

Art-therapy as a method for mobilizing personal resources in the elderly

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Aging can be viewed as a continuation of development and an active interaction with the environment during which regressive changes are combined with progressive new formations. It is believed that the self-determining nature of subjectivity in the elderly mediates self-awareness and favors self-acceptance as an active agent that determines the outcomes of one's own life at this age as an autonomous self-regulating subject of one's own activity. A formative experience proved the efficiency of using art therapy as a method for mobilizing personal resources during aging.

Keywords: subjectivity, personal resources, latent resource of personality, elderly, art therapy

Problem

The social-demographic structure of contemporary society is characterized by an increased proportion of the elderly population. A current social problem involves prolonging the period of labor and social activity among the elderly to enable positive adaptation and personality development, autonomy in elders and possible dialogue between generations (A.I. Podolsky et al., 2010). These factors determine the activity and attitudes of an elderly subject and preserves his control and self-determination.

Most psychologists currently consider human aging to be the *continued development* of an active subject who interacts with society, during which involution symptoms are persedinterspersed with progressive changes that help to surmount the destructive phenomena of gerontogenesis and help to achieve a new level of self-realization of thean individual's personality (Korsakova, Balashova, 1995; Antsypherova, 2001; Ryff et al., 2004). With this the aspect of personality realization in the elderly own need in using personal experience of relations with environment, of self-understanding and self-regulation, this experience appropri-

ated at the previous stages of personality development — in childhood, adolescence and adult age, is underestimated by psychologists. Some authors consider this experience to be a personal resource (Antsypherova, 1996, 2001; Ermolayeva, 2007; Erikson, 1982). No individual uses all of their potential personal resources over the course of one's life because some resources were not needed or available (Hekhauzen, 2003; Druzhinin, 2005). All of the possible resources combined form "the space of potentials" (Leontiev, 2011). These as yet unused personal resources can be considered to be a latent *resource of personality*, which is possible to achieve only through a self-determined choice made on one's own (Leontiev, 2011). During aging, use of the appropriate personal experience is complicated by increased feelings of inability and uncertainty and decreased levels of self-regulation.

Based on these issues experienced by the elderly, we *the aim of this study* is to search for possibilities and special conditions for mobilizing personal resources in the elderly.

The task of this study is to use a specially organized art environment as an external factor for mobilizing personal developmental resources in the elderly.

The following **theoretical foundations** form the basis of this study:

- Previous stages in personality development and previous forms of its existence gradually provide a hierarchic structure in which the new psychological formations, strategies and tactics are not eliminated, but instead, they are qualitatively changed. The previous formations are enriched, limited, or become more dominant due to their inclusion into new systems of personality that are linked with the environment and into new life attitudes. This personal potential permits an elderly person to realize productive changes in their own life and to perform new meaningful activities (Antsypherova, 1996).
- Subjectivity in the elderly involves a process of self-determination through an actualization of the purpose of life, preserved control functions, a stable and flexible self-image, self-acceptance and the possible search for a new identity (Alexandrova, 2000).
- Each "generating activity" (Antsypherova, 2001, p. 95) in the elderly favors an actualization of new meanings in the social world of objects surmounted by the state of uncertainty at this stage of ontogenetic development. It requires the stimulation of mental potentials to force the personality to use both actual and potential life experience, which forms the "zone of proximal development in the elderly" (Ibid).
- The participation of an elderly individual in an integrated mental activity (Tatenko, 1995, p. 33) transforms some structural functional units. Among them, the unit of motivation for development and purpose-making abilities are first decreased as well as their motivation and useful abilities "the results and meanings of one's own mental activity in own experience" (Ibid).
- Psychological resources of self-regulation include the ability to become an autonomous subject of regulation of one's own activity, the ability to per-

form purposeful modifications in the external world, and the ability to be resistant to external circumstances (Leontiev, 2010, 2011).

- Art therapy is a traditional method in gerontological practice that is believed to activate creative potential in the elderly (Filosop, 2005; Beregulina, 2009; Dmitrienko, 2010; Kolpakova, 2010), to stimulate an active lifestyle (Druker, 2001; Glukhanuk, Gershkovich, 2003; Windle, 2013) or to provide an education through art (Ermak, 2009). We believe that the psychotherapeutic aspects of art therapy influence personality in the elderly due to the functions of preservation, compensation and adaptation.
- The art therapy method is based on the theory that the self-determining personality is a system of relationships with the environment. This theory considers an elderly person to be a subject and a creator of culture (Kopytin, 2010). The advantages of this method include its polymodality, interactivity, orientation to personality and bio-psychological organization. Its visual and sensual character of activity, orientation to self-development of personality through a creative activity, and use of active group interactions (external resource) can be considered to be an universal factor (under integrated conditions) for mobilizing the personality resources of development in the elderly.

To achieve the proposed task we designed an art therapy program including *three units* of group psychological work corresponding to the stages of mobilizing the personality resource:

1. “*Activation of the potential personality resource*” — increase in the reflexivity level and the stimulation of creative activity, life resistance, and the tolerance of incertitude. A structured and not structured art activity were used together with some elements of life resistance, creativity and psychosomatic regulation training.
2. “*Solving contradictions and incoherence in life*” — developing a concordant attitude in the one’s present and for the future, discovery of new meanings in life, and the activation of anticipation processes. We used the methods of phototherapy, musical therapy, sand therapy and corporal therapy.
3. “*Self-realization and self-presentation of competence in life*” — realization of one’s active attitudes and one’s own competence in life, self-acceptance in the new state, and the realization of the importance of social units. We used therapy composed of well-known pieces of art, elements of performance, installations, and mandalas.

The consecutive complication and enrichment of sessions in the art program were aimed to stimulate a need to use latent personality resources, leading to positive personality development in the participants. The effect of this development depends upon the degree to which the respondent becomes a subject, a creator of one’s own life, and their sense of contentment and organization in space and time.

Subjects

The study was performed in the Kamchatka regional scientific library named after S.P. Krashennnikov, in the Psychological Counseling Service and in the Center of Applied Psychology at the Psychological Department of Vitus Bering Kamchatka State University. A total of 120 subjects (45 men and 75 women) took part in the study, aged from 57 to 80 years: 47,5% — 65–70 years; 45 % — 71–75 years; 7,5% — 76–80 years. A total of 40,8% of the subjects were married; 30,9% — were divorced, and 28,3% — were widows. A total of 5 % of subjects had a primary education, 70% — had a secondary school education, and 25% — had a college education. A total of 47% of the participants were retired. We excluded from the study subjects with chronic neurological diseases or mental disturbances.

Study design. The study followed the rules of a training experience with a control group of subjects (Experimental Psychology..., 2003)

The constituting part of the experience included 2 units:

1. *Personal Subjectivity (PS)* was evaluated by measuring the individual level of *reflexiveness* (Karpov, 2004); the level of *subjective control* (Rotter, adopted by Bazhin et al., 1984); *self-attitude* (Panteleev, 1993); the *sense of life relations* (SLR) (Krambo & Maholik, adapted by Leontiev, 2006).

2. *Evaluation of the psychological resources of self-regulation* (life resistance, reflexiveness, coping strategies, tolerance of uncertainty) using the following methods: “Test of life resistance” (Maddi, adopted by Leontiev & Rasskasova, 2006); “Evaluation of individual reflexiveness” (Karpov, 2004); “Index of coping strategies” (Amirhan, adopted by Yaltonsky & Sirota, 2008); “Evaluation of the tolerance of uncertainty (Budner, adopted by Soldatova, 2003); “A questioner of artistic hobbies” (Kopytin, 2011).

The results of the tests of the first unit allowed us to form 2 groups of 40 subjects each, experimental (E) and control (C), with polar indexes in the level of Personal Subjectivity (Table 1).

Table 1. Personal Subjectivity in the experimental and control groups

Measures	Scales	Experimental group (N=40)		Control group (N=40)		Coeff. t
		median	dispersion	median	dispersion	
Reflexiveness	Individual level of reflexiveness	115,02	82,2	124,6	79,9	2,24*
Type of locus control	General internality	21,37	29,7	24,07	19,5	2,45**
Self-attitude	Self-direction	6,4	2,65	7,35	6,64	1,71*
Sense of life relations (SLR)	General sense-fulness of life (GS)	97,6	140,7	108,7	102,1	4,46**

*p<0,05, **p<0,01

Social and demographic characteristics of the experimental and control groups are shown in Table 2.

We **le 2.** Social and demographic characteristics of the subjects in each group

Characteristics	E-group (N=40)	C-group (N=40)
Age		
57–65	19 (47.5%)	18 (45%)
66–75	18 (45%)	20 (50%)
76–80	3(7,5%)	2(5%)
Education		
<i>Secondary school</i>	15 (37,5%)	10 (25%)
<i>College.</i>	16 (40%)	18 (45%)
<i>University</i>	9 (22%)	12 (30%)
Marital status		
<i>Married</i>	10 (25%)	15 (37.5%)
<i>Widows</i>	25 (62.5%)	15 (37.5%)
<i>Divorced</i>	5 (12.5%)	10 (25%)
Social status		
<i>Continue previous work</i>	6 (15%)	22 (55%)
<i>Changed work</i>	6 (15%)	9 (22.5%)
<i>Stopped working</i>	28 (70%)	9 (22.5%)

The further analyzed the indicators of self-regulation in each group using the methods described for unit 2.

Tab subjects from *E group* exhibited a decrease in the levels of reflexiveness and life-resistance, dominant maladjusted behavioral strategies, and intolerance of indetermination. They showed reduced independence and subjective self-control, poor life purposes, and rigidity in interactions with other people, which was consistent with poor functional well-being. A deep feeling of one's own insignificance in society and limited social contacts and activity can be considered to represent dissatisfaction with the social aspects of development.

The subjects from *C group* show a higher level of reflexiveness and life resistance, dominant active behavioral strategies, and a tolerance for incertitude. Successful functions were revealed in these individuals due to their attitude toward autonomy, positive self-acceptance, life purposes, and the ability to structure one's their own life. Acceptance of this new status permits these individuals to increase social relations and to evaluate one's their own experience life with a wide range of emotions, which indicates that these people are satisfied with the social aspects of development and have personal subjectivity at this step of development.

The training experience was performed with the members of the *E group* divided into 4 subgroups with 10 subjects each. Art therapy was used in a thematic group as a psychological intervention and a determining external resource. The group was characterized by high organization, active participation in the social interaction and orientation on a permanently changing reality. The order of topics in the art group depended upon the main stages of dynamics in personality behavior in the group interaction: preparation, realization, new evaluation and action. Feedback was achieved through a discussion at the end of each session.

The control portion of the study used the methods described for the second unit of the constituting part of the study. The control portion aimed to reveal the dynamics for indicators of self-regulation in members of the E group after art therapy with consecutive comparison with members of the C group.

Results of the study. Significant dynamics were revealed in the indicators of the psychological resources of self-regulation in the *life-resilience* test in the subjects in the E group. A comparison of medians in all scales of this test in the E and C groups after the training experience proved approximation of values for both groups (Figure 1).

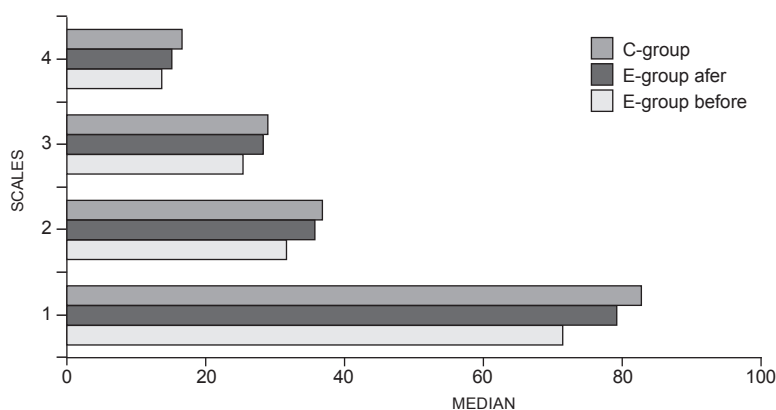


Figure 1. A comparison of medians in the life-resilience scales in the E and C groups before and after the training experience
 1 — general life-resilience; 2 — inclusion; 3 — control; 4 — risk-acceptance.

We can suppose that these dynamics of the indicators of life-resilience in subjects from the experimental group are due to inclusion in an organized creative activity. The possibility of initiating a personal choice and to regulate and plan a creative activity probably decreases the internal tension and favors self-satisfaction with one’s own actions and external activities. New skills from the acquired creative experience increased the possibility of actively enlarging the frames of personal choice.

A significant increase in the level of individual reflexiveness in the E group after art therapy reveals a very important regulative component of personality that allows the individual to consciously construct his or her own life (Table 3).

Table 3. Comparison of median levels of individual reflexiveness in subjects from the C and E groups before and after art therapy

Measures	E-group			C-group	
	Before Median	After Median	Coeff. t	Median	Coeff. t
Reflexiveness	115,02	125,62	5,46**	124,6	1,66

**p≤0,01

Table 4 presents the dynamics of coping strategy selection in subjects from the C and E groups after the training experience.

Table 4. Comparison of the median scores of coping strategy selection in subjects from the C and E groups before and after art-therapy

Coping-strategies	E-group			C-group	
	Before Median	After Median	Coeff. t	Median	Coeff. t
“problem solving”	21,8	22,0	0,92	24,5	1,99*
“social support”	18,5	21,7	2,04*	20,0	1,69*
“avoiding”	27,4	25,9	3,20**	19,4	5,6**

* $p \leq 0,05$, ** $p \leq 0,01$

We should note that when the subjects became more familiar with the techniques and experienced a stimulation of their creative activity, and there was a tendency for their coping strategies to transform from maladaptive to adaptive.

A study of tolerance to uncertainty in the E group revealed significant differences on the scale “new” ($t = 3,69$; $p \leq 0,05$), indicating the subjective value of perceiving the new, unknown situation as stimulating and comfortable; on one hand, because it provides creative security, and on the other hand, as an installation, assuring the phenomenon of “paradoxical control” (Lushin, 2002) and changing the personality through self-regulation and self-organization.

An analysis of the data of *the inventory of creative hobbies* (Kopytin, 2011) revealed that after art therapy the subjects from the E group reported an increased number of creative activities (“systematic painting”, “submerged in jazz music”, “learned the frivolity technique and prepared an exposition”, “group singing”, “take photos and design an album”, “compose a graphic family history (genograms), all family is already interested”, “dancing tango”, “became familiar with computer design”, “so many years passed after the War — the whole life, but only now I became able to restart my lessons of German”, “I visit ski centers”, “I organized a party of poetry in our geriatric service. Not everybody was happy, but it is just a beginning”, “I hesitated for a while, but I learned that my poetic congratulations and jokes are very popular”, “I write an art diary. It organizes and stimulates me, and it makes me proud of my originality”). These statements are direct quotes.

Qualitative changes were also revealed by the emotional reactions to the creative activity. Here are some examples of the answers to the question: “What do you feel at our art sessions?” — “They make me happy and satisfied.”; “They distract me from unpleasant thoughts.”; “They provoke astonishment, admiration, curiosity, excitement”; “They create a feeling of fullness, happiness, and quietness”). Therefore, an analysis of the inventory data also proves that the creative activity transforms the quality of life of subjects in the art therapy group. For instance, a comparison of photo-collage titles at the beginning of art therapy (“Everything is not like I want”, “Stop”, “My memory”, “I lived as I could and not as I wanted”, “Everything is not OK”) and at the end of it (“Look at the world differently”, “Life with a smile”, “My life is a pleasure”, “The life continues”, “A clever owl”, “A volcano woke up”, “Eternity”),

“World”, “Intelligence”, “Good and bad”) proves that the respondents evaluate their lives more positively, realize their productivity and meaning, and accept the present as having the possibility for a full and polymodal life. Comments in response to the answers for the “Feedback” inventory also confirmed the above suggestion. The majority (90 %) of subjects wrote that the systematic creative activities in the art group actualized a “*new understanding of life*” and helped one participant “*to love himself again and even to have a positive opinion of himself*”, to feel self-respect and self-evaluation that favor harmonic interactions with surrounding people and the world. It should be noted that new artistic skills, reconstructed or acquired, permitted some (25%) of the subjects to solve the problem of personal utility and to use their experience in the art group to gain an interesting job.

Conclusion

A study of the dynamics in the psychological resources of self-regulation in the elderly proves to have a great effect on the inclusion of personality into an organized creative activity in a thematic art group. Participation in new typeskinds of activities actualizes latent resources in the participants, with a consecutive enhancement of personal experience and a new enrichment of life resources. A.I. Kopytin (2010, 2011) also suggested that participation in an art group stimulates the realization of regulation mechanisms both in oneself and in others that enables successful functioning in the real life. A temporary and adequate activation with the consecutive realization of the psychological resources of self-regulation in the elderly can be an efficient mechanism for the mobilization of personal resources for the further development of personality, progressive strategies, and life restructuring.

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