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Personal Resources as Factors Concerning Adolescent's Interests. Identity Implications³

ABSTRACT

Interests allow young people to define themselves, encourage the formation of positive elements of their own identity, and give value and importance to their own activities. The issues related to the components of young people's identities have been a subject of increasing research interest in recent years. As it has been determined, there is a lack of data in Poland regarding the role of educational environments in shaping a positive identity based on the development of young people's interests. The purpose of the study is to identify the general level of interests among adolescents. Additionally, it is important to determine whether the level of interests is linked to sense of coherence and resilience. The study was carried out on a sample of 635 adolescents of both genders, aged 14–18 years old. The participants were students of lower secondary schools of the Podlaskie Voivodeship. The following research tools were used in the study: Life Orientation Questionnaire (SOC-29), Resilience Scale (SPP-18), and author's own measurement tool: Level of Interests Measurement Scale. In the sample of adolescents, general sense of coherence and sense of comprehensibility proved to be positively correlated with general level of interests. Regression analysis demonstrated the significance of psychological resilience components and sense of coherence factors that support the development of interests. Preventive and educational work should aim to support the shaping of a positive and creative identity by stimulating the potentials, resources and talents of young people. Young people's passions and interests should be stimulated and encouraged towards creating a positive identity.

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INTRODUCTION

The term “identity” is derived from the Latin word “*idem*” and means uniformity, continuity, being identical. It is an ambiguous category, interpreted differently depending on the emphasised aspect of this concept. Identity consists of individual beliefs, interests, self-esteem, role models, needs, motives, values, way of thinking, life plans. Finding the answer to the main identity question “*who am I?*” determines the consistency of the subject and the consistency of their behaviour from situation to situation. Achieving a sense of identity enables the individual to maintain self-esteem as well as gain acceptance from the members of their social environment. On the other hand, humans are social beings, and a person living in a community with which they identify, also develops a sense of social identity, i.e., a “*We*” identity (Gałdowa, 2000; Nikitorowicz, 2009) formed on the basis of perceived and experienced similarities with other people, resulting in a sense of community and sharing certain meanings with others, which is expressed as cognitive relationships of one’s own person with other people and identification with their goals, values and principles of conduct (Boski, Jarymowicz, & Malewska-Peyre, 1992; Jarymowicz, 1988, 2008). Supporting a positive development of identity in young people can be achieved both in the individual and social dimension. R.F. Catalano, a researcher of positive youth development, and a creator of programs in this area, conceptualised positive youth identity as “the internal organization of a coherent sense of self” (Catalano et al., 2004, p. 106).

The issues related to the components of young people’s identities have been a subject of increasing research interest in recent years. Most of the research, however, focuses on examining the situation of the younger generation in the context of socio-cultural changes. At present, however, knowledge of the nature of interests is neither widespread nor consistently defined, and therefore their measurement, and particularly methods for shaping and supporting their development, are not always known or specific (Szewczuk, 1979, 1998). In addition, there is a lack of studies on young people’s interest in adolescence in the context of variables that may affect their formation and development.

In psychological practice, an interest can mean attention, curiosity, motivation, focus, concern, goal orientation, as well as awareness and pursuit (Reber & Reber, 2000). To complement the view of interests that emphasises their psychological char-

acter, it is important to point out that interests are also a cognitive phenomenon. Yes, an interest has an emotional aspect, but also intellectual, because it is a permanent and active attitude of approaching an unknown object, the desire for knowledge, curiosity; it is also a longer-term relationship with objects within which the individual feels the need to maintain contact with them, to interact with them, to study them (Szewczuk, 1979, 1998). Johann F. Herbart (1982) assumed that interests are the result of knowledge acquired so far and childhood experiences during education and exploration, and that they form the basis for the development of a young person (Herbart & Asmus, 1982). In sociology, interests, in addition to needs and aspirations, are seen as contributing to the initiation of activity undertaken by an individual who “aspires to their fulfilment in a given time and circumstances, through one’s own actions, actions of other people, or both” (Gołębiowski, 1977).

In pedagogy it is pointed out that interests play an important role in shaping the aspirations of young people and then their life plans, as well as that they represent the uniqueness of each individual. Thanks to their interests, young people have a chance not only to fill their free time with activities that satisfy them, but also – in particular – to give a specific “hue” to their identity (Kleszcz & Łączyk, 2013). Interests allow young people to define themselves, encourage the formation of positive elements of their own identity, and give value and importance to their own activities. Young people refer to their interests and passions, whose pursuit allows them to perceive themselves as unique and separate individuals. The tendency for emphasising one’s uniqueness is a natural manifestation of identity formation, which during adolescence almost always abhors uniformity. Personal passions or interests allow an individual to build up their knowledge of themselves as well as bring the individual closer to an orientation for specific goals, or facilitate attempts to understand oneself and develop self-knowledge. Finally, they also provide a space of self-actualisation. If the condition of voluntary and personal choice of passions or hobbies by a young person is fulfilled, it can be assumed that interests may support solving identity crises (Arnett, 2000, 2001; Bauman, 1993; Bauman & Kunz, 2006; Erikson, 1959, 1993, 1994).

RESEARCH GOALS AND RESEARCH PROBLEMS

The purpose of the study was to identify the general level of interests in a sample of adolescents and to determine whether the level of interests is linked to sense of coherence and resilience. The results of the research will allow for formulating research hypotheses regarding a number of factors influencing the development of

interests, including individual, social and cultural attributes. Thus, in adolescents, the overall level of interests positively correlates with a sense of coherence and with resilience.

As it has been determined, there is a lack of data in Poland regarding the role of educational environments in shaping a positive identity based on the development of young people's interests. Therefore, this issue was the subject of the study presented in this paper. Answers to the following research questions were sought:

1. What is the overall level of interests among adolescents?
2. Which of the analysed personal variables (sense of coherence, resilience) are related to the overall level of interests among young people?
3. Which of the examined variables are more important for predicting the overall level of interests among young people?
4. Does gender differentiate the level of interests among adolescents?

RESEARCH GROUP

The study was carried out on a sample of 635 teenagers of both genders, aged 14–18 years old. The participants were students of lower secondary schools of the Podlaskie Voivodeship. The majority of the respondents were girls (56.5%, $N = 359$), compared to the boys (43.5%, $N = 276$). The largest group of respondents consisted of people aged 14 years old (41.9%, $N = 266$) and 15 years old (27.4%, $N = 174$), then 13 years old (23%, $N = 146$). The least frequent in the sample were respondents aged 16 years old (3.6%, $N = 23$) and 17 years old (4.1%, $N = 26$).

RESEARCH TOOLS

The following research tools were used in the study: Life Orientation Questionnaire, Resilience Scale, and author's own measurement tool: Level of Interests Measurement Scale.

1. The overall level of interests was measured using author's own tool. The respondents rated their agreement or disagreement with a series of statements on a five-point scale. The possible score could range from 5 to 25 points. The higher the score, the higher the overall level of interests.
2. Sense of coherence (PK) was tested using the Life Orientation Questionnaire (SOC-29). It consists of 29 statements and three subscales, i.e., sense of com-

prehensibility (PZR), manageability (PZ), and meaningfulness (PS). 11 statements belong to the first subscale, 10 to the second, and 8 to the third. The respondent provides answers using a 7-point Likert scale, where “1” means that given attitude occurs always, and “7” – never. A general score (SOC-29) can also be obtained, indicating the level of the sense of coherence of the tested person (the results can fall within the range of 29–203) (Antonovsky, 1995).

3. Resilience was measured using the Polish SPP-18 scale developed by N. Ogińska-Bulik and Z. Juczyński, designed for measuring resilience in children and adolescents. It is a tool of self-description and consists of 18 statements. Factor 1 – Optimistic Attitude and Energy, Factor 2 – Persistence and Determination in Action, Factor 3 – Humour and Openness to New Experiences, Factor 4 – Personal Competence and Tolerance of Negative Affect. The tested person indicates the extent to which they agree with the statement using a five-point scale (Ogińska-Bulik & Juczyński, 2011).

TYPES AND METHODS OF STATISTICAL DATA ANALYSIS

Anonymously completed questionnaires were appropriately coded. Preliminary data preparation and analysis were performed using SPSS 24 statistical package. Data gathered during the research was quantitative. The data was sorted and classified. A procedure for codifying the received data according to an accepted key was performed. Selected statistical procedures were used to capture the relationships between the variables. The t-Student parametric test was used to test the relationships between independent and dependent variables, answering the question whether selected independent variables differentiate dependent variables. Correlation and regression analyses made it possible to determine relationships between variables and indicate whether such relationships were directly proportional (values > 0) or inversely proportional (values < 0). The strength of the discovered relationships was interpreted according to the following key: $R > 0.5$ was considered to indicate a strong correlation, R between 0.3 and 0.5 – a moderate correlation, R between 0.2 and 0.3 – a weak correlation, and $R < 0.2$ – no or negligible correlation. Predictors of interests were determined on the basis of multiple regression analysis. A variable that explained at least 5% of the total variance of the dependent variable was considered to be a predictor. Thus the results concerning the importance of examined personal resources (sense of coherence and resilience) for the overall level of interests were calculated.

DIFFERENCES IN INTERESTS AND PERSONAL RESOURCES BETWEEN BOYS AND GIRLS

In the first step of the analysis, the level of personal resources and the general level of interests in relation to gender were examined.

Table 1. Scores on the Life Orientation Questionnaire (SOC-29) in the sample

	Min	Max	M	SD
General level of interests	5.00	25.00	16.99	4.89
General level of resilience	18.00	90.00	68.29	13.90
Optimistic attitude and energy	5.00	25.00	18.89	4.27
Perseverance and determination in action	5.00	25.00	19.14	4.15
Sense of humour and openness to new experiences	4.00	20.00	15.75	3.52
Personal competence and tolerance of negative affect	4.00	20.00	14.50	3.48
General sense of coherence	41.00	197.00	120.38	17.02
Sense of comprehensibility	11.00	77.00	43.76	9.95
Sense of manageability	10.00	70.00	42.45	7.84
Sense of meaningfulness	14.00	50.00	34.16	6.06

Source: own research.

The average score on the general level of interests was 16.99 points. The SOC-29 scores ranged from 41 to 197 pts, with a mean coherence score of 120.38, a mean sense of comprehensibility score of 43.76 points, mean sense of manageability score of 42.45, and mean sense of meaningfulness score of 34.16. On the Resilience Scale (SPP-18), the average score for general resilience was 68.29, optimistic attitude and energy – 18.89, persistence and determination in action – 19.14, sense of humour and openness to new experiences – 15.75, personal competence and tolerance of negative affect – 14.50. Student t-test for independent trials did not show ($t(632) = 1.27$; $p < 0.05$) boys' scores ($M = 16.17$, $SD = 5.12$) to be significantly different from girls' scores ($M = 17.20$, $SD = 4.70$) on the general level of interests scale.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PERSONAL RESOURCES AND GENERAL LEVEL OF INTERESTS

The purpose of the correlation analysis was to find out whether the level of interests in the sample was linked to personal resources. Table 2 presents paired correlations between analysed variables:

Table 2. Pearson's r correlation coefficients for the general level of interests with the level of personal resources in adolescents

	INTERESTS
General sense of coherence	0.23**
Sense of comprehensibility	0.36**
Sense of manageability	-0.01
Sense of meaningfulness	0.07
General level of resilience	0.40**
Optimistic attitude and energy	0.39**
Perseverance and determination in action	0.40**
Sense of humour and openness to new experiences	0.31**
Personal competence and tolerance of negative affect	0.31**

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-sided). Source: own research.

In the sample of adolescents, general sense of coherence and sense of comprehensibility proved to be positively correlated with general level of interests. In other words, as general sense of coherence and comprehensibility increased, the scores for general level of interests also increased. The correlation coefficients obtained show a positive – moderately strong – relationship between the general level of interests and resilience and its factors (optimistic attitude and energy, persistence and determination in action, sense of humour and openness to new experiences, personal competences and tolerance of negative affect). The overall level of interests in the sample increased with the increase in resilience and its factors.

REGRESSION ANALYSIS

Because many factors may influence the development of interests, regression analysis was carried out to identify significant predictors in the tested group of adolescents. The analysis was carried out using a step-wise procedure successively including groups of variable in the developing model.

This analysis determined which resilience resources, including sense of coherence and psychological resilience, acted as predictors for the general level of interests. Regression analysis demonstrated the significance of psychological resilience components and sense of coherence factors that support the development of interests, explaining 22% variance of the dependent variable.

Table 3. Predictors of general interests level

Predictors	B	Standard error	Beta	t	Significance
(Constant)	6.585	1.317		5.000	.000
Sense of comprehensibility	.153	.025	.311	6.040	.000
Optimistic attitude and energy	.200	.084	.174	2.381	.018
Perseverance and determination in action	.272	.080	.231	3.407	.001

$R=0.47$; $R^2=0.22$. Symbols: *Beta* – standardised regression coefficient; B – regression coefficient; B error – standard error of the estimate; R – value of the multiple correlation coefficient; R^2 – coefficient of determination. Source: own research.

Variables that predicted the general level of interest in the studied sample of young people include the sense of comprehensibility ($Beta=0.31$), optimistic attitude and energy ($Beta=0.17$) and persistence and determination in action ($Beta=0.23$). The influence of these variables was positive, which means that with increased sense of comprehension, optimism and energy, and perseverance and determination in action, the overall level of interests also increased.

DISCUSSION

The research presented in this paper aimed to show the relationship between the level of interests and psychological resilience and sense of coherence in young people. Statistical analysis of the data revealed a correlation between the general level of interests and the global sense of coherence and its components (measured with SOC-29) and psychological resilience (measured with SPP-18). According to the obtained results, the salutogenic and immune factors act as a predictor of the general level of interests. Sense of comprehension, persistence and determination in action, and optimistic attitude and energy correlate with higher level of interests. It appears that personal resources are one of the key factors for protecting and promoting positive social functioning.

In view of the above, it seems that the basic premise of a positive diagnosis should therefore consist in discovering and developing of the positive (talents, interests, hobbies) facets of the adolescent. Exploring the strengths of the student gives them confidence in their own abilities, boosts their sense of strength as well as increases self-esteem and their sense of own value. The educator looks for and identifies the opportunities and competences of the students and uses them to modify the

identity structure. Therefore, the diagnosis of resources (talent, interests) consists in finding, naming and directing the student's attention towards their potential and abilities. A positive diagnosis involves determining the aspects of individual's characteristics, their environment and social influences in which the factors supporting the development of the individual can be found. The educator (diagnostician) should also notice and examine, taking into account the experience of the student, their ability to co-operate in building an appropriate relationship. Establishing co-operation leads to the achievement of shared goals (Jarosz & Wysocka, 2006; Seligman, 2005; Surzykiewicz & Kulesza, 2013; Wysocka, 2013).

When designing preventive and educational activities for young people, it is worth remembering that the process of shaping identity is particularly dynamic during adolescence (Finkenauer et al., 2002; Kroger, 2000), as well as the fact that the development of a young person is largely determined by the surrounding environment. The latter is defined as a set of relationships with family, peer groups and the neighbourhood, and a perceived relationship with the school, as well as a wide variety of ways for young people to achieve self-fulfilment, which conforms to Bronfenbrenner's ecological model (1979, 1986). Thus thoughtful and planned shaping of the immediate environment, supporting the discovery and strengthening of the potentials of those spaces, has a key place among activities supporting positive development of young people (Bronfenbrenner, 1976, 1986). In this context, the role of the family is important in helping to shape the interests of young people (modelling the behaviour of parents/siblings, creating opportunities for experiencing different forms of leisure for the family), as well as involving school in developing the interests of young people through organising extracurricular activities, trips, meetings with interesting people, implementation of prevention projects aiming at developing resources (knowledge, skills, competences) of young people.

CONCLUSION

The results of the research show that general sense of coherence and sense of comprehensibility proved to be positively correlated with general level of interests among adolescents. Additionally, on the basis of regression analysis, we can make the conclusion that psychological resilience components and sense of coherence factors support the development of interests. According to our the research findings, when developing preventive and educational actions, educators should aim to support shaping of a positive, creative identity – by stimulating the potentials, resources and talents of young people and activating the hubristic motivation of

confirming one's sense of self-worth. A person wishing to broaden the limits of their own world purposely goes beyond what they have and what they are. This constant expansion gives them an opportunity to develop, which does not have to follow the rules of common sense. Young people's passions and interests should be stimulated and encouraged, trying to create a positive identity. Thanks to this, their new life roles will be filled with socially and culturally accepted content, and their existing public representation can be replaced by self-presentation evoking recognition and admiration (Konopczyński, 2006, 2009, 2014). Passions and interests should be activated and stimulated, going beyond what is here and now. Conditions for development through activities including sports, art, writing, creativity, music should be created. Working with the student using creative methods allows for discovering and developing human potentials, resources and talents. The fundamental principle is one of stimulating, activating and developing structural factors and mechanisms of creative processes in young people. Thus developed – and made realistic – structural factors can help to build new ways of solving problematic situations that are encountered during adolescence (Konopczyński, 2009). Solving the difficulties encountered by young people can support the development of positive identities, which in turn can facilitate the future development and efficient use of personal resources (Tsang, Hui, & Law, 2012).

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