
Personality Types and Culture in Later Adulthood

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Personality Types and Culture in Later Adulthood

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Dedication

To the memory of my parents *Irma* and *Simon Stein*, and all the nameless millions whose life-span was cut short in the holocaust of World War II, 1939–1945, and so never had the opportunity to age.

Preface

The question 'How do certain groups of individuals differ from others in the course of development from the middle to the later years?' is raised in this volume. Instead of focussing exclusively on the question 'How do people age?', the aim of the longitudinal investigation reported here was to identify personality configurations which would make it possible to group people by types and in this way to account for variations in the aging process in the transition from middle to old age; in *Thomae's* (1976) words, to identify 'Altersformen' rather than 'Altersnormen'. Such variations in patterns of aging in turn were assumed and found to be contingent upon differences in personal and cultural background. This essentially differential psychological approach to the problem of development during the later years of life appears today mandatory to complement the usual normative one. The emphasis on variety of human styles of adaptation and development avoids oversimplification and enhances the value for application of findings in the various fields of human services in which they are so badly needed.

First and foremost, this volume will be of interest to gerontologists, researchers, and students of personality development during the later years. The analysis of the rich longitudinal data and the use of alternative statistical and methodological approaches to the same set of data shall hopefully encourage a comparative reexamination of some of the major, popular methodological approaches to the study of adult development and aging. The methodological issues raised should also be of concern for all those interested in life-span development, as well as for students of personality who generally disregard in their theories and research the impact of the later years. The focus on the role of coping patterns in normal development, as well as the use of data-gathering techniques usually considered as 'only clinical', such as the Thematic Apperception Test, Sentence Completion, and Q-sort methods, should be of interest for those engaged in clinical practice or research, as well as for those counseling the middle-aged and aging.

It was only a little more than three decades ago that empirical, systematic research on adult development and aging started to gain momentum. The course of its growth reflects the increasing sophistication as well as the changing *Zeitgeist* in the study of human life-span development. It is interesting to note that investigations started in the mid- to late sixties in places as widely apart as Bonn [*Thomae*, 1976], Berkeley [*Block*, 1971], Chicago [*Havighurst*, 1968; *Neugarten*, 1964], and Jerusalem [*Shanan*, 1976] were essentially following such an approach, quite independent from each other. This volume represents the first major effort to portray an integrative report and analysis of a major longitudinal study of aging, the Jerusalem Study of Middle Age and Aging (JESMA), carried out over a decade, a task not easily achieved and possibly not yet quite completed.

The first chapter presents a basically system-theoretical rationale, relating extent and type of change to complexity of the individual and the environment. The investigation turned progressively from a perforce traditional cross-sectional one, to a simple longitudinal one, and subsequently to a multivariate-sequential and finally to a typological approach. Chapter 1 includes a brief analysis of the way the major dimensions of behavior and in particular coping behavior and style were selected for study, as well as the reasons for choosing particular techniques of investigation, including the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT), Sentence Completion, subscales of the Wechsler-Bellevue Intelligence Test, and semistructured interviews.

Chapter 2 concerns the problem of 'experimental death' and dropout from a differential point of view, in light of the analysis of four types of dropouts identified in terms of cultural background and personality. While dropout in general is related to lower intelligence, passive coping, and lower social status, traits associated with dropout vary with the reasons for dropout.

In chapter 3 the possible gains and losses of a nomothetic approach are highlighted by the results of traditional and sequential analyses of coping behavior in the course of later development. A typology in terms of internal congruence of personality structure is presented in chapter 4. This typology serves as a first step in the direction of an idiographic approach. It is based on a limited number of central aspects of personality functioning, i.e., three different levels of conscious control over communication. It demonstrates that the course of development does systematically vary with the extent of inter-level congruence. Further steps to an idio-

graphic approach are taken in chapter 5 where the construction of the Jerusalem Q-sort, an assembly of items sampled from actual self-descriptive statements of a normal-aging population, and the judging process are described. The use of the Q-sort for the assessment of stability and change of the modal personality as perceived by expert judges permits a glimpse into what to expect from the 'average personality as a whole' in the transition from mid- to later adulthood.

In chapter 6, four types of personality configuration, as they appear in the Q-sort at the start of the research, are identified: the active integrated copier, the dependent passive copier, the failing overcopier, and the self-negating undercopier. Then the types as they appear on retest 8 years later are described, and the subcultural and psychological determinants of these types are discussed. Level of education is found to be a major determinant of later development. The developmental trends apparent in the different types are then analyzed in chapter 7. In line with the initial assumptional framework, it could be shown that internally congruent types tend to be more stable over the years than the incongruent ones.

The next two chapters, 8 and 9, discuss critically some of the issues raised by the assumptions and methods on which the research was based. Once the focus moves from the average or normative trend to the person as a whole, or types of person, some of the basic questions in developmental research acquire a new perspective. Questions such as stability versus change have to be reformulated into who changes or remains stable in this or another dimension of personality or the personality as a whole. Yet, an idiographic or a partly idiographic typological approach in itself does not hold all the answers since typologies tend to vary with underlying assumptions and concomitant use of different techniques of investigation. The concluding chapter 10 assesses the possible contribution of investigations like the JESMA for the study of aging and human development as well as some of the implications of the present investigation for developmental and personality theory, along with a hint for everyday application in human service development.

On this occasion, feelings of appreciation are to be expressed to some of the many who assisted in this complex project: *Hans Thomae* and *Ursula Lehr* from the University of Bonn were associated with the project through exchange of ideas, comments, and ever-helpful advice. *Ursula Lehr* also contributed substantially in the translation of the Q-sort into German as well as in gathering validating material on the Bonn Longitudinal Study of Adulthood in the German population. *Bernice Neugarten*

and David Gutmann (Northwestern University, Evanston), Richard Lazarus (University of California, Berkeley), and Warner Schaie (Pennsylvania State University) revealed personal and intellectual interest in the JESMA from its very early days. David Chiriboga and Norman Livson (University of California, San Francisco) and Jack Block and the late Jean Block (University of California, Berkeley) contributed critical comments and encouraging support.

Thanks are due also to all the individuals who were actively involved during the first 12 years of the project when the raw data of the JESMA were gathered and analyzed by conventional uni- or multivariate cross-sectional and longitudinal methods. Rachel Sagiv served as research coordinator, and Jordan Jacobowitz was actively involved in the planning and control of data analysis, along with Omer Shani and Philip Alex. These data constitute, of course, the material on the basis of which the Q-descriptions in the present study were carried out by the team of expert judges: Avi Bauman, Zafira Degani, Nurit Hess, Jordan Jacobowitz, Yael Liron, Edna Mor, Erica Moustakis, Mihal Rosenfelder, Rachel Sagiv, Orna Shahar, Dorit Sharav, and Jonathan Sperber. Their contribution was a central one.

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and their members to participate during regular working hours. To these latter, hundreds of men and women, who were ready to let the researchers intrude into the privacy of their past and to share with them some of their experiences – to all those we owe a great deal.

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