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SEMANTIC STRUCTURE OF ADOLESCENT'S ACTUAL, IDEAL AND UNWANTED SELF[1])

Adolescence is often supposed to be a period in which the problem of self-definition is highly pronounced (Van der Werff, 1990). Psychological research concerning this matter includes a broad range of aspects and approaches (Leahy, 1985; Offer et all., 1988; Jackson & Bosma, 1990). In this context the roles and functions of perceived selves (Rosenberg, 1979, Higgins, 1987, Oosterwegel, 1992), possible selves (Markus & Nurius, 1987) or personally significant self modalities (Macek, Osecká & Blatný, 1992) is considered and analyzed. However, the basic condition, that understanding of functions and roles is based on concrete information concerning content, semantic structure and sense of perceived selves, is not always respected.

We can assumed — from the methodological point of view — that there are such concepts as "most characteristic selves" and that adolescents are able to answer questions regarding their contents (Smollar & Youniss, 1985).

Recent research, oriented toward description of significant adolescents' selves, has given support to these assumptions (Oosterwegel & Oppenhaimer, 1991; Oosterwegel, 1992; Spiel, 1992; Macek, 1992). We can document, that perceived self-concepts, especially the self according to parents, perceived actual one's own self, the ideal self, and the unwanted self are in the center of adolescents' self-system. (Macek & Osecká, 1992).

The selves according to significant others express interpersonal determination of adolescents' self-definition and reflect a process of social comparison, competency, a need of social-support, as well as social approval and acceptance (Hart, 1988). This is why the self-concept should be considered as a number of partial social self-concepts and why the dynamics of these selves may be seen as process of exploring one's own socoial self-identity. On the other hand, some selves could be seen as more autonomous and, especially in the period of later adolescence, also more stable elements of

[1]) A paper regarding the poster on the Third European Workshop on Adolescence, Bologna, April 29—May 2, 1992.

self-conceiving. They create a basis of adolescents' personal self-identity (Berzonsky, 1989) and can be considered as important indicators of self--worth (Harter, 1985), self-acceptance (Assor & Tzeglov, 1987) or self-esteem (Wells & Marwell, 1976). In this framework we see as very important adolescent selves the real (actual) self, the ideal self and the unwanted (undesired) self.

The real (actual) self is conceptualized as the "core" adolescent self (Gergen, 1968). An answer to the question "Who and how am I?" is the basic assumption in a search for one's own personal and social indentity. It is the reference point ("anchor") for the definition of important possible selves.

The adolescent's *ideal self* has been described as a set of ideals and goals related to what the adolescent believes, wants or would like to be (Hewwit & Genest, 1990, Macek, 1987) as well as to positive traits, characteristics and personal attributes.

The unwanted or undesired self contains undesirable traits, beliefs, goals, and probably also unrealized impulses to engage in socially unacceptable activities. It is also likely to contain memories of dreaded experiences, embarrassing situations, fearsome events, and unwanted emotions that actually occurred sometime in the adolescent's past. In this sense the undesired self is more experience based and less conceptual than ideal self (Ogilvie, 1987).

The actual self and the ideal self are traditionally at the centre of the adolescent self-concept research. However, the interest above all has concentrated on an interpretation of the relationship (distance, discrepancy, correlation). Less attention has focused upon the exploration of differences in the content and structure of the actual and ideal selves.

Congruency between the real self and the ideal self is traditionally interpreted as an indicator of a positive self-regard (Rogers, 1951) or — concerning the period of adolescence — as phenomen of cognitive development (Glick & Ziegler, 1985). However, there is also the undesired or unwanted self as a logical opposition of the ideal self and a possible partner (or rival) of the real (actual) self. As D. Ogilvie (1987) has mentioned, the undesired self is more embedded and unshakable standard against which one judges his or her present level of subjective well-beging. Also, our recent research concerning relationships between real and ideal self and between real a unwanted self has showed two different frameworks of adolescents' self-conceiving (Macek, 1991).

On the basis of previous results and the theoretical arguments, the presents study is focused upon two aims and the following predictions:

1. The exploration of the semantic structure of the adolescent actual, ideal and unwanted self. Concerning this matter, we suppose that:

— the structure of the ideal as well as the structure of the unwanted self will be more similar than the structure of the actual self,

— the structural dimensions of the ideal self will articulate relatively more achievement-related and interpersonal characteristics and the structu-

ral dimensions of unwanted self will articulate relatively more evaluation-related and moral characteristics.

2. The description of adolescents' self-assessment within the framework of the above stated structures. Concerning gender differences, we suppose that:

— the level of self-assessment in achievement-related and moral characteristics will be higher for boys than girls,

— the level of self-assessment in interpersonal characteristics will be higher for girls than boys.

METHOD

Subjects

Two hundred and twenty-eight students from various Moravian high schools (128 girls, 100 boys), 17 years old. The data were collected in the spring of 1990.

Procedure and variables

Semantic differential (SD) was used for the rating of three concepts — modalities of self: the actual self (defined through formulotion: "How I am"), the ideal self ("How I would like to be") and the unwanted self ("How I would not like to be").

The set of 23 bipolar adjective opposites on five-point rating scales was chosen on a basis of our previous explorations (Macek, 1987, 1991, Macek & Osecká, 1990, Blatný, Osecká & Hrdlička, 1992) and similar researches (Gordon, 1969, Říčan, 1978, Petrenko, 1988). The choice of scales respected three major factors of general SD approach (evaluation, potency and activity — Osgood, Suci & Tannenbaum, 1957) and was complemented with scales which are seen as relevant to the adolescents' self-assessment (Table 1, 2).

Factor analyses of scales were computed, separately for each concept (rated modality of self). Mean factor scores and mean scale scores were computed, separately for samples of girls and boys. We use the mean factor scores for the description of gender differences and the mean scale scores for description and interpretations of level of self-assessment.

RESULTS

Several variants of factor solutions were performed in order to identify an optimal number of factors. We interpret three-factor solution for each

rated modality here. No sex differences in the factor structures were found.

The actual self

The first factor (explaining 18% of the variance) is called *the factor of general moral evaluation.* Its substantial scales express explicitly or implicitly the concept of the morality, which is not related directly to the social context or to some other concrete spheres of real life.

Mean factor scores of girls and boys are different, but not significantly. Their self-assessments indicates that boys have seen their actual selves as *rather moral.* The girls have situated their rating mean *in the middle* of the five-point scale.

The second factor explains 10% of variance. We have named it *factor of self-assertivity.* It is a special expression of power — its semantic centre includes such scales as "hard — soft", "strong — weak" and "pushing — non-pushing". The meaning of hardness is ambiguous. The correlation of the relevant scale with the scale „rude — fine" probably expresses an undesired aspect of the hardness, whereas the correlation of the hardness with the push and the popularity could characterize its positive desired meaning.

Different means of girls' and boys' factor scores were found. On the basis of mean scale scores we can say, that the actual self of boys is presented as *rather assertiveness* and the actual self of girls as *rather nonassertiveness.*

The third factor got a name *the factor of social value.* It explains 15% of variance. Social utility and commitment are put together with activity. Feelings of an adequate realization of social roles and fulfilling of expectations of others go together with the feeling of success and competence.

Mean factor scores of girls and boys are similar. Adolescents' actual self is located of *the middle level of the social worth.*

The ideal self

The first factor account 17% of the variance. A possible name of this factor could be *the factor of prosocial orientation.* The configuration of scales as "useful — useless", "valuable — valueless for society", "active — passive" emphasizes the specific meaning of expressed morality (the scale "moral — immoral"). Wishes of authenticity and specific subtlety (the presence of scale "fine — rude") are also expressed at the level of the desired self.

Mean factor scores of girls and boys are different. The scale means indicate that girls have presented the wish *to be prosocially oriented* more intensively than boys.

The second factor (explaining 17% of the variance) can be characterized

as *the factor of social prestige and acceptance.* Its basis is formed with the scales "able — unable", "popular — unpopular" and "pleasant — unpleasant". It is important that these attributes of ideal self are presented in the relationship to scales with a moral connotation. In this context, the scale "strong — weak", which is also presented, obtains quite specific meaning.

The scale means show that all adolescents *would like to have the social prestige.* Significant gender differences were not found.

The third factor represents a dimension of the ideal self, which is named *the wish of meaningful and successful career".* It explains 15% of the variance. The configuration of such scales as "gifted — ungifted", "successful — unsuccessful", "meaningful — meaningless" is combined with scales that express positive evaluation and respect. As a result we can see adolescents' wish — to be "valued".

There were found no differences in mean factor and scale scores — all adolescents *would like to be successful and rather valued.*

The unwanted self

The first factor (explaining 25% of variance) can be called *the fear of refusal and loss of positive image.* The highest factor loadings contain scales "unpleasant — pleasant", "unpopular — popular", "unable — able" and "wrong — right". It probably reflects the important dimension of adolescents' public self: "I am seen as an outsider *or* I am not seen as na outsider".

As we can suppose, adolescents do not wish to be refused and unaccepted. Gender differences were not found.

The second factor (including 23% of the variance) was termed *the fear of uselessness and insignificance* for the others. It reflects — similarly as the first factor — adolescents' self-definition in social context. On the other hand, this factor expresses important, more internally and moral aspects of private self-conceiving.

A larger fear of a loss regarding one's own value and the feeling of usefulness is expressed more often by girls than boys (a significant difference of mean factor scores).

Quite a specific quality of the unwanted self is contained in the third factor which accounts for only 7% of the variance. *The factor of striking force* is saturated most of all with the scale "hard — soft" which is accompanied with the scales "rough — gentle" and "pushing — non-pushing".

The mean factor scores of both samples are significantly different. Boys *do not want to be regarded as "soft"* explicitly, girls show their unwanted self closer to the middle of scale.

DISCUSSION

We have explored the structure of self-concept modalities already earlier. Our goal was to determine a common semantic space, within which it would be possible to find positions of concepts of real self and ideal self (Macek, Osecká, 1991), and also positions of real self and unwanted self (Macek, 1991a).

We arrived at the conclusion that both semantic spaces are structured differentially. In other words — adolescents think about the real self in relation to the ideal self in other dimensions than they think about the real self in relation to the unwanted self. From this conclusion resulted a logical requirement to explore the structures of the real, ideal and unwanted self separately.

As the first important finding we consider the fact, that the structure of the adolescent unwanted self is different (in respect to its meaning) from the structure of the ideal self. Similarly as D. Ogilvie (1987), we think that the unwanted (or undesired) self may not be considered as a simple negation of the ideal self. Its specifics have to be respected. Even though we do not know much about the functions of the unwanted self, some results of our research indicate its high subjective importance for adolescents.

Since we already established that the morality and social prestige structure the common semantic space of the real and ideal self (Macek, Osecká, 1991) and that thinking about the real self in relationship to the unwanted self is structured on the basis of dimensions of strength and evaluation (Macek, 1991a), then it follows that separate modalities of adolescent self-concept retained these basic attributes of meaning.

The structure of real self fits best with three general factors of meaning (Osgood, Suci, Tannenbaum, 1957). Nevertheless, it also contains some specifics. The evaluation takes the form of moral evaluation, which is relatively independent from another semantic context. Our earlier opinion is supported indirectely that in the actual moral self-assessment is based on concrete criteria relatively less than the self-assessment in the dimensions of potency and activity (Macek, 1987).

Adolescents sharply separate their moral self-assessment from the self-assessment of their social activity. Strength and pushing are connected more to well-being (pleasantness) than to morality or usefulness for others. The social value is connected more with activity and importance, less with goodness or morality.

The structure of the actual self differs from the structure of the ideal self — among other things — in this respect: a separate factor of morality could not be determined. Morality is considered to be an aspect of the desider social behavior — either in the form of the wish of active prosocial orientation (the first factor), or in the form of acceptance by others (the second factor).

The first two factors of the ideal self are more oriented to concrete aims which are accessible by one's own activity and effort. The third factor includes personality attributes (wishes), which are not accessible by own

one's effort (like to be gifted, handsome), which, nevertheless, also assure a successful social career.

The unwanted self is presented differently. The third factor is quite specific. Its content probably expresses adolscents' images about gender roles in society. The interpretation of the first two factors is more difficult. Both factors are ambigious in respect to their content. Scales which, within the actual self, are united in the same factor, appear here under different factors. This fact underlines the specific meaning of the unwanted self. On the basis of scales with the highest loadings we may interpret the first factor as a worry regarding the loss of acceptance and the second factor as a worry about the loss of prestige due to improper social activities.

It is worth noting that general evaluation (the scale: good — bad) comes approximately with an equal loading under both the factors — the loss of image and sympathy in the eyes of others are perceived as equally "bad".

Gender differences in self-assessment were fond only in factorial scores of actual and unwanted selves. In an actual self-assessment boys view themselves as more rigorous, whereas girls express a greater fear of loss regarding their worth for others. This reflects the fact that boys are more active and vigorous when regarding themselves and girls are more emotional, more focused upon relationships with others (Rosenberg, Simmons, 1975). These differences are — in our opinion conditioned by a specific reflection of socially desired feminine and masculine rolse. Regarding the ideal self, a conclusion can be made again that the ideal self image is definitely more similar for girls and boys than the actual self (Macek, 1987). We can suppose that the structure of the ideal self reflected two different attributes — the wanted self and the socially desired self.

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Tab. 1. The actual self — rotated factor matrix

Variable	Factor loadings		
	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
good — bad	.72		
clean — dirty	.67		
true — untrue	.67		
straight — crooked	.66		
right — wrong	.64		
moral — immoral	.60		
pleasant — unpleasant	.58		
gifted — ungifted	.40		
hard — soft		.72	
strong — weak		.52	
rude — fine		.50	
pushing — non-pushing		.49	.50
popular — unpopular		.48	
beautiful — ugly		.39	
happy — unhappy		.39	
commited — uncommited			.74
useful — useless			.72
valuable — valueless			.67
active — passive			.59
meaningful — meaningless			.51
successful — unsuccessful			.46
able — unable			.44
friendly — unfriendly	.38		.39
Variance (%)	18.40	10.18	14.92

Tab. 2. The ideal self — rotated factor matrix

Variable	Factor loadings		
	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
useful — useless	.70		
valuable — valueless	.67		
moral — immoral	.64		
active — passive	.64		
fine — rude	.56		
good — bad	.54		
true — untrue	.50		
friendly — unfriendly	.51		
commited — incommited	.48		
able — unable		.80	
popular — unpopular		.80	
straight — crooked		.78	
clean — dirty		.77	
strong — weak		.70	
pleasant — unpleasant		.59	
gifted — ungifted			.69
successful — unsuccessful			.66
meaningful — meaningless			.63
beautiful — ugly			.60
right — wrong			.58
pushing — non-pushing			.55
hard — soft			.51
happy — unhappy			.41
Variance (%)	16.55	16.87	14.99

Tab. 3. The unwanted self — rotated factor matrix

Variable	Factor loadings		
	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
unpleasant — pleasant	.92		
unpopular — popular	.90		
unable — able	.84		
wrong — right	.75		
dirty — clean	.71		
weak — strong	.69		
crooked — straight	.63		
bad — good	.49	.58	
unhappy — happy	.41		
unfriendly — friendly	.41	.69	
useless — useful		.74	
meaningless — meaningful		.73	
unpopular — popular		.71	
ungifted — gifted		.65	
untrue — true		.64	
valueless — valuable		.61	
immoral — moral		.60	
ugly — beautiful		.53	
passive — active		.48	
incommited — commited		.43	
hard — soft			.73
rude — fine			.48
pushing — non-pushing			.34
Variance (%)	24.86	22.73	6.59

Tab. 4. Mean factor scores for boys (B) and girls (G), probability of significance of gender differences (prob)

	Factor 1			Factor 2			Factor 3		
	B	G	prob	B	G	prob	B	G	prob
Self:									
actual	.10	—.08	.16	—.27	.21	.00	—.08	—.07	.24
ideal	.32	—.25	.00	—.13	.10	.08	—.07	.05	.35
unwanted	.01	—.01	.86	.18	—.14	.01	.23	—.18	.00

Tab. 5. Mean scale scores — girls: actual (AS), ideal (IS) and unwanted self (US)

Variable	AS	IS	US
good — bad	2.03	1.25	4.94
strong — weak	2.68	1.81	4.71
active — passive	2.47	1.46	4.78
popular — unpopular	2.22	1.21	4.93
pushing — non-pushing	2.62	1.40	4.83
right — wrong	2.02	1.19	4.92
happy — unhappy	2.06	1.13	4.94
pleasant — unpleasant	2.03	1.28	4.90
clean — dirty	1.33	1.21	4.90
hard — soft	3.44	2.54	3.34
successfull — unsuccessful	2.42	1.29	4.85
useful — useless	2.35	1.34	4.80
able — unable	1.92	1.23	4.91
straight — crooked	1.90	1.40	4.87
pleasant — unpleasant	2.56	1.25	4.82
friendly — unfriendly	1.35	1.09	4.93
gifted — ungifted	2.23	1.36	4.83

moral — immoral	1.78	1.39	4.88
meaningful — meaningless	2.88	1.59	4.88
commited — incommited	2.67	2.04	4.43
true — untrue	1.80	1.21	4.88
valuable — valueless	2.70	1.65	4.82
fine — rude	1.71	1.49	4.75

Tab. 6. Mean scale scores — boys: actual (AS), ideal (IS) and unwanted self (US)

Variable	AS	IS	US
good — bad	2.12	1.28	4.91
strong — weak	2.29	1.40	4.88
active — passive	2.50	1.70	4.46
popular — unpopular	2.23	1.25	4.91
pushing — non-pushing	2.53	1.43	4.82
right — wrong	2.09	1.24	4.82
happy — unhappy	2.20	1.23	4.84
pleasant — unpleasant	2.24	1.35	4.85
clean — dirty	1.47	1.21	4.75
hard — soft	3.33	2.05	3.85
successfull — unsuccessful	2.45	1.25	4.85
useful — useless	2.34	1.42	4.75
able — unable	1.88	1.17	4.88
straight — crooked	1.72	1.19	4.77
pleasant — unpleasant	2.61	1.45	4.76
friendly — unfriendly	1.45	1.18	4.85
gifted — ungifted	2.35	1.40	4.77
moral — immoral	2.00	1.50	4.75
meaningful — meaningless	3.00	1.69	4.75
commited — incommited	3.17	2.62	3.53
true — untrue	1.80	1.30	4.76
valuable — valueless	2.63	1.77	4.68
fine — rude	2.17	2.02	4.23