

This project will examine a new framework that explains how people think personality changes over the life span. This framework combines the roles of three mechanisms: culturally shared expectations about changes in personality, self-enhancement, and self-actualization motives. The general assumption is that each of these three mechanisms can influence how people perceive changes in personality over the life span.

The self-enhancement motive, which is defined as people's desire to have a positive self-evaluation, can lead people to evaluate themselves more positively in comparison to others. It also may lead them to think that they will improve over time. Nevertheless, the latest research on how people think about how they change over time indicates that this phenomenon has some limitations and the motive for self-enhancement does not fully explain the perception of change over time in self-perception because not all perceived changes are positive. An additional factor to consider is the kind of changes in personality that are expected or are socially desirable. It is also important to consider how the perception of changes in one's own personality may reflect the process of self-actualization, which can be defined in terms of the fulfillment of the basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

Culturally shared expectations are defined as widely shared assumptions of one's personality traits and behaviors at different age. I expect that how people think their personalities will change over the life span should correspond to how people think they change in general. This expectation will be examined by determining if perceived personal changes in personality over the life span parallel the pattern of perceived changes in personality among people in general. The role of self-enhancement motives in the perception of personality changes over the lifespan will be examined by determining if perceived changes in personality are more positive than the pattern of perceived changes in others, including whether changes in one's own personality will be stronger or weaker than perceived changes in the personalities of others. In the context of self-determination theory, self-actualization is defined as developing a person's potential and striving to satisfy the basic psychological needs of competence, relatedness, and autonomy. I expect that for traits that are associated with the satisfaction of basic psychological needs people will expect different pattern of changes over time.

One hypotheses of the proposed studies is that for traits associated with basic psychological needs positive self-evaluations are expected to increase from childhood to adulthood or midlife and then plateau, whereas for other traits decreases after adulthood or midlife are predicted. Because basic psychological needs are universal we can expect needs satisfaction to lead to normative changes in personality that can be observed at the mean-level changes in both cases: perceived personal changes and perceived social changes. I will also determine if traits associated with basic psychological needs will progress and then plateau at the age at which people expect to actualize their personal potential and become who they really are. The proposed project will also examine relationships between perceived changes in one's own personality, authenticity, and well-being (including self-esteem, meaning in life, and life satisfaction).

I will carry out a series of studies that will examine how people perceive personality changes over time and how people think about how personality changes throughout the life of people in general. The preliminary study found that people perceived an increase in of extraversion and openness to new experiences to the early adulthood and then decrease with age. Agreeableness, conscientiousness, and emotional stability increased with age, results that are consistent with the results of longitudinal studies.

The first of the proposed studies will answer two questions: (1) Do perceived changes in one's own personality parallel changes among people in general, and (2) Do people see changes in their own personalities as more positive than they see changes in the personality of others? The next study will determine if differences in the perception of personality changes are related to satisfying basic psychological needs. Relationships between the perception of personality changes and the sense of authenticity and well-being (e.g. self-esteem, life satisfaction, and meaning in life) will be measured. I expect that the more past and future changes are related to satisfying basic psychological needs, the greater will be the sense of authenticity throughout life.

The innovative aspects of this research are examining relationships among perceived personal changes, perceived social changes, and actual changes in personality over time, which have not been examined previously. Also, investigating people's perceptions of how the satisfaction of basic psychological needs change over the life span and how these changes relate to perceived and real changes in personality traits over the life span have not been studied, and the studies proposed in this project may make important contributions to our understanding of personality and human development.