

NORMATIVITY AND THE AGING SELF: “ACTIVE LONGEVITY” MEDIA DISCOURSE IN CONTEMPORARY RUSSIA

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The author would like to express her gratitude to Erzsébet Barát (Department of Gender Studies, Central European University) for providing insightful supervision of this research during the 2017/18 academic year and to the anonymous reviewers, whose comments and suggestions greatly improved this article.

This article explores the normative understandings of older adults, old age, and aging as they are articulated in the mainstream media’s discourse on “successful aging” and “active longevity” in contemporary Russia. I draw on critical gerontological approach and critical discourse analysis to examine the articles published in 2016–2018 in one of the most popular Russian weekly newspapers, *Argumenty i Fakty* (Arguments and Facts), which actively engages in discussions of “activity,” “longevity,” and “success” in later life. This article traces the consumerist logic behind the “successful aging” discourse, which takes the notion of “success” as a matter of lifestyle that can be maintained through individual’s voluntary reflexive participation in consumerist practices and, thus, ignores the social-structural factors affecting this process. The aging subject is invited to engage with the “successful aging” ideal and express their “reflexive” self through the practices of “managing” health and longevity, appearance and embodiment, and manifestations of sexuality. However, this “successful” management suggests a correlation with the conventional perceptions of femininity, masculinity, and sexuality, subjectivity buttressed with neoliberal values, and familial life in which the aging subject must remain a resource for younger generations. This analysis indicates that such standards exclude those life trajectories that do not comply with the norms of the discourses on aging in an “active” and “successful” way.

Keywords: Active Longevity; Successful Aging; Lifestyle; Consumerism; Normativity

A common interpretation of the lives of older adults during the socioeconomic transformations in Russia in the 1990s has framed them as “the most disadvantaged generation” (*samoje obezdoledennoe pokolenie*) due to their unpreparedness for the rapid sociocultural and socioeconomic changes that happened at that time (Grigoryeva et al. 2015:7; Levinson 2012:34). While the transformations, indeed, caused cuts in pensions, scholars have recently argued for a more nuanced view of senior citizens, who do not constitute a homogeneous group. Some of them have suggested that viewing every older adult as *sovetskii chelovek* (a “Soviet person”) who belongs to the

past and who is inherently “oppressed and disengaged from life” stigmatizes them and frames certain socioeconomic issues as affecting exclusively and universally the older generation (Grigoryeva et al. 2015:37–38; Rogozin 2016:39). However, stereotypes about aging in popular culture are far from being homogenous. While some of them are openly negative and consider older people to be conservative, “grumpy,” carrying “outdated” beliefs, or “pitiful,” positive stereotypes are usually based on an idealized image of older people possessing “great wisdom” (Starikova 2011:45–46). The commonly discussed “respect,” which has to be shown toward older adults and is based on a historical intergenerational “debt” of the younger generations, is rather declarative and does not actually translate into supportive actions (Smol’kin 2008:110, 121). An actual older person is often unable to reach the high standards for deserving such “respect” (Smol’kin 2014:44).

The complex discussion of actual lives in older age in Russia—and how they are different from lives in other places—is complicated by several methodological challenges: the tremendous diversity of living conditions, including access to medical and social care in different parts of the country (rural/urban, central/regional), the gender imbalance in later age due to differences in life expectancy for men and women, and the problems related to the inclusion in studies of socially less active older people (Lidzhi-Goriaeva 2008:37; Strizhitskaya 2016:797–799). For example, scholars suggest that while statistical data confirm poverty to be extremely common among the older generation, in comparison with other categories, such as adults with low income, not all older adults would be considered the “most disadvantaged” due to their pensions, benefits, and property ownership (Grigoryeva et al. 2015:34; Strizhitskaya 2016:796). The diversity of social statuses among older citizens and cultural representations of old age in Russia also stem from its “feminization,” since women’s and men’s life expectancies vary considerably. In addition to adverse effects of gender inequality that accumulate over lifetime, women in their later life are at higher risk of being considered a “burden,” of suffering social, economic, and psychological consequences (for instance, of widowhood), and of being involved in care work for other members of the family (Grigoryeva and Sizova 2018:116–117).

My research is related to a larger question of cultural production of new aging subjectivities under the conditions of growing interest in senior citizens in public discourse in Russia (Grigoryeva 2017). Nowadays, the images of older adults as “the wise elders” or “the most disadvantaged generation” are mixed with other representations: for examples, models in fashion shows and agencies such as *Oldushka* or participants in prime-time TV shows such as *Starshe vsekh* (Older Than Anyone), which showcases older adults with extraordinarily successful life trajectories and spectacular physical abilities and talents.¹ The changing context of aging urges to address the needs of the new generation of older citizens encountering new challenges. “*Aktivnoe dolgoletie*” (active longevity) is a phrase often used by various actors in Russia (such as government agencies, policymakers, NGOs, the private sector, etc.) who contribute to this change: it is presented as a new ideal as well as a

¹ Website of the TV Show *Starshe vsekh!*, Pervyi kanal. <https://www.1tv.ru/shows/55plus>.

new way of imagining differently the future of aging. For instance, in 2016 the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection developed and the Russian government approved a major policy document on this topic, "Strategy of Actions in the Interests of Citizens of the Older Generation in the Russian Federation until 2025," according to which one of the main goals of this new aging policy is "to create conditions for *active longevity* of the older-generation citizens that would allow to enhance their quality of life."² Nongovernmental organizations for older adults also employ this term when developing strategies for financial, physical, and psychological improvement of contemporary senior citizens' well-being.³ It is important to note that how aging is perceived and understood in the context of social policy affects a vast number of people through the regulation and reorganization of their life course, as well as through resources that support certain trajectories of living while restricting others (Angel and Settersten 2013).

Active longevity shares its "positive" connotation with "successful aging," a widely criticized concept originating in the United States that usually refers to a lifestyle that is imagined to allow people to achieve happiness in later life through "low probability of disease and disease-related disability, high cognitive and physical functional capacity, and active engagement with life" (Rowe and Kahn 1997:433). While each of these features seems tempting irrespective of geography, the question is whether "successful aging" can address multiple concerns associated with old age in Russian society, which are often built on fear of losing social recognition and economic status, of a deteriorating quality of life as an outcome of constant changes in social policy, and of the decline of body and mind capacities that often seem inevitable (Grigoryeva 2017:506; Grigoryeva and Sizova 2018:111; Zelikova 2018:127). In this article I am interested in examining the discursive construction of the contemporary aging subject and the role of the "active longevity" discourse in this process: What are those norms, ideals, and images that older adults are urged to incorporate into their actual lives? Therefore, the main question of this article is, How are old age, aging, and older adults depicted in the mainstream media's discourses on "successful aging" and "active longevity" in contemporary Russia?

My study is theoretically grounded in the critical gerontological perspective on aging described in the next section of this article. It is intellectually inspired by feminist and queer theory scholarship that contests normativities that dilute the exuberant palette of life trajectories. Furthermore, such critical analysis aims to set the stage for future examination of the potential effects of the "successful aging" paradigm on the self-perceptions of older citizens and on the limiting effects this reshaped normativization has for imagining more diverse aging futures (Sandberg and Marshall 2017). To explore this concept further in relation to the media discourse in the Russian context, I apply critical discourse analysis (Fairclough 2003) to

² Strategiiia deistvii v interesakh grazhdan starshego pokoleniia v Rossiiskoi Federatsii do 2025 goda. Pravitel'stvo Rossiiskoi Federatsii, February 5, 2016. <http://static.government.ru/media/files/7PvwIIE5X5KwzFPuYtNAZf3aBz61bY5i.pdf> (emphasis added).

³ Konkurs "Aktivnoe pokolenie," Fond Timchenko. <http://timchenkofoundation.org/konkursy-i-granty/vserossiiskij-konkurs-aktivnoe-pok/>.

examine articles published in 2016–2018 in one of the most popular Russian newspapers *Argumenty i Fakty* (AiF; Arguments and Facts), whose frequent and lively discussions of aging are informed by the “active longevity” paradigm. In this article I argue that, while the discourses of “successful aging” and “active longevity” are seemingly disruptive to normative cultural perspectives on old age and life span, their dissemination may result in mere reassembling of norms that now have to align with the market logic rather than with Soviet paternalism. Supporting the market’s goal of extracting maximum productivity from workers, these discourses measure seniors’ value by connecting them to the future of younger generations.

The first section of the article focuses on scholarship that critically engages with the concept of successful aging and its place in public discourse, reviewing the ways in which this concept and its variations have been analyzed in critical gerontology and exposing the limited perspective of mainstream gerontology and professionals promoting “successful aging” and “active longevity.” Then, I describe the study’s methodology based on categories of critical discourse analysis that I used to examine the newspaper articles. In light of this theoretical and methodological background, I discuss the main findings from the media analysis in relation to the perceptions of old age in contemporary Russia, outlining five ways in which the media invites individuals to engage with the “successful” and “active” ideal of old age that it presents.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The term “successful aging” was coined in 1987 by gerontologists John Rowe and Robert Kahn in response to what Morten Hillgaard Bülow and Thomas Söderqvist describe as a theoretical crisis of American gerontology, which used to view aging as a period of physical decline, loss, and estrangement from social relations (Bülow and Soderqvist 2014:140; see also Holstein and Minkler 2003:787). For Rowe and Kahn, introduction of this concept meant emancipation of individuals from the hegemony of the “negative” aging scenario; instead, it offered a perspective that considered “healthy lifestyle” to be a matter of choice. However, many authors outside of the West have been critical of the concept: the “successful aging” paradigm and the results of putting it in practice have been labeled as ageist and ableist, Western- and American-centric, reifying gender stereotypes, reinforcing neoliberal values, and lacking the actual voices of senior citizens (Lamb 2017; Liang and Luo 2012; Polivka 2011; Rubinstein and Medeiros 2015).

Marty Martinson and Clara Berridge (2015) distinguish several lines of critique regarding this “successful” paradigm in social gerontology. In their classification, scholarship in the first one suggests loosening or expanding the criteria for defining “successful aging” to include such criteria as spirituality or life satisfaction. Another two lines of critique propose, respectively, including the “missing voices,” in other words, lay definitions of successful aging provided by older adults themselves, and developing “globally relevant” understandings of age (Martinson and Berridge 2015:60–61, 64). Scholarship that comprises the fourth category, labeled by Martinson and Berridge “Hard Hitting Critiques,” coming from the disciplines invested in

developing critical approaches, such as critical gerontology and feminist and disability studies, is concerned about the ageist and ableist agenda of the "successful aging" paradigm (62). Since the issue of representation of old age in mainstream discourse of "active longevity" is central to my argument, I will further focus on the studies that address the predominance of the images of "positive" aging from this critical point of view, pointing to the notion of lifestyle and choice at the core of the "active longevity" discourse.

Since the 1990s critical gerontologists have considered negative cultural images of aging that exist in popular discourse as one of the factors contributing to the institutionalized inequality intersected with gender-, race-, and class-based discrimination (Baars 1991:221). However, mere replacement of the negative representation of "aging as decline" by an "optimistic" concept of "aging successfully" does not help to overcome these issues: in fact, it intensifies them (Calasanti and Katz 2015). The analysis of the images of positive aging recurring in the discourse illustrates the limits of these attempts to rethink ageist stereotypes (Featherstone and Hepworth 2005). The "exemplary" figure of the healthy, good-looking, (hetero)sexually active, and athletic aged person becomes the extreme opposite of the image of "physical decline," thus pressuring individuals to continuously maintain "healthy lifestyle" as a norm (Marshall 2015). Fashion becomes another default site where this disciplining is produced by the commodification of the self through the notion of "appearance" and regulation of what kind of appearance is considered "appropriate" for a certain age, including what parts of the aging body need to be hidden or managed in particular ways (Twigg 2015; Ward 2015). Along with compulsory "youthful" appearance, the new expectations support compulsory able-bodiedness, repudiating unattainable ideals and posing old age and disability as a result that could have been prevented by "choosing" to abide by a certain normative lifestyle (Gibbons 2016; Pickard 2016). These studies reveal that within the "successful aging" paradigm, the lifestyle is usually understood as a "voluntary" choice of practices for "managing" health, sexuality, embodiment, outward appearance, and so on. This implies that "choosing" certain practices that comply with the standards of "successful aging" should result in improvement of the quality of later life (Rubinstein and Medeiros 2015:35). Thus, on the one hand, the "successful aging" paradigm symbolizes a shift away from essentialist views about aging that see it as a biologically determined process (Baars 2016:78). On the other hand, instead of making the borders and definitions of old age and its regulatory norms more flexible, "successful aging" transfers the question of aging into the domain of neoliberal rationality and connects it with a new perspective on the "self" as an identity that "treats as irrelevant all differences associated with class, gender and (mostly) age" (Pickard 2016:92).

Stephen Katz (2013) takes an explicitly critical stance against equating aging and lifestyle. He advocates using social and feminist theories of the dynamic agency-structure model, risk calculation, and consumption to "illuminate the social circumstances, contexts, structures, cumulative disadvantages, status divisions and life chances that marginalize and devalue the lives of older people" (Katz 2013). He uses the example of how the issue of being more prone to falls in older age is usually

treated in the West. While fall prevention programs press for reflexive maintaining of a healthy lifestyle or individual adjustments of housing for independent living, they ignore the larger, or deeper, structural issues that shape that lifestyle, such as the connection between gender and physical strength, affordability of appropriate housing, or access to the publicly owned facilities. The “success” of aging in a healthy, independent, and “safe” manner is assumed to be a result achieved through the individual’s reflexive process of participation in practices of consumption (Katz 2013). However, this individualized and commodified understanding of reflexivity and, I would argue, independence disregards the fact that reflexivity is a social practice shaped by multiple social relations such as age, gender, race, and class, which affect in a complex and intertwined manner the capacity to participate in these practices of “success,” and therefore ignores the instability of the identity that is presumed in that process (Lury 1996:242, 244).

Thus, consumption is presented as a tool to encourage the agency and autonomy of aging subjects. At the same time, it prepares the ground for judging “who one is” based on their consumption choices, which adds another dimension to the judgmental or discriminatory perceptions (Lury 1996:248). Maria Davidenko analyzed the connection between consumer culture, aging, and femininity through the concept of governmentality before “successful aging” has been employed by Russian social policy (2017:5). Her research was based on interviews with middle-aged middle-class women who had sufficient resources to participate in the “required” consumer practices as part of the process of self-governing to reach the “normative” model of aging, revealing the uncertainties of their position regarding health and outward appearance (6–7, 13–14).

Furthermore, the notion of lifestyle in the context of “successful aging” has a disciplinary meaning. Since life in older age is now considered to be an outcome of one’s choices made throughout life, it implies “bringing the future into the present in knowable and calculable ways” (Katz 2013). The “successful aging” discourse, paradoxically then, does not only shape the expectations for youthfulness from older people; it also extends its demands to younger ages. As Barbara Marshall has noted, “one is never too young to aspire to successful ageing” (2017:367). This indirect extension is an invitation to play with the boundaries between “old” and “young,” which suggests that getting older and being old is desirable and eventually develops and sustains a certain vision of the future that is considered as a “good later life” (Lury 1996:192).

Since “successful aging” nowadays is rooted in transformations of the aging policies in many countries and the resources and opportunities offered by them, it is important to see how this interplay of time and management of one’s age shapes our understanding of a particular way of getting old as a “desirable,” normative way of living. This article suggests a critical reading of this new Russian “active longevity” through the theoretical lens of the Western critique of “successful aging” to demonstrate that by constructing and perpetuating the ideal of a morally and financially self-responsible senior citizen, this paradigm shift might instead result in overloading older adults with the responsibility to take certain actions to “achieve” their own

well-being, rather than attending to the structural factors that constrain the opportunities and resources necessary for being able to make such change.

METHODOLOGY

This article aims to uncover the assumptions that actors hold and universalize in the production of the images of aging and older adults in media. Applied in this article to analyze the process of meaning making, critical discourse analysis serves as a methodological approach that allows to both describe and evaluate what meanings of aging the “successful aging” discourse produces, explaining these actual meanings as the outcomes of structures of power (Fairclough 2013:178). In this process, it is important to consider how actors privilege or exclude certain discourses about old age and ascribe a “universal” status to some views on aging through the use of assumptions, thus “securing” the text from being dialogical and polyvocal, in other words, open to different voices, images, and views (Fairclough 2003:34, 45–46, 55).

For this purpose, it is important to examine and explain the dialogicality within the analyzed texts, distinguishing the quotations, assertions, and assumptions about older adults and aging in Russia that are held and presented in and by these materials. From the point of view of critical discourse analysis, the media presents a site of *mediation*—the process of the movement of meanings from various sources that are being reconstructed by journalists and presented in a certain way (Fairclough 2003:30). As Norman Fairclough further argues, genres and networks of genres emerging from such movement of meanings between different texts are particularly influential for governing society, as they maintain institutional structures through the management of social practices—privileging or excluding discourses (2003:30–32, 34). Fairclough envisions mass media as a “part of the apparatus of governance” that eventually contributes to the ways of living and the meanings ascribed to these lives (34). Therefore, the media becomes an important site for understanding the “positive” images of aging as they are considered in the public discourse on aging, which might eventually influence the way in which the “exemplary” senior citizen and the “proper” way of aging itself are, or rather should be, imagined in society.

The particular interest in examining a media outlet that explicitly engages with the discourse of “active longevity” in Russia and yet remains open to the broad audience of all ages has informed the choice of the weekly newspaper *Argumenty i Fakty* for analysis. Established in 1978 and currently enjoying the estimated weekly readership of 4,688,000 people, it remains in the top 10 of the most cited newspapers in other (print and social) media.⁴ The newspaper’s online version, AIF.ru, exists since 2000 and is today one of the most popular internet media sources with 26,872,833 visitors per month.⁵ It provides access to the articles from the printed version, which are published online within a week after appearing in one of the three newspapers of the media holding, *Argumenty i Fakty*, *AiF Zdorov’e* (AiF Health), and *AiF na dache* (AiF

⁴ “Federal’nye SMI: 2019,” Medialogia, 2019. <https://www.mlg.ru/ratings/media/federal/7130/>.

⁵ “AiF online media kit,” AiF corporate website. <http://repo.aif.ru/file/get/id/1330044>.

at the Dacha). In about 60 cities and regions of Russia the print version of *AiF* has local inserts; these locales also have customized versions of the newspaper's website, which, however, mostly copy the national edition (Deeva 2015). According to statistics provided by the Mediascope agency, one issue of the newspaper reaches 7.7 percent of the Russian population, which is equivalent to that of top TV shows; 57 percent of the printed issues' audience are women and 43 percent are men, and the largest shares of the audience in 2019 were the 25–44 and 65+ year-olds (27 and 26 percent, respectively).⁶ While the newspaper does not market itself specifically to the “silver” audience, the 2015–2016 study by the Russian Center for the Study of Pension Reform on the older generation's media preferences found that *AiF* is considered the most “trusted” by Russian pensioners, suggesting large readership among this group.⁷

Moreover, this newspaper has been of a particular interest for my research due to its direct engagement with the topic of active longevity. Owned by the government of the city of Moscow since 2014, it has been actively participating in the promotion of the new governmental project “Moskovskoe dolgoletie” (Moscow Longevity) launched by Sergei Sobianin, the current mayor of Moscow, in 2018. While my data is mostly centered on the context of Moscow rather than other Russian regions, this project is framed as a “model” case that aims to provide an example for other subjects of the Russian Federation that are wishing to engage with the “active longevity” discourse (Semenova n.d.).

While my research has mostly focused on the discourses at the national level—and therefore the national edition of *AiF*—it would also be important to study regional newspapers, as they might include other kinds of representations of aging. In the process of data collection I encountered several articles published in the regional versions of *AiF* that addressed old age in the context of this “active longevity” paradigm. Specific cultural contexts of thinking about old age and the material conditions for “living” it can differ significantly from one region to another (Strizhitskaya 2016:797). Therefore it would require another study with a comparative perspective to fully include the multiple regional versions into the analysis. Even though I limited the scope of this study to the newspaper's national edition, it nevertheless can provide an outlook on the main trends and actors in this discourse. However, I refer to one article from a regional edition of the newspaper, *AiF Altai*, to provide an example of images of aging that could be considered “unconventional” in the context of “active longevity.”

While the “active longevity” theme also appears in *AiF*'s earlier publications, the scope of this articles is limited to the period of time when “Strategy of Actions in the

⁶ “AiF print media kit,” AiF corporate website. <https://repo.aif.ru/file/get/id/1420894>. “National Readership Survey: Chitalel'skaia auditoria Rossii,” Mediascope, 2019. https://mediascope.net/upload/iblock/4ce/NRS%202019_1.pdf.

⁷ “Mediapredpochtleniia starshego pokoleniia: Kakim informatsionnym resursam doveriaut rossiiskie pensionery,” Tsentri izucheniia pensionnoi reformy, May 25, 2016. <https://web.archive.org/web/20200203072823/http://www.rospens.ru/research/analytics/mediapredpochtleniya-starshego-pokoleniya-kakim-informatsionnym-resursam-doverayut-rossiiskie-pensio.htm>.

Interests of Citizens of the Older Generation" has been in effect, thus corresponding to a larger political framework of the implementation of the "active longevity" policy at the federal level. I used the newspaper's digital database to search for articles focused on the topic of aging and longevity. As the newspaper employs a system of tagging articles based on their content, I selected three tags related to the framing of the discussion on old age: "*pozhiye liudi*" (the elderly), "*dolgoletie*" (longevity), and "*programma_aktivnoe_dolgoletie*" (Active Longevity Program). The search turned up 36, 52, and 15 articles, respectively, all published between February 2016 (when the Strategy was adopted) and May 2018 (the end of the data collection period for this study). I used the procedure of thematic coding (Flick 2009:318–323) to code manually the corpus of retrieved texts using basic word-processing software. The thematic structures of the articles developed in the process of coding allowed me to further analyze the data through the categories offered by critical discourse analysis (Saldaña 2016:198–204). The key themes discovered during this process determined main features of the "active longevity" discourse that I describe in the following section of this article.

GOOD LATER LIFE IN THE RUSSIAN MEDIA: FIVE DETERMINANTS OF "ACTIVE LONGEVITY"

This section focuses on the key themes from the newspaper's articles, which overall seem to determine the images of "successful" and "active" aging as an outcome of reflexive choices in the past and present (Katz 2013). All of them seem to relate to the issue of managing age in a certain way, be it through improving one's own health and life span, intergenerational relations, outward appearance, sexual practices, or psychological well-being.

MANAGING THE LIFE SPAN

The *AiF* articles use "active longevity" as the main concept to discuss the current generation of the retirement-age people. Thus, the paradigm itself suggests a set of "tools" that are supposedly helpful for extending one's life expectancy. Most articles refer to longevity as the core issue of older age, outlining the "healthy habits" and "rituals" assisting in "extend[ing] the time given by fate" (Shigareva et al. 2017; see also Tumanova 2018). Some of them actively promote the expert discourse of technoscience, publishing interviews with and thus promoting research of the gerontologists and biologists whose work focuses on human biological life expectancy (Bezrukova 2017; Shigareva et al. 2017). Another "factual" point of reference is the lifestyle in those regions of the world where life span is considered to be outstandingly long (such as Okinawa, Sardinia, or Cuba), which sometimes is used against the "genetics" argument (Mel'nikov 2017; Zotov 2016):

As soon as the local inhabitants [of Okinawa] moved to other countries, they stopped living long. It means, the genetic factor does not play a role in their longevity; its secret is based on four whales: diet, active lifestyle, self-sufficiency, and spirituality. (Mel'nikov 2017)

As we can see, the lifestyle of people from Okinawa Island is represented as something that can, and should be, transferred to other nations. Used in this article as a basis to recommend a diet, this representation adds the authority to the statements and thus acts as a “proof.” It binds together the “marketed” lifestyle of distant populations and mixes it with the Western understanding of success. Ultimately, it suggests that senior citizens can engage in this lifestyle. Such application of the “active longevity” concept is what Fairclough terms “seeking the universal status” (2003:46). “Active longevity” is thus represented as something that should be desirable and practiced universally in different parts of the world.

Furthermore, the ability to live longer is presented as individual responsibility: “if there is a desire [for youthfulness], there will be youth” (Shatokhina 2016). Everything aside from the genetic factor can be described within this discourse as a matter of “choice.” Personal decisions inevitably lead to either a hastened or a postponed process of biological aging that in this case is considered to be a sign of deteriorating health:

Longevity is destiny, but not in a sense familiar to us. I understand destiny as genetics, which predetermines, however, only 35% of the lifespan.... Everyone decides for himself or herself: to live with dignity for a long time or to drink vodka and die before turning 45. (Volodin 2017)

Here the expert underscores the limits that “fate” has on one’s life span. The statement attributes to the subject a certain moral predisposition to the choice between two options: living “with dignity,” which in this quote is equated with a healthy lifestyle, or consuming alcohol. Thus, the purpose of the “active longevity” lifestyle—understood in this case mainly as a “healthy lifestyle”—is not only to extend the individual’s lifetime; it also reveals that the decision, which has to be made early in life, to manage your body for successful (non)aging will prove the morality of this subject and her or his eligibility for a long and healthy life.

Another point that construes well-being in later life as a result of the continuum of lifelong choices is presented in the articles that highlight how “one should start fighting aging while young,” implying the practices of dieting and maintaining healthy lifestyle (Volodin 2017). However, conscious self-restrictions and disciplining are opposed in their usefulness to those restrictions in diet that come out of necessity. The healthy lifestyle that delays old age or, at least, helps to remain active is promoted as an opportunity that somehow exceeds the issues related to one’s resources, social status, or able-bodiedness. For instance, it is argued that maintaining a balanced diet and healthy sleeping pattern, performing “correct” physical activities, experiencing less stress, and practicing more intellectual hobbies are “easy and affordable for absolutely everyone” (Shatokhina 2016). Thus, the ideal of “active longevity” incorporates elements of anti-age biomedical discourse, presenting one’s health as a lifestyle determined by a series of individual choices based on experts’ recommendations and aimed at eliminating aging as a threatening “disease.”

MANAGING INTERGENERATIONAL RELATIONS

In her review of the life course approach, Susan Pickard argues that there are two trends in thinking about old age that coexist in the modern world. While the norms regarding old age are becoming less rigid, "all ages are being held to the standards and ideals" of adulthood—a symbolically charged "prime" time of life, which is presumed to be imbued with the qualities of a good modern subject: rational, stable, enterprising, and independent (2016:72, 78–79). However, the connection between younger and older generations, who are "outside" of this symbolically central life stage (adulthood), is something that seem to be no less charged with cultural meanings and symbols in my data, as well as in the broader discourse about aging in Russia, where the moral obligation to maintain the intergenerational exchange of care within families often becomes central to the discussion of old age (Tkach 2015). In this light, it is no wonder that intergenerational connection becomes one of the key themes in this discourse. The notion of later life as everyone's inevitable future can be employed to increase the acceptance of older adults by the younger generation: "old age is our future, is the most inevitable thing in everyone's life, if we are lucky enough to live until that point" (Gur'ianova 2017). According to one of the interviews with the head of geriatric healthcare of the Russian Ministry of Health, which appear in *AiF* articles several times, to understand old age in continuum with the rest of life would result in the reduction of the age-based stigmatization—in the sphere of geriatric medicine and beyond it:

We always tell the employees of our [geriatric research and clinical] center: look closer into the faces of your patients, see the yesterday's boy, young guy, mature man, a human being with a unique life behind the cover of a capricious elderly person. These people deserve happy aging, which can and should be successful. (Gur'ianova 2017)

This comment highlights the main agenda behind the common valorization of older adults, as they should be judged based on who they were ("a human being with a unique life") rather than who they are assumed to be at the moment of entering geriatric care ("a capricious elderly person"). On the one hand, this notion blurs the strict boundaries of chronological age and is supposed to assist in providing better care to older adults. On the other, it binds the "present" old age with negative connotations, while the youthful past is seen as the opposite, the "prime" time of life, and the condition against which older adult would be judged as being worthy of well-being in later life. Thus, in this context the "passed" youth constitutes a "common ground" that would allow younger people to see the older person in a more "positive" light.

The symbolic division between older and younger generations also becomes important in the discussion of familial life. The "exemplary" image of a heterosexual traditional family is used throughout the materials as the main point of reference for a happy later life, determined by the relationship between grandchildren and grandparents. First, the "active longevity" lifestyle can be promoted as a strategy to become "closer" to grandchildren through shared interests. For instance, it is suggest-

ed that this connection is strengthened by one of the popular practices of implementing “active longevity” policy through lifelong learning:

“You will be speaking with your grandchildren in the same [learned] language and even study at the same school and with the same teacher. Can you imagine what level the communication will reach, what a link between generations will be created? If all this continues to evolve, people will stop aging at all!” (Semenova 2018)

The author of this quote, the administrator of one of the district providers of social services in Moscow, argues that the ability to share a learned language and educational space provides the ground for decreasing the “generational gap,” which eventually reflects on the general experience of aging.

Furthermore, the articles, invoking scientific findings, stress the benefits of communication with grandchildren for both generations: Communication with their grandparents supposedly stabilizes children’s “emotional state” (Matveev 2017). For grandparents, geriatrists claim, such involvement in the caring process is a way to live longer because it provides a motivation for it; however, experts underscore the importance of not being involved “too much” (Shabalin 2017).

The topic of intergenerational care creates one of the tensions in the discussion of intergenerational responsibilities, which newspapers mostly aim at women. One of the articles, titled “You Are a Grandmother, After All! What Is Right: To Be with Grandchildren or to Live Your Own Life?,” aims to provide tips for avoiding conflicts with the child’s parents that can rise in each of the two models of aging for women in the family: “*klassicheskaja babushka*” (a “traditional” grandmother) caring for children while their parents are at work, and “*sovremennaia babushka*” (a “modern” grandmother) pursuing multiple hobbies and attending classes and other activities (Ionova 2017b). While the first one must be careful about her “over-presence” (*giperprisutstvie*) in the family life, the other should bring “correctives” to her private plans so that “parents can take a break from the child, the child—from them, and you will receive plenty cheerful emotions” (Ionova 2017b). The author concludes: “for sure, you will manage to become the best granny [*babulia*] for your grandchildren!” Thus, the clash of the “active longevity” lifestyle with expectations to maintain a “traditional” grandmother role indicates that the person must negotiate her responsibilities to combine both ways of living to age successfully. Another article offers “tips” to parents for finding an “approach” (*podkhod*) to grandmothers of different “types” that will help to involve even the “freedom-loving” (*svobodoliubivaia*) grandmothers in the process of caring for kids (Babicheva 2017). Interestingly, another article, published in one of the *AiF*’s regional versions (*AiF Altai*), presents three life stories of imprisoned older women in order to contrast “more” and “less” morally acceptable narratives based on how these female prisoners have accepted family values and to encourage those who wish to come back to their family and rearing grandchildren (Nikolaeva 2017). As Eva Krainitzki has highlighted in her analysis of gender, aging, and temporality in the TV show *Orange Is the New Black*, prison can be seen as a space, “out of all places,” where women are “‘freed’ from temporal structures of

heteronormativity," no longer conforming to the linear structure of life course (2015:214). However, the *AiF Altai* story illuminates that even those who live "outside" of the normative structure of life are morally encouraged to get back to the normative familial way of living expected from older women. This story stresses the "redeeming" power of youth (grandchildren) as much as of the grandmother's role in society.

We find another example of the role negotiation in an article on the *AiF*'s special website for the "Moscow Longevity" project:

Adherers of the active pensioners movement were cheerfully striding ... combining pleasant with useful.... Two grannies [*babuli*] walking their grandchildren on a playground in front of a fast-food restaurant looked at them with envy. "There, 'Scandinavians'⁸ are going," grumbled one of them. "Sure, their grandchildren have probably grown up, [so] they are playing chess [and] checkers, painting..." "Maybe, when [our] grandchildren get cold [from walking outside], we can also go and see what they are doing over there?" suggested the other. (Semenova n.d.)

Fairclough stresses the importance of dialogicality as being "aware of competing definitions for the same things," a feature that makes text less authoritative, more open to other, nonhegemonic voices (2003:43). This is why in my analysis I have been noting the position of the speaker (an administrative worker, a geriatrician, a nutritionist, a bioscientist). However, this quote above is one of the few where, instead of the expert in a position to judge the aging subject, the voice seems to be given to those who are supposed to engage in the "active longevity" practices. And still, the narratives are reported indirectly, through the gaze of the journalist who is an outsider, an observer. Rather than representing a different voice, this indirect report leaves an impression of a conversation between those stereotypical models of female aging: either the succumbed to their family duties or the "free" active seniors. Whether imagined by the journalist or not, this scene represents those practicing "active longevity" as people of a lifestyle different from the ones who do not have the opportunity, or will, to engage with the suggested activities. While the "adherers" are shown in a positive light (*cheerfully* striding, doing something both *pleasant* and *useful*), the "grannies" (*babuli*—a word with negative connotations usually avoided in the "active longevity" discourse) appear *grumpy* and *envious*. At the same time, the article leaves the possibility to consider participation in the "movement" as open for everyone. Thus, this clash demonstrates the ambiguous position of women with grandchildren in the light of "active longevity": on the one hand, participation in familial life is mandatory and brings happiness and health; on the other, it may act as a barrier to aging "successfully," if the person cannot manage the balance between the demands of caring for future generations and their own self-development.

⁸ Scandinavian/Nordic walking is one of the practices popular among Russian senior citizens engaged in the "third age" activities.

MANAGING THE APPEARANCE

As I pointed out in the first section, management of the body in later life is extensively discussed in the context of the “active longevity” discourse, which seems to be overpowered by the biomedical anti-age view on aging as bodily deterioration. Regarding the outward appearance, the discussion of “successful” and “active” later life goes into the realm of aestheticism, especially for women, for whom the cosmetic products and services are shown as an important part of any stage of life: “decorative cosmetic products are the main weapon of a woman of any age” (Gladkova 2017). The notion of “elegance” becomes central to this standard of femininity, which implies the preference for, and choice of, the “classical” suits, dresses, and accessories (Ionova 2017c). However, it cannot be argued that youthful appearance is always criticized whereas the aged body is accepted with cosmetic revisions. For instance, an article giving beauty tips suggests that the changes in the bodily appearance that symbolize old age, such as pigmented spots, have to be eliminated:

It is not dangerous for health at all, but it is very unpleasant to look at the spotty manifestations of implacably approaching aging. (Andreeva 2016)

Thus, “success” in aging becomes not only a matter of avoiding age-related illnesses and maintaining a healthy lifestyle; it also instructs the management of any visible signs of aging as “implacably” approaching undesirable future. In these terms, it is important to mention Cynthia Port’s observation that the aged bodies project the strongest societal fear: the “knowledge of eventual bodily failure and mortality” (2012:3). Therefore, bodily experience is presumed to be maintained in a specific way to diminish such manifestations, which at the same time proves reflexivity and self-responsibility of such person in the manner of dealing with their age. The hegemonic ideal of outward appearance in the article quoted above is represented as a noncategorical assertion (Fairclough 2003:47) and suggests that all that does not succumb to it has to be modified, hidden, or excluded.

Fashion shows organized in accordance with the “active longevity” paradigm are therefore presented as a tool for demonstrating the transcendence of the boundaries of aging by “teaching pensioners how to look modern” (Sheikina 2018). The ideal of the pensioner who looks “stylish” and “contemporary” is argued to “help a person to feel confident and fashionable” and “teach how to love yourself and work on yourself” (Voronova 2018). Thus, the “stylish” model, on the one hand, is aimed at decreasing the negative view of aging; on the other, it is imbued with the logic of outward appearance as a matter of lifestyle choices, which “naturally” disregards other sociocultural barriers to complying with the normative standards of fashion and beauty.

“Keeping up” with a “modern” lifestyle is once again presented to senior citizens as an important move toward building the communication with younger generations. Not only the discrepancy in knowledge but the discrepancy in their outward appearances can become a barrier for communication. In the following fragment, the author tells a story on an intergenerational conflict reported from the point of the

mother, in which her child refers to his grandmother as a "ghost" due to her choice of clothing:

She sleeps in these nightgowns. White and long. And walks around the house in them in the evening. As soon as Senia [the child] sees her, he starts to cry. He got scared [by this] when he was very young and is still afraid of it. But what can I say to the mother-in-law? I gave her pajamas as a gift—as a hint, but what can you do... (Traub 2017)

In this fragment, the piece of clothing that is associated with older women (*nochnaia rubashka*) becomes, in addition to behavior, a reason for the child to feel frightened. Pajamas, as a more "modern" attire, suggest the material alternative that could help bring the representatives of two generations together. Therefore, this process of appearance management seems to contribute to maintaining of generativity within the family as one of the important features of this "active longevity" discourse that I have described earlier.

Thus, the management of the outward appearance through a series of consumer choices certainly plays an important role in this process of adjusting the aging subject, physically and visually, to the "active longevity" ideal. The articles presenting certain beauty standards in an assertive and authoritative tone suggest that the visual alterations connected to aging are universally understood as signs of bodily "deterioration" and, along with the clothing or makeup that indicate belonging to an "outdated" period, have to be concealed by the individual in order not to remind the general public of a frightening future.

MANAGING (HETERO)SEXUAL PRACTICES

The representation of concerns related to the "maintenance of sexual function" is one of the central concepts that unite the "successful" and "healthy" parts of the "active longevity" paradigm. For example, it is argued that regularly practicing sex, understood as heterosexual penetrative intercourse, helps against various illnesses and strengthens the immune system. It also positively influences "the functions of the brain, memory, and the ability to learn," which is taken to be one of the reasons for being more successful (Nechaenko 2017; see also Maksimova 2017).

While men who endure lack of sex for a long time have often-changing moods, irritability, inactivity [*vialost'*, another meaning is "flaccidity"], and depression, the representatives of the stronger sex who do not lose their interest in intimacy in their 50s, 60s, and later are well-known for their optimism, vigorousness, firm health [*krepkoe zdorov'e*], and success with women, what in the end makes them happier and more successful in life. (Nechaenko 2017)

In this fragment we see how the assumption that the physical ability to have sex is an inherent part of living a happier, more successful life blocks any possibility of arguing against it. Aimed exclusively at men, called here the "stronger sex" (*sil'nyi pol*), the description of life with sexual intercourse is given here in masculinist terms: "stronger sex," vigorousness, "firmness," while the other type of living is "flaccid,"

depressed, full of “unmanly” mood swings and depression. The inability to perform is argued to be due to “health” but is “treated easily” (Nechaenko 2017). While being sexually active in later life has only recently become a positive feature rather than a sign of the mocked figure of the sexual old man—as in the Russian saying “*sedina v borody, bes v rebro*” (gray hair in the beard, devil in the rib)—it seems to become an obligation to manage the body in such a way that it is able to continue performing sexual intercourse in later age.

MANAGING PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING

The psychological well-being in “successful” later age is seen in the *AiF* articles mostly as the desired result of making the self attuned to the modern everyday life and to younger people around the older person. On the one hand, that self is seen as “incompatible” with old age, whether because of the supposedly “conservative” attitudes of the older generation toward the changed reality (i.e., after perestroika) or out of the “inevitable” changes in the brain in later life. The articles that are aimed at the younger generation offer advice for dealing with older adults in their families that carries a paternalistic overtone: “try to surround them with care and attention. It might be that [their] temper will get better!” (Ionova 2017a). Thus, those older relatives who have negative attitudes toward different issues are presented as inherently “incapable” of expressing “authentic” discontent or aggression; rather, it is a consequence of the biological “deterioration” of their body and mind.

While the experience and “wisdom” of the older relatives supposedly represent one of their most important “resources,” their “link” with the past—the “Soviet mentality” (*sovetskaia mental’nost’*)—is often described as a barrier that keeps them from adapting to “modernity.” For example, in the context of computer learning, older adults are depicted as easily scared by the internet and being too “rigid” about their habits and perceptions of the world (Tyrlova 2016). Again, it is not that such representations do not fit any of the cases they are describing, but the assertive tone in which these descriptions are offered does not include, or leaves little space to, other voices.

So that older adults become part of “modernity” rather than a “burden” on the family, several articles suggest ways for them to “get attuned” to aging, when it became “the present,” for instance, after one reaches the retirement age. They recommend not to express too many worries about health, not to interfere in family’s affairs, and find targets of attention other than the family: for example, through finding new hobbies, using social services or the internet: “If you really want to teach someone how to live, you can start a blog online, where you can publish useful pieces of advice” (Tyrlova 2018). This process of well-being management reveals another controversy in the positive aging paradigm: Intergenerational connection, as the most fundamental aspect of considering the aging temporality, is at once a site of passing the “inheritance”—knowledge, experience, moral values—and an area of constant lack of understanding and compatibility, which has to be managed and negotiated in order to achieve the idealized image of the “successfully” aged subject.

CONCLUSION

Since the end of the 1990s the understanding of "older people" in social policy has considerably changed, gradually transforming the stereotypical negative image of the older person as a "victim of circumstances" who is inherently unable to adapt to contemporary settings. Instead, the currently promoted image entails a self-responsible subject who is invited to actively manifest their agency in later life through continuously performed consumerist choices. The actors participating in policy-making today see the ideal of aging in the future as a "society for all ages," in which the older generation will be able to actively participate in the development of the society's future. However, the analysis of a popular newspaper shows that expectations for older people who are imagined to be included in this "ideal" are rather limiting. When the idea of "active longevity" is moved to the center of thinking about old age, older people are required to act as a "source" of moral values, experience, knowledge, and "wisdom" for younger generations in order to be considered valuable for society. Thus, the negative attitude toward aging is not completely removed from this discourse, which tries to shape a "positive" image of the seniors, because the youthfulness is still considered a major value, and the anti-age biomedical view overpowers other voices in the media.

The people are repeatedly invited to participate in consumerist practices to meet the standards of this ideal "successfully aging" subject, who, in this logic, must overcome their identity as a "Soviet person" trapped in the past. Understood through the concept of lifestyle, commonly perceived in the context of "successful aging," as Katz (2013) argues, as a matter of "voluntary" personal choices, such "self-responsible" and "successful" aging self is expected to be continuously expressed through an active engagement with consumerist practices (Lury 1996). As my analysis demonstrates, these practices should be aimed at the "management" of such aspects of one's life as health and lifetime longevity, intergenerational relations, appearance and embodiment, and (hetero)sexual practices. The standards that have to be achieved in this process are based on the stereotypical perceptions of youthfulness, femininity and masculinity, and traditional extended family, (hetero)normative temporality and neoliberal values, which are restrictive for the life trajectories that do not comply with such image. In this discourse, the aging subject is expected to constantly negotiate between these standards and their actual life to sustain the normative order of living. This order is reimagined within the "active longevity" paradigm through the normative perception of temporality and consumerist interpretation of the lifestyle as a matter of individual choice.

On the one hand, the standards imposed on older adults in the discourse of "successful aging" in Western contexts are equivalent to those expressed in the segment of the media analyzed in this article. On the other, application of the categories of "successful aging" to the Russian context might elucidate their certain dimensions in a different way. As Pickard argues, the contemporary understanding of aging as dependent on "success" suggests an individualized perspective on life course that values "individual accumulation of skills and capital" (2016:79). Thus, the voices of the actors supportive of this perspective exclude those who cannot attend to this

“independent” standard, such as older adults in the so-called fourth age (84). However, in the context of my research the voices that suggest the standard of individual responsibility mix it with an almost antithetical call to include one’s family into this perspective. Yet, this call does not make an argument for an acknowledgement of mutual dependence and closeness. Instead, it suggests another point to which the modern aging subject is required to find a “balanced” solution in order to remain a resource for the younger generation, such as in the discussion of the “*klassicheskaiia*” (traditional) versus “*sovremennaia*” (modern) grandmother described above. The demand for this peculiar gendered way of staying “productive,” not in the workforce but, rather, in familial life, does not escape even those whose life can be seen as set “outside” of the normative and morally acceptable life course.

The relatively small-scale dataset of my study (both in terms of the amount of data and its time frame) to a certain extent limits the analysis of various aspects of the discourse on aging, although it still provides useful directions for a more thorough discussion of the broader scope of transformations of this discourse. For instance, the image of the “active” “neoliberal” aging subject portrayed as a “resource” that can be “productive” for society has not appeared that often in the set of articles that I analyzed, although it is being reinforced through the discussions of senior citizens’ position in relation to the labor market. Therefore the analysis of policy documents such as the Strategy of Actions and the materials of one of the largest conferences on aging in Russia, *Obshchestvo Dlia Vsekh Vozrastov*, which have not been included in this article, allows for a discussion of “resourcefulness” and “productivity,” care work, and ageism in the labor market in greater details.⁹ Another related layer to the discussions of older age in Russia has been added recently, provoked by the announcement in June 2018 and implementation in 2019 of the controversial law on the increase of the retirement age. The discussion of the law in the media began to unfold after I had completed my research, consequently being left out of this article. We can only presume that this change might transform the “active longevity” discourse to include and shape the images of other actors for whom this notion of productivity takes new meanings: for instance, the working pensioners, the older workers in a precarious position resulting from the increased retirement age, and the “frail” older adults (or “geriatric patients”) and their relatives. The question to research, however, is whether their voices as regards their own life trajectories will be represented in this evolving discourse.

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⁹ *Obshchestvo Dlia Vsekh Vozrastov* (Society for All Ages) is an annual national conference established by the Timchenko Charitable Foundation in 2013. The conference gathers opinion leaders and experts from various fields for discussions of aging in Russia. <https://www.ageing-forum.org>.

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НОРМАТИВНОСТЬ И ЛИЧНОСТЬ В СТАРШЕМ ВОЗРАСТЕ: МЕДИАДИСКУРС ОБ «АКТИВНОМ ДОЛГОЛЕТИИ» В СОВРЕМЕННОЙ РОССИИ

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Автор выражает признательность доктору Эржебет Барат за внимательное научное руководство на факультете гендерных исследований в Центральном-Европейском университете (в 2017/2018 академическом году), а также анонимным рецензентам, чьи комментарии и предложения позволили значительно улучшить статью.

Статья фокусируется на анализе нормативных представлений о старении, старости и людях старшего возраста в популярном медиадискурсе об «успешном старении» и «активном долголетии» в современной России. Опираясь на теоретические подходы критической геронтологии и методологию критического дискурс-анализа, автор рассматривает статьи, опубликованные с 2016 по 2018 год в одном из популярных российских изданий (еженедельнике «Аргументы и факты»), в которых обсуждаются темы «активности», «долголетия» и «успеха» в старшем возрасте. В публикациях автор прослеживает консьюмеристскую логику изучаемых дискурсов, предполагающую, что «успех» зависит от стиля жизни, который может поддерживаться индивидом благодаря добровольному рефлексивному участию в практиках потребления, и игнорирует структурные факторы, которые могут влиять на этот процесс. Предполагается также, что субъект старшего возраста может приблизиться к идеалу «активной» и «успешной» старости, выражая свою «рефлексивную» самость через

практики управления своим здоровьем и продолжительностью жизни, внешним видом и проявлением собственной телесности и сексуальности. Тем не менее «успешное» управление подразумевает соответствие конвенциональным представлениям о феминности, маскулинности и сексуальности, субъективности, основанной на неолиберальных ценностях, и семейной жизни, в рамках которой людям старшего возраста предлагается оставаться «продуктивными» для младших поколений. Анализ показывает, что такие стандарты исключают из дискурса об «активной» и «успешной» старости тех субъектов, чьи жизненные траектории не соотносятся с предписанными нормами.

Ключевые слова: активное долголетие; «успешное старение»; стиль жизни; консьюмеризм; нормативность