

Original Papers

Polish Psychological Bulletin
 2011, vol. 42(4), 177-180
 DOI - 10.2478/v10059-011-0023-9

*Maria Czerwińska-Jasiewicz**
*Ludwika Wojciechowska***

“Individual and social determinants of human development. The positive psychology perspective”

Introduction

This Volume presents the studies of seven Authors representing Warsaw developmental psychology, who are members of staff of the Faculties and Institutes of Psychology of the four Warsaw higher education institutions: Warsaw University (WU), the Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University (CSWU), University of Finance and Management (UF&M) and the Academy of Special Education (ASE).

The texts that have been included in the Volume analyse selected determinants of development on various life stages – childhood, adolescence and adulthood. The studies concentrate, above all, on the inner designators of developmental changes but the issue of the influence of the broadly understood social context on the development of an individual has also been discussed. Among the inner determinants, the specific disposition termed as the subjective relation was taken into consideration (text of W. Zagórska), as well as the properties considered in positive psychology to belong to the strong sides of the psyche such as hope (article of L. Wojciechowska), humor (text of A. Radomska) and resourcefulness (article of A. Bieńkowska). The developmental significance of the structure of the value system was also considered (study of M. Czerwińska-Jasiewicz and J. Ciecuch). The problem of the social determinants of development was undertaken in the text of M. Ledzińska and concerned the macrosocial changes in societies, termed as globalisation.

The developmental effects considered in the above publications refer to either a general approach to the development of personality or to particular achievements in given areas of functioning. In the position authored by W. Zagórska, the personal development of an adult is discussed; the text of M. Ledzińska raises the problem of transgression, whereas the text of A. Radomska relates to

the psychological well-being. A more detailed approach to shaping human properties can be found in the articles of M. Czerwińska-Jasiewicz, L. Wojciechowska and A. Bieńkowska. They include the concept concerning one's own life during adolescence, generativity in middle adulthood and magical thinking in social situations during late childhood.

The common motive in the published texts is adoption of the positive psychology perspective. In order to substantiate this, a brief introduction to positive psychology will be required as well as an identification of its points of contact with developmental psychology.

Positive psychology, the main initiator of which was Martin Seligman, arose in opposition to the model of the human person that was analysed from the perspective of deficits, shortcomings and weaknesses (Carr, 2004; Seligman, 2005). According to its premises, psychology is geared towards searching and investigating the strong sides of a person, towards specifying a good and worthwhile life, to designating the factors facilitating the positive experience of life, as well as locating the determinants of an individual's process of personal fulfilment (Seligman, 2004; Trzebińska, 2008). A person, in the approach of positive psychology, builds and perfects their potential during the course of psychological development and during the process of socialisation, lives in harmonious relations with society, respecting the values and traditions acknowledged therein and is actively participating in the support of the common good (Trzebińska, 2008).

Developmental psychology as a field of science involved in describing and explaining the changes taking place during a person's life (Trempała, 2011), is close to positive psychology because it too concentrates on advantageous developmental achievements (and their determinants), which enable adaptation to the requirements resulting from the individual's environment. However, in positive

* Warsaw University, Faculty of Psychology, 00-183 Warsaw, Stawki 5/7, e-mail: marylaczj@psych.uw.edu.pl

** Warsaw University, Faculty of Psychology, 00-183 Warsaw, Stawki 5/7, e-mail: ludka@psych.uw.edu.pl

psychology, greater emphasis is placed on the problem of actuating stimulators that are favourable to the appearance of such changes during the entire life course, which can warrant or facilitate experiencing optimal life satisfaction (Trzebińska, 2008). The similarity of both psychologies can be seen also in the subjective approach to an individual, which takes into consideration their own activeness in relations to the environment as well as involvement in creating the grounds for shaping oneself and one's own development (Trempała, 2011). This is particularly visible in developmental psychology that is also referred to as applied psychology, which is directed towards supporting a person in their developmental undertakings, which adopts an optimistic vision of a person that is equipped in the capacity to cope with new challenges and that searches for the conditions to ensure a favourable life course and satisfactory development (ibidem).

In order to establish the determinants of a good life, intense research was undertaken within positive psychology on the so-called strong properties of a person (Peterson & Park, 2007; Peterson & Seligman, 2004 quoted after: Haidt, 2007; Seligman, 2005). The list devised by Peterson & Seligman includes 24 character strengths through which the following six virtues are expressed, practised and maintained: 1) wisdom and knowledge; 2) courage; 3) humanity; 4) justice; 5) temperance; and 6) transcendence (Haidt, 2007; Peterson & Seligman, 2004, quoted after: Haidt, 2007). They enable establishment of the right conditions to achieve happiness, to acknowledge that one's life possesses sense, is successful and worthwhile. The virtue concept is not alien to developmental psychologists. In the theory of psychosocial development of Erikson (2002), virtues, namely, the basic life strengths appear on subsequent life stages as the result of the positively completed struggles of a person in eight consecutive developmental crises. They include: 1) hope; 2) will; 3) purpose; 4) competence; 5) fidelity; 6) love; 7) caring; and 8) wisdom. The shaping of these virtues ensures, according to Erikson, the successful undertaking of further psychosocial tasks and actions serving the solution of future developmental crises as well as achieving a sense of psychological comfort or, in other words, a good life.

Of the articles presented in this collection, three refer directly to the above thoughts. Two of them analyse two of the many strengths or character merits, which constitute the mechanisms that shape the virtue of transcendence. This pertains to humor (the article of A. Radomska) and hope (the article of L. Wojciechowska). While the third, (article of A. Bieńkowska), the character strength which is referred to as resourcefulness (responsible for the construction of the virtue of courage), and put more precisely, children's coping in social situations that are difficult to control, are analysed.

The concept of virtues and merits of character constitutes the theoretical framework of numerous studies conducted within positive psychology, in which attempts are made to establish not only the consequences of them being shaped for an individual to be able to adapt to given expectations that are set by society, but also the determinants responsible for individual differences in their strength and intensity, etc. (Haidt, 2007; Trzebińska, 2008). Both personal and context factors can be included therein. The value system shaped during the process of socialisation may be responsible for developmental achievements in the scope of formulating life goals and plans and making decisions regarding the life trajectory in the family or professional sphere and, as a result, have a significant role in experiencing quality of life. The issue of values as one of the designators of the possibilities of positive judgement of the current and future life is discussed in this collection in the articles of M. Czerwińska-Jasiewicz and J. Ciecuch.

The value system is connected with the overall worldview of an individual responsible for defining oneself in the philosophical or spiritual dimension. An individual's self definition based thereon may also constitute a factor at the foundation of which are differences in attitudes, undertaken actions and life organisation. The question arises of whether developmental achievements in this scope actually support striving to inner perfection, achieving a sense in life, and fulfilling oneself within it. This problem is considered in the article of W. Zagórska.

Positive psychologists pay a lot of attention to the social context of an individual, to the close and more distant social relations and to cultural determinants, while at the same time presuming that the concept of virtues and strong sides of a person is universal in nature (Haidt, 2007). In the context of global transformation and the mixing of cultures, when faced with significant transformation in societies as well as technological changes, the response to the question regarding how the participation of new experiences is seen in the broad social context and in creating the concept of a good life, is also of great interest. This problem is outlined in the article of M. Ledzińska.

Below is a brief outline of the main problems that have been analysed by the Authors of given articles.

The study that opens the Volume, by Wanda Zagórska (CSWU), is entitled "Subject-subject relationship as a significant aspect of personal development in adulthood." The article refers to the subjective relation also termed as the encounter relation or the I-You relation. The Author adopts the perspective of personalistic psychology in its existential and phenomenological current, pointing out the position and significance of this relation in the personal developmental of a person while at the same time highlighting its significance and important function in the developmental process.

Ludwika Wojciechowska (WU), in her article "Basic hope and the generativity of persons in middle adulthood" presents the results of her own research concerning the relationship between the levels of basic hope and manifesting generativity, namely, caring for the next generations by persons in middle adulthood. A significant relationship was expected to be found between these variables as well as a greater strength of this relation in the group of women than in men, including in persons with a higher level of education when compared to those with a lower level of education. The results of the research have enabled the posited hypotheses to be confirmed. It can therefore be acknowledged, that basic hope is a significant factor in human development during adulthood which is advantageous in successfully solving the crisis resulting from the conflict between generativity and stagnation (Erikson 1997).

The next study, by Maria Czerwińska-Jasiewicz (WU), with the title "The significance of adolescent's value system in creating a concept of their own life," relates to the role and function of the value system in adolescents defining their concept of life in the process of planning their future. A hypothetical model of the concept is analysed wherein the main criteria of its creation has been acknowledged to be the value system. The Author's original model of the concept of their own future formulated by adolescents was based on the theory of J. Piaget (Inhelder & Piaget, 1970), and concerned the creation by adolescents of a "programme" of their own life. This "programme," according to J. Piaget, is based on a specific value scale. The value scale is, therefore, according to him, the basic criterion for adolescents in the creation of their "programme" of existence. The deliberations entailed in the mentioned article have been based on this very concept.

Jan Ciecuch (UF&M), in his article entitled "Integration of the value concept of Schwartz and the Scheler value concept in a study on the development of the structure of values during adolescence," presents his original study concerning the development of the structure of values of adolescents during the adolescence stage. Apart from the goal of discovering the changes in the structure of values during adolescence, an additional methodological aim was the attempt to integrate two theoretical value concepts, namely, that of Schwartz and Scheler. An important goal of this study was to gain deeper insight into the development of the value structure during adolescence. Studies on this topic are few and far between although, as can be seen from the literature on the subject, values are a significant determinant of human development in various different life stages, their personality, social and moral development, and also constitute the main criterion of many actions (e.g. the formulation of goals, plans and decision making, etc.). This clearly results, among others, from the earlier study of Maria Czerwińska-Jasiewicz.

The next article is authored by Anna Radomska (WU) and is entitled: "Humor from the perspectives of positive psychology. Implications for research on development in adulthood." The purpose of this study was to present the property of a person referred to as humor, from the point of view of achieving a "good life" in the meaning of positive psychology, as well as the possibility of transferring the analysed approaches to understanding the issue of humor within the field of developmental psychology during the life course. The said discussion also includes suggestions regarding humor research as a resource supporting positive development: the fulfilment of developmental tasks, overcoming developmental crises and coping with problems connected with ageing.

Agnieszka Bieńkowska (ASE), in her text: "Belief in the causative power of words as a manifestation of magical thinking in late childhood" presents her original studies about the magical thinking of children of young school age as a significant factor helping them cope with social situations during childhood. Magical thinking constitutes a specific mechanism helping children function in various social situations.

The work of Maria Ledzińska (WU), which brings this Volume to a close, is entitled "Merely a Threat? Worldwide Transformations as a Chance of Development – Psychological Reflections." The deliberations of the Authors concern the psychological problems of globalisation. She concentrates on the effects of worldwide transformations and on a selected aspect of the living environment, namely, on diversity. The Author formulates and then tries to justify the thesis that the heterogeneity of the environment, constituting a discriminant of globalisation, stimulates human development in its various phases and scopes, optimising particularly the functioning of thoughtful persons.

The approach to human development from the perspective of positive psychology, accentuating the positive aspects of human development, seems particularly worthwhile from the point of view of the human development process during the entire life course. Such an approach dominates throughout all the articles enclosed and presented in this Volume. It should also be highlighted that relatively few such discussions can be found in literature within the scope of developmental psychology.

References

- Carr, A. (2004). *Positive psychology. The science of happiness and human strengths*. Hove, New York: Brunner-Routledge.
- Erikson E. (1997). *Dzieciństwo i społeczeństwo* [Childhood and society]. Poznań: Dom Wydawniczy Rebis.
- Erikson, E.H. (2002). *Dopelniony cykl życia* [Fulfilled life course]. Poznań: Dom Wydawniczy Rebis.
- Haidt, J. (2007). *Szczęście. Od mądrości starożytnych po koncepcje współczesne* [Happiness. From the ancient wisdom to contemporary

- concepts]. Gdańsk: Gdańskie Wydawnictwo Psychologiczne.
- Inhelder B., Piaget J. (1970). Od logiki dziecka do logiki młodzieży [From the logic of a child to the logic of a teenager]. Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe.
- Peterson, C., Park, N. (2007). Klasyfikacja i pomiar sił charakteru: implikacje dla praktyki [Classification and measurement of character strengths: practical implications]. In: P.A. Linley, S. Joseph (Ed.) *Psychologia pozytywna w praktyce* [Positive psychology in practice] (pp. 263-283). Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN.
- Seligman, M.E.P. (2004). Psychologia pozytywna [Positive psychology]. In: J. Czapiński, (Ed.) *Psychologia pozytywna. Nauka o szczęściu, zdrowiu, sile i cnotach człowieka* [Positive psychology. The science of human happiness, health, strength and virtues] (pp. 18-32). Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN.
- Seligman, M.E.P. (2005). *Prawdziwe szczęście. Psychologia pozytywna a urzeczywistnienie naszych możliwości trwałego spełnienia* [Authentic happiness. Positive psychology and the actualisation of new possibilities of permanent fulfilment]. Poznań: Media Rodzina.
- Trempała, J. (2011). Przedmowa [Foreword]. In: J. Trempała (Ed.) *Psychologia rozwoju człowieka* [Human developmental psychology] (pp. XI-XVI). Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN.
- Trzebińska, E. (2008). *Psychologia pozytywna* [Positive psychology]. Warsaw: Wydawnictwa Akademickie i Profesjonalne.