

New Roles in Old Age

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Abstract: The period of old age brings with it many health problems. In many cases, the individual completely loses his autonomy, being necessary his care by the younger members of the family, more or less permanent. The institutionalization of an old man attracts a faster degradation of his vital functions and psyche. Because life plans are interdependent, the changes in one of them often affect all the others. To the loss of the productive social role is added the loss of social prestige, of the authority gained with efforts over the years, both in society and in the family. Retirement cannot be considered as a moment of social aging, but as the beginning of an individually modified lifestyle, as a psycho-social threshold for restructuring social roles, replacing the primary role in the pre-retirement period with compensatory roles, by increasing the intensity of latent roles or the emergence of new ones.

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The period of old age attracts a series of changes in the life of the individual, at a professional level, but also in the relations with family and friends, changes that have an impact on the perception of the self and the world around.

The person of old age gives up totally or partially, usually gradually, a series of well-known roles that he had as an adult. Usually at the beginning of the interval under attention, the elderly gradually lose weight in the role of parent: children become more independent, get married, increasing the feeling of uselessness characteristic of the transitions between roles.

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For example, a change in the marital role - widowhood - attracts changes in the life and social routine of the individual. Losing your life partner is one of the two major stressful events at this age.

The second, retirement, can mark a terminus of social activity or, conversely, a new beginning for relaxation, involvement in new activities, creating new social relationships. Thus, the elderly either become eager to redefine themselves, to create new roles, or sink into a series of adaptation crises, which, mismanaged, lead to the installation of depression and other mental illnesses. It seems that women cope better with the retirement event and because they feel the need for more free time to dedicate to the family. In Romania, many women have the role of grandmother after retirement. In men, the "crisis" can last more than 2 years.

To the loss of the productive social role is added the loss of social prestige, of the authority gained with efforts over the years, both in society and in the family. The impact is all the greater as the functions held as an adult were more important and depends directly on the degree of involvement of the individual in family life vs. workplace activity.

Naturally, roles are dependent on the social context and psychological characteristics of the individual. The transition to retirement is even easier in environments / countries where the elderly become active members of associations, each with well-defined roles, where there is a concern for and coherence in the reintegration programs of exponents of this age category (charities, courses dedicated, encouraging initiative in businesses, clubs, etc.), as opposed to environments that promote youth.

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According to studies conducted by Luminița Mihaela Iacob, there are 5 styles or practices of retirement and different retirees:

1. retirement type retirement: the individual retires only for himself, the social and spatial field narrows. Sleep time is the most important. He has no plans, not even in the short term, the days being very similar to each other; he moves little and never

outside his neighborhood. Social employment and its maintenance in productive activities are non-existent. One can speak of a “social death” type of retirement, contrary to a successful old age and with a high health risk.

2. retirement of the third age type: the pensioner is socially included through a series of productive activities. These are not only a way to occupy their time, but they occupy a central place in the temporal organization and represent one of the main centers of interest. This type is associated with a successful old age.

3. retirement or family type retirement: the pensioner integrates socially through consumption activities in a family setting or pleasant occupations. He has a special concern for children, grandchildren, he considers himself directly responsible for them, even supporting them financially. He considers that it has an important role in maintaining the family structure. Focused on leisure activities, the pensioner does many cultural activities, sports, travel. The feeling of successful old age is often welcome, but some family tensions can lead to depressive symptoms.

4. Claiming retirement: the pensioner contests the status of old person that he could have in society. He believes that, joining with other retirees, would be a pressure to keep an active role. Shows a special preference in establishing social ties with other retirees. The feeling of successful old age is very unstable due to the frequent feelings of social exclusion;

5. retirement-participation: the individual integrates socially with the help of television.

Television programs occupy most of their time, although they are not a productive activity. The feeling of having a successful old age is weak, and sedentary lifestyle poses a health risk.

The phenomenon of disengagement has its roots in the presupposition of an inevitable decline in abilities, with the passage of age and in anticipation of death. Disengagement is seen as an adaptive behavior that helps the elderly person to maintain confidence and peace of mind even if they perform peripheral social roles. This process can be initiated by the individual or provoked by society.

The theory of disengagement holds that in old age the individual and society withdraw from each other in four stages:

1. The first stage begins at the end of middle age, when traditional roles, such as those of employee and parent, become less available or less important, because the person's social circle is narrowed, because friends die or move elsewhere.
2. In the second stage, people anticipate, adapt and participate in this narrowing of the social sphere by giving up many roles they have played and by accepting this disengagement or detachment.
3. In the third phase, as people become less and less role-focused, their style of interaction changes from active to passive.
4. In the last stage, due to these more passive styles of interaction, older people have less opportunity to choose new roles and thus increase the likelihood of disengaging (detaching) even more.

The theory of disengagement fails in assessing the variability of individual preferences and in differentiating socio-cultural frameworks. The applicability of this theory differs according to individual positions in social structures - a man of culture is more likely to remain involved than a worker in a factory. On the other hand, a rural person will continue to work after the age of 65-70 to ensure a minimum income.

In 2012, the World Health Organization launched the concept of “active aging”, with the stated aim of changing the idea that the elderly are a burden. The term active aging refers to the continued participation of the elderly in economic, social, cultural, spiritual life and not only, to the ability to be physically active or to continue their work. The social integration of the retired elderly person still able to work therefore means the transfer of the status and role from the period of professional activity to that of pensioner. The realization of such a transfer depends on maintaining the consciousness of the social utility of the elderly and the pleasure of living. In societies where close family ties predominate, the elderly are treated with respect for their wisdom and achievements, they enjoy appreciation, and their contribution to community life is recognized. For example, in Eastern cultures, the elder remains active, playing key and honorary roles in the community.

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