

Original Papers

Polish Psychological Bulletin
 2011, vol. 42(4), 198-204
 DOI - 10.2478/v10059-011-0026-6

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The Significance Of Adolescent's Value System In Creating Concept About Their Own Life

This paper presents a study on the significance of adolescent's value system in creating concept about their own life in the process of planning their own future. A hypothetical model of this concept is analysed, which identifies such main components as: preferred life style, life goals and plans, and decisions concerning their own future. This model acknowledges values as the main criterion in creating this concept as they form the base for defining a person's preferred life style, their formulation of life goals and plans and the undertaking of important decisions concerning their future (Czerwińska-Jasiewicz, 2005). The propounded author's own model of adolescents' concepts about their own future has been based on the notion of J. Piaget (Inhelder; Piaget, 1970), concerning adolescents creating a "programme" of their own life, as a specific developmental task during adolescence. The statement that the "programme" of adolescents' own lives is based on a given value scale on which certain ideals and goals can be placed above others seems particularly significant in this concept. The discussion presented herein is based on the above statement. The creation by me of the above model was further inspired by the theoretical concepts and the research programmes concerning the future orientation of adolescents, their goals and life plans and values (Nuttin, 1980; Niemczyński, 1980, 1988; Nurmi, 1991; Matuszewicz, 1975; Mądrzycki, 1996; Zaleski, 1991; Trempala, 1996, 2000).

Keywords: adolescence, adolescents, future orientation, value system, concept about one's own life, life styles, life goals and plans, decisions concerning one's own future

Introduction

At the onset of the discussion presented in this paper it should be stressed that values that are cherished by a person constitute a significant determinant of their development in various areas: the development of their personality (Rokeach, 1973), worldview (Matuszewicz, 1975), and moral and social development (Erikson, 1997). The highly significant role of values in a person's actions is also worth pointing out. They constitute, above all, a criterion for the formulation of life goals and plans (Matuszewicz, 1975; Mądrzycki, 1996; Zaleski, 1991) as well as undertaking complex life decisions (Walesa, 1988 b; Czerwińska-Jasiewicz, 2005). It is precisely this role, which constitutes the object of discussion of this paper. Values thus constitute an incredibly positive determinant of human development, hence studies and theoretical discussions concerning the human value system can be included in the so-called positive psychology current (Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

The discussions presented in this study concern the significance of adolescents' value systems in creating of their own concept of life in the process of planning their own future and looking for their own individual place in society (Inhelder, Piaget, 1970; Erikson, 1997).

The following issues will be subsequently discussed:

- 1) The views of J. Piaget (Inhelder, Piaget, 1970), on the creation by adolescents of their own "programme" of life.
- 2) The author's own model of the concept of adolescents concerning their own life (Czerwińska-Jasiewicz, 2005).
- 3) The main problems connected with studies on the concepts of adolescents about their own life.
- 4) Reference of my own model of the concept of adolescents concerning their own life to the proposal of J. Piaget.

The purpose of this study is to highlight the role that the value systems of adolescents have in creating a general

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concept concerning their own life and in defining and fulfilling its main elements: preferred life style, life goals and plans and making decisions concerning their future. An additional intention of these deliberations is to point out the small body of research that has been conducted in this scope and to inspire scientists to take on this topic.

The Concept Of J. Piaget Concerning Adolescents' Creations Of Their Own "Programme" Of Life

The creation of one's own life "programme" by adolescents during the adolescence stage is, according to J. Piaget (Inhelder, Piaget, 1970), connected with the so-called "growth into" the society of adults by adolescents and with searching for their own individual place in society. This "growth" was acknowledged by J. Piaget as the basic criterion of adolescence. The actual term "growth" into society signifies, according to him, that the young person that is growing up begins to consider themselves a person equal to adults and starts to judge them based on this equality and reciprocity. At the same time, the adolescent differs from a child in that they begin to think very intensely about their future and look for their own place in society (Inhelder, Piaget, 1970; Erikson, 1997).

This process is bolstered by the intensive development of the future time perspective (Nuttin, 1980) and future orientation (Nurmi, 1991) during adolescence. This is closely connected with the development of formal thinking during this stage, which enables adolescents to anticipate the future. In connection to the development of reasoning, but also with the development of the personality and the intense social development, the growing-up adolescent begins to think, according to J. Piaget (Inhelder, Piaget, 1970), about the "programme" of their own life.

During the process of the "growth" of adolescents into a society of adults there are, according to J. Piaget (Inhelder, Piaget, 1970), significant transformations taking place. Above all, feelings towards people start to be accompanied by feelings connected with ideals (approx. between 13 and 15 years of age). This is related to the development of adolescents' personality (their identity, value system, and worldview). The personality of adolescents (including their value system) is shaped under the influence of the value scale functioning in society. The "programme" of life of adolescents is, according to J. Piaget, based on a specific value scale on which certain values are placed higher than others.

In the process of adolescents' "growth" into an adult society, two aspects are, according to J. Piaget, above all crucial: 1) Adolescents' devising their own "programme" of their own life, and 2) Striving to reform the current state of society.

The process of adolescents devising their own "programme" of life seems particularly significant. Without the said process, it would be impossible for the adolescents to consciously and autonomously find their own individual place in society, which, according to E. Erikson (1997), constitutes the basic condition for achieving a mature identity and for becoming an adult.

Equally significant is J. Piaget (Inhelder, Piaget, 1970), stressing the meaning of values in the process of adolescents creating their own "programme" of life. This programme is based on a specific value scale, which results from the individual value system held by adolescents that is shaped during the adolescence stage.

The presented theoretical concept of J. Piaget unfortunately did not manage to see its empirical verification, but nevertheless constitutes a highly valuable, unique and contemporary approach to the specific phenomenon of adolescence entailing the creation of a specific "programme" of life by adolescents.

The views of J. Piaget have constituted an important inspiration for my proposal concerning the concepts of adolescents about their own life as well as my initial attempts of conducting empirical studies in the said scope (Czerwińska-Jasiewicz, 2005).

The Author's Own Model Of The Concept Of Adolescents Concerning Their Own Life

The model concerning adolescents' concept about their own lives propounded by me is based both on theoretical approaches, mainly that of J. Piaget (Inhelder, Piaget, 1970), as well as numerous empirical studies on the life goals and plans of adolescents as well as their future orientation (Nuttin, 1980; Nurmi, 1991, 1994; Zaleski, 1991; Trempała, 1996, 2000; Liberska, 2004; Katra, 2008; Czerwińska-Jasiewicz, 2005).

It should be highlighted that some Authors of the mentioned research created on their basis original theoretical concepts about the life goals and plans and future orientation of adolescents (Nuttin, 1980; Nurmi, 1991; Zaleski, 1991; Trempała, 1996, 2000). The above concepts have been an additional inspiration for my theoretical proposal and empirical studies (Czerwińska-Jasiewicz, 2005).

Based on the proposal of J. Piaget, which remained a theoretical concept only (there were no empirical studies conducted on the subject thereof), and on the theories and research of the abovementioned Authors, I have created my own original model on adolescents concepts about their own life, which I will go on to present in brief in the further discussion, and I have also conducted empirical research concerning the constituent elements of this concept.

Discussion Of My Own Model Concerning The Concept Of Adolescents About Their Own Life

In creating this model I was thinking along the same lines as J. Piaget (Inhelder, Piaget, 1970), that adolescents first create a general project of their own life, after which they try to fulfil its given constituent elements. It is first necessary to create a specific concept of one's own life in the mind, which constitutes an attempt at answering the question: what should it be like?; how do I want to live?; what model of life do I want to fulfil? It is only once thought has been given to these questions and attempts have been made to find the answer, does it become possible to formulate one's goals and life plans as well as making concrete decisions concerning the future.

At present, there is a lack in literature on the subject of this kind of approach where life goals, plans and decision are elements of a general project of adolescents concerning their own life, elements of their personal concept concerning their life. This is how J. Piaget (1970) perceived this problem 40 years ago. The result of the lack of such an approach are the separate research programmes that we have today, concerning life goals alone, life plans alone, or the decisions of adolescents concerning their future. Exceptions to this are the concepts and research of J. Nurmi (1991, 1994) and J. Trempała (1996, 2000), about the future orientation of adolescents.

Before I go on to discuss my own proposal of the model of adolescents about their own life, I would like to remind the readers of how the term "concept of adolescents about their own life" is understood in this paper. The term should be understood as "a conceptualisation concerning a person's own life performed by adolescents, based on the value system held by them," (Czerwińska-Jasiewicz, 2005, p.76).

The term "concept of own life" has already appeared in literature within the realm of developmental psychology much earlier, 30 years ago, in the papers of A. Niemczyński (1980, 1988), concerning psychological models of human development and human development during the life course. A. Niemczyński (1980, p.61) stated that "during the adolescence stage, adolescents create a project of a construct of themselves as the subject of actions in a system of programmes and goals created by them." According to him (Niemczyński, 1988, p.227), the process of the personalisation of human actions falls in the adolescence stage and adolescent age. An adolescent, possessing during this time many goals and programmes, comes before the necessity of ordering them hierarchically. The Author stresses (Niemczyński, 1988, p.229), that the construction of the system of goals and programmes (adolescent projects) encounters the system of culturally defined tasks and socially structured human strivings. In early adulthood, the two later phases of personalisation take place, in which

it is no longer adolescent projects, but a concept of personal identity and a vision of the full shape of one's own life that fulfil the role of coordination and integration centres of human actions. In the concept of A. Niemczyński (1980, 1988), a similar train of thought to that of J. Piaget (1970) can be identified. However, A. Niemczyński in his concept goes beyond the adolescence stage, showing individual human development during the whole life course. Worthy of attention is also the process of personalisation of human actions, which, according to the Author, begins during adolescence and is fulfilled in the early adulthood stage. It is only during this stage of development that we are dealing, according to the said Author, with the process of fulfilment of the personality construct (Niemczyński 1988, p. 229).

The creation by adolescents of the concept of their own life is closely connected with the process referred to as the idealisation process (Macnamara, 1990, quoted after: Niemczyński, 2000). The process of idealisation consists of mentally reaching and trying to interpret a given ideal. According to Macnamara (quoted after: Niemczyński, 2000), reaching the ideal and its interpretation enables the human mind to harness the capability of conceptualisation. Each ideal is accessible in the form of a conceptualisation. Its basic conditions are previous experience and the right mental approach. An important condition in reaching and understanding an ideal is intuition. Thanks to intuition, it is possible to state to what extent given realisations in the real world are close to the ideal (Niemczyński, 2000).

As for the concept concerning one's own life, such a specific ideal is one's own future, the ideation of which is significantly connected with the values that a person cherishes. The conceptualisation of the ideal of one's own future takes place in a person's mind as it concerns future states that at present do not exist but which are anticipated in a person's mind (Czerwińska-Jasiewicz, 2005).

The concept about one's own life is general in nature, and constitutes a specific "vision", an ideation of one's own future. It gradually becomes more and more concrete as adolescents attempt to fulfil it. The most general is the ideation concerning the preferred life style (the way in which one would like to live, its model). In order for this life style to be achieved, adolescents formulate life plans and goals. In the end, in order to fulfil life goals and plans, they undertake appropriate decisions. In my model concerning the concepts of adolescents about their own life, I have attempted therefore to take into consideration the main elements that subsequently appear in the lives of adolescents when they are thinking about their own future and attempting to find their own, individual place in society. I have made an attempt in my model to capture the specific developmental process, which takes place during adolescence. This is a process of not only creating the concept or project of one's own life, but also the process of fulfilment of its elements in order for it to be gradually

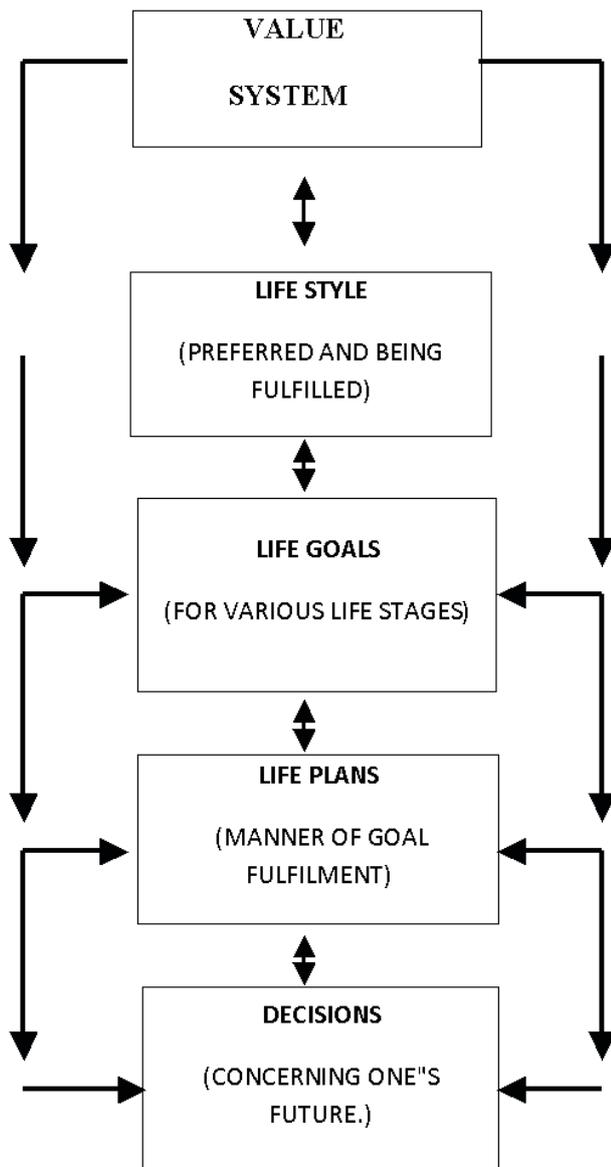


Figure 1. Proposal of a research model concerning adolescents' concept about their own life (Czerwińska-Jasiewicz 2005, p.77).

possible, already in early adulthood, to fulfil, depending on the possibilities, the entire concept of this individual project.

The main elements of this concept are, in my view, the following (cf. Czerwińska-Jasiewicz, 2005), and have been presented in Fig. 1:

1. Preferred life style
2. Life goals (short, long term and for one's entire life)
3. Life plans (ways of goal fulfilment)
4. Decisions concerning one's own future.

It should be stressed that values constitute a superior element in this model, which make up the main criterion determining the general concept of a person's life as well as its elements (life style, life goals and plans and life decisions).

I will now present in brief the main elements of the concepts of adolescents concerning their own life and will attempt to show the relationships between them (Czerwińska-Jasiewicz, 2005):

Value system – is the fundamental and main criterion for determining the concept of one's own life, while at the same time being the main criterion in formulating life goals and plans as well as making decisions about one's future (Czerwińska-Jasiewicz, 2005; Inhelder, Piaget, 1970; Matusiewicz, 1975; Mądrzycki, 1996).

Life style (preferred and in the process of being realised) – is understood as preferred or in the process of being realised way of life, *id est* life model. The main criterion of choosing a preferred life style is the value a person cherishes (Mądrzycki, 1996; Matusiewicz, 1975; Jawłowska, 1976).

Life plans and goals – their formulation and fulfilment is necessary in order to achieve the preferred life style. The main criterion for formulating life goals and plans are cherished values (Nuttin, 1980; Nurmi, 1991; Matusiewicz, 1975; Zaleski, 1991).

Decisions concerning one's own future – without undertaking them, the fulfilment of life goals and plans is impossible. In the case of such complex life decisions (the decision situation being open and risky), the main criterion of undertaking them is referred to in terms of utility, namely, the subjective value that it constitutes for the subject (Kozielecki, 1975, 1992). Thus, the main criterion for making such decisions is the values that a person cherishes.

All the mentioned elements are closely interrelated. Without the fulfilment of life goals and plans it is impossible to achieve the desired life style. On the other hand, without making accurate and autonomous decisions concerning one's own future it is impossible to achieve goals and fulfil life plans.

Summing up the above discussion, the importance of the value system of adolescents in their determination of the general concept concerning their own life as well as for the determination and fulfilment of its main elements (preferred life style, life goals and plans and decisions regarding the future) once again deserve to be accentuated. This has been indicated by numerous theoretical studies (Inhelder, Piaget, 1970; Matusiewicz, 1975; Zaleski, 1991; Nuttin, 1980; Nurmi, 1991; Trempała, 1996, 2000; Mądrzycki, 1996; Czerwińska-Jasiewicz, 2005).

It should also, however, be stressed that there is a lack of empirical studies that analyse simultaneously the main elements of adolescents' concepts about their own life and that study the relations between them and the values cherished by adolescents. The first attempts at undertaking such broad studies is the research of J. Nuttin (1980), J. Nurmi (1991, 1994), J. Trempała (1996, 2000), and M. Czerwińska-Jasiewicz (2005).

The Main Problems Connected With Studies On The Concepts Of Adolescents About Their Own Life

There have only been a few studies conducted on the concepts of adolescents concerning their own life. One of the main reasons for this is the complexity and difficulty of such research. The question thus arises whether to study the entirety, *id est* all the elements of this concept jointly (life styles, goals, life plans and decisions), or whether each element of this concept should be singled out for study, after which a synthesis of the results thus obtained would be performed. To date, the vast majority of studies have concerned the constituent elements of this concept: either the goals of adolescents alone were studied (Zaleski, 1991), or the life plans of adolescents (Małkiewicz, 1983; Kutra, 2008), or only their decisions (Czerwińska-Jasiewicz, 1997). However, in such a situation it is very difficult to combine the results of given studies in a manner that would fully describe the concept of adolescents about their own life. One such important obstacle is that different samples of adolescents are studied. This is why it would be worth attempting to study all the elements of the adolescents' concept about their own life on the same sample of adolescents. Then, any generalisation of the results would be more feasible.

It is even more difficult to measure the relations between elements of this concept, namely, between life styles, goals, plans and decisions of adolescents. There have not been many such studies conducted. An example of such research is the study of J. Nuttin (1980), J. Nurmi (1991, 1994), Trempała and Malmberg (1996, 2000) as well as M. Czerwińska-Jasiewicz (2005).

Another problem that results from the conducted analyses is the lack of studies on the relation between elements of adolescents' concept of their own life and the values they cherish. Many theoretical studies concerning this topic can be found in literature on the subject (Matuszewicz, 1975; Nurmi, 1991; Zaleski, 1991; Mądrzycki, 1996), however, there is a lack of empirical studies devoted to this issue. Such research is complex and relatively difficult to conduct but is, nevertheless, possible. The first attempts at researching this problem in Poland were the studies of Cz. Matuszewicz (1975) concerning the relation between values and the life styles of adolescents, then, that of Cz. Walesa (1988b) about important life decisions of adolescents, the research of K. Skarżyńska (1991) on the relations between values and life goals, as well as the studies of M. Czerwińska-Jasiewicz (2005) about the relations between values and the life styles and goals of adolescents.

It is worth conducting further research on this topic seeing that the problem seems to be of particular importance both from the point of view of the developmental psychology of adolescents, but also due to it being of more general

significance in the overall development of a person during their life course.

The Concept Of J. Piaget And The Author's Own Model Of The Concept Of Adolescents About Their Own Life

The discussion presented above leads to the **following fundamental conclusions:**

Main inspiration for me in creating the model concerning the concepts of adolescents about their own life was the statement of J. Piaget (Inhelder, Piaget, 1970), that an important condition for the "growth" process of adolescents into an adult society is for them to devise their own life "programme."

An important inspiration for placing values in the central position in the model propounded by me, treating them as the main criterion for adolescents creating a general concept of their own life as well as defining its elements, was the statement of J. Piaget (Inhelder, Piaget, 1970) concerning the fundamental significance of values in adolescents devising their own "programme" of life. It is worth accentuating once more at this point that for J. Piaget, the "programme" of life of adolescents was based on their scale (hierarchy) of values.

While devising my own theoretical model (and later the empirical research programme) concerning the concept of adolescents about their own life, I have tried to develop these important ideas of J. Piaget, accentuating thereby their pertinence and significance. Other theoretical and empirical studies on the topic have also helped me in this, which I have already made mention of earlier (Nuttin, 1980; Niemczyński, 1980, 1988; Matuszewicz, 1975; Nurmi, 1991; Zaleski, 1991; Mądrzycki, 1996; Trempała, 1996, 2000).

Summing up the entire discussion, the uniqueness and versatility of the concept of J. Piaget (Inhelder, Piaget, 1970) concerning the "growth" of adolescents into an adult society and developmental processes that are connected thereto, particularly the process of adolescents creating their own "programme" of life, well deserve to be stressed again. Without this "programme" it would be impossible to independently and autonomously find one's individual place in society and to become an adult. For this reason, it is worth taking this idea into account in further studies on this topic.

Summary

This study pays particular attention to values as a significant determinant of a person's development in various areas. Values are of particular significance in the

development of a person's personality (Rokeach, 1973), worldview (Matuszewicz, 1975), and for moral and social development (Erikson, 1997). Particular attention will be paid in this article to the role that values play in a person's actions. I have concentrated on the actions of adolescents, the goal of which are planning their own future. Analysing this incredibly positive function that values have in the development of a human being enables these deliberations and the research connected thereto to be located within the so-called positive psychology current (Peterson & Seligman, 2004)

In the presented study, I have tried to show the significance of the values cherished by adolescents in their creation of their own concept about their life. An inspiration for the model of this concept created by me were the views of J. Piaget (Inhelder, Piaget, 1970), concerning the creation by adolescents of a "programme" of their own life during the adolescence stage, which is a significant condition of the process of the "growth" of adolescents into an adult society. The statement that the "programme" of adolescents' own lives is based on a given value scale on which certain ideals and goals can be placed above others is particularly significant.

The creation by me of the discussed model was further inspired by the theoretical concepts and the research programmes concerning the future orientation of adolescents, their goals and life plans and values (Nuttin, 1980; Niemczyński, 1980, 1988; Nurmi, 1991; Matuszewicz, 1975; Mądrzycki, 1996; Zaleski, 1991; Trempała, 1996, 2000).

The purpose of this paper was not only to stress the significance of values in adolescents creating a concept about their own life. Apart from the theoretical goal, an additional aim was to point out the lack of empirical research on this issue and the need for such to be conducted. The above discussion was also intended to inspire research on the significance of values in adolescents creating a concept about their own life and in determining the elements thereof (life styles, goals and plans, as well as life decisions), including research concerning the relations between the said elements and the values that are cherished by adolescents.

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