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How to introduce Subjective Aging Psychology into Lifelong Guidance and Counseling ?

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Time is freedom, age a constraint.
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INTRODUCTION: AGE, THE NEGLECTED GIVEN IN GUIDANCE AND COUNSELING PSYCHOLOGY

If Guidance Counseling Psychology has for a long time directed its work and practices toward the given moment in the life of the subject who is seeking career guidance, it has rarely considered the subject's age other than to place the individual into a generational class such as, child or adolescent, in school or dropped out, young or “emerging” adult seeking a first job, adult facing a career crossroads, a suddenly unemployable fifty-something, a future retiree contemplating a major change of status, etc. More generally and for more than a century, Guidance Counseling has sought to characterize orientation as a post-graduation activity, as the two major currents identified by Jean Guichard and Michel Huteau(2006) testify to, namely, the relationship between the choice of orientation and relatively

stabilized individual capacities on the one hand, and the construction and development of professional identities on the other.

The contrast between the worry about their age that adults confronted

1Une ethnologie de soi. Le temps sans âge. Seuil, 2014, p.15.

with career choices express and the little importance Guidance Counseling Psychology accords to the psychological dimension of growing older is great. As a matter of fact, anyone questioning his/her career path automatically considers how he/she sees his/her own age (Am I too old? Is this the right time? Maybe I'm too young? Does this match my age?). Certainly the life-designing concept of Mark Savickas (2010) takes this projection into consideration in a dynamic of identity and aging just as do the works of others such as Dai Williams (1999), who uses life lines to analyze the relationship between life-events and career changes. All include the progression of age in their counseling during career transitions. However, it seems that in these cases, age is considered at best a variable, at worst as a datum, and rarely as a determining factor in career decision-making or in post-transition counseling. It is for this reason we wish to demonstrate the extent to which Guidance Counseling in the 21st century can benefit from considering three contributions proposed by Aging Psychology, namely, subjective age, the self calendar, and generational stakes all of which influence both lifelong career choices and coping, at any age, with change already undergone.

1/ CONSIDERING THE DYNAMIC BETWEEN SUBJECTIVE AGE AND CALENDAR AGE

For many years, the manner in which western psychology sees aging has been principally chronological and standardizing. This is due to a succession of works starting with the pioneer studies of Alfred Binet and Theodore

Simon (1904) who forged the notion of "mental age", followed by the genetics-related theory of Jean Piaget (1936) which replaced this concept with the standardizing notion of "stage of development", to which Anna Freud (1956) contributed a psychoanalytic approach.

It wasn't until the 1970's that numerous works by principally English language researchers emerged dealing with subjective age, Heslon (2007). It is certainly not incorrect to base a child/adolescent developmental psychology on chronological age since both cognitive and psycho-affective development are subject to neurophysiological growth which is objectifiable and measurable, even if authors such as Bernard Gibello (1984) have demonstrated the existence of "evolutive disharmonies". But the principal contribution of the theories of subjective age initiated by Robert Kastenbaum (1972) has been to show how, throughout the progression of the years, starting at the end of childhood, growing during adolescence, and then becoming even stronger starting with the period from 25-30 years of age, the age which counts for the person is not chronological, date-of-birth age but subjective age, the age experienced by the individual. We tend to estimate this age as younger than we are as much in a defensive stance in relation to our growing awareness of death as in a posture of confidence in the desires and the potentialities that life offers at all ages.

The fine work of Bernice L. Neugarten (1996) entitled *The Meaning of Age*, among others, has called into question the stage-normative school of adult development. The remarkable syntheses of this traditional school by Renée Houde (1999) and Helen Bee and Denise Boyd (2011) notwithstanding, they persist in promoting a psychology of adult development modeled on the growth patterns of children and adolescents rather than integrate the subjective dynamic of perceived progression in age that constitutes the Aging Psychology that I am defending. Seeking to move beyond the classical school of adult development, Aging Psychology responds to Marcel Gauchet (2004) who argues for a "contemporary psychology" equal to today's changing notions of aging, from the delaying of childbirth to the

assisted end of life. What concerns us here is that subjective age, pioneered by Robert Kastenbaum (1972), and the subjective meanings we assign to our age, presented by Bernice Neugarten (1996), are two dimensions neglected by the majority of practitioners in career guidance and counseling.

Guidance and Counseling Psychology would benefit from freeing itself of the stereotyped models or “developmental tasks” promoted in an earlier age by Robert J. Havighurst (1972) and his predecessor Erik Erikson (1959). This classical model pairs with each calendar age a set of standardized “life tasks” (especially in Havighurst) which no longer correspond to the changing realities of contemporary life paths. Because of this, subjective age has become the dominant factor in orientation or reorientation decisions over a lifetime. Consequently, measuring subjective age according to Robert Kastenbaum's (1972) scale or to the more recent one by R.E. Goldsmith and R.A. Heiens (1992) would enable us to record the difference or the coincidence between subjective age and calendar age and to include this dynamic tension in counseling for career development in line with the ideas of Alexandre Lhotellier (2001).

2/ INCLUDING THE PROSPECTIVE SELF CALENDAR WITH ONE'S RETROSPECTIVE LIFE STORY

Our adult lives, at least in western cultures, are traversed by the tension between the two ages that we are at any moment, our subjective age and our calendar age. This tension may prove to be more or less favorable to wise choices according to whether we feel ourselves to be “young enough” or “too old”; or whether on the contrary, we are overestimating our capacities and denying the reality of the passage of time, or we are anticipating in a timely way a future life or career phase. This tension between the two ages overlaps the dynamic of identity which Pierre

Tap(1993) called "identisation" or the combining of "identity" and "personalization". Paul Ricoeur (1990) explained it as a condensing of one's personal and narrative identities. This dynamic of identity and aging poses the question of change over age and over time. This duality evokes, on the one hand, ipseity or selfhood, which consists in experiencing one's identity as constant over time in spite of the changes life imposes, and on the other, the French term "mêmeté" (sameness) which is identity in the mathematical sense of "identical" (two different calculations can lead to an identical result). Ipseity is a function of memory, of remembrance and forgetting. This is the selective process we engage in in constructing our life story. However, narrating one's story, which is central to numerous practices in career orientation (competence lists, life lines, personality testing, etc.), only serves to reestablish continuity at the moment when the individual is confronted with the disruptions that the years, and existence itself, inflict.

Yet age and time are essential elements in one's personal story. They contextualize and order our life events chronologically, unless we choose a different organization, say, thematic, diachronic, or associational. They punctuate and mark by dates or years the retelling of our life's narrative. They set out and connote the re-readings of our lived experience. But they also act, more or less explicitly, in an anticipatory fashion. This anticipation forms the core of the work of Jean-Pierre Boutinet (2010) who deals in turn with self-direction, time-consciousness, and the ages of life. This was also Neugarten's (1996) concept of the "self calendar" which suggests that during the course of our adult lives, we anticipate the events we hope will happen but that remain uncertain (i.e. college degrees, career plans, home financing, retirement), just as we also anticipate those events we dread but which we know are probable (i.e. the death of parents, career crises, falling ill, etc.). In this regard Neugarten says that painful events will be less traumatic or stressful if they are anticipated and occur at the age that the individual had more or less judged acceptable. In the same way, our

hoped for events (birth of a child, job promotion, etc.) will bring satisfaction if they occur at the age we had imagined they would. If events occur earlier or later than anticipated they can be the source of feelings of frustration or inadequacy. The theory of self calendars is similar to the "clinical anticipation psychology" explored by Jean Sutter and Mario Berta (1991) where they draw a distinction between anticipation of the desired and phobic anticipation.

But it seems essential to us in matters of career development counseling to combine the prospective dimension implied by the personal calendar with the retrospective dimension of the narrative biography. Combining the two constitutes a second manner of integrating the subjective dimension of age into the research and practices of Guidance Counseling Psychology. It is not a question of simply taking subjective age into account, but joining the re-imagined aspects of our ages lived with the imagining of events to come so as to develop a career counseling that takes full account of each individual's unique selfhood and career dynamic. Edmund Husserl's (1928) observation concerning the prospective and retrospective horizons is appropriate here as he finds, between the two, "the personal consciousness of time".

3/ TAKING THE GENERATIONAL STAKES: INTER-, INTRA-, AND TRANS- INTO CONSIDERATION

There remains to examine a third dimension of our growing older that guidance counseling must rethink and take into consideration if it is to assume fully its ambition to be truly lifelong in its scope. Where subjective age (1st dimension) conditions the self calendar (2nd dimension), there is a third term to the equation, namely, the generational dimension. If age progression consists in being subjectively involved in the passing of time, and if re-reading one's past life so as to project oneself into the future proceeds the unique milestones of aging, then questioning one's career progress also means reflecting on one's generational affiliations. These

affiliations impact in three ways the manner in which we live our life's ages and therefore, the entirety of our life choices over the span of our adulthood (Chamanian, Lefrançois, (2012).

-First of all we are born into an historically dated period of identity "crystallisation" as Karl Mannheim (1928) characterizes it. This marks forever our lives, tastes, attitudes, and behavior with the seal of the historical events and cultural habitus predominant at the start of our 20's.

-Secondly, it follows that today's "blurring of age" does not totally erase our feelings of belonging to a particular generation. This fact will dictate in part our choices all along our life's course depending on the strength of our identification with persons of the same generation as ourselves.

-Thirdly, the majority of the questions we ask ourselves about our life's course and career choices, sooner or later, encounter the intergenerational and genealogical dynamic we were born into. This awareness happens most likely at specific family events of our lives, namely births, deaths, separations, and birthdays, etc. In other words, if, on the one hand, our orientation choices depend in part on a specific moment of our lives (according to our subjective age and self calendar) and on our generational identity on the other, then some of those personal and career choices occur at ages or dates which correspond to those notable events experienced by one or another of a member of an earlier generation of our family. Monique Bydlowski (1998) has illustrated this concerning motherhood, and Jacques Bril (2000) has done the same concerning fatherhood.

As a result, a lifelong orientation process is neither conceivable nor practicable without taking into account the three dimensions of the intra-generational, the inter-generational and the trans-generational, all of which play into our lifelong choices throughout our advancing adulthood.

The intra-generational aspect is the unique tension each one of us feels between our subjective age and our calendar age. Far from being theoretical or conceptual, this existential tension conditions the sense of

living that each of us forges out of our individual experience of life. This tension is underscored at each of the birth dates that mark the years of our lives (Heslon 2007); and it expresses itself in the seminal writings of “self-orientation” that make up the auto-fictional stories found in “Les années” [The Years] by Annie Ernaux (2008), or those from the masculine point of view, “D'autres vies que la mienne” [Other Lives than Mine], by Emmanuel Carrère (2009).

The inter-generational dimension is central to the immense issue of transmission from one generation to another which rests on the traditional assimilation of the experience from one generation to develop expertise in the next. By tradition the experience of the older generation is to be transferred to the younger generation who develop their expertise from it. However, the successive theories of “vocational chaos” and of the “psychology of transitions” has signaled an end to this one-way transmission from elders to youth and has led either to a break in that transmission, or to a reciprocal transmission between the generations where young and old experience a mutual transfer of their reciprocal expertise. Guidance and self-guidance no longer consist in transposing former generational models onto younger generations but in creating or re-creating new directions and new ways of life from generation to generation (Boutinet, Heslon 2010). This process is very closely linked to “trans-generational” factors as Nina Canault (2007) has proposed. As related to the subconscious (or to genetics as today's neuroscience would have it), these factors which we have inherited from our ancestors determine the identification from which certain of our career decisions are made (doing the same work as our parents, grandparents, uncles, aunts, etc., or the opposite, choosing entirely different work to break with family tradition). Once again, Lifelong Guidance and Counseling will find support and renewal in taking into account these three generational factors which Aging Psychology, as an emerging school, is beginning to better understand, describe and analyze.

CONCLUSION: TOWARD A SUBJECTIVE AGING PSYCHOLOGY IN GUIDANCE AND COUNSELING

As we have seen, there are at least three potential perspectives offered by the cross-fertilization between Aging Psychology and today's Lifelong Guidance and Counseling, namely, the dynamic tension between subjective age and calendar age, the articulation between the prospective self-calendar and the retrospective self-narrative, and the consideration of the intra-, inter-, and trans-generational notions already at work in any career orientation decision. In accord with this first overview, we are calling, first, for a transcultural approach to Lifelong Guidance and Counseling that is adaptable and applicable in relation to specific countries and their cultures, and second, for a renewal of the counseling views and practices that emerged out of western industrial culture by including the views of Aging Psychology which are more in tune with the necessity of today's clients to make career choices in a time of fluid consideration of age.

Thus, in today's world of globalization and uncertainty when new notions of age, of the prospective and retrospective, and of multiplying generational considerations are seen first and foremost as nationally and culturally derived, their translation into psychological terms by practices and paradigms born of the age of industrial colonialism and cold war are less and less comprehensible. The two dominant images of modernity from this period were those of progress and confidence in the future, but if those notions produced both Developmental Psychology and Guidance and Counseling Psychology, everything in the beginning of this the 21st century points to a world of mobility and unpredictability as Jean-Pierre Dupuy (2004) advances. With this in mind the construction of the person that Mark Savickas (2010) promotes would appear to benefit in its social application and in its scientific pertinence only on the condition that it adopt the contributions of a subjective Psychology of Aging.

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