

DESCRIPTION FOR THE GENERAL PUBLIC

Do you ever feel that important things are getting out of your hands? Have your New Year's resolutions (yet again) turned out to be empty promises? Do you usually put off important tasks? Do you often do unplanned shopping and find yourself with an empty wallet at the end of the month? Are you trying in vain to quit smoking, cut down on alcohol, or lose those extra kilos? If you have answered yes to any of the above questions, you have probably experienced difficulties in the area of self-regulation. Self-regulation is the ability to intentionally control one's own activity. It involves setting goals and adjusting one's thoughts, emotions, and actions in such a way that they contribute to achieving the goals.

The issue of self-regulation, neglected for a long time, has now become one of the most important research topics in the field of psychology. Researchers' keen interest in the issue of self-regulation is to a large extent a consequence of the growing problems that share the presence of impaired self-regulation. These problems include, among others, eating disorders, addictions, risky sexual behaviour, domestic violence, and crime. The search for the answer to the question about psychological mechanisms that allow people to influence their lives is thus not only of major theoretical importance, but is also deeply practical.

The aim of this project is to analyse the importance that for the regulation of goal-directed actions has a sense of personal identity, that is, the way an individual experiences the self – their uniqueness, separateness from others, unity, continuity in time, and self-esteem. The notions of a sense of identity, volition, and intentionality seem to be naturally interrelated. The key question about identity – “Who am I?” – perforce raises the question about the basic orientation and sense of existence – “Where am I going?”. It is often pointed out that decisions one makes and actions one undertakes are a reflection of one's attitude towards oneself; in other words, that identity is turned into actions. The eminent psychoanalyst and developmental psychologist, Erik Erikson, emphasized that the cornerstone of identity is fidelity, that is, the ability to meet commitments freely made. Many similar reports allow to formulate a general hypothesis about a mature sense of identity as a factor contributing to effective self-regulation.

In order to more precisely determine the relationship between a sense of identity and the execution of goal-directed actions, a model was formulated in this project that includes different, non-conflicting paths of influence of a sense of identity. The first concerns the influence of a sense of identity on the way of formulating goals that is characteristic to an individual. The second applies to the influence of a sense of identity on individual tendencies concerning action control. The notion, well-established in psychology, that identity serves the function of integrating the various areas of functioning (thinking, behaviour, and feeling) leads to the expectation that a mature sense of identity will contribute to forming a cohesive (coherent) structure of goals that are consistent (congruent) with the desires and the value system of an individual. Moreover, the popular statement in the psychological literature that the development of a system of affirmed values is the basis and prerequisite of identity suggests that a mature sense of identity will promote a broader and more general understanding (identification) of the sense of one's actions and support one's abilities when it comes to self-control.

The planned research will verify the model, outlined above, of the relationship between a sense of personal identity and the effectiveness of self-regulation (i.e., goal attainment). The research is designed as a longitudinal study. It will be carried out with the participation of female and male emerging adults (i.e., between the ages of 18 and 30). The research will use six methods for measuring the following: a sense of personal identity, goal congruence, goal coherence, self-control strength, action identification level, and the degree of goal attainment. In the beginning, the participants will fill in all the scales (stage 1), and after three months (stage 2) they will be asked to again assess the degree to which they attain their personal goals. Statistical testing procedures will be used to analyse the collected data.

The project will systematize and broaden the knowledge of personality- and identity-related determinants of self-regulation, and identify directions for further empirical research in this area. It can be assumed that the advancement of research on the issues examined in the project could in the future help design more specific diagnostic tools and support measures for individuals experiencing disorders of self-regulation.