

## **The Role of Reflexivity in the Development of Personality in the Elderly**

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## **Роль рефлексивности в личностном развитии в старости**

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**Abstract.** This study is devoted to clarifying the relationship between types of reflection and the status of ego-identity, corresponding to dynamic changes in ego in normative crises of late age. Understanding the specifics of reflexivity will clarify the strategies of individual and group psychological support for older people. Successful aging depends on the awareness and acceptance of the challenges of age development. The identity achievement status as a result of the regulatory crisis is an indicator of the maturity of the individual at this age stage and indicates the ego-integration of the individual. The reflection parameters are compared in groups of respondents with different identity statuses. Identity statuses characterize a certain phase of a normative crisis as a transition from one stage to the next. A discriminant analysis of the main indicators of personality maturity and different types of reflection was carried out. The indicator of deadlock reflection is most characteristic of older people with a foreclosure identity. The reflection indicator of future activities is most pronounced among respondents

characterized by a moratorium of identity and among respondents with a foreclosure status of identity. These statuses correspond to the first phase of the crisis and the critical phase, respectively. The indicators of general reflexive activity, retrospective reflection, reflection of current activity, perspective reflection, auto-reflection, deadlock reflection statistically reliably distinguish groups of respondents with a moratorium of identity and respondents with achieved status of identity. Reflective activity is most characteristic of respondents with a moratorium on identity, which indicates the presence of an acute phase of the crisis.

**Keywords:** *older adults; reflection; identity; ego-integration; normative crisis; personality identity status*

**Аннотация.** Исследование посвящено выявлению взаимосвязи между рефлексивностью и статусами эго-идентичности личности в период нормативного кризиса на поздних этапах онтогенеза. Понимание специфики рефлексии в старости позволит уточнить стратегии индивидуальной и групповой психологической поддержки пожилых людей. Индивидуальная вариативность личностного развития в старости во многом зависит от осознания и принятия новых возрастных задач. Статус автономной идентичности, достигнутый в результате успешного проживания нормативного кризиса, является индикатором зрелости индивида на этой возрастной стадии. Параметры рефлексивности сравниваются в группах респондентов с разным статусом идентичности. Статусы идентичности характеризуют определенную фазу нормативного кризиса, знаменуя переход от одной стадии к другой. Проведен дискриминантный анализ основных показателей зрелости личности и различных типов рефлексии. Показатель тупиковой рефлексии наиболее характерен для пожилых людей с предрешенным статусом идентичности. Показатель рефлексии будущей деятельности наиболее ярко выражен среди респондентов, для которых характерен мораторий идентичности, и среди респондентов с предрешенным статусом идентичности. Эти статусы соответствуют первой фазе кризиса и критической фазе соответственно. Показатели общей рефлексивной активности, ретроспективной рефлексии, рефлексии текущей активности, перспективной рефлексии, ауторефлексии, тупиковой рефлексии статистически достоверно различаются в группах респондентов с мораторием на идентичность и респондентов с достигнутым статусом идентичности. Рефлексивная активность наиболее характерна для респондентов с мораторием на идентичность, что свидетельствует о наличии острой фазы кризиса.

**Ключевые слова:** *пожилые люди; рефлексивность; личностное развитие в старости; эго-интеграция; нормативный кризис; статус идентичности личности*

## Introduction

The age of a person is determined by the age-related stratification of society and is specifically historically determined. Age is expressed in a sense of one's own age identity and determines a person's belonging to a particular age cohort. A transition from one develop-

mental stage to another goes smoothly if it is accompanied by specific rituals such as initiation. They organize the developmental cycle and relationship between different age groups and reflect their principles and values. In case the specific rituals are absent, the change from one developmental stage to another becomes difficult and time-consuming. That is due to the need of an individual to become familiar with the social expectations and the new tasks on his own. As a result, an important question rises concerning the ways an individual accustoms to age-related norms and identifies with them. The personal level of identity includes identity with one's own goals, meaning of life and life values. The social level of identity is a commitment to the goals and values of the social group with which a person associates himself.

Identity changes over the course of a person's life, and the main changes occur in normative crises. A normative crisis is a transition to the next age stage associated with changes in the structure of the personality in accordance with age goals as the social expectations. A normative crisis includes three phases that are associated with a consistent change in identity status: from a foreclosure through a moratorium to an identity achievement. Developing the theory of E. Erikson (1968) and J. Marcia (1966), we found that they have a certain continuity.

The result of successfully overcoming the normative crisis is identity achievement. Identity achievement means that a person understands the own age identity and comprehensively realizes the new guidelines for the own development with accordance of age tasks as a social expectations and his (her) life goals. Such restructuring of the personality structure lead to achievement of personal maturity (Soldatova & Shlyapnikova, 2013).

Successful ageing is combined with age-related stereotypes (Weiss & Kornadt, 2018). There are two potential approaches to the relationship. On the one hand, lifelong age-related ageing stereotypes influence on development at the advanced age. Negative effects related to stereotype danger in seniors are the best reported (Armenta, Scheibe, Stroebe, Postmes, & Van Yperen, 2018) because negative age-related stereotypes have the strongest impact on senile behavior (Meisner, 2012). The more evident age-related identification is, the stronger negative influence of age-related stereotypes is observed (Kang & Chasteen, 2009). Impact of personal ageing concept on health (Wurm, Diehl, Kornadt, Westerhof, & Wahl, 2017), self-rating (Rothermund & Brandtstädter, 2003), cognitive and physical results (Menkin, Robles, Gruenewald, Tanner, & Seeman, 2017) is empirically confirmed.

On the other hand, seniors do not response on stereotypes that seemed to be unrealistic in virtue of their own experience (Fung et al., 2015). Therefore, projection is a response to already existing changes (Kornadt, Voss, & Rothermund, 2017). Facing negative age-related stereotypes, seniors are prone to distance and to dissociate themselves from them (Weiss & Kornadt, 2018). A relationship between self-rating and evaluation of other seniors is more evident for positive personal properties (Lin, Ankudowich, & Ebner, 2017).

The development of personality in late adulthood is characterized by the integration of ego-identity — self-identity in the past, present and future (Erikson, 1968). The boundaries of crises of late adulthood are difficult to differentiate due to the large influence of social factors and the high level of variability of individual development at this age.

However, it is possible to determine which phase of the crisis a person lives in relation to the status of identity.

The mechanism for the formation of age-related identity is universal for adult development and includes some normative crisis associated with a regular changes of ego-identity statuses. During the crisis, identity changes from a foreclosure through a moratorium to an identity achievement (Soldatova, 2006). Restructuring of ego-identity in the process of crisis is accompanied by an active search, reflection of changes in the process of adopting a new lifestyle. Reflection is an important component of the mechanism of development of the personality of an adult.

The leading role of reflection to achieve personality maturity is preserved in late adulthood. Progressive development in late adulthood is associated with the comprehension, integration and transmission of the semantic and value content of their life experience to future generations, that is, with a reflection of the past life path.

The ability to reflection can be understood as the ability to reconstruct and analyze a broadly understood plan for building one's own or another's thoughts; as the ability to single out its composition and structure in this regard, and then to objectify them, to work out accordingly to the goals set. A. V. Karpov points to the existence of an optimum of reflexivity, which is characterized by the fact that with an increase in reflexivity, both the integration and differentiation of the system of metaprocesses increase. But at high and very high values of reflection, its differentiating function clearly dominates (Karpov, 2003).

Reflexivity is a multimodal process. It is possible to differentiate the significance of certain types of reflection for the development of a person's personality at a later age. There are both positive (for example, systemic reflection) and negative (for example, quasi-reflection) varieties of reflexive processes (Leontiev & Osin, 2014), therefore the positive role of reflection in personality development is combined with reflexivity as a property characteristic of an idle, passive person.

In addition, reflection can be a kind of response to stress when a person goes through the possible causes of his condition, actions, and reactions, which ultimately enhances a depressed state and personality maladaptation (Hilt, Cha, & Nolen-Hoeksema, 2008). The multimodality of reflection also explains the high variability of research results (Sizikova, 2019).

There are several reasons for the classification of reflection. First, they distinguish intrapsychic reflection (the ability to self-perceive the content of one's own psyche and its analysis) and interpsychic reflection (the ability to understand the psyche of other people). Secondly, according to the temporary principle, the following three types of reflection can be distinguished: situational reflection provides direct self-control of human behavior in the current situation, retrospective reflection is manifested in a tendency to analyze past activities and accomplished events, perspective reflection is correlated with: the function of analyzing future activities and predicting likely outcomes.

According to the direction of reflective activity, they distinguish activity reflection (an individual's ability to evaluate various parameters of one's own activity), commu-

nication reflection (the basis for productive interpersonal communication), deadlock reflection is fruitless self-digging that does not lead to thoughts about one's own life (Zav'yalova, 2016).

Thus, reflection is crucial in the process of forming an individual's identity, being, in fact, a tool for self-development of a person's personality and achievement of personality maturity. Reflection allows you to rethink your life path, the value-semantic conditionality of your life during a crisis. The integration of self-image through the activation of reflection skills allows you to successfully live through regulatory crises, reaching personal maturity at the current age stage. This study is devoted to specifying the relationships between the statuses of ego-identity and the severity of various types of reflection in late adulthood.

## Methods and Equipment

### Subjects

Subjects were enrolled by snowballing. Age ( $\geq 55$  years old) ( $M = 64.89$ ;  $SD = 6.85$ ) was an inclusion criterion. In total, 306 subjects (including 188 females) filled up a question list and submitted sociodemographic data (such as sex, age, marital status, place of residence and educational background). 36 % and 64 % of subjects are married and unmarried, respectively. 72 % and 28 % of respondents live in city and country, respectively. 18 %, 58 % and 24 % had elementary/incomplete secondary education, general/special secondary education and higher professional education, respectively. In general, percentage ratio of sociodemographic parameters complies with the study population.

### Materials

To provide data on current status of a senile personal identity, modified E. L. Soldatova's Ego-Identity Structure Test was performed to evaluate personal identity status (Soldatova, 2006).

A. V. Karpov and V. V. Ponomaryova's Individual Reflexivity Test represents a self-rating of several reflection types (including retrospective reflection parameters). The method was applied to measure current change reflection and spent life reflection (Karpov, 2003).

C. R. Rogers and R. F. Dymond social and psychological adaptation diagnosis adapted by A. K. Osnitskiy (2004) evaluates personal characteristics related to both social and psychological adaptation and relevant personal characteristics conventionally considered as ones supporting successful ageing. The method enables determination of integral indicators such as adaptation, acceptance-of-others, internality, self-acceptance, emotional comfort, need for dominance and escapism.

## Results

The status of personality identity indicates the psychological characteristics of awareness and the degree of acceptance of changes that have occurred in connection with age. We

believe that the process of creating a renewed age identity in old age is associated with reflection. In this regard, we assume that in people with different identity status in old age, there are differences in the severity of different types of reflection. To clarify the specifics of actualization of various types of reflection in people with different statuses of identity, a pairwise comparison of the corresponding extreme groups of respondents was carried out according to the parameters of various types of reflection.

Comparison of indicators of actualization of reflection skills in groups of respondents with Identity achievement status and moratorium revealed the following significant differences (*Table 1*).

*Table 1*

**Comparison of indicators of actualization of reflection skills  
in groups of respondents with identity achievement status and moratorium**

Indicators	Identity achievement		Moratorium		<i>Significance of Differences</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
Overall level of reflection	63	5.527	70.6	6.693	.001
Retrospective reflection of activity	63	5.527	70.6	6.693	.002
Reflection of the present activity	63.27	5.86	64.67	6.91	.001
Reflection of future activities	63	5.527	70.6	6.693	.017
Reflection of communication	38.4	4.288	38.1	5.579	.76
Retrospective reflection	41.3	4.708	47.23	5.575	.000
Actual reflection	42.5	5.316	43.63	4.672	.365
Perspective reflection	63.27	5.86	64.67	6.91	.089
Interpsychic reflection	63.27	5.86	64.67	6.91	.436
Autoreflexia	63	5.527	70.6	6.693	.000
Deadlock reflection	32.27	4.548	38.37	4.93	.000

Respondents with an autonomous identity status — identity achievement have a statistically significantly lower general indicator of the severity of reflective activity compared with respondents with a moratorium status ( $p = .001$ ), this is also characteristic of the following indicators: retrospective reflection of activity, reflection of present activity, reflection of future activity, retrospective reflection, auto-reflection, dead-end reflection. Probably, the autonomous status of identity (an indicator of personality maturity) contributes to self-acceptance and significantly reduces the reflective activity of a person.

A comparison of indicators in groups of respondents with moratorium and foreclosure identity status revealed the following significant differences (*Table 2*).

*Table 2*

**Comparison of indicators of actualization of reflection skills in groups of respondents with moratorium and foreclosure identity status**

Indicators	Moratorium		Foreclosure status		<i>Significance of Differences</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
Overall level of reflection	70.6	6.693	64.67	11.309	.169
The overall level of reflection in sten	38.1	5.579	39.47	7.899	.218
Retrospective reflection of activity	70.6	6.693	64.67	11.309	.098
Reflection of the present activity	64.67	6.91	62.93	10.583	.109
Reflection of future activities	70.6	6.693	64.67	11.309	.013
Reflection of communication	38.1	5.579	39.47	7.899	.422
Retrospective reflection	47.23	5.575	43.3	9.363	.064
Actual reflection	43.63	4.672	42.63	8.177	.689
Perspective reflection	64.67	6.91	62.93	10.583	.054
Interpsychic reflection	64.67	6.91	62.93	10.583	.756
Autoreflexia	70.6	6.693	64.67	11.309	.031
Deadlock reflection	38.37	4.93	35.63	7.397	.197

In the group of respondents with moratorium identity status, the reflection of future activities and auto-reflection is statistically significantly higher than in the group of respondents with a foreclosure status ( $p = .013$ ). This shows that people with a predetermined ego-identity status are less likely to think about their future and really live in the illusion of accepting their new age status. A comparison of indicators in groups of respondents with autonomous and predetermined status of identity revealed the following significant differences (*Table 3*).

In the group of respondents with an identity achievement status, the indicator of deadlock reflection is statistically significantly lower compared to the group of respondents with a foreclosure identity status ( $p = .033$ ), which confirms the rejection of oneself due to age-related changes and indicates that people with an identity achievement of ego-identity to a lesser extent prone to reflection restricting the development of personality.

Table 3

Comparison of indicators of actualization of reflection skills in groups of respondents with achievement and foreclosure identity status

Indicators	Achievement status		Foreclosure status		Significance of Differences
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
Overall level of reflection	63	5.527	64.67	11.309	.525
The overall level of reflection in sten	38.4	4.288	39.47	7.899	.664
Retrospective reflection of activity	63	5.527	64.67	11.309	.256
Reflection of the present activity	63.27	5.86	62.93	10.583	.3
Reflection of future activities	63	5.527	64.67	11.309	.599
Reflection of communication	38.4	4.288	39.47	7.899	.37
Retrospective reflection	41.3	4.708	43.3	9.363	.5
Actual reflection	42.5	5.316	42.63	8.177	.672
Perspective reflection	63.27	5.86	62.93	10.583	.486
Interpsychic reflection	63.27	5.86	62.93	10.583	.745
Autoreflexia	63	5.527	64.67	11.309	.382
Deadlock reflection	32.27	4.548	35.63	7.397	.033

To identify the significance of the status of ego-identity in the structure of personality maturity as ego integration, a discriminant analysis of the main indicators of personality maturity as ego integration and various types of reflection was carried out. The results indicate that the indicators of reflection to a greater extent determine the differentiation of the diffuse status of ego-identity, according to the tendency to reflective activity, we can judge the presence of an acute phase of living of the regulatory crisis of the transition to the age of wisdom. Moreover, of particular importance is: perspective reflection, retrospective reflection, including activities, auto-reflection, reflection of future activities.

To identify the significance of various indicators of ego integration as personal maturity and reflection for differentiating the status of ego identity, a discriminant analysis of the main indicators of personality maturity, including the structure of identity, and various types of reflection was carried out. A graphical representation of all objects and centroids of ego-identity status classes on the axes of canonical functions is shown in the *Figure*.



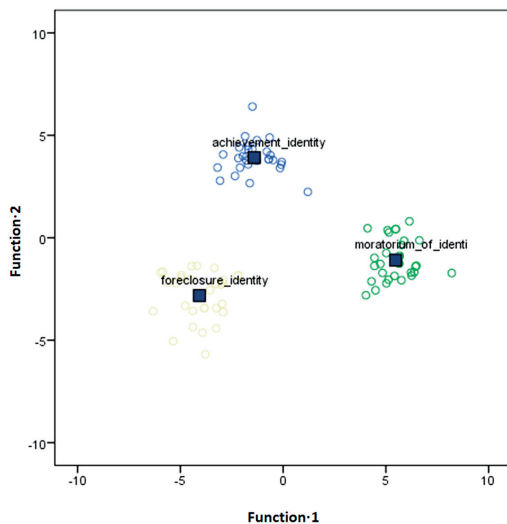


Figure. Graphic expression of canonical discriminant functions.

Note. ■ = centroid group

The differences between moratorium of ego-identity and the other two identity statuses are highlighted in *Figure* (function 1). An analysis of the factors presented in these functions will clarify the relationship between the identity statuses, indicators of personal maturity and the level of reflection. The results of the structural matrix of differential functions of ego-identity statuses are presented in the *Table 4*.

Table 4

Structural matrix of differential functions of ego-identity statuses (fragment)

	Maximum correlations with function 1			Maximum correlations with function 2	
	function			function	
	1	2		1	2
Retrospective reflection	.267	-.052	Ejection of others	.102	-.349
Deadlock reflection	.264	.012	Maladaptation	.103	-.322
Reflection of future activities	.264	.165	Integral indicator of acceptance of others	-.130	.317
Retrospective reflection of activity	.245	-.018	Integral Adaptation Index	-.08	.306
Autoreflexia	.213	.000	Escapism	.209	-.301
Overall level of reflection	.201	.034	Emotional discomfort	.052	-.28
Interpsychic reflection	.196	.098	Statement	.174	-.266

The content of function 1 includes features such as the retrospective reflection, overall level of reflection, the reflection of future activity, the retrospective reflection of activity, auto-reflection, the general level of reflection. Conventionally, function 1 can be called “The trend toward reflective activity.” This is consistent with the idea of phase 2 of the normative crisis as a time to rethink your life, introspection, and redefine yourself.

Function 2 mainly includes indicators of personality maturity. Such indicators as the non-acceptance of others, maladaptiveness, the integral indicator of acceptance of others, the integral indicator of adaptation, escapism, emotional discomfort, the statement, the rejection of oneself, the integral indicator of emotional comfort, the integral indicator of self-acceptance, have the maximum value for differentiating the achievement and foreclosure status of ego-identity.

## Discussion

Elderly people with the achievement status of identity significantly differ from people during the moratorium of identity in terms of the general indicator of reflective activity, the retrospective reflection of activity, the reflection of present activity, the reflection of future activity, retrospective reflection, auto-reflection, deadlock reflection.

These differences indicate that elderly people who have reached maturity, differ significantly in terms of reflection from people who have not yet accepted their updated age status. People with the moratorium of identity status are statistically significantly different from people with a foreclosure status in one indicator — reflection of future activities (in the group with moratorium of identity  $M = 70.6$ ;  $SD = 6.693$ ; in the group with foreclosure status  $M = 64.67$ ;  $SD = 11.309$ ). This is consistent with the idea that people with a foreclosure status of identity do not critically perceive their own future.

A foreclosure identity status characterizes the first phase of the crisis and indicates an uncritical acceptance of changes and one's own future, which is confirmed by significantly lower reflection indicators of future activities and self-reflection in comparison with the results in the with moratorium of identity. At the same time, there are no significant differences in other indicators of reflection, which indicates relatively weak differences in reflective activity in people with a foreclosure ego-identity status and with moratorium of identity.

People with achievement identity status are significantly different from people with a foreclosure status in one indicator: deadlock reflection (in the group with achievement identity  $M = 32.27$ ;  $SD = 4.548$ ; in the group with foreclosure identity status  $M = 35.63$ ;  $SD = 7.397$ ), which again indicates an uncritical assessment of changes in life in people with a foreclosure identity status.

A discriminant analysis of the main indicators of personality maturity, including the structure of identity, and various types of reflection, confirmed that the tendency to reflection is more manifested in people with moratorium of identity. Reflection indicators to a greater extent determine the differentiation moratorium of identity, according

to the tendency to reflexive activity, we can judge the presence of an acute phase of living of the normative crisis of the transition to the old age. Moreover, perspective reflection, retrospective reflection, retrospective reflection of activities, auto-reflection, reflection of future activities is particular importance. While differentiating the foreclosure identity status and achievement identity status seems to be a much more difficult task. The key points in this are the formation of signs of a prosperous — mature personality, the most important of which are: self-awareness and self-acceptance, authorship of one's life, successful relationships with other people, socio-psychological adaptation, emotional comfort.

## Conclusion

To determine the characteristics of the status of identity means to identify the phase of the crisis and predict the dynamics of overcoming the crisis. Understanding the features of reflexivity will allow you to adjust the strategies of individual and group psychological support for older people, indicating the current possibilities of reflexive activity. In the first phase of the regulatory crisis, reflective activity is reduced, with the exception of deadlock reflection, a person does not accept the future, is prone to an uncritical and ossified analysis of his life. At the peak of the normative crisis, the diffuse status of ego-identity is characterized by the actualization of reflexive activity, the most important of which are auto-reflection and retrospective reflection. Subjectively, this period can be perceived as maladaptive, however, under the control of a person of deadlock reflection, it can lead to a safe living of a normative crisis. When an autonomous identity is achieved, reflective activity decreases slightly compared to the acute crisis phase, the person is more adapted, assumes his updated age status.

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