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Editorial - On the Road to Adulthood

Although the picture of adolescence G. Stanley Hall (1904) drew over a hundred years ago is no longer accepted, most contemporary researchers agree that the period between childhood and adulthood poses a serious challenge to the developing individual. The developmental achievements typical of this age, such as radical changes in appearance and behaviour, severe criticism of existing reality brought about by the recent acquisition of formal thinking, first intimate relations and sexual experiences and the various forms of social pressure connected with the new, age-related demands and expectations can often lead to emotional instability, disturbed parent-child relations and a propensity for risky behaviour (Arnett, 1997). These are the phenomena that accompany the struggle of a young person in the process of self-discovery and self-determination.

In the second volume of PPB "On the Road to Adulthood", which the reader is currently holding, we include a selection of research papers meant as an empirical complement to the theoretical base provided in volume one. The articles published in this volume are an illustration of the way Polish and American adolescents and young adults, living at the turn of the 21st century, experience themselves and the world around.

In this introduction we would like to provide short summaries of the papers included in the volume, drawing the readers' attention to the results of the studies described therein and presented in more depth later on.

Volume two starts with a paper by Michael Berzonsky on a problem considered fundamental in human development, namely the formation of identity styles. Michael Berzonsky and his collaborator Andrew Kinney searched for the links between identity styles (for Berzonsky's model see volume I) and the defence mechanisms diagnosed in the model developed by Ihilevich and Gleser. The existence of the following relations was assumed by the authors:

a. the informational style is associated with utilizing relatively comprehensive cognitive defensive manoeuvres, mainly rationalization or

intellectualization (making up *principialisation* as it is understood by Glaser and Ihilevich), which control fear and protect the self against threats.

- b. the diffuse-avoidant style is associated with the limited awareness of a stressor specificity, fixation on emotions, avoidant coping and maladaptive decision-making strategies as predecision panic, postponing decisions and denying responsibility (buck passing) after making a decision.
- c. the normative style is related to authoritarianism and lack of tolerance to information discrepancy; thus the authors assume that individuals characterised by this style tend to distort information, negate and deny the reality.

In their research Berzonsky and Kinney employed two methods: the Identity Style Inventory (ISI) by Berzonsky to identify identity processing styles and the Defence Mechanism Inventory (DMI) for diagnosing defence mechanisms in the Ihilevich and Gleser's model.

The participants were 213 American students of a community college (aged 23.06 on average). The following relationships were revealed by this study:

- 1. consistently with the authors' assumption informational style was associated with utilizing comprehensive cognitive defences expressed by distortion in the perception of reality, in other words with the intellectual efforts, which Gleser and Ihilevich linked with principialisation.
- 2. the diffuse-avoidant style, as it is emphasised by Berzonsky and Kinney, was more interrelated with maladaptive aggressive defences, predominantly with the aggression turned against an object but also with the one turned against oneself.
- 3. the normative style proved to be connected with the group of defence mechanisms referred to by Gleser and Ihilevich as reversals representing relatively immature defences like denial, repression and negation. The article includes a multi-layered discussion focused

on the interpretation of the findings. Thus, the results provided by Berzonsky and Kinney clearly show that the different styles are significantly related with separate groups of defences linked with them in a logical way and playing the role of their predictors.

The next article in this volume by Alicja Senejko deals with the issue of psychological defensive activity of the Polish youth. The author focused her attention on how the individual-related factors influence the way in which young people cope with the threat posed by their extremely important final secondary school exam, i.e. their attitude to the exam and the way they react to it in the form of defensive activity. The theoretical framework of the study was the function-action approach to psychological defence (see volume I).

The participants were 177 students of secondary schools (aged 18-19); 121 females and 52 males. In the study two questionnaires were employed. 1/ the Psycho-Social and Psychic Defences Questionnaire (PSPDQ) developed by Senejko and diagnosing young peoples' attitude towards threat and psychological defences, which they apply to cope with it; 2/ the questionnaire developed by Lachowicz-Tabaczek and Senejko aimed at identifying the following psychological dispositions: self-esteem, social anxiety, depressiveness, obligation will, emotional reactivity, sensitiveness, activity and endurance. The students' reactions to the exam were diagnosed twice – in January 2005 (after their mock) and in April 2005, a fortnight before the exam.

Endurance, obligatory will, depressiveness, self-esteem and gender proved to have the strongest effect on the students' attitudes towards the exam and their reactions to it. As it is emphasised by the author, endurance, self-esteem and gender not only turned out to be the predictors for the attitude towards the threat but also for the reactions to the threat, i.e. the adopted psychological defences.

The article contains a detailed analysis of the influence exerted by all the diagnosed factors on the approach to the final exam as a threat, and points to the fact that the study made it possible to discern a very important regularity: in the second stage some of the dependent variables, both the ones related to the attitudes and responses (especially constructive defences), proved not to be significantly influenced by the investigated psychological factors. It suggests the direction of further studies, which would take into account other factors (eg. social ones and competence) responsible for secondary students' behaviour related to their final exam.

Identity formation is a necessary step in assuming the role of an adult. Adulthood, however, can be construed in many different ways. The image of adulthood that a young person possesses determines his or her current relations with other people as well as influences the very way of transitioning into adulthood. Ewa Gurba in her

paper entitled "The Attributes of Adulthood Recognised by Adolescents and Adults" has made an attempt to build up a picture of adulthood that adults and adolescents employ and identify the qualities associated with it. The crucial question she tries to answer is whether the different concepts of adulthood that adolescents and adults develop can be responsible for the parent-child conflict that becomes especially pronounced in adolescence, very much like the findings described by Smetana (1988) concerning the conflict-inducing differences in the perception of social situations and the role of parental authority. Two groups of adolescents (15-year-olds and 18-year-olds representing early and late adolescence respectively) as well as a group of adults who could have adolescent children (aged 37 to 56) took part in the study. The picture of adulthood was analysed in terms of the choices made as to the characteristics associated with adulthood selected from the items included in the Polish adaptation of the Questionnaire of the Transition to Adulthood by J. Jensen Arnett (1997). The analyses were done by comparing the mean frequency of selecting particular attributes by the three studied age groups. Considerable overlap was revealed among all studied groups in the choice of "adulthood" attributes. The most popular characteristics were those that belonged to rather ambiguous and not well-defined categories, such as financial independence, the ability to support the family financially and provide security for the family and accepting responsibility for the consequences of one's actions. On the other hand, the characteristics that referred to more objective and well-defined criteria, such as completing one's education or getting married were not considered as important indicators of adulthood by any participants. However, events such as reaching a certain age, getting an ID or sexual maturity were ranked as indicators of adulthood by more 15-year-olds than adults. The author concludes that these differences, along with the ambiguity of the most popular attributes of adulthood selected by both adults and adolescents can hinder mutual understanding and provoke conflict.

In her interesting article Hanna Liberska looked into the problem of the changes in the future orientation of the Polish youth, and how it is threatened in the settings of the political and economic transformation. She assumed that future orientation, as one of the forms of time orientation, is a mental structure representing expectations of future events and their chronological order. She stressed that the formation of future orientation is culturally, socially and historically determined. The research embraced three stages: the preliminary transformation period (year 1991), the period of developing adaptation to relatively stabilised context of life (1999) and the period of first experiences associated with Poland's membership of UE and new military alliances (2005). The study involved 180 participants (60 in each stage) aged 16.9 – 18.1. Essays (to

collect material on future orientation) and psychological interviews, (for collecting data on socio-economic status as a co-determiner of future-related personal expectations) were employed.

The finding provided by Liberska shows that the subjects' future-related personal expectations were similar to each other and involved the basic tasks of adolescence and adulthood such as: working out an individual system of values and moral norms, finding a group of friends, deriving joy from playing and recreation, getting to know the world, educating, preparing for future professional occupation, achieving a certain social status in the world of adults, taking on social responsibility, starting and supporting a family. Moreover, the study showed that young people noticed many phenomena and processes taking place in their world, which they viewed as the threats that might affect their future lives. The author points out that the hierarchy of the categories of threats indicated by the participants was different at particular stages of her research. The results of the first stage (1991) pointed to internal conflicts in Poland as the threats which were mentioned most frequently, whereas the findings of the second stage (1999) indicated the radical increase in the threats related to their own future and associated with unemployment and crime. The following threats were listed most often in the third stage (2005): homelessness, unemployment, depreciation of universal values, breaking moral and legal norms and international conflicts. What is essential, Hanna Liberska reported that in the successive stages of the research the participants more and more often assessed events and processes of the outer world a threatening to their personal future.

Władysław Łosiak in his paper "Resource Loss, Coping, Alcohol Expectancies and Drinking in Students" focuses on adolescent risk behaviours (e.g. becoming drunk) in the context of coping strategies under stress. The author makes reference to the theory of resource conservation by Hobfoll (1989), which states that loss of resources induces stress. He goes on to assume that in such situations a positive expectancy concerning alcohol is conducive to actually

using it. The study involved 125 participants aged 19 to 26, who were first or second year students of sociology, law, history and economics at the Jagiellonian University. They filled in the following tests: a) Conservation of Resources Evaluation Scale by Hobfoll, to study resource loss and gain, b) Strategic Approach to Coping Scale by Hobfoll et al., to study coping strategies, c) Alcohol Expectancy Questionnaire, and d) Alcohol Consumption Scale. A comparison of complete non-drinkers (43 subjects) with remaining participants showed that the non-drinking participants were more likely to make use of pro-social forms of coping, they had higher levels of resource loss and more pronounced negative expectations of alcohol. To analyse the results the author used hierarchical analysis of regression, which helped him identify a strong correlation between alcohol consumption and positive expectations of alcohol as well as a strong tendency to employ instinctive strategies of coping with stress. It can be expected then that effective strategies of alcohol prevention in young people should involve creating negative expectations of alcohol as well as helping them develop more adaptive coping strategies to be used under stress, e.g. being more assertive.

The current volume of PPB is concluded with the only theoretical paper "The Specific Feature of Adolescent Depression – from Developmental Reaction to Clinical Syndrome" written by Grzegorz Iniewicz. In it the author tries to tackle the important problem of depressiveness and adolescent depression, calling our attention to the symptoms of the disorder specific to adolescents. The paper is an important voice in the ongoing debate over the question whether lower affect and depressiveness constitute maturational symptoms in development. The author urges us to make the important distinction between depression as a developmental reaction and depression as a disorder, which can also be present in adolescents. As the criteria useful for drawing this distinction he recommends considering the severity of symptoms, their duration and the reactivity of affect and cognition.