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Personality Traits in the Context of Transactional Analysis and Emotional Intelligence in Young Adults: A Research Report

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Abstract

This article examines the relationship between the personality structure according to Transactional Analysis (TA) theory and emotional intelligence. Within TA, personality is divided into three ego states: Parent, Adult, and Child, which reflect different ways of thinking, feeling, and behaving. Emotional intelligence, on the other hand, refers to the ability to recognize, understand, and manage one's own emotions and the emotions of others. The adopted model of emotional intelligence assumes the existence of four main components: the ability to perceive and express emotions, the ability to assimilate emotions in cognitive processes, the ability to understand and analyse emotions, and the ability to manage emotions. The conducted research indicates that the Adult ego state, characterized by an objective assessment of the situation and logical thinking, correlates positively with empathy, understood as the ability to recognize and understand the emotions of others. This described relationship is helpful in understanding the process of development and integration of the Adult ego state and underlines its crucial role in a well-developed personality.

Keywords: Adult ego state, integrated Adult ego state, emotional intelligence.

Introduction

Transactional Analysis (TA) is a theory that continues to develop and evolve. Since Eric Berne first introduced the concept of ego states in 1956 (Stewart

& Joines, p. 392) to the present day, new threads and new areas for application have been emerging. The publication of the book "Games People Play" in 1964 did both good and bad for TA; on the one hand, there was a widespread popularization of the concept, and on the other hand, TA began to function overly simplified, as part of mass culture. "The ego state model suffered the most. In place of Berne's original version of the model, in which the Parent and Child are reflections of the past, and only the Adult is fully grounded in the present, most media accounts presented a more simplified version [...]" (Stewart & Joines, p. 394). Scientific publications on TA that have appeared in recent years concern both the practical use of the theory and basic research. This gives hope that transactional analysis will remain in the field of researchers' interest. This study is a return to thinking about the Adult ego state as a reflective structure that manages our personality and allows us to function flexibly (James & Jongeward, 1994, pp. 304-323). The ACL and PKIE questionnaires (Martowska, 2012; Jaworowska & Matczak, 2005) were used in the conducted research.

Theoretical Assumptions

In transactional analysis, using a structural description, personality is divided into three main ego states: Parent, Adult, and Child, which are responsible for three different ways of thinking and acting. The Parent is the most primal, normative state, the Child is the emotional state, and the Adult should be objective and responsive to the needs of practical actions. The essence of the theory is the assumption that ego states have considerable autonomy and, in interaction with other people, activate the appropriate ego states in the interlocutor. This model is, of course, sometimes an oversimplification, as clearly indicated by Stewart and Jones (2016, p. 25), and sometimes works to the disadvantage of the theory's proponents. Detailed descriptions use a more elaborate model that structurally includes the so-called sub-ego states. Structurally, in each ego state, there are equivalents of the other states, i.e., in the Parent ego state, there is Parent in Parent, Adult in Parent, and Child in Parent, and analogously in the other states. In practice, however, the most commonly used division is functional, relating to observable behaviours, and distinguishes substates that characterize our behavior model. These states have been named differently during the development of the theory. The controlling or critical Parent is now most often called the normative Parent. The nurturing Parent can be divided into positive or negative. The Child state is divided into free, sometimes called spontaneous, and adapted, also called compliant substates. In this substate, a state called the rebellious child was sometimes distinguished. The Adult state is usually not divided. A flexibly functioning personality should be able to react using

different ego states, depending on the interaction being conducted (Solomon, 2003; James & Jongeward, 1994, pp. 41-61; Stewart & Joines, pp. 13-40).

Emotional intelligence is the second concept used in the research. There is still a lack of a single, coherent way to define this concept (Pracka, 2021, p. 14), "although the detailed ways of understanding this term adopted by creators of various theoretical concepts and authors of various practical endeavours differ significantly, a general definition would probably meet with widespread acceptance, defining emotional intelligence as a disposition that enables a person to use emotional processes to cope effectively in life, supporting in this regard the so-called rational intelligence (typically measured by the intelligence quotient). It is precisely the cooperation, not antagonism, of emotions and reason that constitutes the essence of today's views on their mutual relations" (Matczak & Knopp, 2013, p. 11). Emotional intelligence means the ability to process emotional information, which forms the basis for the development of competencies enabling effective emotional regulation and coping in social and task-oriented situations (Goleman, 1997, pp. 34-111). It also includes skills related to interpreting emotional meanings and taking them into account in the process of reasoning and problem-solving. For the purposes of further research, the basic model of Mayer and Salovey (1990, 1997) is used, which indicates the existence of four main components, i.e. the ability to perceive and express emotions, the ability to assimilate emotions into cognitive processes, the ability to understand and analyse emotions, and the ability to manage emotions. The adopted model allows for the preparation of a personality profile that includes both a general measurement of emotional intelligence and its components (Jaworowska & Matczak, 2005, pp. 4-10), which will be correlated with the components of personality in TA.

It is assumed that there is a predicted link between personality structure in the TA approach and emotional intelligence. A proper personality structure in the TA approach should allow for flexible responses in various life situations and allow for diverse interactions with other people. At the same time, it should allow for achieving psychological well-being and a life stance called "winning" (James & Jongeward, 1994, pp. 23-40). Such a situation will be possible if the activation of ego states is a reflective process, subject to our control. The ego state that can manage the activation of various aspects is the Adult ego state, which is anchored in the present and can direct the process of entering into someone else's roles, adopt various perspectives, and analyse their consequences. Adopting the assumption of response subjected to constant reflection allows for integrating the structural and functional model in TA, which should facilitate understanding the basis of some of our behaviours (Wieczorek, 2016). According to James & Jongeward (1994, pp. 304-323), the Adult ego state can direct our personality, activate the Child, use the Parent, avoid psychological games, and

direct our own development. The process of such actions can be called integrating the Adult and can be tracked with appropriate tools (Wieczorek, 2016). The process of tracking changes is both diagnostic and developmental, as it supports the integrating Adult (Jusik & Wieczorek, 2024). A strong Adult ego state should positively correlate with emotional intelligence, as it is used to solve problems, express (rather than experience) emotions, and assimilate them.

The age of the participants is the final component used in the research. Assuming that we function properly and our Adult ego state integrates through gaining experience and entering into relationships with others, age should favor both the development of this state and the development of emotional intelligence (Jankowska, 2017). To divide the participants into age groups, the classification of young adulthood into stages was adopted: transition to adulthood, 17-22 years; emerging adulthood, 22-28 years; transition through the thirties, 28-33 years; settling down, 33-40 years; and transition to middle age, 40-45 years (Miś, 2000). This last stage, due to the lengthening of average life expectancy and the popularization of the idea of lifelong learning, has been extended to the age of 55 for the purposes of further research.

Research Methodology

The aim of the research was to find a relationship between personality structure in the TA approach and emotional intelligence. Two tools were used in the research. The first is *the Adjective Check List* (ACL) created by H.G. Gough, A.B. Heilbrun Jr., with Polish normalization (Martowska, 2012) – ACL. This is a tool used to analyse various personality traits. The ACL questionnaire includes 300 adjectives arranged in the alphabetical order. The task of the respondent is to indicate those adjectives that, in their opinion, best characterize them. The reliability of the tool, measured in the analysed scales, for women ranges from 0.67 (CP scale) to 0.78 (FC scale). In the case of men, the values of Cronbach's alpha coefficient range from 0.61 (CP scale) to 0.79 (NP scale). The ACL has been normalized, and the results are given in tens. Norms have been developed separately for women and men aged 15 to 69. The ACL is used both in individual personality diagnosis, for example for clinical purposes, and in scientific research. Examples of its application include the study of cultural archetypes, the analysis of stereotypes, as well as the exploration of issues related to environmental psychology and other areas of science. For the discussed research, a part of the ACL measuring the intensity of ego states in the TA approach will be used. The questionnaire uses the traditional nomenclature of functional ego states, namely: Critical Parent (CP); Nurturing Parent (NP); Adult (A); Free Child (FC); and Adapted Child (AC). To avoid terminological problems, the rest of the article will use descriptions of ego states in the terminology adopted from the ACL authors.

The second tool used in the research is the *Popular Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire* (PKIE), developed by A. Jaworowska, A. Matczak, A. Ciecchanowicz, J. Stańczak, and E. Zalewska (Jaworowska & Matczak, 2005), which is based on the theory of emotional intelligence proposed by P. Salovey and J.D. Mayer. The tool contains 94 statements written in the first person singular, and responses are given on a 5-point scale. The questionnaire includes four component scales for emotional intelligence and also enables the calculation of an overall score. The overall score is the sum of the results from all questionnaire items and is characterized by high reliability – Cronbach's alpha coefficient exceeds 0.90 for the overall score, and in the case of individual scales, it oscillates around 0.80 (for the adult group). The scales included in the tool are: AKC – Accepting, Expressing, and Utilizing one's own Emotions in action; EMP – Understanding and Recognizing the emotions of others; KON – Control, including cognitive, over one's own emotions; and ROZ – Understanding and Realizing one's own emotions. The Polish adaptation of the questionnaire is normalized, and the results are converted into stens separately for gender and depending on age for students and adults.

Research Results

The research was conducted using the CAWI survey technique on a group of 423 adults. 357 people completed it fully. For the Adjective Check List (ACL), additional response selection was performed, consisting of rejecting extreme results (No.Ckd scale) and rejecting results on the Typicality (COM) scale, which verify responses for lack of consistency or randomness in providing answers. Finally, responses from individuals over 55 years of age were rejected, which ultimately reduced the research sample to two hundred people. The results were classified into specific frequency groups, which allowed for an appropriate analysis of respondents who chose fewer adjectives and those who chose more. For each frequency group, and separately for age and gender, raw scores were converted into tens, which in turn made it possible to assign the respondents to be assigned to appropriate categories describing personality structure in the TA approach. Each ego state could be assigned values: very low, low, average, high, and very high. The normalized ACL results for the studied population are presented in Table 1.

Raw scores for the PKIE questionnaire for each scale and as a whole were converted separately for gender into a sten scale, which allowed for the determination of defined results for each scale as: low, average, and high. The normalized results for the studied population are presented in Table 3.

Table 1
 Personality structure in age groups, N=200

		transition to adulthood	emerging adulthood	transition through the thirties	settling down	transition to middle age
Critical parent	very low	0	0	0	0	0
	low	0	0	0	1	0
	average	31	44	5	9	26
	high	30	29	3	9	8
	very high	2	3	0	0	0
Nurturing Parent	very low	9	13	1	1	5
	low	35	39	5	7	20
	average	19	24	2	11	9
	high	0	0	0	0	0
	very high	0	0	0	0	0
Adult	very low	0	0	0	0	0
	low	20	28	2	7	8
	average	43	48	6	12	26
	high	0	0	0	0	0
	very high	0	0	0	0	0
Free Child	very low	1	1	0	1	0
	low	17	20	2	5	10
	average	45	55	6	13	24
	high	0	0	0	0	0
	very high	0	0	0	0	0
Adapted Child	very low	0	0	0	0	0
	low	2	2	1	0	0
	average	56	71	6	19	31
	high	5	3	1	0	3
	very high	0	0	0	0	0

Source: own research, 2024; The values of states that do not occur in the studied population are marked in red.

As an introduction to the analysis of the results, a compilation of age, personality structure, and emotional intelligence components was conducted, solely for informational purposes. This procedure was chosen because the questionnaires used were standardized based on the age of the respondents. However, it should be noted that the age norms of the questionnaires are not consistent within the adopted modified Levinson's division. An additional problem

is that the results in the studied population were distributed quite specifically. For example, in the Critical Parent category, very low and low results pertain to only one person. In the Nurturing Parent category, no one achieved high or very high results, and the same is true for the Adult category, where additionally no one obtained very low results. In the Adapted Child category, no one achieved very low or very high results. All of this yields a rather specific distribution in the research sample, a statistical egogram, which will certainly affect further results.

Since the results, after calculation, were transformed into an ordinal scale and the age of the respondents was divided into groups, it was decided to examine the relationship between age and personality structure using nonparametric tests. Chi-square, Kendall's tau b, and Spearman's R coefficients were calculated for the studies. IBM SPSS Statistics 29 was used for all calculations.

The first stage of the analysis was to calculate correlations between Ego States and the age of the respondents. Correlations were calculated separately for each Ego State.

While analysing the results, only one statistically significant correlation was found. A low negative correlation was found between the Critical Parent and the age of the respondents, with the following results: Kendall's tau-b = -0.15, Spearman's correlation = -0.17 with $p=0.018$. It was expected that a significant relationship would emerge between the Adult Ego State and the age of the respondents, but the obtained result is partially consistent with the assumptions adopted in the study. Since the Critical Parent decreases as the age of the respondents increases, it can be assumed that the level of a realistic approach to life, which characterizes the Adult Ego State, increases. The numerical compilation is presented in Table 2

Table 2
Critical parent and age, N=200

		transition to adulthood	emerging adulthood	transition through the thirties	settling down	transition to middle age	Total
Critical parent	low	0	0	0	1	0	1
	average	31	44	5	9	26	115
	high	30	29	3	9	8	79
	very high	2	3	0	0	0	5
Total		63	76	8	19	34	200

Source: own research, 2024.

Table 3
Emotional intelligence in age groups, N=200

		transition to adulthood	emerging adulthood	transition through the thirties	settling down	transition to middle age
Accept	low	35	34	2	10	13
	average	27	41	6	9	21
	high	1	1	0	0	0
Empathy	low	18	11	2	4	7
	average	36	56	4	14	23
	high	9	9	2	1	4
Control	low	3	2	2	2	4
	average	30	48	3	14	22
	high	30	26	3	3	8
Understanding	low	7	13	3	7	13
	average	45	56	5	11	20
	high	11	7	0	1	1
Generally	low	5	4	1	3	2
	average	53	68	7	16	32
	high	5	4	0	0	0

Source: own research, 2024

Analogous to the personality structure, the components of emotional intelligence and the age of the respondents were examined using nonparametric statistics. Dependencies were found between age and the KON scale, which determines the ability to control, including cognitive control. A person characterized by the ability to control their own emotions also knows which emotional states promote and which do not promote the effective performance of various types of activities (Jaworowska & Matczak, 2005, p. 31). However, surprisingly, the correlation turned out to be negative, for this pair of variables chi-square = 17.49, with $df=8$ and a probability coefficient of $p=0.025$. Kendall's tau-b = -0.20, Spearman's R = -0.21 with $p=0.02$. Contrary to initial intuitions, for the studied population, the highest results on the KON scale were achieved by representatives of the first two age groups. The numerical compilation is presented in Table 4.

Table 4
KON scale in age groups, N=200

		transition to adulthood	emerging adulthood	transition through the thirties	settling down	transition to middle age	Total
Control	low	3	2	2	2	4	13
	average	30	48	3	14	22	117
	high	30	26	3	3	8	70
Total		63	76	8	19	34	200

Source: own research, 2024.

Similar results, namely a negative correlation, were obtained for the ROZ scale, understanding, which indicates a very good understanding of one's own emotions, the ability to name them and distinguish their intensity. It also suggests knowledge of the causes of one's own emotional states (Jaworowska & Matczak, 2005, p. 31). For this pair of variables, chi-square = 18.98, with df = 8 and a probability coefficient of p = 0.015. Kendall's tau-b = -0.26; Spearman's R = -0.29 with p = 0.000. The numerical compilation is presented in Table 5.

Table 5
ROZ scale in age groups, N=200

		transition to adulthood	emerging adulthood	transition through the thirties	settling down	transition to middle age	Total
Under-standing	low	7	13	3	7	13	43
	average	45	56	5	11	20	137
	high	11	7	0	1	1	20
Total		63	76	8	19	34	200

Source: own research, 2024.

Although the negative correlations between age and the selected components of emotional intelligence are not consistent with the initial assumptions, the results should not be questioned, as there is evidence indicating that in selected populations, such a relationship does not necessarily occur (Jaworowska & Matczak, 2001, p. 21; Jaworowska & Matczak, 2005, p. 21). It can be assumed that better emotional intelligence results on the KON and ROZ scales are related to the specifics of the life period; the best results were achieved by the youngest respondents, who are either in the educational process or have just completed it, which may promote a broader perspective and self-improvement. The analyses regarding age are treated as a background for the main research.

The main part of the research concerns the relationship between personality structure and emotional intelligence. Variables were compiled, and statistical calculations were performed using the same nonparametric tests. After the calculations, only two statistically significant relationships between the variables were identified. The first of these concerns the relationship between the Adult Ego State and the EMP (empathy) scale. The chi-square test obtained a value of 6.260, with $df=2$ and a probability coefficient of $p=0.044$. Kendall's tau-b = 0.17; Spearman's R = 0.176 with $p=0.011$. The numerical compilation is presented in Table 6.

Table 6

Relationship between the Adult Ego State and EMP (empathy) scale scores, N=200

		Empathy			Total
		low	average	high	
Adult	low	19	42	4	65
	average	23	91	21	135
Total		42	133	25	200

Source: own research, 2024.

Similar to the previously described analysis of the studied population, the results for the Adult Ego State are quite specific. In the studied population (Table 6), all results pertained to low and average values. This is not an unusual situation; when analysing personality in TA, an egogram is created, which is a kind of map of Ego States. The studied population has a statistical egogram in which a high Critical Parent and a low Nurturing Parent dominate, which may explain why the Adult achieves lower values (Table 1).

Despite the previously described doubts, the calculations indicate a correlation between the distribution of the Adult Ego State and the distribution of the emotional intelligence component – EMP – empathy. The rank correlation at the level of 0.17 – 0.176, according to the classification of Stanisz and Guilford, is defined as weak, but it does exist and is consistent with the initially adopted assumptions. The ability to empathize, understood as the skill to recognize and understand the emotions of others (EMP), allows for a deeper understanding of human behaviour and the precise reading of their intentions. Thanks to this ability, an individual can recognize what others are feeling, distinguish sincere expressions of feelings from insincere ones, and predict what emotions might be evoked in others by their own actions. High scores on the EMP scale indicate the ability of the respondent to easily and accurately recognize the emotions and intentions experienced by others. Such a person can notice, for example, that someone feels embarrassed, experiences fear, or is trying to draw attention to

themselves. They are also characterized by the ability to notice subtle aspects of other people's behaviour that remain invisible to most people (Jaworowska & Matczak, 2005, p. 31). This corresponds to the Adult Ego State, in terms of its integrative nature, which utilizes the functionality of other states without losing its autonomy (Wieczorek, 2016). Integrating the Adult means the ability to see from another person's perspective, awareness of one's values, the ability to predict the consequences of one's actions – also in terms of interaction flow – and awareness of one's placement on the timeline. The timeline refers to the symbolic perspective of who I was, who I am, and what will happen to me in the context of the actions taken. This corresponds to Jesse Delia's concept of cognitive complexity, which is a good predictor of professional achievements (Wieczorek, 2017; Griffin, 2003, pp. 136-148). People who accurately predict the behaviour of others, know what they can afford, recognize their own emotions, and can manage them, performing better in the labour market

It is worth noting that the lack of relationship between the components of emotional intelligence and the remaining elements of personality structure supports the concept related to the integrating function of the Adult Ego State. If such relationships had appeared, it could be assumed that we would have used the Child Ego State, which largely corresponds to emotional reactions, to understand and communicate emotions. The second possibility is that the Nurturing Parent would be significant in, for example, providing support. The absence of these relationships suggests that the Parent and Child states serve more for automatic, situation-forced reactions, while the Adult state is responsible for the actual recognition and understanding of emotions, as well as for building empathic reactions. This is important for understanding the mechanisms of personality functioning and significant as an element of basic research.

The second potentially statistically significant relationship is the connection between the Adult Ego State and the KON (control) scale. In this case, a statistically significant result was found in the chi-square test of independence, with a value of 6.458 at $df=2$ and $p=0.04$. However, no statistically significant correlations were found, and for this reason, no further analyses were performed.

Conclusions and Summary

This article presented the relationships between personality structure in terms of transactional analysis and emotional intelligence. As a backdrop to these considerations, the age of the respondents was taken into account, namely the so-called young adulthood in Levinson's classification, which may have a potential relationship with the discussed topic. The presented research results indicate a relationship between the Adult Ego State and the empathy

scale, and they also indicate a correlation between age and selected areas of personality, as well as selected areas of emotional intelligence.

Transactional analysis is most often used as a theory that allows for a better understanding of what happens in interpersonal relationships, hence the enormous popularity of, for example, the concept of psychological games or transactional dependencies. Theoretical descriptions, however, are based mainly on theoretical assumptions and observations, and the conclusions drawn cannot always be empirically confirmed. For this reason, for the development of the TA concept, research conducted using standardized tools should be considered very valuable.

The dependence observed in the research fits into the understanding of both empathy and the functioning of the Adult Ego State. Both the correlations that were confirmed and those that did not appear are significant, as they testify to the key role of the Adult Ego State in the process of building emotional intelligence. The analysis of the research findings also showed a certain flaw in Eric Berne's concept. A good understanding of personality structure is not always sufficient to understand human functioning in a holistic way. We can comment on the intensity of a given Ego State, but describing what their proportions mean is more complicated. TA works best when we use its individual components separately, such as game analysis, script analysis, or personality analysis to create an egogram.

For practical applications, additional concepts are created, which are a kind of overlay on the core of the theory, referring to other theories or classifications. One such theory is the description of functioning from the perspective of personality adaptations (Ware, 1983; White, 2004; Stewart & Joines, 2014-236). Personality adaptations are a set of six consistent ways of coping based on what worked best in the family, supported by terminology from the DSM classification. There is a chance that developing the concept of the integrating Adult in conjunction with other psychological classifications will, in the long term, allow for the creation of an analogous, practically useful classification. This is a perspective that encourages further research and exploration of the topic of personality structure.

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Cechy osobowości w ujęciu analizy transakcyjnej a inteligencja emocjonalna młodych dorosłych. Raport z badań

Streszczenie

Artykuł analizuje zależność między strukturą osobowości według teorii analizy transakcyjnej (AT) a inteligencją emocjonalną. W ramach AT osobowość jest podzielona na trzy stany Ja: Rodzic, Dorosły i Dziecko, które odzwierciedlają różne sposoby myślenia, odczuwania i zachowania. Inteligencja emocjonalna odnosi się natomiast do zdolności rozpoznawania, rozumienia i zarządzania własnymi emocjami oraz emocjami innych osób.

Przyjęty model inteligencji emocjonalnej zakłada istnienie czterech głównych komponentów zdolności do spostrzegania i wyrażania emocji, zdolności do asymilowania emocji w przebiegu procesów poznawczych, zdolność do rozumienia i analizowania emocji oraz zdolności do kierowania emocjami. Przeprowadzone badania wskazują, że stan Ja Dorosły, charakteryzujący się obiektywną oceną sytuacji i logicznym myśleniem, koreluje pozytywnie z empatią, rozumianą, jako umiejętność rozpoznawania i rozumienia emocji innych. Opisany związek jest pomocny w rozumieniu procesu rozwoju i integracji stanu Ja Dorosły i podkreśla jego kluczową rolę w prawidłowo rozwiniętej osobowości.

Słowa kluczowe: Ja Dorosły, inteligencja emocjonalna, zintegrowany Dorosły.