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Student Actors of Different Generations: Invariance and Variability of Personal Characteristics

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The task of the study: a comparative analysis of the personal characteristics of student actors of different generations so we can identify vectors of change and invariant personality structures. The study used data from 172 respondents: student-actors, of Russian Institute of Theatre Arts, GITIS, study period 1976–1979 (3rd year, N=14); student-actors, Moscow Theater College, study period 2010-2018 (3rd year, N=91); student-actors, Russian Institute of Theatre Arts, GITIS, study period 2022 (4th year, N=38); student-actors, Institute of Contemporary Art, study period 2023 (3rd year, N=49). We used the Kettell 16 PF questionnaire. We compared mean personality profiles of students who studied in 1976-1979 with student-actors who studied in 2010-2018, 2022, 2023.. Factor analysis was conducted to identify structural features. We revealed trends of changes in the expression of personality characteristics of student-actors who studied in the 1970s compared to those who studied in 2010-2018, 2022, 2023: a decrease in the indicators of the F (expressiveness), M (dreaminess) scales and an increase in the indicators of the H (courage) scale, significance level $p \leq 0.05$. Invariant combinations of scales common to all subsamples were described as following: “anxiety – emotional stability”, “normativity of behavior – dreaminess”, “emotional leadership”, “radicalism – diplomacy”, “public communication – nonconformism”. The study reveals the interpretations of these combinations from the point of view of specifics of professional training and actor’s activity.

Keywords: actor’s talent, generational differences, personality characteristics, structural features, actor’s psychology, Kettell’s questionnaire, factor analysis.

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Студенты-актеры разных поколений: инвариантность и изменчивость личностных характеристик

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Изменения социокультурного контекста в течение последних 50 лет отразились, в том числе, на специфике профессиональной деятельности актеров. Можно предположить, что лежащие в основе механизмов актерского перевоплощения психологические особенности остались неизменными. Задача исследования: сравнительный анализ личностных характеристик студентов-актеров разных поколений для выявления векторов изменений и инвариантных личностных структур. В исследовании использованы данные 172 респондентов (студенты-актеры, ГИТИС, 1976–1979 гг. (3-й курс, N = 14); студенты-актеры, Московский театральный колледж, 2010–2018 гг. (3-й курс, N = 91); студенты-актеры, ГИТИС, 2022 г. (4-й курс, N = 38); студенты-актеры, Институт современного искусства, 2023 г. (3-й курс, N = 49). Использован опросник Кеттелла «16 PF». Проведено сопоставление средних личностных профилей студентов, обучавшихся в 1976–1979 гг. с выборками студентов-актеров 2010–2018, 2022, 2023 гг. Для выявления структурных особенностей проведен факторный анализ. Выявлены тенденции изменений выраженности личностных характеристик у студентов-актеров с 1970-х гг. по сравнению со студентами 2010–2018, 2022, 2023 гг.: снижение показателей по шкалам F (экспрессивность), M (мечтательность) и рост показателей по шкале H (смелость), уровень значимости $p \leq 0,05$. Описаны инвариантные сочетания характеристик, общих для всех подвыборок: тревожность–эмоциональная стабильность, нормативность поведения–мечтательность, эмоциональное лидерство, радикализм–дипломатичность, публичное общение–нонконформизм. Предложены интерпретации данных сочетаний с точки зрения специфики профессионального обучения и деятельности актера.

Ключевые слова: актерская одаренность, личностные характеристики, структурные особенности, поколенческие различия, психология актера, опросник Кеттелла, факторный анализ.

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Introduction

Researchers from various scientific fields, including philosophers, culturologists, educational practitioners, sociologists, and psychologists, are interested in the peculiarities of the personality of actors. At the same time, the primary focus centers around the correlation between an actor, their role, and the viewer. This means that it is crucial to understand the psychological traits

that define an actor's personality. The philosophical essay Paradox of the Actor by Denis Diderot initiated this discussion, which was repeatedly debated by prominent Russian theater practitioners and theorists in the early 20th century (including K.S. Stanislavsky, V.E. Meyerhold, M.A. Chekhov, A.Y. Tairov, and E.B. Vakhtangov). Unfortunately, there are relatively few psychological studies in this area based on empirical material.

It is important to note that the study of personality traits characterizing predisposition to stage activity is important for both psychological science and pedagogical practice. Experts in the field of theater psychology state that during training for the acting profession, special attention is given to developing not only individual mental processes such as stage attention, affective memory, imagination, volitional qualities, and thinking, but also professionally significant personal characteristics [2; 6; 16; 18]. Empirical studies have shown that qualities such as plasticity and endurance in working and communicating with people, ability to predict the consequences of behavior, sensitivity to nonverbal and verbal expression are important for professional acting activity [8]. There are also specific psychological characteristics that indicate a predisposition to acting: sociability, courage, willingness to take risks, emotional sensitivity, tendency to artistic perception of the world [3; 11; 12; 12; 13; 13; 14; 14; 15; 17; 18; 20], demonstrativeness, rich imagination, femininity, intellectual flexibility [5; 10].

Similar tendencies are noted in the works of foreign authors. Thus, comparative studies of personality traits of actors and individuals in other professions using variants of the Big Five scales indicate that actors possess certain intrinsic qualities such as openness, extraversion, neuroticism, as well as higher levels of social intelligence and tolerance to uncertainty [21; 23]. Additionally, actors are found to possess great empathy and the ability to understand the mental state of others [22]. Furthermore, several studies have shown that there is a set of distinct personality characteristics that can be regarded as “specific abilities” that determine the success of influencing the audience, which cannot be attributed to mere training [24].

At the same time, in our opinion, the issue of an actor’s personality cannot be viewed in isolation from the cultural and historical background in which they develop and become professionals [1]. It is worth noting that an actor’s work is not limited to theater and film. Their participation in multi-episode and multi-season series, virtual reality projects, and online performances is also significant.

Thus, we can assume that the modern socio-cultural context suggests the development of special personal qualities in representatives of the acting profession, which, in addition to creative abilities, provide opportunities for successful professional realization. It is clear that the peculiarity of types of an actor’s social activity in a new socio-cultural context changes the requirements for their professional training. It is in this regard that comparative studies of the personality characteristics of student actors of different generations may be of interest. At the same time, such intergenerational comparisons are particularly important because they not only reveal the dynamics of personality changes over time, but also help identify the universal personality traits as-

sociated with the psychological mechanisms of an actor’s transformation.

Methods

Data collection method. The research is based on a comparison of data obtained from our multi-year studies of student actors using Cattell’s 16 PF Questionnaire (Form A).

Samples:

- student actors who studied at GITIS on O.P. Tabakov’s course in 1976–1979 (3rd year, N = 14);
- student actors who studied at the Moscow Theater College under the direction of O.P. Tabakov in 2010–2018 (3rd year, N = 91);
- student actors who studied at the Russian Institute of Theatre Arts (GITIS) in 2022 (4th year, N = 38);
- student actors who studied at the Institute of Contemporary Art in 2023 (3rd year, N = 49).

Data analysis methods. In this study, we used Student’s t-test for independent samples to compare the average profiles on Cattell’s questionnaire. The average profiles for each sample were compared to each other in pairs. The main focus of this paper is to compare the personality profiles of students who attended O.P. Tabakov’s course in 1976–1979 with samples of student actors from 2010–2018, 2022, 2023.

Another line of analysis is related to the identification of common personality traits among student actors. For this purpose, a factor analysis of their individual profiles using Cattell’s questionnaire (16 PF) was conducted. An initial data matrix included characteristics of students of different generations. The columns of the matrix represented 16 scales of Cattell’s 16 PF Questionnaire, and the rows represented individual profiles (172 rows in total). The matrix cell (intersection of column and row) identified the value on the scale for a particular student. The matrix was factorized using the principal component method with Varimax rotation.

Results

The results obtained concern two subjects: 1) the analysis of average profiles of student actors aimed at identifying generational differences; 2) the identification, by means of factor analysis, of invariant complexes of interrelated personality characteristics common to students across different generations.

1. Comparison of average profiles. A pairwise comparison of mean values on the scales of Cattell’s 16 PF Questionnaire revealed three scales on which all contemporary student actors (2010–2018, 2022, and 2023 samples) differ significantly from their counterparts who studied in 1976–1979. The data are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Mean values of Cattell's questionnaire scales for which significant differences were found (sten scores, significance level $p \leq 0.05$)

Sample	F restraint-expressiveness	H shyness-courage	M practicality-dreaminess
GITIS, 1978 (O.P. Tabakov's course), N = 14	7.9	5.1	7.6
Tabakov College, 2010–2018, N = 91	5.5	7.5	5.8
Institute of Contemporary Art, 2023, N = 49	5.6	6.8	5.0
GITIS, 2022, N = 38	6.3	7.5	6.4

Student actors of the late 70s had significantly higher values on the F scale (expressiveness) of Cattell's questionnaire than today's student actors. This scale measures emotional intensity and dynamism in communication processes. Its high values capture such manifestations as cheerfulness, impulsiveness, enthusiasm, carelessness, and potential for emotional leadership [4; 19]. Hence, fifty years ago, student actors were more characterized by various manifestations of liveliness and bright emotions, whereas modern student actors have average values.

On the H scale (courage) the values of modern student actors were significantly higher than those of third-year actors 50 years ago. The H scale is a measure of social activity, and it is assumed that it also reflects temperament. A high score on this scale suggests traits such as being active, entrepreneurial, risk-taking, adventurous, able to make independent and unconventional decisions, and possessing leadership qualities. It

also indicates being thick-skinned and not sensitive to criticism [4; 19].

The analysis of mean values on the M scale of Cattell's questionnaire (dreaminess) revealed that in the late 1970s, student actors were likely to possess such characteristics as a developed imagination, immersion in the inner world, and bohemianism. However, modern student actors have an average score on this scale and generally do not differ from normative values [4; 19].

2. Structural analysis. Factor analysis was conducted to identify invariant personality traits common to student actors of different generations. Table 2 shows the factor loadings of Cattell's 16 PF Questionnaire scales.

For convenience, Table 3 presents these factors as a code letter.

As shown in Table 3, the factor analysis resulted in 5 factors describing 63.0% of the total cumulative variance. Let's briefly consider the content of these factors.

Table 2

Factor loadings of Cattell's 16 PF Questionnaire scales

Questionnaire scales	Factors				
	F1 19.3	F2 12.3	F3 11.7	F4 10.0	F5 9.7
A	-0.10	0.04	0.20	0.06	0.77
B	-0.15	0.08	-0.12	0.72	0.10
C	-0.78	-0.09	0.12	0.13	-0.10
E	0.20	0.06	0.81	0.15	-0.08
F	0.02	-0.56	0.54	0.18	0.11
G	0.02	0.81	0.02	0.06	0.12
H	-0.47	0.03	0.69	0.02	0.19
I	0.09	0.12	-0.24	0.06	0.69
L	0.69	-0.04	0.21	0.30	-0.11
M	0.03	-0.68	-0.09	0.32	-0.06
N	0.02	0.41	-0.10	0.51	-0.19
O	0.78	0.00	-0.09	0.17	0.13
Q1	0.01	-0.05	0.11	0.70	-0.07
Q2	-0.05	0.13	-0.48	0.07	-0.56
Q3	-0.58	0.55	-0.14	0.10	0.01
Q4	0.87	-0.09	0.05	0.03	-0.12

Note: after the factor number the percentage of explained variance is given; Cattell's questionnaire scales (positive poles): A – sociability, B – high intelligence, C – emotional stability, E – dominance, F – expressiveness, G – high normativity of behavior, H – courage, I – sensitivity, L – suspiciousness, M – dreaminess, N – diplomacy, O – anxiety, Q1 – radicalism, Q2 – nonconformism, Q3 – high self-control, Q4 – tension.

Table 3

The content of the factors (the sign “/” separates the positive and negative poles of the factor)

Factors	Cattell’s 16 PF Questionnaire scales
F1	Q4 O L / C Q3
F2	G / M
F3	E H F
F4	B Q1 / N
F5	A I / Q2

Note: the legend of this table is the same as in Table 2.

Factor 1 comprises suspiciousness (L), anxiety (O), tension (Q4) on the positive end, while emotional stability (C) and self-control (Q3) are on the negative end. Together, these scales of Factor 1 reveal the emotional aspect of the student actors’ personality.

Factor F2 reflects the opposition between dreaminess (M) and normative behavior (G). This factor characterizes the opposition of the tendency to escape reality and compliance with the norms of behavior.

Factor F3 is determined by the correlation between scales E (dominance), H (courage), and F (expressiveness). This set of these scales determines the subject’s activity in social and interpersonal contacts, readiness to take action in uncertain situations, aspiration to emotional leadership, disposition toward risky behavior. In general, this factor reflects a person’s attitude toward emotional dominance.

Factor F4 is made up of the B (intelligence) and Q1 (radicalism) scales on the positive pole, and the N (diplomacy) scale represents the negative pole. All scales included in this factor are related to intellectual characteristics. While the positive pole reflects a person’s desire for intellectual independence, the negative pole is associated with a preference for building social connections.

Factor F5 is a bipolar factor that combines scales A (sociability) and I (sensitivity) on the positive pole, while the negative pole is represented by scale Q2 (non-conformism). The positive pole of this factor reflects a person’s orientation toward emotional experiences, while the negative pole is associated with the dominance of self-interest.

Discussion

Generational differences. In comparison to their peers from 50 years ago, modern student actors tend to exhibit higher scores on the H (courage) scale of Cattell’s 16 PF Questionnaire, while scoring lower on the F (expressiveness) and M (dreaminess) scales.

The significance of the H (courage) scale for contemporary student actors has been described in our previous works [7; 16; 17; 18]. It is worth noting that the rise of new performance formats and platforms for self-presen-

tation, such as online platforms, social networks, and virtual reality, along with the emergence of numerous private universities and acting courses have created new demands on actors. To succeed in the profession, actors must be active, assertive, and willing to take risks. This is reflected in higher scores on the H scale among today’s students.

In contrast, students in the 1970s scored significantly higher on the F (expressiveness) scale. Comparing the differences in the tendencies of the F and H scales in representatives of two generations reveals a meaningful contradiction. This contradiction lies in the fact that the F and H scales are part of the emotional characteristics group and are usually considered together as an indicator of disposition toward risky behavior when interpreting personality tendencies [4; 19].

However, we see that student actors from the late 1970s exhibit a tendency toward optimism, a belief in luck and favorable outcome of events. At the same time, they were cautious about taking risks and mostly did so when they were likely to succeed. In contrast, student actors of the 2010–2020s generation are less optimistic (lower F scale scores). At the same time, they are inclined to take risks in unfamiliar and non-standard situations. They risk even if it could harm their health, financial stability, or reputation and do not think about the consequences (high scores on the H scale).

In our opinion, such dynamics are primarily affected by the current changes in the socio-cultural and socio-political context – the transition from stability and predictability to uncertainty and dynamism of events. Back in the late 1970s, student actors had a clear idea of their professional future – they would work in the theater and possibly participate in film projects. However, modern student actors look for work in their senior years and often have no definite prospects for employment.

As mentioned earlier, the M scale (dreaminess) reflects a rich imagination, a fascination with inner illusions, and a focus on one’s ideas. Compared to student actors in the 1970s, those of today have significantly lower scores on this indicator. This scale plays a crucial role in determining how well an actor can creatively accept the given circumstances of their role [12]. It could be suggested that modern student actors’ readiness to

accept the given circumstances is driven not so much by constructing an imaginary situation, but rather by attempting to replicate the stage behavior of more experienced and successful performers. In this respect, they are more oriented to copy the example. Modern student actors, like most people of their generation, are heavily involved in consuming various forms of visual culture such as TV series, movies, and videos. This could be one of the reasons for the decrease in imagination, as it is easier to mimic the performance of a successful actor than to come up with their own unique stage solution.

Structural analysis. Despite the noted differences in the expression of personality characteristics of student actors of different generations, the results of structural analysis allowed us to identify a number of invariant combinations of personal qualities that define the psychological features of an actor. Let us consider this in more detail.

We labeled F1 factor as “anxiety—emotional stability”. Its structure is almost identical to the secondary factor FI (general anxiety) of Cattell questionnaire. This secondary factor describes anxiety in its usual sense, including self-dissatisfaction. It is important to note that high levels of this factor can lead to decreased productivity and even blockage of activity. Therefore, it can also indicate hypermotivation, where high anxiety about success hinders the start of activity. [4; 19].

On the one hand, the manifestation of these characteristics in student actors highlights the importance of emotional mobility. This is the psychological foundation of an actor’s professional activity, which involves not only an actor’s transformation but also the ability to respond to their partner and the audience. We should add that according to V.E. Meyerhold “...a necessary characteristic of an actor is reflex excitability. A person who lacks this ability cannot be an actor” [9, p. 4].

On the other hand, the high anxiety levels observed in student actors can be attributed to the public nature of their profession. Since stage performances are constantly evaluated by teachers, peers, and audiences, characteristics such as suspiciousness (scale L), anxiety (scale O), and tension (scale Q4) also indicate the importance of external evaluation for self-perception and performance satisfaction in student actors.

Factor F2 can be defined as “normativity of behavior—dreaminess”. This factor quite clearly reveals the relationship between artistic creativity (M scale) and normative behavior (G scale). The ability to create new ideas, images, and artistic solutions requires a certain level of flexibility in relation to moral norms, generally accepted rules, and standards. This can be compared to having a “weak super-ego” in psychoanalytic terms [4; 19]. And vice versa, the presence of a “strong super-ego” (G scale) reflects a desire to adhere to established norms and patterns. In artistic terms, this will manifest in more prosaic, concrete, and realistic images. Thus, there are

two types of student actors who differ in their working attitudes toward a role. One type prefers to experiment and rely on their inner images, fantasies, and motivations when creating a role. The other type is characterized by their action in a specific real situation, striving to follow norms and existing examples.

The unipolar factor F3 is referred to as “emotional leadership.” This factor is characterized by high values on scales H (courage) and F (expressiveness), which contribute to an optimistic outlook on life and prospects, with belief in luck prevailing over difficulties and problems. In addition, a high score on the E scale (dominance) included in this factor suggests the expression of characteristics such as perseverance, stubbornness, assertiveness, willfulness, and the desire to be admired. From the point of view of the acting profession, this factor seems to be extremely important, since emotional leadership can be seen as an individual’s desire to have a direct emotional impact on others.

Factor F4 combines characteristics that describe different sides of the intellectual sphere of personality, including B (intelligence), N (diplomacy), and Q1 (radicalism). It can be labeled as “radicalism—diplomacy”. From our perspective, this factor captures two possible scenarios for achieving success in an actor’s career. In the first case, an actor with quick thinking, who learns easily (scale B), has a pronounced desire for innovation and experiments (scale Q1) is successful in their profession thanks to these qualities. They have an original approach to working on a role, promote the rapid mastering of skills necessary for stage tasks and related professional areas (directing, scriptwriting, producing, etc.). In the second case, diplomacy is the key characteristic that contributes to success — it is the ability to behave in society, tactfulness, perceptiveness, and the ability to find a way out of difficult situations (scale N). An actor’s “social intelligence” helps to build good relationships with partners on stage, the director, and other members of the team. It creates a positive impression not only about their professional qualities but also their personal qualities. In general, this factor is an orientation to positive self-presentation in social situations and readiness to accept the position of the other.

We have labeled factor F5 as “public communication—nonconformism”. The positive pole of this factor comprises qualities such as naturalness, kindness, openness, attention to people (scale A), and the ability to empathize, empathetic response, artistry, inclination to romanticism, and artistic perception of the world (scale I). This combination represents a specific personality structure that orients behavior toward a particular public artistic communication, demonstrating a willingness to express an emotional empathetic response to others.

Let us specify that the scale I (sensitivity) included in this factor characterizes personality manifestations such as attention and sympathy seeking, tendency to

act intuitively, fantasizing in conversation and alone [4; 19]. In other words, here we encounter not just a desire for public communication, but a special set of attitudes aimed at attracting attention to oneself (a kind of narcissism), which involves leaving the situation of ordinary and everyday communication for an “unreal”, “fantasy” space with a special author-narrator.

The negative pole, on the other hand, reflects readiness for group interaction (scale Q2). In combination with the above-described aspiration to public artistic communication, low scores on the Q2 scale (conformism) indicate a pronounced desire for teamwork and decision-making, with a focus on the group’s opinion for student actors, the group is the outer circle they seek to attract. In the professional life of actors, a certain degree of conformism can help their success in the theater or film industry.

Our factor analysis of Cattell’s 16 PF Questionnaire scales is important because most psychological studies of actors, where this questionnaire was also used, are limited to describing only the manifestation of personality characteristics in a total group profile. Thus, among the specific qualities of an actor’s personality there are dreaminess (M scale), radicalism (Q1 scale) [3], sociability (A), expressiveness (F), courage (H), sensitivity (I), trustfulness (L) [11]. At the same time, we emphasize that these trends are in many respects similar to those identified in our studies. However, it is the factor analysis, aimed at revealing the links between the scales, that gives grounds to speak about invariant features in the structure of an actor’s personality.

In this regard, let’s take a look at the results of a structural analysis of the psychological traits of student actors who studied at different courses of the theater college under the direction of O.P. Tabakov between 2010 and 2018. Cattell’s 16 PF questionnaire was used to collect data during the entrance examination stage and at the end of each course of study. This data was processed using factor analysis which led to the identification of 4 invariant factors that describe the structural features of student actors’ personality: “Personal anxiety / emotional stability”, “Striving for public communication / nonconformism”, “Emotional

impact on another”, and “Artistic creativity / moral normativity” [17]. We will compare these findings with the results of factor analysis of student actors from different generations presented in the current study (Table 4).

Table 4 shows that the factors in the 2018 and 2023 studies are almost identical. The present study introduced a new factor, F4, which describes the intellectual sphere of student actors. This factor captures two types, one relating to the heuristics of solving professional tasks, and the other assuming their solution mainly through the effective application of social interaction skills.

However, the most important result for our study is that the factor structures describing the combination of personality characteristics in different generational subsamples of student actors are the same. This indicates the stability of the personal organization of an actor as a subject of professional activity, which is formed during the process of mastering the profession. This invariance is generally ensured by the stability of the pedagogical practice of the Russian theater school, both at the level of goals, and at the level of programs and teaching methods. In this regard, it is worthwhile to analyze those competencies of actor training that have remained practically unchanged from 2002 to the present [16].

Conclusions

Summarizing the results obtained, we can draw the main conclusions.

1. The changes in the manifestation of personality traits amongst modern student actors when compared to their peers from the late 1970s were revealed. It was found that current students show more courage and willingness to take risks, but have less developed imagination compared to their counterparts 50 years ago. These changes are believed to be related to the evolution of the socio-cultural context and the transformation of the features of actors’ professional activity.

2. As a result of structural analysis, we identified invariant combinations of scales (factors) that describe the

Table 4

The content of the factors in the studies of 2018 (O.P. Tabakov Theater College) and 2023 (student actors of different generations)

Factors	Student actors of different generations (total)	Students of the O.P. Tabakov Theater College from 2010–2018
F1	Q4 O L / C Q3	Q4 O L / C
F2	G / M	M / G
F3	E H F	E H F
F4	B Q1 / N	—
F5	A I / Q2	A I / Q2

Note: the legend of this table is the same as in Table 2. The sign «/» separates the positive and negative poles of the factor.

emotional, intellectual and volitional aspects of personality. Interpreting these combinations from the perspective of professional training and an actor's activity allows us to refine our understanding of actor's transformation and the psychological mechanisms of actor's creativity. Additionally, it helps to identify the target orientation of

pedagogical processes for acting faculties while considering the development of student's personality.

3. In general, the prospect of further analysis of the obtained material suggests the use of cluster analysis to identify different types of actor's personality during their professional training.

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