples of digitization of education are computer literacy classes, digital "black" boards, and so on. But - using Google less and less people use libraries and less read books in general, which frankly leads to dullness and ignorance of important authors.

Another example of poor digital literacy in education - school exam questions are already closed (structured) rather than open and require a high level of thinking, creativity in writing and analysis. This stems from the excessive use of computers" (female, 43, representative of NGOs).

"There are countries such as Finland, Estonia, the Netherlands, Canada, etc. where education is close to the real needs of life; oriented mainly towards the successful practical realization of the learners; is based on developing critical thinking and there is no way not to stimulate the development of digital skills" (male, 59, lecturer at university).

"The problem of outdated teaching methods is that grown in the digital world children have very different habits of perception of information. Teachers often compare their own learning culture to their pupils' age and that of current students, and conclude that new generations lack attention, interest, ambition, persistence, and so on. The truth is that the change in the environment renders meaningless any attempt to adapt yesterday's methods" (female, 46, public organization).

Respondents say that Bulgarian education is digitized, but not always the digital devices that are purchased are actively used and become the real basis for innovation in the educational process. More consistency, continuity and activity are needed for the real digitization of education and its basing on successful practices and methods.

"The reporting of results shows that the country adheres to the requirements of the European Union related to the development of (digital) media literacy. In practice, it works in a piecemeal way without a complete strategy: buying equipment that is not used (at least not for developing critical thinking), usually the technological means in schools are out of date, students use completely different technological means; lack of methodologies; lack of sufficiently trained teachers" (male, 59, lecturer at university).

"In my view, the digitization of contemporary Bulgarian education is currently focused on the physical acquisition of new technologies and, to a very small extent, in their functional use to acquire new digital competences, not to learn and consolidate fundamental knowledge" (female, 34, PR in a public organization).

Children in the family

During the childhood, parents are the most important intermediaries in digital media socialization. Parents are the individuals who can provide the necessary cognitive and emotional
balance to their children and in the later ages. Parents are aware of the serious challenges they face in the current situation related to various negative aspects of the action and content of digital media. Parents said that with age and school attendance, it is becoming increasingly difficult to control children’s choice. The role of the school environment in this case is also of great importance. The assessment is that digital devices create conditions for widening divisions and inequalities among children, which complicates childhood assessments and perceptions (Grusec and Hastings, 2014). The basic element of media socialization are the parents, the extent to which media messages break through the prism of group norms and rules in the relationship between the personality and society (Peicheva et al., 2018).

The family is of great importance to media socialization, because parents are the ones from whom the children learn various aspects of the world, including the media; kids are informed for different sources of information thanks to their parents, and they receive access to various digital devices: computers, tablets, Internet, mobile phones. Namely, parents are the people who may impose certain restrictions on the viewing of TV programs or usage of the Internet; and not only on what to watch, but as to how long (Greenfield and Yan, 2006). Thus, the children can be protected from a variety of negative effects associated with aggression, high anxiety, uncertainty and emotional discomfort related with them. Parents are the ones with whom children can discuss a character, an event, a show or a movie viewed in the media as well as issues requiring further clarification, information or support.

Children get their first internet device at about 2 years of age - these are usually the smartphones that mothers give to children to have fun, not to cry and have fun on their own. More than half of Bulgarian households have tablets and just as much have smartphones. For many children, the virtual world is more real than the real world. It is well known how dangerous it can be surfing the net for a child that is 10 years old; the dating sites are also dangerous, where adolescents can be spoken by inappropriate people. There are various studies showing the impact of media usage on individuals, like violence and aggressive behavior in society (Lemish, 2015). The role of the environment is also determined as a decisive factor (Anderson, 2008).

The Internet offers many opportunities but also hides a number of dangers, especially for those who do not know how to guarantee their security. Children are one of the most vulnerable groups. According to statistics in 2018, 50% of adolescents are already using the Internet before they reach 7 years. They often start communicating with different people across the screen, and this is an ideal opportunity for pedophiles and fraudsters (Valcheva, 2018), reason or which the children need to be educated to cope with cyber attack and aggression on the Internet, phenomena that are increasingly common throughout the world and with extremely serious effects (Baciu, 2019).

The "National Safer Internet Center Marketlinx" conducted in 2016 a National Representative Survey on online behavior of children in Bulgaria, as the UNICEF (2017) report on children and digitization shows. The study is concerned with exploring the use of the Internet, information and communication technologies by children between 9 and 17 years of age and their parents. The results show that today's children are using the Internet ever earlier, more often and using increasingly diverse mobile devices, which increases the risks they face online.

In 2016 Bulgarian children start using the Internet at the average age of eight, which is one year earlier than in 2010). Many Bulgarian children enter the online world for the first time in about 7 years. Around 97% are active users, a big leap compared to 81% in 2010. In addition, Bulgarian children go online more often in both school and non-academic time. Increased use increases the risks. 40% of kids users have public Facebook profiles. The most endangered by the traps that the net hides are children aged 8-14 (UNICEF, 2017).

Also, the same report shows that Bulgarian children are increasingly falling on harmful content on the Internet. About 15% of them say they have been worried or afraid of something they've seen online in the past year. An alarmingly high percentage of social networking accounts are public, with the percentage being highest for an average age group (12-14). About 87% of
children use social networks (following the results from the national survey conducted in 2016), which is significantly above 54% in 2010. One third of Bulgarian children have communicated with a person they have not met live. Online and offline child abuse has grown significantly over the past six years. About 30% have been offended or affected by a peer in the past year. The percentage of children using sexting (sending and receiving textual or visual content of a sexual nature) has not increased compared to 2010 (last survey), but remains worrying high. Risks even hide innocent photos posted on the web with inappropriate content, which can lead to harassment and extortion. Experts suggest that one of the most important factors to ensure the safety of children on the Internet is to build a strong relationship of trust (Livingstone, 2009).

In the focus groups, respondents shared that:

"Parents must have constant control over what access children have to the Internet. Many people say today's children are born to be literate on the net. But, doing well does not make them digitally literate and does not make them safe for all risks online" (female, 45).

Parents commented that more than half of children get information on sites with inappropriate content, and they do not want it, which is very damaging to them.

"Parents do not even suspect that children often go to inappropriate games - violent ones" (female, 35).

The age of admission of minors on the web, including making a social networking account, is steadily decreasing. Therefore, these activities should be under the control of parents.

"Virtual communication itself can become aggressive in real life" (male, 52).

Efforts are needed to protect children from the dangers of the Internet. The technique is constantly improving and more and more opportunities for Internet access appear. Progress in the field of technology places children with both unique opportunities and unpredictable dangers. One such danger is cyberbullying, which is a consequence of the uncritical manipulation of digital means.

It consists in spreading discrediting information, photos, sending threatening messages, hacking into accounts and send messages to the contacts list in order defamation. The most important feature of online bullying is that it is public and destroys authority, and can negatively affect the confidence and self-concept of the child itself, since once shared information can spread very quickly across all platforms.

In one of the interviews, a parent said that after consulting with a psychologist he had his child close down his account to stop the attacks on him. Parents are concerned about the effect of the online world on the emotional and physical condition of their children. Children's threats online are equally real with adults, such as viruses, identity theft, online fraud. The problem is that children are more trustworthy and have less experience. Children can give information without thinking about the consequences that this may have.

Therefore, it is necessary to keep in contact with the children in order to be reasonable and to use the Internet responsibly, to be aware of the dangers in the network. Thus, the Internet will be a useful means of communicating and obtaining information that will not threaten their security.

Parents in focus groups say that in order to protect their children they must have basic knowledge of the Internet and what their children do when they communicate by instant messaging or "chat", browse web pages or do something else on the web. This information can be obtained through a variety of software programs that offer parental control, which stops inappropriate messages and images that appear on the computer screen, and prevents children from opening dangerous pages. It was shared that:

"These filtering or blocking programs do not provide 100 percent protection. Additionally, older youngsters understand computers and learn how to ignore or outsmart these programs" (male, 43).

That is why parents have to determine when children can use the Internet and for how long, as well as what websites they can visit and what websites are forbidden. According to parents,
this should not have the nature of a ban or coercion, but of explanation and discussion with the children, and why it is necessary.

One of the participants in the focus groups said that "children should go to specific educational sites dedicated to animals, nature, science" (female, 38) or "make a list of Internet libraries, dictionaries and tutorials" (female, 40).

Another problem that parents have pointed out that they can not keep track of what their children do when parents are not at home. It is therefore important that the control of the Internet is not a single action, and it is a continuous process of mutual trust, the formation of values, the observance of rules so that kids can make the right decisions even when they are alone. In this sense, the finding that the protection, which parents can ensure by monitoring children's activities is limited. The principles that parents teach their children and the example they give can achieve much more in this respect. Therefore, it is time to discuss with children the dangers of using the Internet.

"Open communication with children is the best protection against hidden threats on the Internet" (male, 46).

There are a variety of digital devices, each of which is associated with different benefits:

**Mobile phones.** In the focus groups, respondents shared that the average age at which children receive their first smartphone is 10 years. The smartphone provides a number of advantages with regard to the constant connection and location of the children: where they are, what friends they are with, when the children will return home, as well as to stay in contact for an extended period of time or to have a quick response if parents need to respond quickly when needed.

The advantages of smartphones, however, can also become their shortcomings because they are personal devices and may not always have full control over them by parents, and that makes children highly vulnerable. In the focus groups, some of the parents shared how they could limit the continued use of smartphones:

"I basically strive to give myself a personal example by not keeping my phone on the table, not calling while driving" (female, 37).

"I think there should be limitations, for example, how many hours a day the phone can use, but I think this is difficult to realize, and it is known that when you restrict someone, you stimulate him to show a trick, to try to invent ways to disregard the restrictions, so great care must be taken" (male, 45).

**Online games.** Massively children aged 3 to 17 play video and online games. Children can play alone or with some of their peers they know, or with others who do not know it but have met online. The games form different skills related to rapid reaction, imagination and creativity, perspective thinking, teamwork. Some of the games also have a cognitive element. Online gaming is a prerequisite for creating new contacts with other gamers, even from around the world, which opens the possibility of abuse.

Threats related to online gaming can be manifested in several ways (Lemish, 2015):

- Violence is present in the games, quality of vengeance is developing; the very process of play is accompanied by nervous overload, high adrenaline, which affects the child's psyche.
- The games go through different levels, which requires a prolonged stay in front of the computer and actually tears the child out of his or her schooling or homework duties. Children do not exercise and do little to do.
- Children can create relationships with other players and become subject to online harassment.

In the focus groups, parents say that they are trying to discuss their children's online games in order to give them advice or to share their personal experiences, to help their children, to support them when they have difficulty.

**Social networks.** Teens are the most active age group on social networks, using more than one platform but spending at least 3-4 hours daily. Moreover, it is the contacts they make on social
networks are a priority for them, rather than finding the learning materials they need for school or university. Social networks become very important because they contribute to developing age identity, peer association, posting information about different events or people. In this sense, social networks develop dependence on teenagers, as they are the basis of contacts with strangers, sharing inappropriate content or cyberbullying. It is therefore necessary to set boundaries with regard to the long standing in the social networks and the risks that it hides.

In the focus groups, parents share that one of the ways of control is to regulate privacy settings, and to monitor the child's online activities, which would allow parents to respond preventively. According to our respondents, profiling and social networking should be limited as long as possible to protect children from adverse and risky influences or addictions.

**Discussions**

Digitization is a fact in modern society. All aspects of relationships, processes, institutional networks are under the sign of digitization. Relationships in family and child growth are also influenced by digital means (Rosengren, 2014). This study reveals the benefits of digitization as well as the problems that accompany the digitization of society; one of the issues is related to upbringing, as well as the way of children formation, the parental support and comfort that children need to have to form themselves as balanced and confident individuals. In this sense, parents should seriously rethink their children’s access to digital devices that become an active participant in the process of socialization.

One of the main findings about the relationship of children with digital tools regards their protection from various hazards that online communication lies. Therefore, it is necessary to talk to children, to have sustainable communication and clarifications, trust between parents and children.

Another implication is related to the fact that long online time does not make children more digital and media literate. With the prolonged use of digital media, children develop basic technical skills to handle digital devices, save files, organize online information, create social networking profiles and manage their settings, and so on. Also, children successfully use a variety of websites and digital communication platforms. Researchers (Poell, 2014), however, find deficits in children's critical thinking and social skills that make it difficult for them to assess the truth of information found online and to effectively collaborate with other users for common activities. These skills are at the heart of digital and media literacy and are needed to successfully exploit the great opportunities of the digital era (UNICEF, 2017).

The answer to the basic research question related to the risks of digitalisation and parents' attitudes towards this process is that the negative effects of digitalisation can be minimized when the whole of society is involved with its various public and non-governmental institutions. Only then will the efforts of the social actors lead to the expected positive result.

One way to control the behavior of children in the network is to achieve good communication with school structures by creating a symbiosis in the direction of action and approach to child education.

In the focus groups it was stated that the Bulgarian school excluded the dangers of the network from their point of view and the parents were left alone to deal with the digital control of their children.

The consequence of the penetration of digital technologies and educational processes is the transformation of digital access into a new dividing line, as millions of children who could benefit most from digital technologies do not have access to them (Van Dijk, 2014).

Internet and technological progress are identified as the main prerequisite for the emergence of digital divide. In general, the division is not only determined by access to the internet, but depends also on the economic capital of the family, the social environment. Digital divide reflects the prevailing economic disparities by increasing the benefits for children from richer
environments and not providing opportunities for the poorest and most disadvantaged children. In this way, the digital divide goes beyond the issue of access to computers and internet.

Important factors implying the emergence of digital divide include: digital technology usage skills; resources and literacy; training; lifestyle (Peicheva and Milenkova, 2017). There is also digital inequality between age groups as well as between genders. Worldwide, 12% more men than women used the Internet in 2017 (Peicheva, 2017: 152).

In the conducted interviews, special emphasis is placed on the digital divide:

"It should be noted that there are groups of people who do not have the same level of access to digital technologies (these are elderly people and people with low economic status, representatives of marginalized populations, including ethnic minorities, people living in remote and hard-to-reach regions of the country). This leads to the so-called digital gap (technological gap, mismatch, division), which - as I mentioned - is an inevitable social phenomenon. Society needs national programs to support the technological development of the aforementioned groups" (female, 43, representative of NGO).

**Conclusions**

In conclusion, it could be said that the participation in modern digital environment includes access to different e-resources, devices and information products and services. It should be taken into account that the acquiring of digital skills for work in interactive environment improves their efficiency with respect to creativity and innovatively pursuing education activity. Achieving greater effectiveness in training and education involves the successful use of communication technologies, based on acquired skills for seeking and finding resources, as well as the capacity to analyze and combine the obtained information, to share different ideas, which they may discuss with their parents and teachers.

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MOTIVATION FOR TRADITIONAL STUDY AND E-LEARNING OF DESIRED AND UNDESIRED SPECIALTIES

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Abstract

Objectives. It is important to establish if motivation for studying a desired specialty is more long-lasting, stimulating e-learning and job-related performance than motivation for studying an undesired specialty. It may be expected that studying the desired specialty would be related to greater motivation for acquiring the necessary knowledge and skills using diverse sources of information, including online learning, in order to correspond to the job requirements.

Material and methods. A survey was conducted in 2017 among 156 Bulgarian students who were asked about their behaviour, feelings and intents related to learning their specialty based on some items from two self-report questionnaires measuring academic motivation and adaptation to university environment.

Results. Less proportion of students who wanted to study their specialty before being enrolled at the university preferred to change the specialty ($p < .001$), were not satisfied with their exam results ($p < .05$), thought of giving up their studies ($p < .01$), felt unpleasant when they learned ($p < .05$), and did not regularly search for additional material on the Internet ($p < .001$) than the students who did not want to study their specialty before being enrolled at the university.

Conclusions. Studying the desired specialty was related to greater motivation for acquiring the necessary knowledge and skills using diverse sources of information, including online learning. E-learning may complement traditional learning related to a chosen vocational field.

Keywords: learning, motivation, occupation, students, specialty.

Introduction

There are long-lasting scientific efforts to understand what motivates human behaviour in order to direct, stimulate or stop some activity. Learning is a desired activity in the society, as well as being a competent specialist in some occupations. It is important to study the link between the attitude toward the studied specialty (favourable in the case of a desired specialty or unfavourable in the case of an undesired specialty) and learning motivation in order to find some stimulators of desired students’ behaviour.

Motivation is an incentive that directs human behaviour towards a specific purpose and sustains the efforts (Milkovich and Boudreau, 1988, p.165; Riggio, 1990, p. 157) until a need has been satisfied (Maslow, 2001, p. 65). Learning motivation is a set of reasons for learning that direct the efforts to acquire knowledge and skills (Stoyanova, 2015). It may be expected that studying the desired specialty would be related to greater motivation for acquiring the necessary knowledge and skills using diverse sources of information, including online learning, while one who is enrolled in an undesired specialty may be not enough motivated to study and to search for additional.
information online related to this specialty.

Motivation is regarded as a process that is developed (Iliev, 2005; Paunov, Paunova and Paunov, 2013) and may be stimulated (Milikovich and Boudreau, 1988), or as a state that is constant long time until the goals are achieved and the needs are satisfied (Maslow, 2001). E-learning expands and enriches the learning experience (Aldiab et al., 2017, p. 575) that is why e-learning may complement traditional study regarding desired specialty in the process of developing and maintaining motivation for study.

Some motivation theories focus on setting specific goals for performance in a particular area in the most effective way (Riggio, 1990). The vocational requirements related to the occupation may strengthen motivation for self-improvement (Riggio, 1990), including means of e-learning, in order to correspond to the job requirements. Enhanced motivation for self-realisation in the learning activity related to a chosen future profession leads to more efforts, better results and higher satisfaction (Paunov, 1998).

A connection has been established between the feelings during study, exam results, and e-learning, because it has been found that the students, who think they are efficient and cope well with their study, use Internet in more areas and amuse more than the learners who feel they are not efficient and do not cope well with their study (Poude, Zamani and Abedi, 2011, p. 2694). This finding indicates the importance of pleasant feelings and satisfaction with results as motivators for learning activity.

Motivation includes feelings, perceptions, attitudes related to goal achievement, and engagement with the goal (Agbor-Baiyee, 1997). The lack of motivation leads to losing the interest (Freeman, 2001). E-learning is related to the students’ increased interest in the studied content (Bozarova and Tasev, 2002). The study of a desired specialty is related to more positive feelings, a favourable attitude towards this specialty, high interest in the specialty, and respectively such a student should be more engaged with his/her learning than a student who studies an undesired specialty. Engagement with the study of desired specialty may be expressed also as the use of online resources for acquiring further knowledge and skills related to the selected area of study. The student in e-learning is active in the learning process (Topîrceanu, 2017, p.42) that should maintain motivation for study. Interactive features of e-learning increase learning motivation (El-Seoud, El-Khouly and Tsj-Eddin, 2016). The study of a desired specialty may enhance motivation for self-improvement by means of search of additional information online related to the selected specialty, because the students are more motivated when applying e-learning and being engaged (Harandi, 2015), whilst the study of an undesired specialty should be characterized by means of weaker motivation for e-learning of additional knowledge and skills related to the specialty.

The students sometimes are enrolled in a specialty that they do not like because of different reasons (for example parental influence, the estimated future benefits as high income, etc.). The school vocational orientation and professional orientation within the family are related to the motivation to learn:

"The modern parent is no longer an educator, but also a partner and an associate of the child who does not impose himself/herself but stimulates the child’s capacity of understanding and sympathy in order to become aware of the consequences of his/her own actions. Considering the anti-cultural and anti-real values bombardment, the task is a difficult one for both categories of parents and of educators and teachers" (Rada, 2013, p. 344).

However, the present research does not accent on the reasons why a specialty is desired, but another is not preferred, that may be related to parental and school vocational orientation. The current research is focused on the students’ formed preferences towards the university specialties (after the influence of personal interests, own abilities, and parental, peer and school career orientation) striving to establish if such preferences of traditional study of specialties are stable and related to e-learning.

It is important to establish if motivation for study may be stable, long-lasting, and
developing in such a way that traditional study of a desired specialty might stimulate e-learning as additional possibility for acquiring the necessary knowledge and skills in order to correspond to the job requirements, engendering pleasant feelings and successful results in learning. The objective of this study was to investigate if studying the desired specialty expressed enhanced and stable learning motivation, including motivation for e-learning. The hypothesis supposed that studying the desired specialty would be related to greater motivation for acquiring the necessary knowledge and skills using diverse sources of information, including online learning, in order to correspond to the job requirements.

Material and methods

A survey was conducted in 2017 among 156 students at seven Bulgarian universities in Blagoevgrad, Burgas, Plovdiv, Sofia, and Veliko Tarnovo. Some authors (Burmeister and Aitken, 2012; Zimmerman, 2012) recommend at least 100 participants in a study. The eligibility criterion was to select students in different specialties and educational degrees at several Bulgarian universities. They participated voluntarily and answered anonymously.

The participating full-time students were 112 (71.8%), and the part-time students were 44 (28.2%). They were from 19 to 50 years old. The students in bachelor’s degree were 118, i.e. 75.6% (the freshmen were 12, the sophomores were 38, the third-year students were 30, the fourth-year students were 38), and the students in master's degree were 38, i.e. 24.4%. They studied Educational management, English philology, Finance, Law, Medicine, Pedagogy, Psychology, Public administration, Social activities, Sociology, Speech therapy, and Tourism. The female students were 136 (87.2%), and the male students were 20 (12.8%). The married students were 38 (24.4%), the single students were 76 (48.7%), the cohabitating students were 40 (25.6%), the divorced students were 2 (1.3%). The working students were 74 (47.4%), and the students who only studied without working were 82 (52.6%).

The participants were asked several questions. One question asked about their behaviour that should be a reliable source of information about their motivation (Milkovich and Boudreau, 1988) - "I regularly search for additional material related to my study on the Internet". (This question was inspired by Radoslavova and Velichkov, 2005). Some questions asked about feelings (because motivation includes feelings, according to Agbor-Baiyee, 1997) - "How do you feel when you learn?", "Are you satisfied with your exam results?" (These questions were inspired by Dzhonev, 1990, and they were chosen, because, according to Paunov, 1998, enhanced motivation for learning related to a chosen future profession leads to better results and higher satisfaction). Some questions asked about intents in order to understand more about durability of motivation (as a state that is constant long time, according to Maslow, 2001) - "Is this the specialty that you wanted to study before being enrolled at the university?", "If you have such an opportunity, would you change the specialty you are studying? ", "Have you ever thought of giving up your studies?" (These questions were inspired by Dzhonev, 1990).

Data were processed statistically by means of SPSS 20 applying descriptive statistics and chi-square analysis. The effect size Phi for chi-square analysis (Zaiontz, 2019) was calculated.

Results

The results related to establishment of motivation for study of the chosen specialty as stable, long-lasting or changeable are presented in Table 1 and in Table 3.

Less students who wanted to study their specialty before being enrolled at the university preferred to change the specialty that they were studying than the students who did not want to study their specialty before being enrolled at the university and who preferred to change the specialty that they were studying, and respectively more students who wanted to study their
specialty before being enrolled at the university would not change the specialty that they were studying than the students who did not want to study their specialty before being enrolled at the university and who would not change the specialty that they were studying (see Table 1, $\chi^2 (df = 1, N = 156) = 45.363$, Likelihood Ratio = 29.081, $p < .001$, Phi = 0.539, i.e. a large effect size, according to Zaiontz, 2019).

Table 1. Comparisons between the frequencies of students who wanted to study their specialty and of those who studied undesired specialty regarding a possible change of their specialty

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Is this the specialty that you wanted to study before being enrolled at the university?</th>
<th>If you have such an opportunity, would you change the specialty you are studying?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empirical count</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expected count</td>
<td>16.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within desired specialty</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empirical count</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expected count</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within undesired specialty</td>
<td>62.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Less proportion of students who wanted to study their specialty before being enrolled at the university were not satisfied with their exam results than the proportion of students who did not want to study their specialty before being enrolled at the university and who were not satisfied with their exam results, and respectively more students who wanted to study their specialty before being enrolled at the university were satisfied with their exam results than the students who did not want to study their specialty before being enrolled at the university and who were satisfied with their exam results (see Table 2, $\chi^2 (df = 1, N = 156) = 8.057$, Likelihood Ratio = 6.251, $p = .005$, Phi = 0.227, i.e. a small effect size, according to Zaiontz, 2019).

The results related to establishment of motivation for study of the chosen specialty as engendering pleasant feelings and successful results in learning are presented in Table 2 and in Table 4.

Table 2. Comparisons between the frequencies of students who wanted to study their specialty and of those who studied undesired specialty regarding satisfaction with their exam results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Is this the specialty that you wanted to study before being enrolled at the university?</th>
<th>Are you satisfied with your exam results?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empirical count</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expected count</td>
<td>120.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within desired specialty</td>
<td>88.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empirical count</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expected count</td>
<td>13.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within undesired specialty</td>
<td>62.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Less proportion of students who wanted to study their specialty before being enrolled at the university thought of giving up their studies than the proportion of students who did not want to study their specialty before being enrolled at the university and who thought of giving up their studies, and respectively more students who wanted to study their specialty before being enrolled at the university did not think of giving up their studies than the students who did not want to study...
their specialty before being enrolled at the university and who did not think of giving up their studies (see Table 3, \( \chi^2 (df =1, N = 156) = 14.263, p < .001 \), Likelihood Ratio = 10.969, \( p = .001 \), Phi = 0.302, i.e. a medium effect size, according to Zaiontz, 2019).

Table 3. Comparisons between the frequencies of students who wanted to study their specialty and of those who studied undesired specialty regarding their intents to give up their studies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Is this the specialty that you wanted to study before being enrolled at the university?</th>
<th>Have you ever thought of giving up your studies?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Have you ever thought of giving up your studies?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empirical count</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expected count</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within desired specialty</td>
<td>12.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>Empirical count</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expected count</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within undesired specialty</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Less proportion of students who wanted to study their specialty before being enrolled at the university felt unpleasant when they learned than the proportion of students who did not want to study their specialty before being enrolled at the university and who felt unpleasant when they learned felt unpleasant when they learned, and respectively more students who wanted to study their specialty before being enrolled at the university felt pleasant when they learned than the students who did not want to study their specialty before being enrolled at the university and who felt pleasant when they learned (see Table 4, \( \chi^2 (df =1, N = 156) = 8.057, p = .005 \), Likelihood Ratio = 6.049, \( p = .014 \), Phi = 0.227, i.e. a small effect size, according to Zaiontz, 2019).

Table 4. Comparisons between the frequencies of students who wanted to study their specialty and of those who studied undesired specialty regarding their feelings when they learn

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Is this the specialty that you wanted to study before being enrolled at the university?</th>
<th>How do you feel when you learn?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Unpleasant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empirical count</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expected count</td>
<td>19.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within desired specialty</td>
<td>11.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>Empirical count</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expected count</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% within undesired specialty</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Less proportion of students who wanted to study their specialty before being enrolled at the university did not regularly search for additional material on the Internet than the proportion of students who did not want to study their specialty before being enrolled at the university and who did not regularly search for additional material on the Internet, and respectively more students who wanted to study their specialty before being enrolled at the university regularly searched for additional material on the Internet than the students who did not want to study their specialty before being enrolled at the university and who regularly searched for additional material on the Internet (see Table 5, \( \chi^2 (df =1, N = 156) = 19.276 \), Likelihood Ratio = 15.376, \( p < .001 \), Phi = 0.352, i.e. a medium effect size, according to Zaiontz, 2019).

The results related to establishment if motivation for study of the chosen specialty is related to motivation for e-learning are presented in Table 5.
Table 5. Comparisons between the frequencies of students who wanted to study their specialty and of those who studied undesired specialty regarding if they search for additional study material online

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Is this the specialty that you wanted to study before being enrolled at the university?</th>
<th>I regularly search for additional material related to my study on the Internet</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Empirical count</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Expected count</td>
<td>28.7</td>
<td>111.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% within desired specialty</td>
<td>15.7%</td>
<td>84.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>Empirical count</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Expected count</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>12.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% within undesired specialty</td>
<td>62.5%</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Besides, it was found that the proportion of part-time students (95.5%) who searched for additional information online was higher than the proportion of full-time students (73.2%) who searched for additional information online ($\chi^2 (df=1, N=156) = 9.583, p = .002$, $\Phi = 0.248$, i.e. a small effect size, according to Zaiontz, 2019). The proportion of students in Master’s degree (21.1%) who preferred to change their specialty was higher than the proportion of students in bachelor degree (8.5%) who preferred to change their specialty ($\chi^2 (df=1, N=156) = 4.455, p = .035$, Likelihood Ratio = 3.977, $p = .035$, $\Phi = 0.169$, i.e. a small effect size, according to Zaiontz, 2019). Any other significant differences between the studied groups of students (gender comparisons; family status comparisons; year of study comparisons; the working students compared with the students who only studied) were not found ($p > .05$).

Discussions

It has been found that studying the desired specialty was related to greater motivation for acquiring the necessary knowledge and skills using diverse sources of information, including online learning that supported the research hypothesis. The results from the present study converge with the previous scientific finding that higher motivation to begin self-directed online learning is related to perceived relevance of learning goals related to occupational and personal life (Kim and Frick, 2011). The study of a desired specialty tends to enhance motivation for self-improvement by means of search of additional information online related to the selected specialty, whilst the study of an undesired specialty was characterized by means of weaker motivation for e-learning of additional knowledge and skills related to the specialty. A student in a desired specialty seems to be more engaged with his/her learning than a student who studies an undesired specialty, as the use of online resources for acquiring further knowledge and skills suggests. Some previous findings also indicate that the students are more motivated when being engaged (Harandi, 2015) as it is the case with the desired specialty. Besides, the students are motivated when applying e-learning (Harandi, 2015), and the results from the current research also reveal that the students who studied the desired specialty preferred to study online, too, that expressed their higher learning motivation. The findings from the present study reveal that e-learning complements traditional learning for acquiring knowledge and skills related to a chosen vocational field. Lack of interest in the studied specialty and the negative attitude to it diminish learning motivation, including motivation for e-learning, too.

Some authors affirm that e-learning can enhance learning motivation (Lin, Chen and Nien, 2014, p. 424) because of its interactive environment (El-Seoud, El-Khouly and Tsj-Eddin, 2016; Lin, Chen and Nien, 2014, p.424), its multi-sense stimuli (Lin, Chen and Nien, 2014, p.424) and
students’ engagement (Harandi, 2015). The findings from the current research contribute to clarifying the reasons why e-learning is related to higher learning motivation – the role of initial motivation to study the desired specialty seems important for self-directed e-learning in the chosen occupational field, as well as diversification of means of study maintains learning motivation using multi-sense and interactive stimuli in e-learning that may be appropriate for different learning styles preferred by students.

Learning motivation may be durable, because less students who wanted to study their specialty before being enrolled at the university preferred to change the specialty that they were studying and thought of giving up their studies than the students who did not want to study their specialty before being enrolled at the university. Motivation for learning the desired specialty may be a constant state that is stimulated by means of online learning and the job requirements. It has been previously established in the scientific literature that learning motivation during online learning changes in dependence on motivation at the beginning of the online course, as well as on perceived quality of online instruction (Kim and Frick, 2011). The results from the present study reveal that motivation for e-learning was higher for the students who studied their desired specialty compared with the students who studied an undesired specialty, and this finding suggests that motivation at the beginning of online learning was higher for those who had chosen the desired specialty that should maintain their durable motivation not only for online learning as established by Kim and Frick (2011), but for traditional learning also as established by the current research. Study of desired specialty related to a chosen future profession leads to more efforts for searching additional information online, better exam results and higher satisfaction with own exam results. Greater learning motivation successfully directs the behaviour for achievement of better results, because less proportion of students who wanted to study their specialty before being enrolled at the university were not satisfied with their exam results and felt unpleasant when they learned than the proportion of students who did not want to study their specialty before being enrolled at the university. Some previous findings have pointed out the importance of pleasant feelings during study for exam results (Poude, Zamani and Abedi, 2011) and this research emphasizes on the link between the pleasant feelings related to satisfaction with the chosen desired specialty and satisfaction with own performance during exams.

This study has some limitations concerning the small and uneven number of the studied students from different specialties, courses, educational degrees, and forms of education. However, participation was voluntarily, and more students were approached and asked to answer the survey, but only those who voluntarily agreed were studied. Another limitation concerns the possibility of non-sincere answers that might be diminished by means of anonymous participation and check for inconsistency of answering the different questions. The results should not be generalized for the students in the specialties and cities that were not represented in this study.

Conclusions

Studying a desired specialty with a favourable attitude towards it seems to enhance learning motivation for traditional education and modern e-learning. It has been revealed the importance of learning motivation (expressed in the form of positive feelings, favourable attitude towards the implemented activity, and constant intents) for successful performance, striving for self-improvement and better preparedness for future occupation. Learning motivation for traditional education may enhance also motivation for e-learning in the area of selected occupational field.

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References


ANALYSIS OF LEISURE TIME AND SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS IN A GROUP OF
TEENAGERS IN MOLDOVA

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Abstract

Objectives. The aim of the study is to find out how students spend their free time and to assess the daily time allocated to these activities; also to determine the presence (or absence) of the group of friends and the parents’ level of interest concerning the child’s school performance and free time activities.

Material and methods. The survey was carried out on a group of 212 pupils, in the 7th and 8th grade, from two different schools, who completed a questionnaire with items about leisure time and social relationships.

Results. Television programs are not viewed by 25.00% young people, the differences calculated by grade and school being statistically insignificant (p>0.05). The time spent on the computer is "zero" in 31.13% cases; the differences are statistically insignificant. The presence of the group of friends is recognized by 56.60% young people, but there are also 10.84% of cases in which the option "none" is chosen; the calculated differences are statistically significant (p<0.05) for both grades and schools. There are 26.88% situations where students do not spend time with friends outside the school. Parents "always" have time when it comes to school performance only in 26.88% of cases and concerning the pupil’s leisure activities in 23.58% of cases. Differences calculated by grade and school are statistically insignificant (p>0.05).

Conclusions. There are many problems with how teenagers spend leisure time and with the parent’s level of interest about school performance.

Keywords: computer games, leisure activities, parents, teenagers.

Introduction

Adolescence is a period between 11 and 18 years of age, and it represents the transition from childhood to adult life. During this period the young person undergoes numerous physical, mental and social changes. It is important to monitor adolescent health in order to avoid the occurrence of sexual problems, nutritional imbalances, psychological problems, cognitive problems (depression, anxiety, social isolation and suicidal tendency) and accidents (Salam et al., 2016).

Particular attention should be paid to the social situations represented by the changing relationship with parents and the appearance of the group of friends. Parents become the preferred confidants when it comes to matters relating to health and school, but not those related to feelings and sex (Ballonoff Suleiman and Dahl, 2017). Parents remain the main pillar when it comes to
school related issues, which requires close collaboration with teachers. Nowadays it is considered that the school should be closer to the community, and the relationship with the parents should be constant (Palmieri and Palma, 2017).

The group of friends becomes more and more important. Students perform numerous group activities, they dress the same, have the same musical and literary tastes, have the same leisure activities and even the same eating habits (Gavât, Albu and Petrariu, 2006). Particular attention should be paid to leisure activities, as young people turn to computer use and socialize on the internet. This type of socialization is often associated with the appearance of loneliness, depression, anxiety and aggressive behavior (Buonomo et al., 2015). Currently, even computer addiction is being described as an emergent issue, which could be as serious as drug addiction. It is also associated with the lack of real friends and the time spent with them. The peer group and curiosity may have a major role in the start of drug use, too (Baciu, 2017). Another issue that may arise is that of nutritional imbalances and the avoidance of specialist advice concerning this problem. It is preferable to young people to obtain information from the online space, a phenomenon that may favor the appearance of body image issues and the use of totally inappropriate diets (Arsenie-Koehler et al., 2016).

The second preferred way of spending leisure time is represented by television programs. Adults spend most of their free time in front of the television, listening to music or meeting with their neighbors (Rada, 2017). With age, there is a 15% increase in the percentage of those who spend time with friends, neighbors and almost 20% of those who spend time in front of the television. In this context, young people will get the same habits as their parents or grandparents and risk becoming sedentary.

**Objectives of the study:** knowing the time spent by young people in front of the television / computer screen and assessing the differences that occur between schools and grade; the presence of the group of friends and the time spent with them; parental interest in the child’s school performance and leisure activities.

**Material and methods**

The study was carried out on a group of 212 pupils in the 7th and 8th grades, aged between 13 and 15 years. The group is comprised of 111 pupils from a National College in Pascani, Iasi County and 101 children from a General School in Dorohoi, Botosani County. These are pupils from two small towns, belonging to two counties in Moldova, Romania. These teenagers were given a questionnaire on leisure time and social relationships.

Leisure time involved evaluating the time spent in front of the television (TV) and computer: "How many hours per day do you spend watching television programs? - using the computer?":

1. Zero 2. 30-60 min. 3. 2-3h 4. 4-5h.

The assessment of social relationships has been quantified using two basic elements represented by the group of friends and parents’ interest level.

**Friends group:** How many true friends do you have?:


In general, how many times per week do you go out with friends after school?:

1. Zero 2. 1 time 3. 2-3 times 4. 4-5 times 5. 6-7 times.

Do parents (at least one of them) help you with how you prepare your homework? - organize your free time?


Interpretation of the results were done separately for the 7th and 8th grades and for the two schools (Paşcani and Dorohoi). The results were processed using the Pearson's chi-squared test.
Results

The results are presented considering the two basic aspects of the study: leisure and social relationships.

At present, basic leisure activities include watching television programs and playing computer games. In most cases, students watch television programs 30-60 minutes (37.73%) or 2-3 hours (30.66%) per day. There are 25.00% of young people who marked the "Zero" option (Table 1).

Differences calculated by school year are statically insignificant (p>0.05, \( \chi^2=3.208 \)) and draw attention to the 8th graders who have to undertake the so called maturity exam. The differences calculated by school are also statistically insignificant (p>0.05, \( \chi^2=2.747 \)) and show a tendency of young people from different counties for spending their free time in front of the TV or computer screen.

Table 1. Daily time spent watching television programs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Grade 7th grade</th>
<th>Grade 8th grade</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Total %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Zero</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Pașcani</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-60 min.</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>Pașcani</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-3 hours</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Pașcani</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-5 hours</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Pașcani</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Another free-time activity preferred by young people is that of playing computer games. The situation is interesting because the dominant answer (31.13%) is "Zero" (Table 2).

Table 2. Daily time spent on the computer

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Grade 7th grade</th>
<th>Grade 8th grade</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Total %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Zero</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Pașcani</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-60 min.</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Pașcani</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-3 hours</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Pașcani</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-5 hours</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Pașcani</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Differences calculated by grades are statistically insignificant (p>0.05, \( \chi^2=5.912 \)), as well as those calculated by school (p>0.05, \( \chi^2=1.436 \)).

The second aspect to be observed is that of the presence of the group of friends and the relationship between the child and the parents. In the studied group the answer "three or more" (friends) is seen in 56.60% of cases. Our attention is drawn to the 10.84% of pupils who marked the "Zero" option (Table 3).

Table 3. The presence of the group of friends

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Friends</th>
<th>Zero</th>
<th>One</th>
<th>Two</th>
<th>Three or more</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7th grade</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8th grade</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>10.84</td>
<td>12.73</td>
<td>19.81</td>
<td>56.60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Results based on school

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Zero</th>
<th>One</th>
<th>Two</th>
<th>Three or more</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pașcani</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dorohoi</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The calculated differences based on school year are statistically significant ($p<0.01 \, f=3, \chi^2=12.505$) and underlines the situation of the 8th grade students where the group of friends becomes less important.

Concerning schools, the differences are statistically significant ($p<0.05 \, f=3, \chi^2=7.962$) and draw attention to the students in Pascani where the group of friends is present, but there are more young people who chose the "two friends" or the "Zero" option. The presence of friends involves time spent with them outside of school. Unfortunately, 26.88% of negative responses appear (Table 4).

### Table 4. Time spent socializing with friends outside of school

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Times per week</th>
<th>Zero</th>
<th>1 time</th>
<th>2-3 times</th>
<th>4-5 times</th>
<th>6-7 times</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Results based on grade</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7th grade</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8th grade</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>57</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>%</strong></td>
<td>26.88</td>
<td>25.00</td>
<td>32.07</td>
<td>6.13</td>
<td>9.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Results based on school</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pașcani</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dorohoi</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The calculated differences based on grade are statistically insignificant ($p>0.05, \, f=4, \chi^2=8.528$). When looking at schools, the calculated differences are statistically significant ($p<0.01 \, f=4, \chi^2=15.060$) and highlight the increased frequency of negative responses from teenagers in Dorohoi.

Only 26.88% of teenagers chose the "always" answer related to parents' interest level. There are 36.32% of "most of the time" responses. Practically in over 60% of cases, the parents check their child’s work. Our attention is drawn to the over one-third of the young people who chose the "rarely" or "never" answers (Table 5).

### Table 5. Parents’ level of interest concerning school performance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interest level</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Total %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7th grade</td>
<td>8th grade</td>
<td>Pașcani</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Always</strong></td>
<td>37</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Most of the time</strong></td>
<td>39</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rarely</strong></td>
<td>26</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Never</strong></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Differences calculated based on grade are statistically insignificant ($p>0.05, \, f=3, \chi^2=6.200$), a worrying result for the students in the 8th grade. The differences when looking at schools are also insignificant statistically ($p>0.05, \, f=3, \chi^2=1.927$).

The leisure activities of the young people are rarely monitored in some families. There are 29.24% of "rarely" answers and 8.96% of "never" answers. Practically, one third of surveyed students are not being supervised in their spare time (Table 6).

### Table 6. Parental preoccupation for leisure activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interest level</th>
<th>Always</th>
<th>Most of the time</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Results based on grade</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7th grade</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8th grade</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest level</td>
<td>Always</td>
<td>Most of the time</td>
<td>Rarely</td>
<td>Never</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>23.58</td>
<td>38.20</td>
<td>29.24</td>
<td>8.96</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Results based on school

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Always</th>
<th>Most of the time</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pașcani</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dorohoi</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Differences calculated by grade are statistically insignificant \((p>0.05, f=3, \chi^2=2.972)\), as well as those based on the school \((p>0.05, f=3, \chi^2=2.069)\).

**Discussions**

There were addressed two essential aspects, that of leisure time and social relationships. Spare time is mostly spent watching television programs and on the computer. In the study, there are 25.00% of the negative answers related to the time spent in front of the TV screen. In a study carried out on teenagers in Iasi we observed the presence of 22.78% of such answers (Albu et al., 2016). There are 22.61% negative answers from the students in the technical colleges in the Moldavian area, which shows a declining interest for viewing TV programs (Albu, Dima and Bădăluță, 2018).

Instead, the computer becomes more and more important to teenagers. There are 31.13% negative responses in the studied group, while in the Iași adolescents study, their frequency drops to 11.81%. It is an unusual answer considering that generally, students tend to spend a lot of time on the computer.

At the technical colleges in Bacau and Suceava, the percentage of negative responses increases to 32.16% and show the existence of different situations, probably related to the type of high school.

In a study carried out on adolescents in Zagreb, there were 72.66% cases of daily computer use, social networking (29.09%), computer games (25.14%), Internet browsing (20.76%), studying (14.32%) (Lazic, Pavlina and Belovic, 2017). Adolescent studies in the Republic of Moldova highlight the presence of 27% of students who use the computer daily, especially for Internet browsing and games (Croitoru, 2015).

In this study, there are 11.79% of students using the computer daily for 4-5 hours, while in the Zagreb group this percentage is 14% and in the Republic of Moldova 14.6%. It is a strange result which should be carefully studied to better understand the interests and concerns of the young people in the studied group. Usually, the time spent in front of the computer is associated with the emergence of online relationships and the tendency to reduce real life relationships with friends. In this context, it is important to evaluate social relationships and especially the existence of the group of friends.

At the ages of 13-15 years, the group of friends is very important, everything is done in groups, and the exclusion from such a group may have the consequences of a real tragedy.

The presence of the group of friends in adolescent life is an essential element for normal social development. We must not overlook the 10.84% of negative responses. A 4.52% negative response rate appears in another high school adolescent study \((10^{th} \text{ and } 11^{th} \text{ grade})\) (Albu et al., 2018). In the current study, the percentage of adolescents with no friends is higher, which is concerning. There are also 26.88% of young people who do not spend time with their friends outside the school. These are situations that need to be known in order to properly intervene when social isolation occurs. In the high school adolescents study, in grades 10 and 11, the percentage was 22.62%, thus being similar. In Japanese adolescents, at the age of 13, 22.8% of boys and 25.8% of girls show a preference for solitude and there are 20.4% of boys and 11.8% of girls in a situation
of social isolation (Endo et al., 2017).

Parents must still help their children to prepare homework assignments and help organize their free time. Unfortunately, many problems arise because they are often very busy and get home tired from work. Parents are rarely interested in students’ school performance in 28.30% of cases or "never" in 8.49% of cases. The modest level of interest that parents show is often associated with the idea that it is only the school's and teacher's obligation and responsibility to solve problems related to teaching children.

When looking at leisure time, 29.24% of "rarely" answers appear and 18.96% of "never" answers. Spare time cannot be the concern of the teaching staff, being entirely the responsibility of the parents. In high school adolescents, the situation is worse because 41.17% of "rarely" responses appear and 26.69% of "never" responses. Also, concerning spare time activities there are 38.00% of "rarely" answers and 20.36% "never" answers. Lack of family supervision (often) is associated with behavioral problems such as smoking (4.8%), alcohol use (16.00%), antisocial behavior (28.2%), and behavioral difficulties (19.6%) (Zilanawala, Sacker and Kelly, 2017). Harmonious family relationships, parents' involvement in education by enforcing rules and supervising leisure were factors that determined the participants to not use illegal drugs (Baciu, 2019).

Regarding the limitations of this study, it can be noticed that the sample includes pupils from two small towns in the counties of Moldova. It would be necessary to extend the study to other parts of the country, which would allow for a better overall picture. Unfortunately, such studies in our country are few and the discussions and interpretation of the results were done with the help of research carried out in the area of Moldova.

Conclusions

In the questioned teenagers, time spent in front of the TV screen is modest, as is the interest for computer games. Few young people sit in front of the TV or computer for a period of 4-5 hours per day. The presence of the group of friends is recognized by most adolescents, but the time spent outside the school with them is nonexistent in over 25% of cases. There is a tendency for social isolation, which is worrying. The most difficult problem is related to the modest preoccupation of parents for school performance and leisure activities. These are pupils in 7th and 8th grades who still need to be supervised and guided, but parents have no time for this aspect of the child’s life. In this context, unwanted behaviors associated with the risk of loss of interest in school activities may occur.

Such studies are important because they enable teachers, school psychologists, physicians and even parents to focus on problematic aspects of the child’s behavior.

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References


Abstract

Objectives. The aim of our study was to show the changes in the nubility of the population of the central Belarus that happened during 1860-2018. Due to the fact that patterns of marriage and unions have changed significantly across the world, it was important to characterize these processes in Belarus.

Materials and methods. The marriage data were acquired from the analysis of the parish registers (5831 entries) and statistical sources. Data was treated by conventional statistical methods.

Results. In the second half of the 19th century and throughout the 20th century, the mean age at first marriage varied between 24.3 and 25.5 for men and between 21.5 and 22.5 for women. The two World Wars were events that greatly affected the marriage patterns on the territory of Belarus in the 20th century, reducing the male population. The first divorces were registered in the 1920s, and in the early 21st century, more than half of the registered marriages ended in divorce. Significant changes in the marriage pattern occurred in the early 21st century. Over the period between 2000 and 2017, the mean age at first marriage increased by 3 years for men (28.0 years), and by 2.9 years for women (25.6 years).

Conclusions. The population in the central part of Belarus in the second half of the 19th century and throughout the 20th century was characterized by the traditional type of nuptiality (young age at first marriage, low permanent celibacy levels). The traditional marriage pattern was substituted by a European one at the turn of the 21st century (late age at first marriage, high permanent celibacy rates and high percentage of consensual unions).

Keywords: nubility, Central Belarus, traditional and European marriage patterns.

Introduction

During the 20th and the early 21st centuries marriage and family as institutions of reproduction and primary socialization of new generations were losing their functions in many countries: the birth rate is declining, the number of divorces and illegitimate births is increasing. Transformational processes in the sphere of marriage, family are the result of the influence of many factors: culture, economy, state, law, religion and others.

Today in Belarus, family is considered as a social value, state efforts are directed to supporting family relations, preparing young people for family life. However, researchers more objectively describe realities and prospects of modern society (Kalacheva, 2008; Sosnovskaya, 2015; Solovey and Shuhno, 2018). Over the last 160 years, the marriage patterns of the population on the territory of Belarus have changed significantly. There are no enough works that would reflect changes of separate characteristics in the marriage and family sphere throughout such long time.
In 2017-2019, with the support of the Belarusian Republican Foundation for Fundamental Research, Belarusian anthropologists and historical demographers implemented the project "Evolution of socio-demographic aspects of the Belarusian family (the second half of 19th – the early 21st centuries)", which allowed to take the first steps in the analysis of long-term dynamics in the field of marriage and family relations.

The aim of our study was to show the changes in the nubility of the population of the central Belarus that happened during 1860-2018.

Material and methods

Analysis of data on the age at marriage of the population in the central part of Belarus, we conducted on the basis of information on the Minsk region. The territory of the Minsk region within its modern boundaries was determined only by 1960 and today includes 22 districts (figure 1). During the period of the Russian Empire (up to 1917) some territories of the modern Minsk region were a part of the Minsk, Mogilev and Vilnius provinces. In 1921, western Belarus (including the region studied) became part of the Second Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, the eastern part of the modern Minsk region then became part of the USSR.

Figure 1. Minsk region on the map of Belarus (a), Belarus on the map of Europe (b)

The marriage data for the period between the 1860s and the 1930s were acquired from the analysis of the parish registers (5831 entries). Parish registers (metric books) on this region are kept in the National Historical Archives of Belarus in Minsk, the National Historical Archives of Belarus in Grodno and in the Lithuanian State Historical Archives, and are also partially accessible online (National Historical Archives of Belarus, etc.).

Metric books are the only mass sources containing data on births, marriages and deaths in the 19th – the early 20th centuries. In the interwar period (between World War I and World War II) in the Soviet territory due to the negative attitude to religion, as well as the gradual development of the state system for civil registration, metric records were actively replaced by public records. After the end of World War II in the territory of Minsk region marriages officially began to be registered only by the civil registry offices.

For the analysis of age at marriage from the 1860 to 1938, we took data on 13 Orthodox parishes of Vileyka and Sventyany districts of Vilnius province (now – Minsk region). 3 Orthodox parishes were located in cities (Vileyka, Maladzyechna), 10 – in the nearby countryside. The
population in the second half of the 19th and early 20th centuries in this area was predominantly rural: according to the 1897 census, the proportion of rural dwellers in the region was 86.5% (The first general census of the Russian Empire in 1897). Nationality was not specifically indicated in the metric books. Belarusians comprised the majority of the region’s population (86.9% according to the 1897 census). Apart from marriages between Orthodox people, mixed marriages (Orthodox with Catholic or with Protestant) were also registered in churches of that time: the share of such marriages in the parishes studied varied from 0.7 to 14.4%. Data on marriages and divorces in Slutsk district for 1928 were also studied (State Archives of Minsk Region, 1928).

The marriage data between the second half of the 20th and the early 21st centuries were acquired from statistical sources and scientific articles (Statistical Yearbook of Minsk region, 2018; Demographic yearbook of the Republic of Belarus, 2018). Although the data for that period encompassed the representatives of all nationalities, Belarusians in the Minsk region made up the majority of the population. Their share in the total population varied during those years from 85.1 to 88.8% (Ethnic composition of the population of the Republic of Belarus, 2011). It is quite difficult to calculate the share of the Orthodox population in modern Belarus given that certain part of the population does not identify themselves with the members of any specific religious denomination after the period of active atheistic propaganda in times of the Soviet Union. The majority of believers in Minsk region consider themselves Orthodox.

We have considered the following periods:
1) 1860-1913 (before World War I) – this is the time when the territory of Belarus was part of the Russian Empire. This period was divided into 2 parts: 1860-1889 and 1890-1913;
2) 1914-1920 (wartime) – the time of World War I (1914-1918), the Civil war (1917-1922), and the Soviet-Polish war (1919-1921). We limited time interval to the year of 1920, since the military operations in the studied region ended in 1920, the following year of 1921 was the beginning of peacetime;
3) 1921-1939 – interwar time, the territory of Minsk region was a part of the USSR and the Second Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth;
4) 1945-1990 – the time of the USSR, the Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic (BSSR) was one of the 15 republics of the Soviet Union;

The period of World War II was not included into the analysis; data on marriages at this time are not developed.

Basic descriptive statistics were computed. Chi-square test was used to evaluate differences between relative indicators. Between-period comparisons of mean age at marriage were performed separately for each gender using the Student’s t-test. Significance of differences is determined by the p-value < 0.05.

Results

1860-1913. In 1860-1889, the mean age at first marriage was 24.3 years for men and 21.5 years for women (Table 1). The majority of women (50.6%) took marriage to 20 years, 41.2% – at the age of 21-25 years, i.e. 91.8% of women under 25 years were already married. Men most often formed a family in 21-25 years (47.2%), somewhat less – under the age of 20 years (22.2%) and 26-30 years (21.7%) (Tables 2, 3).

In the second half of the 19th century divorces were extremely rare. For the period 1867-1887 among the Orthodox population of the local Lithuanian diocese only 85 divorces were registered (4.7 per 10 thousand marriages), of which: for unknown absence – 50, for adultery – 19, for deprivation of all rights – 15 and for the inability to marital cohabitation – 1 (Bechasnov, 1893). Up to the late 1910s, both men and women remarried only after the death of their spouse, divorces were not common.
In 1860–1889 in the Minsk region men remarried at the age of 41.7 years on average, women – at the age of 35.9 years. Women most actively entered into a second (or third) marriage after 40 years (28.2%), as well as at the age of 26–30 and 31–35 years (21.2% and 20.0%, respectively). Men were also more likely to remarry after 40 years (47.4% of all remarriages). Men remarried almost twice as often as women.

Mean age at first marriage in the early 20th century was for men 24.9 years, which is by half a year (p < 0.01) more than in the second half of the 19th century, for women – 22.3 years, which is by 0.8 year higher (p < 0.001).

In 1890–1913 in relation to 1860–1889 the proportion of men forming families at earlier ages declined: up to 20 years – from 22.2 to 13.4% (-8.8%, p <0.001), in 21–25 years – from 47.2 to 45.6 % (-1.6%). The percent of grooms aged 36–40 years also decreased from 3.3% to 0.7% (-2.6%, p <0.001). At the same time, the proportion of marriages at 26–30 years was increased – from 21.7% to 34.5% (+12.8%, p <0.001) and at 31–35 years – from 4.5% to 5.3% (+0.8%).

As well as men, the share of women who married at earlier age fell: up to 20 years – from 50.6 to 46.3% (-4.3%, p < 0.05), in 21–25 years – from 41.2 to 37.6% (-3.6%). At the same time, the percent of later marriages increased: in 26-30 years – from 5.6 to 10.7% (+5.1%, p < 0.001), in 31-35 years – from 1.7 to 3.4% (+1.7%, p < 0.01).

Mean remarriage age in 1890–1913 was 40.1 years for men and 35.3 years for women. Men, as in the previous period, most often enter into a second (third) marriage after 40 years (45.4%), women had three such periods — after 40 years (24.0%), 31-35 (23.0%) and 26–30 years (22.0%).

1914-1920. During the 160-year period under consideration, military events in the central part of Belarus happened several times: in 1914-1921 – World War I (1914-1918), Civil war (1918-1919) and the Soviet-Polish war (1919-1921); in 1941-1944 – World War II. The two World Wars were the events that greatly affected the marriage patterns on the territory of Belarus in the 20th century, reducing the male population, and also increasing the migration activity of the population. We have considered the peculiarities of marriage during World War I.

On the Belarusian lands in 1914 martial law was imposed. According to different calculations, 800–900 thousand men were mobilized from the Belarusian provinces. In addition to mobilization, the Belarusian lands were affected by the refugee process. According to various sources, from 1 million 130 thousand to 2 million 290 thousand people left their permanent place of residence for the period of military actions (Volkava, 2018). Since 1915 in the territory of the region for two and a half years the Russian-German’s front line stabilized (Smolyaninov, 2017). Most of the land of the current Minsk region was on the Russian side of the front. In the frontline zone a large number of men – soldiers, officers of the active army – appeared near local girls.
Table 1. Mean age at marriage of the population of the central part of Belarus in 1860-1938 (years)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marriage</th>
<th>Parameter</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Differences of mean values between time periods</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Differences of mean values between time periods</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>time periods</td>
<td></td>
<td>time periods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1    2  3  4</td>
<td></td>
<td>1    2  3  4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>949</td>
<td>1464</td>
<td>973  1425</td>
<td>1078</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>24.3</td>
<td>24.9</td>
<td>25.5 25.3</td>
<td>21.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>S</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>4.0  4.1 4.2</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>4.6  4.0 3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remarriage</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>302</td>
<td>306  189 184</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>100  92 119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>41.7</td>
<td>40.1</td>
<td>39.9 38.1</td>
<td>35.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>S</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>9.5  9.8 10.1</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>8.3  8.3 8.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Time periods: 1 – 1860-1889, 2 – 1890-1913, 3 – 1914-1920, 4 – 1921-1938; t-test, p-value: * – < 0,05; ** – < 0,01; *** – < 0,001; N – number of records, M – average age at marriage, S – standard deviation
Table 2. First marriages and remarriages at different age intervals for men of the central part of Belarus in 1860–1938

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>1860–1889 (1)</th>
<th>1890–1913 (2)</th>
<th>1914–1920 (3)</th>
<th>1921–1938 (4)</th>
<th>Differences between time periods</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First marriage</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>≤ 20</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>13.4</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21–25</td>
<td>448</td>
<td>47.2</td>
<td>667</td>
<td>45.6</td>
<td>429</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26–30</td>
<td>206</td>
<td>21.7</td>
<td>505</td>
<td>34.5</td>
<td>367</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31–35</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36–40</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt; 40</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>949</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>1464</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>973</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Remarriage    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    | d   | χ²  | d   | χ²  | d   | χ² |
|---------------|    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    | d   | χ²  | d   | χ²  | d   | χ² |
| ≤ 20          | 0  | 0.0  | 0  | 0.0  | 0  | 0.0  | 0  | 0.0  | 0.0  | 0.0  | -  | 0.0  | -  | 0.0  | -  |
| 21–25         | 10 | 3.3  | 12 | 3.9  | 3  | 1.6  | 11 | 5.9  | +0.6 | 0.16 | -2.3 | 2.17 | +4.3* | 4.98 |
| 26–30         | 42 | 13.9 | 48 | 15.7 | 37 | 19.6 | 38 | 20.7 | +1.8 | 0.38 | +3.9 | 1.24 | +1.1 | 0.07 |
| 31–35         | 48 | 15.9 | 43 | 14.1 | 32 | 16.9 | 35 | 19.0 | -1.8 | 0.41 | +2.8 | 0.75 | +2.1 | 0.28 |
| 36–40         | 59 | 19.5 | 64 | 20.9 | 33 | 17.5 | 38 | 20.7 | +1.4 | 0.18 | -3.4 | 0.89 | +3.2 | 0.62 |
| > 40          | 143 | 47.4 | 139 | 45.4 | 84 | 44.4 | 62 | 33.7 | -1.9 | 0.23 | -1.0 | 0.05 | -10.7* | 4.52 |
| Total         | 302 | 100.0 | 306 | 100.0 | 189 | 100.0 | 184 | 100.0 |      |      |      |      |      |      |

In tables 2-3 d – differences, %; p-value: * – < 0.05; ** – < 0.01; *** – < 0.001
### Table 3. First marriages and remarriages at different age intervals for women of the central part of Belarus in 1860–1938

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>1860–1889 (1)</th>
<th>1890–1913 (2)</th>
<th>1914–1920 (3)</th>
<th>1921–1938 (4)</th>
<th>Differences between time periods</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First marriage</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>≤ 20</td>
<td>546</td>
<td>50.6</td>
<td>775</td>
<td>46.3</td>
<td>488</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21–25</td>
<td>444</td>
<td>41.2</td>
<td>630</td>
<td>37.6</td>
<td>438</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26–30</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31–35</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36–40</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt; 40</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1078</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>1674</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>1065</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Remarriage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>1860–1889 (1)</th>
<th>1890–1913 (2)</th>
<th>1914–1920 (3)</th>
<th>1921–1938 (4)</th>
<th>Differences between time periods</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>≤ 20</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21–25</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>12.3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26–30</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>21.2</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>22.0</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31–35</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>23.0</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36–40</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>19.1</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>19.0</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt; 40</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>28.2</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>24.0</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
If in 1914-1915 only local people took marriage, then in the next three years of World War I (1916–1918) local girls actively married soldiers and officers of the field force from different regions of the Russian Empire (54.7% of the registered marriages).

The average age at first marriage in war period compared with the previous one for men increased by 0.6 years (p <0.001) and amounted to 25.5 years, while for women, on the contrary, it decreased slightly (-0.4 years) and was equal to 21.9 years. As in 1890-1913, during this period men more often started a family in 21-25 years (44.1%) and in 26-30 years (37.7%). The proportion of young grooms (up to 20 years) continued to decrease – from 13.4 to 9.8% (p <0.01), but the share of 36-40-year-old grooms increased – from 0.7 to 2.3% (p <0.001). The share of young brides remained high among girls: under 20 years (45.8%) and 21-25 years (41.1%).

The mean age at remarriage continued to decline in both men and women and amounted to 39.9 and 33.4 years, respectively. Men, as before, entered into the second and third marriages mainly after 40 years (44.4%), women most often remarried at the age of 26-30 and after 40 (26.1 and 22.8% of all marriages, respectively).

1921-1938. The average age at first marriage in 1921-1938 was 25.3 years in men. For the period from 1860-1889 to 1921-1938 the average age at first marriage in men increased by 1.0 year (p <0.001). Women entered into their first marriage at the age of 21.5 (-0.4 years by 1914-1920, p <0.01). In the period from 1860-1889 to 1921-1938 the mean age at first marriage for women varied somewhat, but eventually returned to its original value.

In 1921-1938, 49.3% of men preferred to marry at 21-25 years (+5.2% to the previous period, p < 0.05), 31.9% – at 26-30 years (-5.9%, p < 0.01, respectively). As in all previous periods, girls married more often before the age of 20 (49.4%) and at the age of 21-25 (40.8%).

Men remarried at 38.1 years, women – at 32.1 years. In the period from 1860-1889 to 1921-1938 the average age at remarriage in both men and women has been steadily decreasing: by 3.6 and 3.8 years, respectively (in both cases p <0.001). So, men became less likely to remarry after 40 years – only 33.7% (-10.7% compared to 1914-1920, p <0.05), but more often at 21-40 years (in 21-25 years – +4.3%, p <0.05).

1939-1990. Information on the characteristics of the marriage of the population during World War II in Belarus is not available and requires further development. Also, there are no data both in official statistics and in scientific studies on the mean age at marriage in the period from 1946 to 1989. There is only data on the mean age of the bride and groom in 1990 – the last year of Belarus’s stay in the Soviet Union (figure 2). Thus, the mean age of a man from the Minsk region in 1990 at the first marriage was 24.6 years (-0.7 years to the period 1921-1938), at the second – 37.9 years (-0.2 years), women – 22.5 (+1.0 years) and 35.7 years (+3.6 years), respectively.

On the basis of published and unpublished statistics from the USSR Russian researcher Zakharov tried to reconstruct the average age at marriage of women in the European region of the Soviet Union, including Belarus (Table 4). Thus, the average age of women at their first marriage varied from 1949 to 1984 in the range of 21.9-22.5 years, which is close to the data we received. The high percentage of unmarried women by the age of 50 in 1949-1959 reflected significant losses in the male population during World War II.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Territory</th>
<th>Mean age for marriage up to 50 years</th>
<th>Never married by 50 years, %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1949-1959</td>
<td>USSR</td>
<td>22.3</td>
<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1965-1968</td>
<td>Russia, Ukraine, Belarus</td>
<td>21.9</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975-1978</td>
<td>Russia, Ukraine, Belarus</td>
<td>21.9</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In the statistical yearbook "Population of the USSR, 1988" was demonstrated within which age range the citizens of BSSR married in 1978 and 1988 (Population of the USSR, 1988, 1989). In this period both young men and women most frequently started families between the ages of 20-24: 53.6-61.1% of young men and 42.4-49.0% of women (Table 5). Furthermore, young women also often married before the age of 20 (24.1-26.2% of early marriages of the total). From 1978 to 1988 the proportion of earlier marriages declined for both young men and women. Accordingly, the percentage of marriages contracted at older ages increased. Unfortunately, the data on first marriages and remarriages were combined impeding the analysis.

Table 5. Marriages of Belarusians of the BSSR (first marriage and remarriages together) at different age intervals in 1978 and 1988 (Population of the USSR, 1988, 1989)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Territory</th>
<th>Mean age for marriage up to 50 years</th>
<th>Never married by 50 years, %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1980-1984</td>
<td>Russia, Ukraine, Belarus</td>
<td>22.5</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The first divorces were registered in the 1920s, and their number has increased greatly over time. So, for example, already in 1928 in the Slutsk region, there were 69 divorces for 441 marriages (State Archives of Minsk Region, 1928). The change in the dynamics of the crude marriage and divorce rates by the Minsk region after World War II was shown in figure 3.

1991-2018. In 1991, Belarus gained independence and since this time began to develop as the independent state. Since mid-1995, official statistics have recorded a significant change in the average age of first marriage registration for both men and women.

Throughout the 20th century, the mean age at first marriage varied between 24.3 and 25.5 for men and between 21.5 and 22.5 for women. The progressive increase in the age of first and second marriages began in 1995. From 1995 to 2017 the average age of first marriage in the Minsk region increased for men by 3.7 years: from 24.3 to 28.0 years, for women by 3.5 years: from 22.5 to 25.6 years. The average age at remarriage also increased accordingly – for men by 4.3 years: from 37.4 to 41.7 years, for women by 3.1 years: from 35.2 to 38.3 years (figure 2).

The first divorces were registered in the 1920s, and their number has increased greatly over time. So, for example, already in 1928 in the Slutsk region, there were 69 divorces for 441 marriages (State Archives of Minsk Region, 1928). The change in the dynamics of the crude marriage and divorce rates by the Minsk region after World War II was shown in figure 3.
Figure 2. Mean age at marriage by the Minsk region, Belarus from 1990 to 2017 (years): a – first marriage, b – remarriage

Figure 3. Crude marriage and divorce rates by the Minsk region, Belarus from 1950 to 2018
In 2018 in the Minsk region there were 5041 divorces for 8881 marriages (Minsk region in numbers, 2019). Divorce rates have been steadily increasing since 1950, reaching their maximum value in 2000 (4.2). Whereas previously the only possibility of remarriage was the death of a spouse, now in most cases remarriage is after divorce.

**Discussions**

Metric books are the primary sources with a huge information base for researchers. The Belarusian researcher Nosevich (2004) on the example of one micro-region (now it is the Logoisk district of the Minsk region), using metric books, traced the peculiarities of marriage among the population from 1740 to 1858 (Nosevich, 2004). It was found that between 1780-1793 and 1821-1851 the mean marriage age for men increased by 3.5 years: from 20.1 to 23.6 years, for women – by 3.0 years: from 19.8 to 22.8 years (data for 485 men and 501 women).

Then (based on an analysis of our data) over a long period of time – from 1860 to 1995 – the average age at first marriage varied in a rather tight range: for men from 24.3 to 25.5 years, for women from 21.5 to 22.5 years. During this period significant socio-economic, political and other changes took place in what is now Belarus as a whole, and the Minsk region in particular. However these changes did not significantly affect the age at marriage.

As the region under consideration was primarily agricultural, the Manifesto on the abolition of serfdom in 1861 was an important event in life of the peasant population of the Russian Empire in the 19th century. Peasant reform did not lead to a simultaneous change in the situation of peasants, but created the conditions for the gradual cessation of serfdom in subsequent years.

In general, at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries in terms of the average age at first marriage, European Russia, even taking into account the western and northern provinces with their later marriage, was much closer to the agrarian East European countries (Bulgaria, Romania, Serbia), or to the countries of Asia than to the countries of Western Europe and North America. Whereas in Western Europe and North America the mean marriage age for women ranged from 24 to 27 years and for men – from 27 to 29 years, in Russia it was at least 4 years lower for both sexes (Zaharov, 2006a).

The tradition of early marriages existed long in the Russian Empire. In Western Europe from the middle of the second millennium, a new, European marriage pattern began to spread (Hajnal, 1979). Two main distinguishing features of the European marriage pattern were the late age at first marriage and the high incidence of permanent celibacy. With the exception of the Baltic provinces and some other areas with a significant share of the Protestant and Catholic population, whose marriage pattern was close to the European one, traditional early and almost universal marriage dominated throughout the rest of the Russian Empire (Vishnevskiy and Tolc, 1988).

According to our data, although the average age at first marriage for both men and women was quite stable between 1860-1913, but in 1890-1913 compared to 1860–1889 a slight increase was observed (by 0.5-0.8 years), a decrease in the proportion of marriages at an early age and a certain increase in the percentage of marriages at later ages are also revealed. At the same time almost half of girls (46.3-50.6%) married under 20 years of age.

According to Vishnevskiy (1977), the traditions of early marriages were still very strong. Changes in the second half of the 19th – the early 20th centuries although have occurred, were not very pronounced and affected only those provinces where after the agrarian reform
industry quickly developed and the peasantry’s migratory mobility intensified. In our case, the proportion of early marriages in men decreased significantly: from 22.2 to 13.5%.

The World War I and World War II, the Russian Revolution were important events in the 20th century. Since 1921, the territory of the Minsk region was divided between two states – the USSR and the Second Polish Republic. Two world wars influenced the marriage behavior of the population: due to the significant loss of the male population during the wars, many women at a young age became widows, i.e. the average age of remarriage decreased especially strongly among women (32.1 years in 1921-1938). Also, after the war, the proportion of never-married women under 50 increased (8.0% after World War II).

The process of urbanization was a significant socio-economic process in Belarus in the 20th century. Urbanization took place most actively during the second half of the century. The share of urban population in the republic increased more than 3 times due to migrations of the rural population: from 21.0 in 1950 to 66.1% in 1990 respectively.

The social norm, determining the age of the first marriage as 21–22 years for women and 24–25 years for men, has been maintained throughout the life of a number of generations, despite the gigantic political and socio-economic changes that have occurred in Belarusian society during this time.

Recent trends in the transformation of the age model of marriage do not look an exception against the background of other countries. In Western countries the first signs of an increase in the age at marriage were found in the second half of the 1970s, and in the 1980s this trend became prevailing in almost all European and non-European developed countries, with the exception of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe (Zaharov, 2006a; Zaharov, 2006b). In Belarus and the Minsk region, these trends began to appear only after 1995, at the beginning of the 21st century. New aspects in the reproductive behavior of the population, which European demographers associate with ideas about the second demographic transition, became especially noticeable in Belarus in the 1990s.

In 2017, the average age at first marriage for women in the Minsk region, Belarus was 25.6, for men – 28.0 years. However, in comparison with other countries, the mean age at first marriage was relatively low. In European countries, for example, the mean age at first marriage varied between 24.8 (Turkey) and 33.8 years (Sweden) for women, 29.6 (Poland) and 36.6 years (Sweden) for men (Eurostat).

In addition to increasing the mean age at marriage, the number of divorces, the number of consensual unions in Belarus as a whole was growing. As the 2009 census showed, 5.1% of men and 4.2% of women out of the total number were in cohabiting relationships. For 10 inter-census years (1999-2009) this indicator has grown almost one and a half times, from 3.5% to 5.1% in men and from 3% to 4.2% in women. The vast majority of men and women in Belarus have married. Permanent celibacy rates in the republic were relatively low. According to the 2009 census, only 5.9% of men aged 50 years and 3.9% of women were never married. Comparison of the proportion of never-married men and women in the Republic of Belarus aged 45-49 years with the corresponding data for other countries indicated that in Belarus this indicator remained at a relatively low level, although it had rather high growth rates (Shakhotska, 2015).

Conclusions

The population in the central part of Belarus in the second half of the 19th century and
throughout the 20th century was characterized by the traditional pattern of nuptiality, with early marriage and low permanent celibacy levels. Until the 1910s, the vast majority of remarriages followed the death of a spouse. The number of divorces started growing in the 1920s, and thus in the early 21st century, more than half of the registered marriages eventually broke up. Due to socio-economic, political, and cultural changes in the country, the traditional marriage pattern was substituted by a European one at the turn of the 21st century (late age at first marriage, high permanent celibacy rates, and high percentage of consensual unions).

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Abstract

Objectives. The aim of this study was to determine the variability of socio-demographic aspects of the family in Belarus during the 20th and at the beginning of the 21st centuries, based on the analysis of the survey results.

Material and methods. In the early 1980s and in 2017, by questioning young women, information was obtained about them, their spouses, children and two generations of ancestors (in all 6406 individuals born from 1885 to 2017). Five generations were divided: of the early 20th century, of the 1930s, the 1950s, of the 1980s and of the early 21st century.

Results. For the considered period the generation time reduced from 28 to 24 years. During 20th century the mean number of children in families decreased by more than 2.5 times, the mean age of women at birth of first child increased, the age of birth of last child decreased, the proportion of women whose first birth was under the age of 20 has decreased. In difficult socio-economic conditions, in conditions of war (the generation of the 1930s), the childbearing is delayed. During the 20th century the influence of urbanization on the formation of the structure of generations increases and the influence of immigration decreases.

Conclusions. The composition of the family in Belarus from the beginning of the 20th to the beginning of the 21st century changes in an unfavorable direction and the natural decrease is not compensated by migration processes.

Keywords: demography, birthrate, migration, urbanization, Belarusian family.

Introduction

Demographic and social processes in populations directly relate to many aspects of human biological variability. Place of birth, nationality, confessional affiliation, place of residence, marital status, education and social status, indicators of socio-professional and qualification character, family structure, number of children, brothers and sisters and others may affect the indicators of physical development, health status of individuals and population as a whole. The intensity of migration, the vital rate (natality and mortality) are associated with the
intergenerational transfer of biological and cultural information. They determine the total population and the proportion of people of reproductive age, the ratio of the indigenous and alien populations. Long-lasting unfavorable socio-economic conditions impede the formation and the growth of the size of families, becoming factors that reduce the reproductive volume of the population (Spicina, 2006; Dubkova, 2008). Social changes contribute to the age structure of childbearing (Sifman, 1974). The study of socio-demographic processes is becoming the basis for determining the socio-economic policy of the state in the short and long term (Shakhotko, 2010; Kasperovich, 2018). To assess the composition of the family and the population reproduction, such demographic indicators are used as the age at first marriage, the age of women at birth of first child, the childbearing age, the parity etc. (Tegako et al., 2006; Marfina, 2015).

According to official statistics in 2018, the number of inhabitants in the Republic of Belarus was 9491.8 thousand people (National Statistical Committee of the Republic of Belarus, 2018), since 1994 it has decreased by 874.0 thousand people. Since 1995, in the country, a natural decrease was fixed. In developed countries migration makes an important contribution to maintaining the total population (United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, 2017). Migration gain in Belarus in 2018 was only 9.4 thousand people. The result was the increase in demographic burden: the reduction in the proportion of the working age population. Rate of natural decrease (the ratio of the number of deaths to the number of births) was 1.2 in 2017. At the same time, the urbanization continues in the republic, the population moves from villages to cities: from 1897 to 2018 the proportion of the urban population increased from 13.5% to 78.1%, and the rural population decreased from 86.5% to 21.9%. This process was most active from the 1950s to the 1980s (Demographic yearbook of the Republic of Belarus, 2015; Demographic yearbook of the Republic of Belarus, 2016).

The purpose of the work is to analyze the evolution of the socio-demographic aspects of the family in Belarus throughout the 20th and the early 21st centuries, based on an analysis of the results of the questioning.

Material and methods

The materials were the results of a questioning of young women. In the early 1980s through an individual questioning of Marfina collected detailed information about families uniting 3377 people and in 2017, Skryhan received information about families uniting 3029 people. The survey covered the whole territory of Belarus. According to the approach adopted in demography, the material is grouped by conditional (hypothetical) generations of people of different ages living at the same time (Nikiteno, 1975; Sifman, 1974, p. 9). The term "generation" was used as a genetic concept: generation is all the direct progeny of individuals of the previous generation (Timofeev-Resovsky, Yablokov and Glotov, 1973, p. 139). The traditional frequency of fixation of population changes is 25-year intervals correlated with the division into generations.

The questionnaire developed will allow collecting information about the relatives (ancestors) and children of the women being interviewed and their spouses (Marfina, 1981). Based on the information provided in the questionnaires, the chronologic age was calculated, data on sex, nationality, level of education, age at marriage, age of women at birth of first and subsequent children were highlighted. In total, as a result of the survey, information was obtained on residents born from 1885 to 2017. The children of the women surveyed formed one
generation. The women themselves, their husbands, brothers and sisters made up the next generation. A separate generation was made up of the mothers and fathers of the women and their spouses surveyed, another one – grandmothers and grandfathers, and the eldest – great-grandmothers and great-grandfathers. In all 5 generations were singled out.

With regard to the complex nature of the research, the methods of biological and social scientific disciplines were used in the work: genealogical and demographic information was obtained (Marfina, 2017; Skrigan, 2018). Some of the information from the questionnaires could not be used in the study due to the incompleteness of the data. This fact affected the different populations of the groups at different stages of the analysis.

Results

The numerical content of the generations and the mean year of birth for each generation is showed in the Table 1: V generation – generation of the beginning of the 20th century, IV – of the 1930s, III – of the 1950s, II – of the 1980s and I – of the beginning of the 21st century.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Generation</th>
<th>The number of individuals, genealogically related to this generation, men</th>
<th>Year of birth (mean value)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>V</td>
<td>502</td>
<td>1904</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV</td>
<td>1358</td>
<td>1932</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>3044</td>
<td>1957</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>1151</td>
<td>1981</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>355</td>
<td>2005</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Intergenerational intervals by mean year of birth were: between V and IV – 28 years, IV and III – 25 years, III and II, II and I – 24 years. As already noted, the measure of the length of a generation in demographic studies is conventionally taken 25 years. Usually, the smaller this interval, the shorter the cycle of generations’ renewals, the more rapidly the population grows.

Within each generation, individuals were distributed over 5-year intervals depending on the year of their birth. This made it possible to assess the filling of each generation by individuals of a certain age (figure 1). The tops of the distributions and intersections of generations were identified quite clearly.
The determination of the generational renewal interval was performed by calculating the mean age of women at birth of first child. During the 20th century, from the oldest generation V (on average, born in 1904) to generation II (born on average in 1981), there was a slight increase in the mean age of women at birth of first child (figure 2). Amongst men, the opposite tendency is observed – a decrease of the age at which their first child appears. A decrease in the age of birth of last child is identified, both in women and men. The interval between the births of the first and last child were: for women in generation V – 12.5 years, in generation IV – 7.5 years, in generation III – 5.6, in generation II – 5.7 years; for men – 12.5, 7.3, 6.1 and 6.2 years, respectively.
Figure 2. The average age of women and men of the generations V-II at the birth of the first and last children

Figure 3 presents the results of the distribution by age intervals (up to 20 years, 20-24 years, 25-29 years and over 30 years) of women of the V-II generations depending on the age of the first childbirth.

Figure 3. The distribution of women of the V – II generations depending on the age of the first childbirth by intervals (up to 20 years, 20-24 years, 25-29 years, over 30 years)

The highest frequency of firstborn births by women in the age up to 20 years is in the oldest generation V, in the age range 20-24 years – in generation II (on average born in 1981),
and in age intervals 25-29 years and over 30 years old – in generation IV (average birth year 1932). In general, over the course of the 20th century, the firstborn birth frequency by women up to the age of 20, as well as women aged 30 years and older, decreases, while in cases of women aged 20-24 years and 25-29 years gradually increases. In generation IV (on average born in 1932) the proportion of women whose first birth was under the age of 20 was reduced, and the proportion of those who gave birth in age of 25 and older was increased. The average interval between the birth dates of children (if a woman has more than one child) at the beginning of the 20th century was 4 years, in generation IV – 4.6 years, in generation III – 4.7 years, at the end of the 20th century – 5.2 years.

The average birthrate (the average number of children born by one woman) decreased by more than 2.5 times from the beginning of the 20th century to the beginning of the 21st century. Figure 4 shows the number of siblings in each generation. From generation IV to III, the indicator decreased by 1.6 times, from III to II – 1.25 times. It should be noted that at the time of the research among the representatives of generation II some women were in reproductive age and probably did not complete the realization of reproductive potential, thus an increase in the average number of siblings in generation feasible. The mean chronologic age of women in group II was 35 years and 10 months, while the proportion of women under 30 years old is 26.6%, up to 40 years old is 40.4% and up to 50 years old is 33.0%.

**Figure 4. The average number of siblings in a family, generation V-I**

![Figure 4. The average number of siblings in a family, generation V-I](image)

The change in the structure of Belarusian family relative to the number of children is presented in Table 2. The proportion of large families (having 3 or more children) from the beginning of the 20th century to the beginning of the 21st century has decreased more than 4 times. From IV to III generation, the indicator decreased by 2.3 times, from III to II – 1.9 times. In the younger generations (both in II and III), families with more than 6 children were not observed, while in generation IV their proportion was 8.5% and in generation V – 24.2%.

**Table 2. The occurrence frequency of families with different number of children, %**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Generation</th>
<th>1 child</th>
<th>2 children</th>
<th>3 children</th>
<th>4 children</th>
<th>5 children</th>
<th>6 or more children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>V (1904)</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV (1932)</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>30.3</td>
<td>26.1</td>
<td>14.8</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>13.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
When studying of the change the composition of the family under the influence of migration processes, geographical (Belarus, other countries) and socio-economic factors (city, village) were taken into account.

Figure 5 shows the change in the proportion of the urban population for generations V-II. The place of birth and residence of individuals was considered. Distinctions in distributions reflect the intensity of the urbanization in the 20th century. The migration of individuals from villages to cities was largely determined by marital affiliations. The greatest increase in the urban population due to the relocation of a person from rural areas was noted for generation III – by 29%.

**Figure 5. The distribution of representatives of generations V-II depending on the place of birth and residence (city / village), %**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Generation</th>
<th>1 child</th>
<th>2 children</th>
<th>3 children</th>
<th>4 children</th>
<th>5 children</th>
<th>6 or more children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>III (1957)</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>57.5</td>
<td>20.7</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II (1981)</td>
<td>43.2</td>
<td>42.2</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The contribution of internal migration and immigration to the change in the family structure is reflected in figure 6. Four groups of individuals are distinguished: 1 – natives of the cities of Belarus; 2 – natives of the villages of Belarus; 3 – migrants from cities and urban villages of other countries; 4 – migrants from villages of other countries.
Figure 6. Distribution of representatives of generations V-I by place of birth, %

Table 3 presents the main statistical parameters of fertility in cities and rural areas of Belarus in the generations of the 20th century. The sample of generation V was not numerous (in particular, the city) but the indicators for it were also calculated to get an idea of the general trend.

Table 3. Statistical parameters of fertility in the V-II generations (city / rural settlement)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Generation</th>
<th>Number of women in the sample with children (N)</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Max</th>
<th>Skew</th>
<th>Mode (M₀)</th>
<th>p10</th>
<th>p25</th>
<th>50p</th>
<th>p75</th>
<th>p90</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>V (1904)</td>
<td>33 city 7 village 26</td>
<td>2.86</td>
<td>1.68</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5.35</td>
<td>2.80</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0.98</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV (1932)</td>
<td>319 city 120 village 199</td>
<td>2.56</td>
<td>1.11</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1.47</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3.78</td>
<td>1.99</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2.02</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III (1957)</td>
<td>412 city 275 village 137</td>
<td>2.08</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2.58</td>
<td>1.17</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2.64</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II  (1981)</td>
<td>198 city 172 village 26</td>
<td>1.67</td>
<td>0.77</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.15</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1.96</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.56</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Additionally, the average number of children in families living in cities with different populations is determined (figure 7).

Figure 7. Average number of children in a family (populated areas with different number of inhabitants)

![Bar graph showing average number of children in families of different settlements](image)

There is a clear tendency of the increase of the average number of children in the family while reducing the size of the settlement (in terms of the number of inhabitants). To a greater extent this is manifested in generation IV.

Discussions

In the second part of the 20th century the regulating influence of social factors on the duration of the period of the birth of children in families was increasing in Belarus. The influence of biological factors was abating. From the end of the 20th to the beginning of the 21st century this period decreased almost 3 times. The data obtained are consistent with the materials of the First General Census of the Population of 1897, according to which the average size of an urban family in Belarus was 5.5 people. Each second family included 5 people or more. Moreover, a significant group consisted of families of 6 people or more. For example, in the cities of the Minsk province such families were 37.0% (Statistical Committee of the Ministry of the Interior, 1904, p. 15). Thus, the demographic situation in the republic during the 20th century was manifested by a sharp decline in the rate of population growth. By the early 1990s the negative rate of natural decrease was marked. The priorities in the family changed, and the prestige of social status in society gained special significance. Small families began to dominate not only in the city, but also in the village.

Generation IV, which included individuals born in the period from the beginning of the 20th century to the 1950s, is characterized by a decrease in the frequency of first childbirth under the age of 20 years and an increase in the proportion of women whose first birth was after 25 years. This fact is related to some socio-economic reasons. Researchers note that during this time, both creative and destructive factors acted in the republic with respect to the population
The first and second world wars, revolutions, civil war and the waves of migrations, forced relocations and epidemics associated with them had a devastating effect on the population, sex ratio and, as a result, on the formation of families and birth of children. Peacetime between wars is considered as a phase of compensation.

The stratifying factor in relation to the number of children born is the place of residence of the parents. Lower birthrate in cities than in villages can be a consequence of the changing social role of women which revealed more in cities. The maximum convergence of birth rates in cities and villages in the youngest generation probably reflects the smoothing out of differences in living conditions and medical care in Belarus by the end of the 20th century. Adverse shifts in birthrate over the course of the 20th century are recorded along with active urbanization which is provided mainly by internal migration.

Conclusions

From the beginning of the 20th century to the beginning of the 21st century, the pace and nature of the population reproduction in Belarus changes significantly: the average number of children in a family steadily decreases (over the century, it has decreased by almost 3 times); the age of birth of the firstborn shifts to later ages, and the age of the birth of the last child is becoming lower and lower, as a result, by the middle of the 20th century, the period of birth of children within the reproductive age reduced by 2 times, the mean age of women at birth of first child increases; closer to the present, women give birth to firstborn children in the most favorable age period – from 20 to 30 years. The birthrate in all generations in cities is lower than in villages, but the differences by the end of the 20th century reduced. For the considered period the generation time reduced from 28 to 24 years.

During the 20th century, the influence of urbanization on the formation of the structure of generations increased and the influence of immigration decreased.

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References


HEART RATE VARIABILITY IN MALE ARTISTIC GYMNASTICS – A CASE STUDY

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Abstract

Objectives. The aim of this paper was to emphasize the importance of HRV measured at rest, as a valuable cue for objectifying the training status of a young gymnast. Thus the coach can further integrate the data into the individualized sports training strategy.

Material and methods. The HRV research methodology was applied in this ascertaining study focused on 13 years old male junior athlete practicing artistic gymnastics. This subject was chosen by the coach to be investigated because of his results and potential for performance. The gymnast has an experience of 8 years in sports, being awarded several times the National champion title in children and junior competitions. The HRV measurements were taken by means of BioHarness BT3 units from Zephyr Technologies©. The snapshot-type assessment took place during the competitive stage, early in the morning, before the training session. The analysis of HRV parameters included the 10 minute monitoring during rest in supine position.

Results. HRV analysis demonstrates that at rest the gymnast generally fits into the normal values of other athletes emphasized in various studies. Basically the indexes calculated for the time domain, frequency domain and nonlinear analysis prove that measuring HRV during rest is a good indicator for the capability of the subject to address the autonomous nervous system.

Conclusions. These results marked the good balance between sympathetic and parasympathetic pathways. This kind of research should incorporate long term periods of monitoring so that data bases for each athlete should be available and subject for analysis and further adjustments of the training contents.

Keywords: autonomous nervous system, junior, performance.

Introduction

Derived from the cardiovascular physiology, heart rate variability (HRV) is a non-invasive tool which enables the analysis of the intrinsic regulation mechanisms through the inference of the sympathetic and parasympathetic pathways, namely the RR intervals between consecutive heart beats. The sympathetic regulation refers to cardio acceleration through activating sinoatrial node, enhanced myocardial contractility (Ehrman, Karrigan and Keteian,
2018, p. 78), raising blood pressure and peripheral vasodilatation, as well as increased mental activation (Kenney, Wilmore and Costill, 2015, p. 86). In contrast, the parasympathetic activation via the vagus nerve carries impulses to sinoatrial and atrioventricular nodes responsible for decreases in heart rate, myocardium contractility, constriction of the coronary vessels, and increasing mental focus (Kenney, Wilmore and Costill, 2015, p. 86). Given this frame, specialists acknowledge that HRV acts like a relevant marker of the balance between sympathetic and parasympathetic mechanisms.

This is possible by means of the HRV three analyzing models, namely time domain, frequency domain and nonlinear methods (Vanderlei et al., 2009). Most of the studies focus on measuring HRV indexes during supine rest (Young and Leicht, 2011), in multiple recording sessions, in order to create HRV profiles for each athlete. This will serve as a baseline for identifying different training adaptations and states such as peak performance, fatigue/burn-out, risk of injuries, recovery status.

Bucheitt (2014) connected RMSSD parameter with the endurance capabilities. LnRMSSD is linked with the adaptation to training in submaximal efforts (Thorpe et al., 2016).

Authors like Dong et al. (2018) argued that the frequency domain data indicate mental stress, acting like a stress resilience marker in competition settings.

Additionally, non-linear methods include the Poincare plot representing the RR intervals’ dispersion, mathematically objectified through three indexes SD1, SD2 and S1/SD2 ratio (Task Force, 1996).

The six apparatus routines performed in men’s artistic gymnastics exhibit acute and long-term effects upon the junior and senior athletes, in terms of fitness components and neuromuscular control. Along with the strength, power, and flexibility, cardio-respiratory stress is associated with high anaerobic demands especially in the floor routines, pommel horse, rings, horizontal bar and parallel bars performances, hierarchically (Papadopoulos et al., 2014). Obviously, male artistic gymnastics is a highly stressful sport due to the technical complex apparatus routines, with a maximum duration of 70 seconds (floor) and a minimum duration of 4 to 6 seconds (vault) (Jemni et al., 1998). The intensity of the effort brings the maximal heart rates up to 186±11b/min. and blood lactate from 6 to 11mmol/l (Mkaouer et al., 2018).

In order for a gymnast to learn the technical content, to physically and mentally prepare and to deliver the best possible performance, it takes an average of 30 hours per week, with considerable variations depending on age, level of competition or national strategy in gymnastics (Malina et al., 2013). Most of the gymnasts trained two sessions daily, six days per week including warm up, stretching routines, strength training, repetition of technical elements, with energy costs varying from 3.0 to 5.0 MET (MET - metabolic equivalent of tasks) (Ridley, Ainsworth and Olds, 2008).

In a larger context, monitoring of each gymnast is an important prerequisite for having complementary information regarding the training status and the competition readiness prior to the major sport events.

The aim of this paper was to emphasize the importance of HRV measured at rest, as a valuable cue for objectifying the training status of a young gymnast. Thus the coach can further integrate the data into the individualized sports training strategy.
Methodology

The HRV measurements were taken by means of BioHarness BT3 units from Zephyr Technologies©. Data were collected in June 2018, before the National Artistic Gymnastics Championship. The snapshot-type assessment took place during the competitive stage, early in the morning, before the training session. The analysis of HRV parameters included a 10 minute monitoring during rest, in supine position. All raw data were extracted from the BioHarness BT3 units and analyzed with Kubios HRV software (version 2.0; Department of Physics, University of Kuopio, Kuopio, Finland) by DC. Data were analyzed following the Tasks Force Recommendations (1996).

Case presentation

The HRV research methodology was applied in this ascertaining study, focused on a 13 years old male junior athlete practicing artistic gymnastics. This subject was chosen by the coach to be investigated because of his results and potential for performance. The gymnast has an experience of 8 years in sports, being awarded several times the National champion title in children and junior competitions. The gymnast competes for Dinamo School Sports Club from Bucharest, since the beginning of his sports career. The subject trains 5 hours per day, 5 days a week, being coordinated by coach MM.

The subject voluntarily enrolled for this study, being genuinely interested about the topics and the possible use of the information for optimizing his preparation. The subject was clinically healthy with no exercise restrictions whatsoever. The research protocol of this study was approved by the UNEFS Research Ethics Commissions which validated it in conformity with the Declaration of Helsinki.

Heart Rate Variability analysis

Figure 1 presents the RR intervals time series of the gymnast during the selected 10 minute monitoring. The first graph reveals genuine fluctuations of the RR intervals including the presence of ectopic beats which makes difficult the extraction of statistical information. The second graph shows the same curve after the trend removal and the filtering of the ectopic beats. (Thuraisingham, 2006). This pre-processing HRV data is a mandatory phase for obtaining relevant statistical inferences.
Figure 1. Curves of the gymnast’s RR intervals

*RR = time between consecutive heart beats

Table 1. Time domain results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Units</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean RR (SDNN)</td>
<td>(ms)</td>
<td>805.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STD RR (SDNN)</td>
<td>(ms)</td>
<td>31.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean HR (1/min)</td>
<td>(1/min)</td>
<td>74.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STD HR (1/min)</td>
<td>(1/min)</td>
<td>3.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RMSSD (ms)</td>
<td>(ms)</td>
<td>22.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NN50 (count)</td>
<td>(count)</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pNN50 (%)</td>
<td>(%)</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RR triangular index</td>
<td>(ms)</td>
<td>9.936</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TINN (ms)</td>
<td>(ms)</td>
<td>155.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These data are analyzed from the statistical standpoint and through geometric indexes (Table 1). One can notice that the average heart rate during the monitored period was 74.8 while, the mean RR was 805.7ms. Regarding the standard deviation for normal RR intervals (SDNN), the value of 31.70ms relates to both sympathetic and parasympathetic activity. The root mean square of differences between RR intervals (RMSDD), with a value of 22.7ms emphasizes the moderate activation of the parasympathetic pathway. In terms of percentage of RR intervals with a duration difference greater than 50ms (pNN50), the value of 4.3% reveals a moderate activation of the parasympathetic mechanisms.

Figure 2 shows the HRV triangular index representing the total number of heart beats divided by the number of beats with the highest peak of the histogram (Stein, 2002). It can be noticed that the RR intervals’ distribution fits into the Gaussian curve.
Figure 2. RR* intervals’ distribution of the gymnast

*RR = time between consecutive heart beats

Being an oscillatory phenomenon, HRV needs to be decomposed in different frequency spectrums. Authors often debate whether they should use for analysis Fast Fourier Transformation (FFT) or Autoregressive Spectrum (AR). By means of FFT we can identify the presence of each frequency component in the HRV continuous wave. When there is a finite number of dominant frequency components, FFT is preferred over the AR spectrum which characterizes random vibration signals (Heinzel, Rudiger and Schilling, 2002). So, the data reveal that the value of LF peak is lower than the HF peak, showing reduced sympathetic activity predominance and a stronger parasympathetic activity (Table 2).

Table 2. Frequency domain analysis – Fast Fourier Transform (FFT) spectrum

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency band</th>
<th>Peak (Hz)</th>
<th>Power (ms²)</th>
<th>Power (%)</th>
<th>Power (n.u)*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>VLF (0-0.04 Hz)</td>
<td>0.0352</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LF (0.04-0.15 Hz)</td>
<td>0.1055</td>
<td>607</td>
<td>59.9</td>
<td>63.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HF (0.15-0.4 Hz)</td>
<td>0.1719</td>
<td>346</td>
<td>34.2</td>
<td>36.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>1014</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LF/HF</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.753</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*n.u.= normalized units

The nonlinear analysis puts the emphasis on the complexity of the cardiac regulation via the autonomous nervous system (Table 3). As the RR interval electric signals follow a nonlinear pattern, there was analyzed and quantified the approximate entropy (ApEn) and sample entropy.

The Approximate Entropy (ApEn) was developed by Pincus in order to identify the predictable regular character of HR (Pincus and Goldberger, 1994). This system models the signal in vectors of different lengths for assessing if the oscillations are recurrent. In this case study, the values for ApEn and SampEn were 1.119 and 1.161, respectively. These figures fit into the normal values accepted in literature, 1 – 1.5 (Task Force, 1996).

Table 3. Parameters from the nonlinear analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Unit</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Poincare plot</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD1</td>
<td>(ms)</td>
<td>16.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD2</td>
<td>(ms)</td>
<td>41.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variable</td>
<td>Unit</td>
<td>Value</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>--------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recurrence plot</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean line length (Lmean)</td>
<td>(beats)</td>
<td>8.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Max line length (Lmax)</td>
<td>(beats)</td>
<td>159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recurrence rate (REC)</td>
<td>(%)</td>
<td>25.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Determinism (DET)</td>
<td>(%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shannon Entropy (ShanEn)</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.927</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Approximate entropy (ApEn)</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample entropy (SampEn)</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Detrended fluctuations (DFA):α1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.318</td>
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<tr>
<td>Detrended fluctuations (DFA):α2</td>
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<td>0.369</td>
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<tr>
<td>Correlation dimension (D2)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Multiscale entropy (MSE)</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.456 -1.894</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: RR_{n+1}(ms)

The ratio SD1/SD2 as shown in the Poincare plot (figure 4) represents the dispersion of RR intervals in a time period. SD1 value was 16.1, while SD2 was 41.8. These values indicate a fast response to stimuli of the gymnast, fact argued by SD1 which shows a parasympathetic predominance.

**Figure 4. Poincare plot of the gymnast’s RR intervals dispersion**

Discussions

HRV analysis demonstrates that at rest the gymnast generally fits into the normal values of other athletes emphasized in various studies. The indexes calculated for the time domain, frequency domain and nonlinear analysis prove that measuring HRV during rest is a good indicator for the capability of the subject to address the autonomic nervous system. Concretely, these values mark the good balance between sympathetic and parasympathetic pathways.
The time domain results even in a snapshot evaluation confirmed that the values are conclusive for a good parasympathetic activity which is an asset for the gymnast’s physiological status during the precompetitive stage. That means a good resilience to training stimuli and a fair readiness to compete in a short while. The combination of SDNN, RMSSD, pNN50 and triangular index should be taken into consideration on a regular basis to monitor cardiac autonomous activity (Plews, Laursen and Boucheit, 2016).

The frequency domain data also emphasize a predominance of the low frequency band as an indicative for the activation of the vagus nerve modulating the response of sinoatrial node, associated with a more variable heart rate. Articles on cardiac control acknowledge our results (Grossman, Wilhelm and Spoerle, 2004).

Generally, nonlinear HRV data are scarce in sports area. Although few of them reported that this analysis is probably connected to predicting competition results, specialists have not clearly described its role in different sports or different age groups. The longer the RR intervals, the greater the dispersion in Poincare plot; as noticed in our case study, the gymnast exhibited a high dispersion of the values at rest, signifying a good adaptation to the specific training. Different studies on this topic agree with our findings (Shaffer and Ginsberg, 2017). The low values of the entropy demonstrated that the RR intervals followed a predictable, regular pattern without ectopic beats.

**Limitations of the study**

Our case study refers to a snapshot HRV assessment giving insights about the training status at a certain point. The authors have not taken into account in this analysis aspects about respiration pattern, training load, or other performance-related factors.

**Conclusions**

Time domain, frequency domain and the non linear method are convergent in objectifying the autonomic nervous system regulation in the sport context, expressed in the prevalence of either sympathetic or parasympathetic reactions, with influences on training, recovery state and peak performance.

The data collected in this case study through a ten minute HRV measurement might be a complementary source of information for coaches, in order to have an additional standpoint for adjusting the training content.

The gymnast’s results confirmed the aim of the research and the efficiency of the HRV assessment. The subject performed as his peak during the 2018 National Artistic Gymnastics Championships, winning the team competition and the second place in the individual all-around ranking. Due to his accomplishments, the gymnast was selected for the National Junior Team.

Given the above findings, one can generally state that HRV measured at rest could possibly act as a predictor for the competitive behaviour of the athlete within target competitions.

Ideally, this kind of research should incorporate long term periods of monitoring, so that data bases for each gymnast should be available and subject for analysis and baseline for further adjustments in the training contents. Repetitive assessments are recommended within each training stage or in particular sensitive situations, such as post-recovery, psychological challenges or other environmental factors.
HRV measured at rest is a topic to be developed by specialists, in interdisciplinary
teams, so that the athletes should have a relevant objective feed-back for indicating their training
status, in different preparation stages.

Acknowledgements

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The contribution of authors

All authors have equally contributed to this study.

References


IDENTITY RESHAPING AND MANIPULATION IN CYBERSPACE

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Abstract

Objectives. This article draws attention to some important considerations in the study of an online identity. Becoming a part of the virtual reality, sets the stage for the opportunity of reconstructing one’s self, of reshaping the identity and furthermore to explore the identity of others who are more or less familiar to us in the real world.

Material and methods. The use of ethnographic method through interviews and participant observation remains actual even when dealing with the aspects of cyberspace study. An in-depth discussion of the epistemological and methodological challenges of studying the online activity, especially the social media becomes necessary.

Results. Participants to virtual reality forge their own persona-s. It is a complex construct of objective technological requirements and subjective semantic preferences. These features are to be taken into consideration before and after carrying out a research of the online activity.

Conclusions. Online environments provide new challenges for reconsidering the intersubjectivity in its most phenomenological sense. It is difficult to say whether virtual reality is facilitating the creation of new persona-s or just the surfacing of the inner most uninhibited ones. Nevertheless, it provides social scientists with the opportunity to grasp and intellectually digest new the fruits of most novel forms of sociabilities facilitated by the digital interaction.

Keywords: social media, digital identity, manipulation, cyber-anthropology.

Introduction

Ontology of human being placed the identity topic at the origin of many research fields. Both the self-defining act and the relationship ego-alter underline the fact that the identity search cannot be separated from the differentiation endeavour. These two tendencies lean towards the same existential objective: the removal of any form of uncertainty a person could encounter uncertainty which might represent a potential threat.

These universal coordinates are valid for both personal and collective identity, be that the community of a village, of a religion, a professional one or even a nation. Nowadays the advance of communication technology made possible a phenomenon through which the world is more and more interconnected – becoming a genuine "global village" (McLuhan, 1962).
"Through culture, humans are always already virtual ethnography has always been a kind of virtual investigation of the human, and can therefore play an important role in understanding cybersociality" (Boellstorff, 2008).

More than the geographical space, which tends to shrink - as matter of perception - due to faster means of transportation, the cyberspace created by more and more powerful computers linked through a global ominous network brings people closer than ever.

The internet had so far three ages:

Web 1.0 – it marked the basic attempt to gather and organize raw data in a form accessible all over the world and, in the same time, it also covered a basic need to instantly exchange extended messages. The end of the 2nd millennium saw the growth of online forums, chat-rooms, e-mail services, blogs and wiki-s.

Web 2.0 – encompasses the diversification of communication platforms culminating in ubiquitous Social Media. Messenger services which soon enabled voice and video calls started a trend of continuous interpersonal awareness through the possibility of ongoing emotional sharing accompanying the already existing exchange of information. Social networking "by the grace" of new media brought an enormous commercial opportunity, revolutionizing all marketing techniques and savvy. This age marked also a serious preoccupation regarding the protection of personal data available online. The anonymity provided by the fundamental philosophy which forged the creation of internet can also present an opportunity for criminal behaviour.

Web 3.0 represents the semantic web. It is the most recent development of internet starting in the second decade of 21st century. It was anticipated by simulated society platforms like IMVU or Second Life which allowed individuals to create and experience their own ideal world. Web 3.0 represent the apogee of internet customization, facilitating a so-called total control over every feed a user can receive. Whether this control is authentic and the feed corresponds to a person’s actual needs is an important matter of debate for civil society representatives and social scientists.

**Trick or treat - identity reshaping**

The world of connected individuals and groups, continuously expanding, relying on myriads of simultaneous information exchanges via internet is generally called cyberspace or virtual reality. To be a part of it someone needs to obtain a virtual / digital identity and, according to one’s needs to become a member of a virtual community.

"Users must deal with this materiality, both in what its technical characteristics will allow (screen size, image resolution, keyboard, etc.) and in what they impose. We therefore have to question the role(s) of digital objects, particularly screen-based ones, in human activity. Some digital tools seem to have become extensions of the human being" (Baldauf, Develotte and Ollagnier-Beldame, 2017).

From a technical standpoint, virtual identity encompasses a complex digital marker given by:

- the computer which is used with its unique physical address (MAC)
- the local internet connection facilitated by a service provider which grants to each subscriber its own protocol address (IP)
- a virtual private network (VPN) – an optional additional internet security service
- username and a password assumed or assigned, requested once online in order to access certain websites
• an avatar - online character which can be created in order to participate to different communication platforms or multi-player internet games

Creating a digital persona represents the perfect opportunity to reshape an identity. An internet user can forge a profile of hero or villain changing every aspect of his or her particular features: age, gender, race or nationality, background, religion, occupation, marital status and even physical appearance (through posting fake photos or home movies). It is the quintessence of the postmodern view on identity and personality. Due to the fact that virtual reality represents a world with no boundaries of time and space an anthropologist who immerses in its environment while studying it must adopt a vision similar to the one of Foucault, taking into account that "heterotopia is fully manifested only when those that find themselves within it are separated from their representation of time" (Burlacu 2019, p. 118). In the virtual worlds of IMVU or Second Life a player can look however he or she likes, can have the house and the job of his / her dreams and even create its own life partner. The historical perspective provided by these metaverses is no less fluid, ranging from an ancient past to a distant future.

However, there is no need for a virtual world game to create a completely different online persona. As long as there is no voice or video calls involved the communication or profile on social media platforms can be managed at somebody’s own leisure.

"The influence of cyberspace on identity is not a change of the content, but a change in the form, evidence, or procedure. So, in terms of the law dealing with the issue of identity in cyberspace, there is no difference between the virtual and the real world, therefore general rules and controls, applied to the identity in the real world, can be applied in cyberspace as well" (Vesali-Naseh, 2016).

Furthermore, in order to accurately insinuate as a participant observer in cyberspace, a researcher needs also to create a persona. This endeavour brings up an ethical conflict which constitutes a subject of an ongoing debate in social sciences while studying virtual reality: how far a social scientist can go in assuming a fictitious profile? Does allowing some tribesmen from Papua to believe that the anthropologist they just encountered is the white spirit of an ancestor is more acceptable than participating in Second Life as a former Olympic medallist presently active member in Doctors without Borders? Most of all, can there be made any correlation between the answers provided by a subject and the actual personal features he or she assumes? Are these features relevant anymore for ethnography in such a particular environment?

"The traditional methods for data collection in ethnographic studies (primarily participant observation and interviewing) are used differently in online research. Thus, ethnographers must learn how to translate observational, interviewing, ethical, and rapport-building skills to a largely text-based and visual virtual research environment" (Garcia et al., 2009).

Each way of doing interviews or observation online has its own pros and cons. For example, a text-messaging interview and posting observation technique are deprived of the data gathered from facial and vocal emotional expressions. Behavioural observations inside a metaverse are even more difficult to grasp in terms of validity. A video-call interview has the advantage of placing the interviewee in his or her environment of choice, giving a feeling of comfort and the liberty to end it abruptly.

**Virtual communities**

"Virtual communities are social aggregations that emerge from the Net when enough
people carry on those public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace" (Rheingold, 1993).

Virtual community is not inherently associated with objective coordinates like ASL (age, sex and location), social status (occupation, wealth, standing, etc.) or physical interaction. Therefore, in most cases, its members are not required to meet face to face and they usually don’t. However, there is a universal ethics code and a specific one which applies to every form of human regrouping. As such, the virtual communities make no exception. There is always etiquette, a protocol of communicating information and relating to other members. Those who are trespassing the netiquette are signalled to others and may withstand an impervious label ascription process.

Golder and Donath (2004) analyzing the newsgroups on Usenet (a World Wide Web predecessor) identified different roles which can be adopted by members of virtual communities according to their particular behaviour towards different topics in debate:

- **Celebrities** – they are key members of communities (group founders or just significant content producers)
- **Newbies** – they are new users who can produce misinformation due either to their lack of mastering the topic or the communication technique (lingo)
- **Lurkers** – passive member who receive the information but do not participate to any debate or common project
- **Flamers** – they are agitators, they use extreme speech (insults, profanities) in order to stir up reactions from other members
- **Ranters** – they are antisocial individuals which thrive in promoting hate speech among various groups and group members
- **Trolls** – they are wreckers, aiming to sabotage the coagulation of a group attitude or action emerging in a virtual community
- **Spammers** – they become of a virtual community with the purpose of promoting some commercial interests in more or less subtle fashion through interaction with other members

All these roles were assembled by Derek Doran (2017) in a schema which offers in addition the hierarchical relation image of a virtual community (figure 1).
In this particular model flamers and *ranters* are two particular type of trolls and *lurker* is just a veteran or eternal newbie. The red dashed outline orange boxes mark the adversarial roles of individuals who "try to intentionally disrupt a Usenet community" (Doran, 2017).

 Authorities’ representatives (intelligence agents) can pose as trolls or flamers in order to prevent, defuse or discredit potential inconvenient or dangerous social actions emerging from virtual communities.

**Bringing a knife to a gunfight - resisting online manipulation**

Could it be that cyberspace represents an anarchist’s dreamworld? A world without physical boundaries is a world with no rulers and possibly with no rules. Even if it sounds plausible, this statement cannot be further from the truth concerning virtual reality. There is control and monitoring in cyberspace. Otherwise, *Anonymous* feed and *Wikileaks* would have been mainstream media and the "dark web" would have been pointless. Internet offers the possibility to overcome the obstacle of physical distance when people want to meet and create new forms of solidarity or to push forward common projects. That is why "…states are presented with a plethora of novel challenges to their authority and narratives. Challenges of distance and politics that might have once prevented physically dispersed nations from communicating across state borders have almost completely evaporated as new virtual relationships develop which are uninhibited by conventional notions of political territory and national sovereignty" (Saunders, 2011).

New media technologies for social networking such as Facebook, Twitter or WhatsApp are continuously transforming the public practices of individuals and institutions. Web 2.0 technologies evolved specifically to facilitate the collaborative production of World Wide Web content through the potential of social networking. It made possible to relate in a more clear way...
the online activity with the social everyday life bringing the anonymity to a lower level than it was initially intended by the promoters of internet. Alternatively, it created the opportunity, as Robert Putnam conceived it, for an enforced social capital among community members. This applies for human individuals regardless their age. Kids are more and more computer savvy at younger ages. They prefer the ludic and entertaining feature of computer use. On the other hand, for adolescents smartphones and tablets (their primal tools for social networking) are becoming as basic needs as food and water. However, these "benefits" can bring also various threats. Social networking services are used as a means for young people to connect with their friends and provide them with a wide range of information and leisure opportunities that is constantly available and enriched. Young people experience both positive (e.g., opportunities for social contact) and negative (e.g., cyber-bullying) effects when using social media.

Recently, in the eve of web 3.0, virtual communities are turning more and more into smart mobs. "Smart mobs consist of people who are able to act in concert even if they don’t know each other. The people who make up smart mobs cooperate in ways never before possible because they carry devices that possess both communication and computing capabilities" (Rheingold, 2002).

Although these transformations provide new possibilities for construction of public or personal rhetoric and ideologies, and, therefore, new rationalities for actions and attitudes, they can also be targeted by new forms of manipulation. These occurrences are natural as new territories are discovered and our animal instinct demands us to be conquerors and rulers. In world built on information and communication power is drawn from *captatio benevolentiae*. Ultimately the power players strive to modulate their audience ideas and opinions and thus its decisional act and behaviour. So, as long as someone believes having a total control of the information received and choices made, the scene for "the grand tour" of manipulation and social control is set. This is the key idea a person should remember as he or she enters the simulated reality, be that a social media platform or a *metaverse*. "But immersed in simulation, we are also vulnerable. [...] An older generation fears that younger scientists, engineers, and designers are ‘drunk with code’. A younger generation scrambles to capture their mentors’ tacit knowledge of buildings, bodies, and bombs. From both sides of a generational divide, there is anxiety that in simulation, something important slips away" (Turkle, 1999).

A particular case of social media influence over political stands is its the ability to turn into civic movements incubator. This space provides the perfect framework for spontaneous cyber-solidarities. Several public actions like *Occupy, Indignados, Arab Spring* and more recently *Gilets Jaunes* started from coagulations of ideas and opinions expressed over different social media platforms. The author had the opportunity to study first hand, through interviews and participant observation, the #REZIST movement in Romania for several months. The observations and interviews took place online and *in situ* (i.e. Victoria Square, Bucharest). During this period several manipulation forms aimed both the Facebook platforms and the participants in the street. Every classic technique was employed: from inviting to a more violent action to warnings of potentially dangerous events and proposing a change of venue… Fortunately, through a thorough checking of every bit of unusual information most participants to the movement managed not to let themselves into believing the "trolls".

**Conclusions**

The use of social media, particularly social networking platforms such as Facebook, has
steadily increased over the years and becomes the prevalent source of information, entertainment, and interpersonal exchanges regardless age, social status or, more importantly, cultural background. It is the only location where you can actually find some places where people are not biased by their race, ethnicity, religion or any ideology.

Online environments provide new challenges for reconsidering the intersubjectivity in its most phenomenological sense. It is difficult to say whether virtual reality is facilitating the creation of new persona -s or just the surfacing of the inner most uninhibited ones. Nevertheless, it provides social scientists with the opportunity to grasp and intellectually digest new the fruits of most novel forms of sociabilities facilitated by the digital interaction.

"Networked and remixed sociabilities emerge and are practiced over multiplied place and audiences that do not necessarily collapse one’s sense of place, but afford sense of place reflexively. […] This presents the modus operandi for the networked self and the context of newer patterns of sociability and routes to sociality that emerge" (Papacharissi, 2011).

This article draws attention to some important considerations in the study of an online identity. Becoming a part of the virtual reality, sets the stage for the opportunity of reconstructing one’s self, of reshaping the identity and furthermore to explore the identity of others who are more or less familiar to us in the real world.

"Digital anthropology, which can include the study of both use and consequence, is thereby as much a study of what people are becoming as what technologies are becoming. We now face an extreme contrast between anthropology’s initial interest in custom and tradition, compared to the speed of contemporary developments. At the same time, these may be just as expressive of persistent anthropological concerns, such as the nature of normativity” (Miller, 2018).

As participant observers, researchers are not spared by the emergence of one`s emic metamorphosis while accessing virtual reality. This is an essential part of the methodological specificity of digital anthropology. Therefore, a virtual imago of an anthropologist must encompass an honest, unbiased socially opened individual, who should not add a share to the potential manipulative endeavours perpetrated in cyberspace.

References


THE CULTURE OF CHILDHOOD IN TRADITIONAL ROMANIAN SOCIETY

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Abstract

Objectives. Childhood and children has been the subject of research in anthropology, sociology and psychology only for a short while; previously, they were rather the object of attention of doctors, pedagogues, childcare workers. The approach of this area of study in the social sciences is conducted either in the form of research on children (including here the anthropological structuralist perspective) or, more recently, within a type of research with children, in which research data are the perceptions and definitions of children, their participation and decisions in social life.

Material and methods. This paper is a structuralist investigation. According to the ethnographic data of Romanian researchers, childhood, through rites of passage or other types of social thresholds of other ages, is not only a separate stage, but also a way of social existence and a self-sufficient cultural type compatible in the highest degree with the village community’s culture.

Results. In the traditional Romanian society, children are not developing adults, but social actors and generators of culture with specific ways of expression and particular types of activity and statutes, both in the family and in the community space, or in the mythical universe.

Conclusions. Correct knowledge of childhood culture and its comparison with the stereotypes that adults have about children and childhood can support solving certain problems pertaining to the subject of generational interdependence.

Keywords: child, childhood, family, culture, adoptive age.

Introduction

European societies are aging, while they experience a technical, informational and social progress. Children are, in spite of increasingly better living conditions, fewer and fewer, as the populations grow older. Many European societies, the European Union as a whole, are losing children (statistically), in exchange for an increasing percentage of older people (Eurostat, 2016). For more than 5 years in a row, in Romania too, the number of people over 65 has exceeded the number of children under 15 – a phenomenon which in demography is beginning to be known as demographic extinction. Traditional societies, with high birth and death rates, dominated by the ages of youth and childhood, are now looking for other solutions and social and cultural models that will make them work with a totally different age structure than they have known for
hundreds of years.

Modern studies on childhood begin with the 20th century, due to the emergence of paediatrics, childcare, psychology, i.e. those areas through which the tools of raising children are transferred from the family to the specialized institutions of society. However, the reason for the emergence of these areas, i.e. the emphasis on systematic concern for children, originates – according to studies of the history of mentalities – a long time ago, with the discovery of the "moment" of children as a social class (Ariès, 1960; 1975). It is the period when the urbanization of Western societies is perfect and the way to modernization is open. A new feeling towards childhood (which historians have called "the privatization of childhood") begins to manifest itself since the 15th and the 16th centuries and especially during the 17th century: the "new child" of modernity that is born is more caressed by parents, more casual than the previous children. The English philosopher John Locke wrote in his work Some Thoughts Concerning Education (1693) that parents too passionate about their children distort generations with the pampering they practice in family life. Dr. Jacques Duval speaks in 1612 with contempt or disgust about "that curious zeal that urges (mothers – our note) to hug and kiss their child. It is acknowledged that, through this curious behaviour, they show a monkey-like love, which, it is said, consists in hugging their chicks so hard that it suffocates them" (Ariès and Duby, 1995, VI:17). These conclusions can indicate both a novel maternal behaviour in the era, more affectionate than in previous eras, but also the social "discovery" of motherhood. In the new union of the sexes in urban housing and in the urban environment, men and foreigners (doctors, especially, whose presence is becoming increasingly important) witness hitherto hidden aspects in the highly specialized sexual space of the medieval peasant household (in female and male areas); and one of these novel aspects is the relationship between mother and child.

Philippe Ariès’ work on childhood entitled Centuries of Childhood. A Social History of Family Life (original title: L’enfant et la vie familiale sous l’Ancien Régime, 1960, 1975; translated into English in 1962) was a major success in contemporary anthropology. Under his influence, specialists explain the phenomenon of "children's appearance" in the social space in the 17th century, through two phenomena: a) if before they were considered a subspecies, a category of "tiny animals", now children become "persons" and are loved as such by adults; b) if they were considered mini-adults, now they become individuals with specific needs. Therefore, children are defined, according to these studies, as people (like adults) with special needs (especially those of adults), as a "sector" of society, a group with its own interests in social evolution. They were researched either as a resource – as a valuable possession of adults, which contributes to the economic well-being of families and societies or as a medium or long-term investment of society – or as a burden and cost, especially for women (Badinter, 2012).

This ambiguity of the scientific attitude towards children and childhood does not remain without practical consequences. The 20th century is the time when Western European culture, seeking to delimit childhood, puts children "quarantined" in the world of adults (children deal with play and education, adults with work and economic responsibility). Previously separated, the two worlds can be compared. Children are seen as people who have not yet achieved full legal and economic status in society, people who are politically, intellectually, sexually or economically incapable. For this reason, contemporary researchers approach issues such as (Tesar, 2016):

1. the status of children nowadays as independent social actors, capable of decision-making and action in their own interests or
2. the children's rights (participation, partnership or protection).
Current studies on childhood enforce the construction of an "understanding" and "respect" of the child and childhood that changes significantly the relationship to them, just as feminism has changed significantly the relationship to women (Moran Ellis, 2010).

In addition to these studies, however, structuralist approaches remain relevant; in these investigations childhood is not only a framework for the manifestation of children, but an autonomous cultural structure. This "classical" perspective of anthropology was exemplified by Leo Frobenius (in 1921), in his theory of the ages of culture. The culture of childhood is dominated by intuition and animism. Frobenius calls it the "paideuma of childish demonism" (1985: 102), represented by almost unlimited creative capacities, fuelled by the belief in the unseen vital representations of the world and by the conception of continuity between the perceptual centre (which will later become the self and the interior universe of the adult person) and the concentric dispositions of reality.

Based on Frobenius' theory, Lucian Blaga (1944) also approached the subject of childhood. However, for Blaga, childhood can become, beyond age, a culturally prevailing state in which the structures of thinking and representation are childish and persistent for all ages. A culture of childhood is defined, therefore, by intuition, animism, and by the feeling of solidarity and continuity between self and the other, between nature and society, between man and God. The favourite environment for this culture is the village.

**Methodology**

The present study approaches childhood from a structuralist point of view, referring to the family, community and cultural frameworks of the traditional Romanian society. The main source of the information is the demographic, ethnographic and anthropological literature on this topic.

Until recently, Romanian society knew an extremely consistent childhood culture, especially in its predominant peasant dimension. After the Second World War, Romania still had more than three quarters of population peasants and, of this peasant population, almost a third were children up to 14 years old and only a tenth of the elderly were over 60 years old (Trebici, 1985). That is, a couple of grandparents had, on average, six grandchildren. The demographic profile also supported a socio-cultural profile in which childhood was very present. In fact, the imprint of childhood age in traditional Romanian cultural manifestations was so strong that Lucian Blaga made childhood the defining hallmark of Romanian popular culture: "Childish’ is the village; it considers itself the ‘centre of the world’ and it lives within comic horizons, extending into myth" (1969: 267). The age of this culture is not given by the specific organic ages, but by what Blaga calls "the phenomenon of collective psychology of the ‘adoptive ages’" (1969: 271); thus, culture is not the product of children directly, but of mature people who are still under the sign of childhood, that is, subordinate to a childish spiritual order.

The knowledge of childhood as a social structure cannot, therefore, ignore the knowledge of the village. The traditional and modern Romanian society is one dominated by popular culture. The village is the place of the intuitive manifestation of the person, the place of story and myth, of the direct connections and of the continuity, which are the main specific features of childhood. The ethnography of the child and the rural childhood is in fact the attempt to recover the knowledge of the genuine character of the childhood. In this type of community, people are not abstractions, but they are specific people with particular traits, and they are fundamentally distinguishable – the woman from the man, the young man from the old man or
the child from the adult. Not coincidentally, the specification of the most present social types is made by children: the woman without children is not a woman, the man without children is not a man; instead, the child without parents is an orphan, one of the most powerful types in mythical thought.

The frameworks and institutions for the social manifestation of the child are the family, the neighbourhood, the age group and the community, i.e. the entire social space, the natural world and the supernatural world. Family roles (of filiation or fraternity) are complemented by important social roles, such as that of practitioner of certain forms of worship or specific rites, which cannot be taken over by another social group and without which the community may be endangered. Specific activities combine specific social learning actions with lucrative (productive) or ordering (administrative) actions.

**Results and discussions**

The child played, worked and grew at once; never alone, always in the familiar world of the village. Play, work and story were the coordinates of childhood. The child did not shy away from death or birth, or from sickness or evil; and a child had even specific techniques of communication with those beyond or with the guardianship spirits of death and nature. A child could have known if the case, along with everyone else, hunger, in the dry years, and abundance, when God gave. And he worked, not beyond his powers, but within his powers, which he measured and rose through what Simion Mehedinți recommended (in 1919) as a favourite way of educating children – the school of work. Compared to children's direct experience with earth (considering its plasticity par excellence as the best stimulant of creative activity, both in its clay and life support hypostases), with plants, with animals, so vulnerable and so strong at the same time, the pupils imprisoned among the four straight walls of the classroom and in a strict schooling schedule, seated in dead furniture, are, according to Mehedinți, future crippled souls (2006: 160-172).

**In the family, the child** was the "fortune of the Romanian" (Zanne, 1897: 77). The family, like the village community, were in Romania formulas for organizing the way of life in the world, or for gathering the "world" between the thresholds of daily existence. The traditional man and especially the child (a traditional man par excellence) do not know the difference between family intimacy and public life; they relate directly and entirely to the world, understood at once as a gathering of people (society), a cosmic order, and a divine law. The family was the initial world, the smallest, that children learned first. It was related to mother and food, to house, to places in the courtyard and to alleyway, to brothers and sisters, to animals, to father and work, to living and departed relatives. The Romanian family keeps in it what we find also in the family of Greco-Roman antiquity: the place, that is, the household, with the land in the heart of the village, but also with the land in the estate; the house with its objects, useful and beautiful at the same time; animals of all kinds (birds, bees, ruminants, or working, dairy, guarding animals or only souls "around the house"); and people, children, and parents, but seldom only the spouses, (sadly) isolated in their couples, without offspring.

The child is expected in the family as a witness to the blessed state of the woman, who reveals her maternal essence and thus reaches the most important social status she can have; as a witness to the man's investiture, who becomes the head of the family and enters the continuity of the offspring, paying his debt to his ancestors; as a witness of the elderly parents, who renew their family status as "good parents" (the grandparents), as "big parents" (the grandmother and
the grandfather) or, in the same sense, "the elderly" (the old mother and the old father); as a witness of the house or nation in which he brings evidence of growth, fertility and abundance. The ritual richness of the gestures that accompany the child's expectation between wedding and pregnancy are a sign of the importance of the child for the family.

The entrance of the child into the family was welcome through the first great threshold of life – the birth. Romanian peasant customs related to birth have much in common with the customs of the other thresholds, namely, marriage and death. The wedding is celebrated by the symbolic passage of the former children to the state of parents; it is the ritual officiating of good conception, in conditions of maximum physical, material, social and religious security, so it has as its focus the mobilized energies through the conception of the child. Death, although it does not refer at all to the child or childhood, has an obvious and surprising ritualistic symmetry with birth: the same expectation of the moment of passage, the same bath through which the remains of an existence are removed in preparation for initiation into another existence, the same care for rites and the propitiatory teachings, the same feast at which the community gathers to celebrate the integration of the soul into the next world into which it has just entered (Ghinoiu, 1999). "Bringing a child into the world has always been felt by people as a miraculous and mysterious act; those directly involved in it (mother and foetus, alike) being invested with great powers and treated as such by the whole community. Subject to the rites of passage, birth, like death, is an effective passage from one "world" to another, from one state to another; the world from which the child comes and the one in which the dead went, always being noted negatively in relation to our world, the ‘white’ world, the world of ‘longing’" (Constantinescu, 2000: 128).

The physical birth takes place, in the Romanian village, without much preparation: until recently, the birth could take place at home, in the garden, in the field, where the woman did her chores. Sometimes she happened to be alone, but most of the time the assistance was provided in advance by one of the most important figures of the family, the family or, more recently, the community – the midwife, the oldest woman in the father's family, who received the child in her lap (Constantinescu, 2000: 135). As in the family of classical European antiquity, physical birth meant nothing without symbolic birth: the child had to be greeted and served, not so much by the mother, but by the midwife, godmother or supernatural beings, such as the deities of destiny (Ursitoarele, the Romanian versions of the Moirai or the Fates, the Parcae). As a source of vitality and precious growth, the young child was also threatened by evil spirits (Samca or Striga in Romanian, Strzyga in Polish, Stryha in Belarusian) and the child was guarded with great strain against these by his protectors.

The period of the first ages of life is terribly full of norms, rituals and beliefs, because it is crucial for the life-long wellbeing of the child and, through him, for the good continuity of the nation (Gorovei, 2002). The birth is immediately followed by the first bath, an important rite of separation, but also an opportunity to influence, by those qualified (midwife, first of all) the physical and moral condition of the child (water, objects added to the bath, the time and place decided for the bathtub are rigorously fixed by tradition) (Marian, 1995: 57-80). The rites of integration follow, the worship of the hearth and the fire, the centre of energy and vitality of the household, when the child receives, also from the midwife, a generic name, sometimes unknown to the mother (Constantinescu, 2000: 129). A dangerous period is the one between this first (domestic) integration and the baptism (which is the integration in the extended community), the forty days in which the child is kept, even today, even in cities, away from any foreign eye, closed in the house. Baptism, the second threshold of separation from the "unlit" condition of the child (the one outside our world, the white world) and his integration into the community,
together with the hitherto guardians (the midwife, the parents) and godparents, with whom the connection will be as durable as a blood bond (Stahl, 1936; Cojocaru, 2008: 163). The godmother and the midwife are the two spiritual mothers of the child whose authority is sometimes stronger than that of the blood parents; it extends beyond childhood, beyond the marriage of the "godchild" and does not end until after his death: for as long as he lives, that person (she, the godmother – our note, C. P. B.) is accountable to God for the child. For the godmother is more important both as a father and as a mother and as all the kinship of the godson or goddaughter, who must obey her, for she bears the word of God. For, if the human being is left without a godmother, it's worse than when his mother has died; for, who pays for him in the pit?" (Stahl, 1998: 137).

In the family, the child not only redefines and enriches the area of kinship, but, as a newcomer from another world, restores the bonds between the living and the dead. The custom of naming the boy after the paternal grandfather, or the girl by the name of the maternal grandmother, resisted for quite some time against the right of godparents to give their name by baptism. In fact, the midwife, a central character with the role of performer of the ritual of birth and the cult of the deities of birth, is the oldest woman in the community, the closest to the elderly-dead of the new-born’s community; the existence of this family status and of the cult that she officiated has already been attested in the Geto-Dacian populations (Cojocaru, 2008: 161-163). The etymological investigation of the term "midwife" (Vulcănescu, 1987: 213-214) highlighted several ideas:

1) the reference to a matriarchal family order, in which the cult of the dead and of the new-borns is the attribution of the elderly woman, and the old man does not represent an equivalent function, but he is the "midwife’s husband";

2) the connection of form and content between the midwife and the estate (the land, the burial place of the elderly, i.e. the dead), which extends the ceremonial function of the midwife to a priestly one, officiating a Neolithic cult of the land and of the telluric deities of death and fertility (Bistrițeanu Pantelimon, 2007: 77-80).

The great concern for the good receiving of the child is already an argument for considering him as the "Romanian's fortune". But this qualification also has an economic meaning, given that the child enters naturally into family life by working along with the other members. Although the child began to work from an early age, he worked not beyond his powers, but according to their power and ability; therefore, these powers became known to him and they developed through lucrative physical activity. Although modern thinking tends to condemn child labour as exploitation, research into definitions and ways of doing family work does not support this. In the village, work was an ontological and cultural fact and not an economic activity. Its purpose was not to gain, but to increase, a quality of less economic and more magical significance, which is aimed at most of the domestic concerns of men, and which contains in itself a wealth of economic, social, and religious meanings. A "prosperous" household is one in which people are cheerful and healthy, working together (but not to the same extent), young and old, with pleasure and benefit; a household where children are "crowded", cattle are fat and crops are plentiful. In the "no-increase" household, hard work is done, but in vain, the field does not bear fruit, the animals perish, people get sick and die. (Cristescu-Golopentia, 2002: 153-160). The magical-religious significance of a category that apparently has only economic connotations is due to a different definition of wealth: this is not only the result of individual effort, but the result of a good settlement in the world and in fate. Increase of wealth is not a positive amount, but a gift, which man can at most guard, but not "produce". He is not the
author of his wealth, but only the one who enjoys it. The integration of the child in this type of work has, therefore, very little in common with his "employment" in the meaning accepted in modern economics. Through work, the child enters the world and finds out what he can do in it. Through it, the child finds out how space and time are segmented and he learns the type of causality that integrates him into the universe (Bistrițeanu Pantelimon, 2010).

This is the reason why, household work is also the best family education received by a child. According to the judgment of Simion Mehedinți, work is neither a shame, nor a trauma for children urged by their parents to work, but a pursuit of nature, of the given order of the world. Moreover, work is the natural continuation of the game, and children work, says Mehedinți, even when it seems to us that they are playing (when they imitate, with the clumsiness of age, the work of their parents), thus building a strong character. On the contrary, "the simulacrum of work, beginning with the falsity of certain Fröbelian games (true caricatures) and ending with the verbal teaching of secondary and even higher schools, is the surest path not only to ignorance, but also to lack of character. (...) So, in order not to go the wrong way, we must start at any age, as much as possible, from real work. This guide is the surest of all those that ethnography and ethnology have made available to pedagogy and morality" (Mehedinți, 2006: 48).

In the community, the child was meant to play: "If he is a child, let him play; if it is a horse, let it pull and if it is a priest, let it read", said the great Romanian storyteller Ion Creangă, in his memoirs in 1879. Like any other form of activity that requires the absolute dedication of the participants, play is also a form of return to archaic, primitive (in the sense of fundamental and primordial) formulas of manifestation. As adults, we are often amazed at the intensity with which children live playing (not the games themselves). And often, as citizens and public defenders of public peace, we are concerned about the violence mobilized by children through play. As a result, many of the old forms of playing are either virtualized (transferred to the area of the computer's virtual space) or replaced with games designed to create skills that adults find useful.

However, for the traditional Romanian community, play is the perfect formula for education outside the family and integration in the public space. This integration involves not only functional adaptation, or the creation of skills to operate with the objects of public space and to use the resources of this space in their own interest, but also the child's understanding of extra-family community forms and their adoption. Entering the playgroup means entering the age group. Later, after 7-8 years, from these unstructured groups, ritualized associations arise, in the form of carolling troops, for example (Cojocaru, 2008: 413, 436), or, from unstructured groups may arise the primary ties of ritual communion (such as the "tying" of blood, or cross, brothers and sisters). The integration in these extra-familial community formulas was done either by passing some tests (of resistance, skill, discretion – in the case of group integration), or by the ritual exchange of vital substance, blood or by the ritual consumption of the same foods (Constantinescu, 2010: 140-141). These age groups with distinct organization and autonomy from the world of adults achieved an extremely strong type of socialization, through which children were connected not only in the continuity of generational descendants, but also in horizontal solidarity that would keep the community strongly connected and had to guarantee them a solid social integration.

Apart from these initiation rituals within clear age groups, which often retain an esoteric character, accessible only to the initiates, play is, in turn, a ritual whose spiritual charge is accessible to the child precisely through the demonic dimension of his thinking (Leo Frobenius, 1921/1985) or through child’s metaphysical sensitivity, as Lucian Blaga called it (1944/1969).
Playing in the traditional community always follows a scenario that reproduces ancestral fragments or myths, which can be preserved as such or in forms of concentrated infantile magic that refer to the fundamental religious formulas of sacrifice, birth, death, etc. They include "the dialectic of of life and death, of good and evil", as well as the meanings of the mythical Christian and pre-Christian confrontations and conclusions (Geană, 2017: 157-158).

The connection between childhood and death, before horrifying the thinking of adults as joining categories that today seem to be excluded, is the basis of a majority of traditional play scenarios. According to Ivan Evseev (1998), the counts in children's games contain the mythologeme (the mythological, universal, structural theme) of choice by drawing lots. Fate is called to designate, in mythical scenarios, a human sacrifice dedicated to a deity of nature (such as fairy-tale dragons, guardians of groundwater) or a messenger of the community to the deity (as was, in the Geto-Dacians, the most brave young man, the one who wins the brave games of measuring strength, alertness, courage). Ball, circle, or stone games once had cosmological functions and were assigned solar or lunar symbols.

The mythical representations of the ancestors are also present in the traditional games, to be recognized especially in the guise of masks (common in the processions that are formed during the winter or spring holidays) and in the vigil games. The dead of a family, even those who have not metamorphosed into ancestors, and especially girls and women, are present in the games with the leuca (the Romanian word for a piece of wood from the moving mechanism of the chariot, used in a game which is played on the night of Easter Saturday and Sunday in the cemetery, around a burning fire lit of the rotten or broken crosses), or the games of the felegii (an ancient type of adorned doily used to "bind" together either dance partners, or married couples), the game of the bands of Surate (sisters), of the girls from Lioara's or Lilioara's band. They take place as ritual dances, started on the graves in the cemetery by the girls and continued outside the cemetery, in the village, in the fields, on the roads, when other people are included. These are as described by Ion Ghinoiu (1997: 109): "According to the place and the meaning assigned to the magical acts, the ceremony consists of two parts: the division of the Surate into two unequal groups and their passage from one group to another, one by one, in the order specified by the text spoken or sung by participants in the form of dialogue, in order to restore balance by inviting the ‘sisters’ from the larger group addressed by the ‘sisters’ from the smaller group to choose ‘little sisters’; the formation of pairs, representing the souls of the living accompanied by the dead, holding hands, or a wand, or a handkerchief, or a small doily and they would form a bridge, by raising the arms under which they pass allegorically, some pairs from life to death and from death to life, the other pairs".

Embodiments of death as such are also present in the games. Thus, for example, the game of chick-gaia (or, of hawk and pigeons) contains the mythical characters of death and life: gaia, the bird of death, whose claw cuts the thread of life comes and "steals" a chicken, a bird symbol of life and fertility (present in wedding rituals). Likewise, Baba-oarba (the Blind Hag, or, now you see me, now you don't), a game attested throughout the Romanian space, a game in which the main character – the embodiment of death – seeks to catch a victim that he adopts through contagion.

Even the cradle has multiple mythological meanings. It is the vehicle that accompanies the crossings of the great thresholds: birth (the new-born child is placed in the hollow in which the bread is kneaded, bathed and rocked to grow easily) and death (according to information provided by Ivan Evseev, the oldest coffins had in the form of a cradle or monoxylon boat, meant to carry the soul over the waters that separate the world here from the one beyond, and the
mourning cries speak of the "rocking one", in which the soul of the dead travels) (Evseev, 1998: 205; 221).

Children in the village community were not limited, locked in reserved places (as is the case in contemporary societies, for security reasons), but were always present in the world that was both theirs and that of adults, as well as it was a world of women, of men, of human beings and of God. Their social importance is also visible in the fact that they had their own cultic manifestations - of Caloian or Paparuda, Romanian names for the deities of the rain that had to be invoked in times of drought to save the fruit of the field and these fulfilled a priestly role that only they knew and could play. One of the most common customs, part of meteorological magic practices, is Caloian. The Caloian, a doll made of children's clay (sometimes two tiny faces were made, "the father of the sun" and "the mummy of the rain"), was buried and after three days ritually unearthed and thrown into a well or on running water, to release the rains or, on the contrary, for their "binding" (to stop the floods). Ethnographic information says that the character is the embodiment of a child who disappeared in unknown conditions, probably drowned, sought and cried by his mother throughout the hearth and the village estate. Other research joins Caloian with mythological characters of antiquity (Adonis, Attis, Osiris, Sabazios, Dionysos, even Zalmoxis), or, with the main figures of Christianity (John the Baptist or John the Beautiful, Caloianis) (Cojocaru: 243; 340-341). Through ritual, Caloian is invested as a messenger of the community to the divinity of rain or sun. And Paparuda is a pluviometric goddess, also embodied by children, especially girls, little priestesses of this cult which requires the goodwill of the divinity to ward off drought. Similar cults were identified by Frazer in India (1890/1980), and Ovidiu Bîrlea (1981) considers that the poetic structure of the text and melody suggests an archaic prehistoric origin of the custom.

At other times, children’s status was one of initiation into one of the most important roles of an unwritten community, that of witnesses. For this purpose, the best of the children were selected and ritually beaten when establishing the boundaries between the fields. Contemporary thinking is quick to condemn the beating of children in traditional societies, but it does not know – or it does not mention – the social importance and prestige that the beaten child will have in front of the community, when he will be the only one believed when he confesses about the state of borders in public cases of property regulation (Stahl, 2000).

The child was initiated into the mythical universe through fairy tales. The principle of public education in the great cultures of antiquity was based on the principle that mythology and sport have an essential role in the education of children. Myths were learned, in a first form, through the stories of mothers and nurses and, later, through their teaching in school. In the Romanian village, physical education was done through work, and mythological education through fairy tales.

If through play the child is initiated in the mythical scenario, through the story he learns the mythical spirit (Blaga, 1969: 290-308). The story conveys to the child a certain sense of reality: it includes not only the objects, phenomena, characters he sees, but also those he does not see. The world in which he lives is revealed to him as full of life, spirits, deities, demons, leprechauns: the forest is carolled by forest girls, fairies, the Wood-Bender or Mummy of the Forest, other fairies or fish-emperors live in the waters, in the air the lele (the fairies of inspiration and/or madness) play, in the sky the Moon and the Sun fulfil their curse from the beginning of the world, the mountains bang their heads, the flowers are speaking and enchanting. Even the domestic universe can be, at some point, inhabited by fairy tales: the weakest horses can become mischievous if they eat embers, the dog can be a beautiful enchanted Prince
Charming, the ox, the sheep, the pig or the rooster can each be guides to the fantastic realm and the pots and pans can open the door to strange spirits. The world of the child in the countryside is, through the fairy tale, heterogenized – through the extraordinary diversity of the mythical, demonic or human owners who govern the segments of existence – and totally enlivened. On the contrary, the world of the child in the city is artificial, homogeneous and dead (Blaga, 1969: 265-266).

Unlike modern civilization, in which the age of childish demonism is strongly differentiated from that of mechanical maturity, and childhood tales are only a relic of the tired memory of parents, children of peasant culture are not upset by confrontation with adults: in turn, they cultivate the mythical spirit through the lyrical or religious developments of fairy tales. The beliefs, superstitions, religious representations of the parents complete and guide the orientation of the children in the fairy tale world. This orientation is essential to the most elaborate moral systems. Through stories, the absolute limits are established: of good and evil, in particular, but also of beauty and ugliness, of truth and falsehood. The nuances by which, in mature thinking (generalized at all ages in modern and contemporary times), these categories are relativized and become indistinguishable are foreign to the paideuma of childhood: children ask and get to know the precise boundaries that separate categories, through the story. The exclusivism of these categories is complete, so that the most explicit conflict between their representations cannot be avoided. Dragons will never make a pact with Prince Charming, nor will wolves with lambs or dragons and emperor's daughters. The role of violence is to potentiate the conflict and therefore the differentiation of the mythical categories, transferred, with the maturation, in moral categories. Death, a terrifying event, is not for childhood accompanied by a fairy tale but an expiatory or purifying event (when the dying person is a negative character) or a sacrifice, is a return of death to life (the death and resurrection of the Handsome Boy) (Candrea, 2001).

Fairy tales do not begin or end with their actual narration. As the excessive imagination of childhood takes over and expands the categories of the fantastic in the profane area, the fairy tale is organically continued in play, in myth, and later, in morality. Keeping children close to this mythical dimension of existence creates a much stronger (and infinitely superior) liaison as compared to what the new networks of urban, civilized sociality can offer: belonging to the family and social group, on one hand, and belonging to the transcendent community, on the other hand.

We can offer here, as an example, the dialogue among the children of his village reproduced by L. Blaga: "I was not more than about seven years old: We were about five boys, all about the same age; we stood in a circle, calm, in the middle of the alley, in the evenings. We do not know in what connection it happened that one threw around the question: "What will it be like when you are dead?" One of us answered without delay, as enlightened: ‘Dead must be as if alive. That’s how you don’t even know you’re dead. For example, we sit here in a circle and talk, but maybe we are dead, but we don’t realize it’ ... We recall very well that shivering feeling in front of the abyssal perspective opened by the answer of that boy. It was that earthquake, which you experienced as a child, as well as later, when you stepped around the last border" (Blaga, 1969: 266).

In any discussion of childhood, orphans or illegitimate children deserve a special reference. Normally, the children were raised by the small family, that is, by their parents and siblings. In the case of orphans, they were raised by large families, relatives, neighbours and, ultimately, communities. Most of the time, it was customary for a relative (the wealthiest or the
one who wanted them the most) to raise them until they could return to the affairs of their house; upon occasion, a woman who wanted children turn to her relatives. In addition to these concentric powers of the village, orphaned children took refuge (unlike orphans in urban areas) in their home and land, which did not disappear with the death of their parents. And, very important, they were in God’s care (Majuru, 2006: 224-234). The same happened with the love children, born of mother-girls, who sinned without being married. They were believed to be especially loved by God or the Mother of God, as infants without earthly parents. Adopting illegitimate children or orphans was considered auspicious by families without children or whose children were dying: it was believed that after you adopted a child for your soul, God would also give you children of the body. It was a very grievous sin on the soul of the married woman or the wrong girl to hide or kill the child. The village could, wanted and knew how to keep all its children, orphaned or illegitimate, too. While the childless parents were condemned, and considered oppressed by a curse, children without parents were considered to bring luck and welfare.

In connection with these children, there is, in the Romanian folklore, a myth of the orphan (present especially in fairy tales) and another, equally puritanical, of the orphan's sacrifice. The sacrifice of the child was assimilated by Eliade to the interpretation of the legends of the building sacrifice (such as the legend of the Argeș Monastery) and was related to the previous sacrifice of the father (of the father, of the mother or of both). The sacrifice of the child cannot be fulfilled, for the sacrifice has no maximum value unless it is no longer someone's child, but the child of the whole world, whose appearance is necessarily linked to a mystery: "Important, in the world of myth, is the investment [of the child – our note, C. B.] with the attributes and destiny of the orphan, of the child par excellence, that is, of the primordial child, in his absolute and invulnerable cosmic loneliness, in his perfect uniqueness. The appearance of such a child coincides with a primordial moment: the creation of the Cosmos, the creation of a new world, of a new historical epoch (Virgil), a 'new life' at any level of the real" (Eliade, 1992: 171).

Conclusions

The Romanian village is a world of childhood. It was confirmed by ethnographers, anthropologists, sociologists and everyone else who found that the village is the place of intuitive manifestation of the person, the place of story and myth, of direct connections and continuity. Children are, in the village, in their own world, the one populated with various supernatural and worldly characters in which they are not the only who believe - like some sort of a behavioural deviation that disappears with maturity - but the adults as well. Their game and their games, like the fairy tales told by the elders, connect them to the fundamental themes of the world: life and death, joy and pain, good and evil. Children were important in the traditional village, not only as a promise of maturity, but also as active members in the family, community and the supernatural universe. Beyond studying children, getting acquainted with this cultural experience (the paideuma) of childhood is not only a noble goal, but also a solution in our biological, our social and (why not?) our religious balance.

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