The Determinants of Identity Formation during the Transition from Adolescence to Adulthood

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Abstract

The process of identity formation during the transition from adolescence to adulthood and its determinants are currently a central issue in the social sciences. On the one hand, the huge variety of offers creates the opportunity to expand the fields of exploration and to tailor commitments to individual aspirations and preferences. On the other hand, increasing instability and Bauman’s liquidity of the social environment of development may create threats that impede the making of decisions, engaging in their realization, and identifying with the choices made. James Marcia’s two-stage model of identity formation no longer adequately describes and accounts for paths of identity development. The dynamic dual-cycle model of identity formation developed by Koen Luyckx and collaborators is much more accurate. Although identity continues to form throughout the life course, childhood, and particularly adolescence seem to be pivotal from the point of view of what developmental trajectory the individual is on at the moment of entry into adulthood. From this point of view the factors which we regard as crucial for identity formation are shame proneness and shame regulation strategies on the one hand, and the system of personal beliefs about one’s life and related key social experiences which define the quality of social participation of adolescents on the other hand.
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Introduction

Identity formation continues throughout the life course. However, childhood, and particularly adolescence seem to be pivotal from the point of view of what developmental path the individual is on at the moment of entry into adulthood and what the quality of identity status is, both at the onset of the next stage of identity formation and modification and at consecutive stages of adulthood which emerge in response to new challenges and life plans.

The classical two-stage model of identity formation proposed by James Marcia\(^1\) was valid in stable, modern society but is no longer adequate today when we want to describe identity and the process underlying its formation or to predict the paths of its further development in consecutive phases of adulthood. In response to new approaches to identity, Stephen, Fraser and Marcia\(^2\) modified the classical model (the repetitive moratorium – achievement – moratorium – achievement, i.e. MAMA, cycles), acknowledging that identity status in adulthood can change in response to changes in one’s individual psychology and/or changes in the environment. In our opinion, the assumptions underlying the dynamic dual cycle of identity formation model by Koen Luyckx and collaborators\(^3\) are a very promising inroad for the analysis and study of identity.

We are going to analyze the determinants of identity formation from the dynamic systems perspective spelled out by Esther Thelen\(^4\) in her dynamic systems theory. This means that we must analyze the interactions between various areas and factors, viewed as embedded subsystems and systems and dynamic relations which change at many levels simultaneously. This complex model of relations is illustrated in Figure 1.

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THE SOCIAL CONTEXT OF DEVELOPMENT

KEY SOCIAL EXPERIENCES:
- Primary socialization (family, peer groups)
- Secondary socialization (educational institutions)

SHAME AND REGULATION OF THE SHAME EXPERIENCE
- The tendency to experience shame
- Optimal regulation/disregulation of shame

THE SYSTEM OF BELIEFS CONCERNING ONE’S LIFE COURSE
- Sense of punctuality of life events
- Perception of life turning points

DEVELOPMENTAL ORIENTATION AND TYPE OF SOCIAL PARTICIPATION
Integration Assimilation Marginalization Segregation
Strong transitional orientation Week transitional orientation

QUALITY OF IDENTITY
TRAJECTORY OF IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT
- Identity dimensions
- Identity status

MARKERS OF ADULTHOOD
- Assumption of social roles
- Sense of adulthood

DEVELOPMENTAL ORIENTATION AND TYPE OF SOCIAL PARTICIPATION
Integration Assimilation Marginalization Segregation
Strong transitional orientation Week transitional orientation

Figure 1. Determinants of identity formation: subjective and social
Source: Compiled by Tomasz Czub and Anna I. Brzezińska on the basis of the literature
When we reviewed the literature on transition to adulthood we repeatedly found evidence of increasing slowing down and increasing inter-individual differentiation of this process. This led us to identify several areas which are significant for our understanding of this phenomenon (see Fig. 1):

- quality of identity formed during adolescence with which the individual makes the transition to early adulthood; three issues interest us here: intensity of identity dimensions according to the dual cycle model of identity formation developed by K. Luyckx and collaborators, identity status and the developmental trajectory of changes in both identity dimensions and identity status;

- markers of transition to adulthood, dually approached – objectively, i.e. assumption of typical adult roles (role transition) and subjectively, i.e. “the sense of becoming/being an adult”;

- subjective determinants of identity formation and “growing up” to adulthood, including two groups of factors; the first group consists of the individual’s beliefs concerning his/her own life course, grouped in two categories: sense of punctuality of life events and the associated developmental tasks, and perception of the meaning of life turning points; the second group consists of factors associated with the tendency to experience shame and the moderating effect of the capacity to regulate emotions, and most importantly, to regulate shame;

- type of social participation which, on the one hand, is the direct effect of the type and nature of people’s key social experiences and, on the other hand, is derived from their capacity to regulate such a basic emotion as shame and their adaptive or maladaptive system of beliefs about their own lives;

- key social experiences accumulated in the process of natural and institutional socialization which provide the context in which all the remaining analyzed areas are “submerged”.

The dominant type of social participation in people’s functioning leads them to accumulate these rather than other social experiences during consecutive developmental

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stages and these experiences in turn affect (1) the process of regulation of shame and other emotions, (2) the modifications of beliefs about one’s life course, and (3) the range and variety of processes which are crucial with respect to the formation of identity status and the individual’s positioning on his/her developmental trajectory – processes of exploration and making of commitments and identification therewith.

Our basic hypothesis says that the level of shame proneness and the meta-capacity to regulate shame (optimal regulation vs. dysregulation) are crucial determinants of the process of identity formation. The experience of shame affects the way in which individuals perceive themselves and their lives, the degree to which they make effective use of types of social participation learned in previous developmental phases, and the ways in which they acquire new key social experiences. All this determines the process of exploration but above all it determines the willingness to make and identify with commitments and to begin or not to begin to explore further. Reciprocally, in the next stage of development, the experienced effects of exploration and the effects of making and identifying with commitments may be an important source of shame activators. Because the experience of shame motivates people to avoid activity which arouses this emotion, we assume that an increased tendency to experience shame, additionally accompanied by a poor capacity to regulate this process, may significantly interfere with the process of identity formation.

1. Two approaches to adulthood

In order to analyze transition to adulthood we must first look at the concept of adulthood itself from various perspectives. The most frequent criterion of adulthood is rooted in the so-called praxeological approach\(^7\). This approach pays particular attention to the realization of typical adult social roles (so-called objective indices of adulthood). Adult status is attributed or not depending on how well the demands of these roles are fulfilled. The praxeological approach, which accentuates changes at the socio-demographic level, is the most popular approach among researchers who study transition to adulthood and the most frequently adopted objective indices of adulthood, and the ones most universally shared by these researchers are\(^8\):

\(^7\) Por. E. Czerka, Rodzinne uwarunkowania odraczania dorosłości u młodych mężczyzn [Family determinants of delayed adulthood in young men], Kraków 2007.

(1) termination of education, an important point of transition requiring readjustment and initiation of realization of new demands, including above all assumption of occupational activity;

(2) setting up a household of one’s own, i.e. becoming independent of one’s family of origin by changing one’s place of residence;

(3) developing a long-term relationship, often also involving setting up a household together;

(4) having children: this is (usually) a consequence of having developed a long-term partnership (often a marital partnership);

(5) assumption of occupational activity and satisfactory integration with the labour market: this is a fundamental step in the process of transition to adulthood, one which gives one a chance to become independent of one’s family of origin and leave home, and also facilitates marriage and parenthood.9

A second approach emphasizes adulthood as a subjective category (so-called subjective indicators of adulthood10). In this approach researchers usually focus on two issues: (1) sense of adulthood, i.e. the feeling that one is grown up (categorical approach) or more or less grown up (continuous approach) and (2) psychological maturity, also called psychosocial maturity11, i.e. possession of typical adult competencies such as the capacity to make independent decisions, self-sufficiency, autonomy, the capacity to develop long-term relationships. In this approach one is an adult if one feels like an adult or behaves like an adult.

Interest in the subjective approach to the study of adulthood increased when J.J. Arnett12 published the findings from his many studies of the concept of adulthood in 13-55-year-olds.


11 P. K. Oleś, Psychologia człowieka dorosłego [Adult psychology], Warszawa 2011.

He found that objective criteria are definitely not the ones people think are crucial determinants of adulthood. Neither marriage nor childbirth is the decisive factor for ascribing adult status to someone. The key factors are external. Arnett calls them individual criteria and they include: taking responsibility for the consequences of one’s conduct, making independent decisions concerning one’s beliefs and values, and relating to one’s parents on “equal terms”. These findings clearly suggest that the process of transition to adulthood is currently undergoing major modifications.

2. Transition to adulthood in contemporary societies

Both in Poland and other countries we can see a clear tendency to delay the assumption of adult social roles. Young people are putting off the decision to marry, have children and leave home until later and later. Compared with a dozen or so years ago or several decades ago, people are now taking longer to grow up and we are observing a peculiar “suspension” between adolescence and adulthood. One of the main reasons for this, if not the main one, is probably prolonged education (in Poland one high school graduate in two decides to study further) and the need to pursue a career for several years before reaching a state of relative occupational stability. In other words, the increasing delay in transition to adulthood is caused by the same macroeconomic and macrosocial factors which we can also observe in developed countries, mainly in the educational and occupational.

For masses of young people today, the period between age 18 and 29/30 (so called emerging adulthood) is a period of profound change. In this period youngsters achieve consecutive milestones in their (post-junior-secondary) education and gain their first occupational experiences which will only bear fruit in later years. Towards the end of this period, as they approach the end of their third decade of life, most people have quite well-

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defined life goals and make decisions which will have relatively permanent consequences for their current, but mainly their future, functioning. Nowadays however, adulthood, understood as assumption of adult social roles, is achieved several years later than even just a dozen or so years ago.

Transition to adulthood is also becoming increasingly individualized and less determined by social expectations, i.e. the so-called social clock \(^{16}\), and personal preferences and individual lifestyles are beginning to take precedence. Notably, however, most of the diversity can be found in the developmental paths to adulthood (individual routes of transition to adulthood). Adulthood itself, as far as objective indices are concerned, is similar in most cases. The vast majority of adults work, have a partner, have their own household, and most of them have at least one child.

Therefore, differences between individuals are largely differences in the way the socially defined goal of adulthood is pursued. An increasingly frequent strategy is emergent adulthood \(^{17}\) but even the author of this concept does not think it is universal and he associates it mainly with average or high socio-economic status. M. Sińczuch \(^{18}\) provides a more general review of strategies of transition to adulthood and identifies four types:

1. when support (both material and social or emotional) from the nearest family is unavailable, individuals are forced to assume adult social roles and responsibilities (mainly occupational ones) earlier so that they can gain independence from their families, move out of home and create a new family; this situation is most commonly found in regions where the labour market is well-developed and offers relatively good wages not only to qualified specialists but also to beginners who do not yet have rich and diverse occupational and educational experiences;

2. the second model also applies to individuals who assume adult responsibilities rather quickly but can count on considerable help and support from their families; these young people emulate their parents and often continue their life trajectories and have similar attitudes and value hierarchies; this model is frequently found in stable societies where older people have high social status, financial resources and power; this group of young

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\(^{18}\) M. Sińczuch, *Wchodzenie w dorosłość w warunkach zmiany społecznej* [Emerging adulthood in conditions of social change], Warszawa 2002.
people would probably fit into the group identified by Hanoeh Flum\textsuperscript{19}, a group of people who evolve toward mature identity without experiencing identity confusion;

3. the third model applies to people who cannot count on support from their nearest family but are also confronted with unfavourable external factors (such as limited access to the labour market) which prevent them from gaining independence and self-sufficiency; hence they delay assumption of adult roles and responsibilities but mostly due to external contingencies, not personal decisions;

4. in the last model reluctance to assume adult social roles is a matter of individual choice which is further supported and accepted by the nearest environment; delayed transition to adulthood may be caused by prolonged education and gaining further qualifications or the wish to gain a greater variety of professional experiences, for example by means of traineeship in prestigious firms or life experience via foreign travels.

In light of this increasingly individualized development and prolongation of transition to adulthood, we need to revise our understanding of this subject. In recent years the socio-cultural context of young people’s development has changed so radically that we must conduct an in-depth diagnosis of this process and identify the trajectories of identity development which actually exist in our country, taking into account the psychosocial determinants of the process – beginning with early adolescence when young people are really still children (early junior high school), through their first steps toward greater autonomy (late adolescence and emergent adulthood), to achievement of young adult status, i.e. crossing the threshold of early adulthood defined both from the social perspective (adult social roles) and the individual perspective (sense of adulthood).

3. Identity development during transition to adulthood

To have a personal identity is to have a self-definition, a complex and available “set” of personal attributes which can be used to identify oneself, and differentiate between self and other. Therefore, personal identity is a cognitive construct. This construct consists of schemas concerning oneself, of great personal significance and differing in generality. Identity formation is the process whereby this set of elements develops. It acquires special regulative significance in the process of becoming an adult member of society.

These two approaches to identity are very important for our present analysis. The first one is typical for sociologists who think that identity is the effect of interactions between the individual and the environment. It applies to external, objective criteria (cultural values, social roles, institutions, other people). Sociologists view identity itself as immersed in the social context and formed by that context. When analysing the process of transition to adulthood, adult social roles (objective criteria of adulthood) move to the forefront. Assumption of these roles is usually associated with crystallization of the individual’s identity and difficulties with punctuality may lead to difficulties in identity formation.

According to the assumption which we too accept, people negotiate their personal identities vis-à-vis the demands of the social environment in which they are developing. A.E. Yoder even uses the concept of environmental barriers. Some environments facilitate exploration, for example universities. Other environments reduce individual exploratory activity, for example full-time employment.

Adoption of this perspective is particularly important today, when external circumstances are changing so quickly. Until just recently, for example when J. Marcia was developing his theory, a theory which sociologists qualified as a modernist account of society, where the social context is clearly defined, predictable and stable, changes of social status were more predictable, people were less mobile, and such factors as background, socio-economic status and gender played a greater role as determinants of social position. In such conditions it was possible to maintain in adulthood the identity developed in rudimentary form in adolescence.


Today, in the postmodern era, an era which Bauman called liquid, people must continually renegotiate their identity in response to changing conditions of life. Hence we need to focus much more strongly than before on the relations between identity and social factors. Students are very over-represented in research on transition to adulthood. Researchers very seldom study people who have terminated their education. This is unfortunate because the educational and occupational context is probably a key factor in identity change and the dynamics of transition to adulthood. Employment is associated with greater homogeneity, stability and predictability of the developmental environment. Hence employed people are less explorative and more committed than students.25

The point of development at which adult roles are assumed is also important. Resolution of the identity crises is more frequent in people who terminate their education and begin full-time employment later, confirming perhaps the finding that longer education (longer moratorium) and higher education facilitate identity development.26 Generally speaking, it looks as if a weak tendency to explore and a strong tendency to commit (a pattern similar to Marcia’s foreclosure) is typical of development in stable, predictable contexts, lacking serious conflicts (in the areas of study/occupation, relationships and interpersonal relations in general, religion and worldview) whereas exploration increases and commitment decreases when conflicts are severe.27

Personal identity is associated not only with objectively understood adulthood, i.e. adulthood analyzed in terms of assumption of social roles, but also subjectively understood adulthood, i.e. adulthood analyzed in terms of sense of adulthood and qualification of oneself as grown up or nearly grown up. Individuals who feel more grown up are more likely to have resolved the identity crisis in the sphere of relationships (intimacy) than individuals who don’t.28 They are also more convinced that they have made the right choice of occupational developmental path and have a stronger sense of overall self-identity.29 Self-identity is also


29 L. J. Nelson, An examination of emerging adulthood in Romanian college students, “International Journal of
submerged in the social context, as demonstrated by Benson and Furstenberg\(^\text{30}\) who found that 19-year-old students were less likely to view themselves as adults than their peers who had terminated their education. Moreover, they found that the context of realized social roles may be decisive for the emergence of a sense of adulthood. Termination of former realization of adult roles (e.g. return to the family home following a period of being in charge of a separate household) reduces the likelihood of viewing oneself as an adult.

A review of recent studies of transition to adulthood revealed that identity development is just as significant a psychosocial indicator of maturity as assumption of adult social roles and sense of adulthood, and should therefore be taken into account in analyses of developmental trajectories at the transition from childhood to adulthood. Polish researchers are just beginning to investigate these\(^\text{31}\) but they need to verify their hypotheses in extensive longitudinal research which will allow them to monitor the changes which take place at the transition to adulthood from a longer time perspective, i.e. from early adolescence to early adulthood. This will help them to identify the determinants of satisfactory or unsatisfactory resolution of the process of becoming an adult member of society (from both the social and the subjective perspective).

So, if research on identity and adulthood is to provide ecologically valid findings, taking into consideration the present dynamic changes in the social conditions of life of adolescents and young adults, we must (1) study individuals differing not only with respect to age but also with respect to their social conditions of life and their internal characteristics and (2) analyze the relations between these variables and their interactions with identity\(^\text{32}\) from a long time perspective.

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4. Subjective determinants of identity formation

4.1. The role of shame in the regulation of behaviour

Psychologists usually investigate the intrapersonal nature of identity and pay most attention in their empirical research to relations between identity and other psychological characteristics. We think that one of the most important characteristics is shame and shame proneness. Shame is a painful emotional experience. Its object is the self. Shame is also associated with devaluation of the self. When people are ashamed they feel exposed to the scrutiny of others and want to hide or disappear altogether. They also feel worthless and powerless. Shame can be aroused when people blame themselves for failing to meet their standards, live by their principles or realize their goals.

People differ in their shame proneness but shame proneness itself is a relatively stable personality disposition. It develops when people adopt a specific way of evaluating their actions, urges and thoughts. One of the most important determinants of individual shame proneness is quality of the family child-rearing environment. Specific affective parental styles, beliefs and practices have been pinpointed as the basic determinants of individual shame proneness. The specific way in which people evaluate their own activity is presumably responsible for the arousing of shame and it largely results from internalization of significant others’ ways of evaluating a child’s behaviour.

We think that when looking for relations between individual shame proneness and identity formation we must pay special attention to so-called anticipatory shame. Specific patterns of evaluation of one’s own behaviour, strivings or goals, responsible for the triggering of shame, are applied not only to current activities but also to ones which are merely imagined, or to anticipated future activities. Due to the extremely aversive nature of


shame, anticipated shame is an important regulatory mechanism on whose basis various activities may be inhibited, goals may be unrealized, and emotions or desires – unexpressed. We think that when shame proneness is particularly intense, anticipated shame may lead to considerable limitation or disruption of identity formation.

4.2. The role of shame regulation processes

We assume that the experience of shame may play an important and constructive role in development of the self and the individual’s social adaptation but it may also lead to deformation of the self image and interfere with the individual’s relations with the environment. Presumably, the most important factor differentiating between constructive and destructive shame is the capacity to regulate the experience of shame.\(^{38}\)

Optimal shame regulation requires the activation of reparative strategies in response to a devaluing experience.\(^{39}\) Efficient use of this strategy in response to the experience of shame allows us to anticipate restoration of balance. The capacity to cope with shame constructively is associated with relative shame tolerance and enables shame to be experienced consciously. When this is the case, shame can serve as a signal to reflect upon one’s behaviour and change it if necessary.

Dysregulation of the shame experience is a sign of deficient or completely absent reparative strategies. Instead of activating such strategies, people activate strategies which will defend them against the experience of shame. They may deny the shame altogether (unacknowledged shame),\(^{40}\) attack themselves or attack others.\(^{41}\) Dysregulation of the shame experience is associated with lack of shame tolerance and often also with lack of conscious registration of the experience. When this happens, the shame is inaccessible and cannot be used to explain one’s behaviour and, consequently, cannot be used for adequate control of shame-motivated behaviour. Also, when shame is unacknowledged, all sorts of symptoms


may develop, such as depression, attacks of fury, narcissism or multiple personality disorder.\footnote{The role of shame in symptom formation, H. B. Lewis (ed.), Hillsdale 1987; M. Lewis, Shame. The exposed self, New York 1992}

We therefore assume that the role of shame in identity formation is not just the role of a catalyst which determines the type and range of situations to which the individual may react with this aversive emotion. We think that the ability to regulate the experience of shame is an important determinant of the course and outcome of identity formation. When one has learned to cope with shame constructively, one is able to anticipate that one will be able to reduce the aversive consequences of shame effectively and hence control the consequences of decisional processes related to anticipated shame.

We therefore think that the potentially disruptive consequences of severe shame proneness may be compensated by the adoption of reparative strategies which help to tolerate the shame experience and limit its disruptive effects on one’s functioning. On the other hand, we view the presence of defensive strategies as an additional factor disrupting or exacerbating the disruption of identity formation.

4.3. The role of the system of personal beliefs about one’s course of life

Key childhood and adolescent experiences help to shape the system of beliefs about one’s course of life. Beliefs have been extensively analyzed in the literature, both from the perspective of their associations with health and activity\footnote{A. Luszczynska, B. Gutierrez-Dona, R. Schwarzer, General self-efficacy in various domains of human functioning: Evidence from five countries, “International Journal of Psychology” 2005, 40 (2), 80–89.} and from the perspective of educational achievement\footnote{D. H. Schunk, F. Pajares, Self-efficacy theory [In:] Handbook of motivation at school, K. R. Wentzel, A. Wigfield (ed.), New York 2009.}. We know from A. Bandura’s research on self-efficacy\footnote{A. Bandura, C. Barbaranelli, G. V. Caprara, C. Pastorelli, Self-efficacy beliefs as shapers of children’s aspirations and career trajectories, “Child Development” 2001, 72, 187-206.} that the study of belief systems in children and adolescents makes sense because they play an important role in our efforts to account for differences in activity and achievements (e.g. at school).

We ourselves are interested in a specific type of beliefs which we have called beliefs about one’s course of life\footnote{Por. A. I. Brzezińska, R. Kaczan, L. Rycielska, Przekonania o swoim życiu. Spostrzeganie historii życia przez osoby z ograniczeniami sprawności [Life beliefs: Perceiving one’s life history by persons with disabilities]. Warszawa 2010.}, especially beliefs concerning punctuality of life events and the
related developmental tasks which are typical for consecutive stages of life and which young people are expected to realize. The sense of whether or not life events are on-time or off-time compared with one’s peers underlies the development of generalized beliefs in the punctuality of one’s life events. In our approach we pay particular attention to subjective sense of punctuality, rooted in one’s own experience (rather than feedback from other people) and facilitated by social comparisons, especially with one’s peers. We want to know how young people perceive the realization of their life tasks: are they punctual and in keeping with their contemporaries, or are they delayed or premature. In other words, we want to know how well young people’s individual developmental timetables are functioning.

One example of this approach is the work of Inge Seiffge-Krenke. She interviewed young (25 years old) adults and asked them to rate the timing of such events as leaving home, beginning full-time employment and cohabitation with a romantic partner. Respondents rated these events retrospectively, indicating whether they were too early, on time, or too late. Nine percent (9%) of the respondents said they had left home too early, 80% on time and 11% too late. Respondents who began to cohabitate with a partner at about 21 years of age rated this event as either premature (35%) or punctual (65%). The last event, i.e. full-time employment, was rated as punctual by 93% of the respondents and premature by only 7%. The young respondents’ ratings were compared with ratings made by their parents. These turned out to be very similar: both children and parents rated the time of leaving home (the only event the parents were asked to rate) similarly but mothers experienced more stress relating to this event than fathers.

S. Bell and C. Lee adopted a slightly different approach to the study of punctuality of life events. These researchers were interested not only in the timing of the events but also and mainly in their sequence. They asked people to rate the timing of six important life events and found that the most common sequence was: (1) termination of education at the first complete level, (2) leaving home for the first time, (3) first full-time employment, (4) first relationship, (5) first marriage, and (6) birth of first child. They called this the “correct sequence” and said that the sequence was incorrect when, for example, the first marriage preceded termination of

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the first complete level of education. They concluded that the correct sequence is the socially most typical one and has a variety of benefits such as greater support and sense of punctuality of life events.

The regulative role of beliefs manifests itself in their capacity to create mindsets and expectations concerning one’s life course, one’s interpretation of incoming information about oneself, other people and surrounding reality. Young people who look at their life to date from the perspective of events which they think are unpunctual may feel so different from their peers that this will limit not only their willingness to enter new types of relations (limited exploration) but also their willingness to make new commitments and to identify with them, especially when they are not sure that they have made a good choice.

Research conducted in our laboratory with 20-25-year-old participants found that the sense of delay of realization of developmental tasks compared with one’s peers correlated significantly and positively with ruminative exploration and just as significantly but negatively with commitment and identification with one’s commitments. People who viewed their life as unpunctual because of premature realization of developmental tasks compared with their peers identified more strongly with their commitments. The sense of punctuality of realization of developmental tasks also correlated significantly with identity status. Those participants who rated themselves as more delayed in the realization of developmental tasks had moratorium or diffused identity status whereas those participants who had the lowest ratings of delay (had the greatest sense of punctuality) had achieved identity status.

These findings suggest that beliefs concerning one’s life course, particularly a sense of delay, should correlate with the stages of identity development. Moreover, people differing in identity status will probably differ in their beliefs concerning their life course. These are preliminary hypotheses, however, and need to be explored further and put to the empirical test.

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49 ibidem, p. 268

50 A. I. Brzezińska, R. Kaczan, L. Rycielska, Przekonania o swoim życiu. Spostrzeganie historii życia przez osoby z ograniczeniami sprawności [Life beliefs: Perceiving one’s life history by persons with disabilities], Warszawa 2010.

51 K. Lewandowska, Status tożsamości a poczucie punktualności realizacji zadań rozwojowych w okresie wyłaniającej się dorosłości [Identity status and sense of punctuality of realization of developmental tasks in emergent adulthood], Poznań 2011.
5. Key social experiences and social participation in childhood and adolescence, and the formation of identity

In accordance with the model proposed by H. Merkens and associates, we have distinguished four developmental paths relating to different types of social participation – the integrating type, assimilating type, marginalizing type, and separating type. The authors have distinguished these types on the basis of the intensity of two orthogonal dimensions which they call orientation toward transition to successive phases of development and orientation toward the present/actuality (cf. Fig. 2). When we analyze the typical developmental paths of contemporary youth we can see that they fall into two basic groups: relatively quick transition to adulthood (two paths and two related types of social participation: integration and assimilation) and prolongation of adolescence for as long as possible (again with two paths and two related types of participation: marginalization and separation).

The orientation toward transition distinguished by the German researchers (the vertical axis in Fig. 2) applies to assumption of future-oriented activity and realization of socially ascribed developmental tasks (Germ. Entwicklungsaufgaben) which show young people an important problem area with which they must cope if they are to make the transition to adulthood successfully. Realization of developmental tasks, i.e. fulfilment of substantively defined social demands and expectations, forces young people to develop specific competences and skills. In this orientation young people are receptive to socially accepted life course patterns, and the educational and occupational sphere, which they believe to be very important for successful adulthood, requires very considerable involvement. The authors believe realization of the developmental tasks of adolescence to be the main way of preparing to lead an economically and socially independent life. Therefore young people emphasize the importance of educational and occupational development. They typically submit to the influence of educational institutions and want not only a good education (without which one cannot have a successful career) but also rich and heterogeneous occupational experiences.


The second basic orientation – toward the present (the horizontal axis in Fig. 2; Germ. gegenwartsorientierte Entfaltung) – applies to the concept of types of social participation, the need to cope on a daily basis, to pursue present-oriented developmental opportunities (Germ. Entfaltungsmöglichkeiten), and to shape one’s adolescent development independently. What seems to be crucial in this orientation is the need to seek one’s own, personal “expression” of one’s identity. Since the developmental opportunities relating to the horizontal orientation are less structured than the opportunities relating to the vertical orientation, which are defined in terms of developmental tasks rooted in social expectations and demands, present-oriented adolescents (moratorium status) have a chance to draw upon a broader palette of behaviours, less strictly defined by society, despite certain limitations. This orientation allows them to shape their life paths more independently and to build the foundations for their own unique paths later. In other words, it is conducive to a more “individualistic” biography.

The typology proposed by Merkens and Bergs-Winkels contains four types of contemporary adolescent developmental paths, distinguished according to the position of each
of the orientations mentioned above vis-à-vis each other. Each type is a function of high vs. low intensity of each orientation:

1. The path of integration (Germ. Integration). This path is chosen by individuals who are both largely future-oriented and present-oriented. These people are receptive to socially accepted life course patterns, fulfil expected developmental tasks successfully, and strive to obtain an education in traditional educational institutions. They also “understand the socially ascribed need to seek alternatives for the future and for their further personal development”\(^{54}\). They do not feel limited in the development of their potential by social demands or social control. The authors point out that their considerable resources, both the ones offered by their social environment and their own, facilitate a variety of forms of social participation.

2. The path of assimilation (Germ. Assimilation). This path is chosen by individuals who pursue a specific goal on their developmental trajectory toward adulthood and usually rely on patterns of living ascribed by their social environment. They neither seek nor create their own unique developmental paths. Instead, they internalize socially available patterns of life. They have no problems realizing the developmental tasks of adolescence and view other developmental possibilities as unattractive. Individuals who take this path are strongly future-oriented and weakly present-oriented.

3. The path of marginalization (Germ. Marginalisierung). This path is followed by individuals who are passive and neither interested nor engaged in shaping their own lives. They find it very difficult to fulfil their developmental tasks. They also have insufficient social and personal resources to help them undertake various, personally satisfying activities on the horizontal axis. Therefore they are a high risk group – they run the risk of self-marginalization and social marginalization or even – in particularly adverse circumstances – self-exclusion and social exclusion (cf. the model of marginalization and exclusion\(^{55}\)) in adulthood. Individuals who take this path are poorly future-oriented and poorly present-oriented.

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\(^{55}\) A. I. Brzezińska, K. Zwolińska, *Marginalizacja osób z ograniczeniami sprawności na skutek zaburzeń psychicznych* [Marginalization of persons with disabilities due to mental disorder], „Polityka Społeczna” 2010, 2, 16-22.
4. The path of segregation (Germ. Segregation). This path is followed by young people who do not fulfill their developmental tasks satisfactorily because they either cannot or will not accept the external demands and social expectations associated with transition to adulthood. They have sufficient personal and social resources, however, and know how to use them to create alternative developmental paths on the horizontal axis. The possibilities created this way do not fit the socially accepted trajectories of identity development “toward adulthood” so they find outlets in subcultures and opposition against generally accepted norms and values. Individuals who follow the path of segregation are poorly future-oriented but strongly present-oriented.

We think that each of these two orientations is associated with different elements of the process of identity formation described by K. Luyckx et al. 56 – broad exploration (focus on getting to know alternatives) and deep exploration (evaluation of commitments from the perspective of their consistency with expectations and standards) or undertaking identity commitments and identification with these commitments).

High present-orientation is associated with seeking a space for activity in the present and finding satisfaction here and now, often in ad hoc activities rather than long-term plans. It coincides with realization of the need to seek an identity of one’s own – with recognition of elements of one’s own unique identity. This is facilitated by the less precise social definition of horizontal patterns of activity57. Taking this actualistic tendency and the need to find an identity of one’s own into account, we may formulate the following hypothesis: strong present-orientation coincides above all with more intense broad exploration. We also predict that two types of broad exploration will be found, especially in young people who are on the “path of segregation” in the process of independent and very active and intensive identity construction – an orienting-investigative type, aimed at the genuine search for specific information, and a type resembling children’s “as if” games, aimed at often haphazard scanning of the environment with no plan or just a “what if” plan.

High levels of transitional orientation, i.e. the self-propelled urge to move to the next developmental stage (adulthood), are associated with future-oriented activity and future fulfilment of the social environment’s aspirations and one’s own. Current activity in


individuals with this orientation is therefore planned in the short-term, medium-term and long-term perspective and its purpose is to prepare the individual to assume adult social roles in the future. We may therefore formulate the following hypothesis: strong transitional orientation is associated with the assumption and consideration of issues relating to one’s own future in the long term, construction and realization of a personal life project, or “programmatic changes” to use K. Obuchowski’s terminology. This tendency should coexist with intensification of commitment-related activity and identification with commitments in the process of identity formation.

Presumably the process of identity formation within each of these four developmental paths (so different with respect to orientation of activity toward specific goals), each of which activates a different type of social participation, should have a different dynamic, associated to a greater or lesser extent with one of the categories of developmental trajectories identified by K. Luyckx and collaborators.

Concluding remarks

The process of identity formation during the transition from adolescence to adulthood and its determinants are currently a central issue in the social sciences. On the one hand, the huge range of offers creates an opportunity to expand the fields of exploration and to tailor commitments to individual aspirations and preferences. On the other hand, increasing mobility, instability, ambiguity and liquidity of the social developmental environment may create threats that impede the making of decisions, engaging in their realization, and identifying with the choices made and their consequences.

We assumed that several as yet poorly understood factors are crucially involved in the process of identity formation. These include shame proneness and shame regulation strategies viewed from a broader perspective, i.e. in the context of individual emotion

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regulation strategies. In our culture shame is a very important emotion in primary socialization in the family and the natural peer group, and in secondary socialization in educational institutions and formal groups.

We also assumed that the individual’s system of personal beliefs concerning his/course of life, particularly beliefs containing contents concerning punctuality of life events and the related developmental tasks and the perception of life turning points are an important factor, one which provides an individual “internal context” and reference point.

We are analyzing these factors, which are subjective determinants of identity development, in an even wider context, i.e. the context of key social experiences, accumulated in three domains (family, education, occupation) and determining the type and quality of an individual’s social participation.

References


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