SEMINARE

The Role of Conscientiousness in the Religious and Moral Functioning of Young Adults
Rola sumienności w religijno-moralnym funkcjonowaniu młodych dorosłych

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Abstract: According to the Five-Factor Model of Personality by Paul Costa and Robert R. McCrae, a conscientious person is strong-willed, self-motivated, persistent and dutiful. All these predispositions can also be used in the religious and moral sphere. The period of early adulthood is a developmental period abounding in tasks that require conscientiousness, and, at the same time, it provides many opportunities to make moral and religious choices.

The purpose of this article is to analyse the relationship between conscientiousness as well as moral and religious functioning of young adults. This study juxtaposes in a theoretical way conscientiousness as a personality trait as well as moral and religious abilities of those in early adulthood. For this purpose, a qualitative analysis was conducted based on scientific psychological theories and the results of sociological and psychological studies. The comparison led to the conclusion that conscientiousness is linked with the moral and religious aspect, and that its factors such as dutifullness and self-control can support religious and moral functioning of young adults. Dutifulness can support an individual in striving for consistency between professed norms and decisions made. Self-discipline allows for the realization of these norms, especially when a person must confront them with other life challenges. It also paves the way for further research and helps create effective methods to aid in the fulfilment of developmental tasks during early adulthood.

Keywords: Youth Ministry, Adoptive Youth Ministry, Chap Clark, Ecumenical Youth Ministry, Christus Vivit, Catholic Youth Ministry, Ecclesio-centric Youth Ministry, Intergenerational Youth Ministry

Abstrakt: Według Pięcioczynnikowego Modelu Osobowości autorstwa Paula Costy i Roberta R. McCrae osoba sumienna charakteryzuje się silną wolą, jest zmotywowana do działania, wytrwała i obowiązkowa. Wszystkie te predyspozycje można wykorzystać także w sferze religijno-moralnej. Okresem rozwojowym, który obfituje w zadania wymagające sumienności, a jednocześnie stanowi okazję do dokonywania wyborów moralnych i religijnych jest okres wczesnej dorosłości.

Celem niniejszego artykułu było zaprezentowanie roli, jaką sumienność może pełnić w moralno-religijnym funkcjonowaniu młodych dorosłych. W pracy zestawiono w sposób teoretyczny sumienność jako cechę osobowości ze zdolnościami moralnymi i religijnymi charakterystycznymi dla osób znajdujących się w okresie wczesnej dorosłości. W tym celu zastosowano analizę jakościową w oparciu o teorie naukowe z dziedziny psychologii oraz wyniki badań socjologicznych i psychologicznych. Zestawienie to dało podstawy do sformułowania wniosku, iż sumienność łączy się z aspektem moralno-religijnym, a jej czynniki, takie jak obowiązkowość i samodyscyplina, mogą pomagać w religijno-moralnym funkcjonowaniu młodych dorosłych. Obowiązkowość może wspierać jednostkę w dążeniu do spójności pomiędzy wyznawanymi normami a podejmowanymi decyzjami. Samodyscyplina pozwala realizować te normy, zwłaszcza gdy osoba musi konfrontować je z innymi

życiowymi wyzwaniami. Otwiera to także pole do dalszych badań oraz do tworzenia skutecznych form pomocy w realizacji zadań rozwojowych w okresie wczesnej dorosłości.

Słowa kluczowe: sumienność, moralność, religijność, wczesna dorosłość, osobowość

INTRODUCTION

Theories of personality constitute an important area of study in psychology. Those theories may be presented through a variety of models, but still one of the most popular is the Five-Factor Model of Personality by Costa and McCrae's (Łaguna et al. 2014, 404). This model includes such factors as neuroticism, extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness and conscientiousness. The main characteristics attributed to a conscientious person include a strong will, motivation to act, and perseverance in pursuing designated goals (Zawadzki et al. 1998, 94). Such predispositions can be an indicator of an individual's professional fulfillment or satisfaction with life, but they also characterize people who are guided by moral norms in their choices.

The developmental stage in which such predispositions can especially manifest themselves, precisely due to the presence of many psychological, social or moral challenges, is the period of early adulthood. Young adults, taking up professional activity or starting a family, face a number of developmental tasks related to the fulfillment of new social roles, i.e., that of an employee, spouse, parent. Research conducted in this age group shows that conscientiousness is related with dependability, striving for achievement, and the ability to plan (Barrick, Mount and Judge 2001, 11), as well as obedience, honesty and a tendency to follow rules. (Hogan and Ones 1997, 852). Thus, by shaping in themselves a trait such as conscientiousness, young adults are in a better position to cope with the challenges of this period of life.

The purpose of this article is to show the role conscientiousness can play in the religious and moral functioning of young adults. This goal will be pursued in three stages. In the first stage, the article will discuss the theories describing the issue of conscientiousness as well as provide an overview of research on conscientiousness in the field of psychology. In the second stage, the article will conduct a

brief characterization of the period of early adulthood, taking into account also the moral aspect. Finally, an attempt will be made to juxtapose conscientiousness with the religious and moral sphere of young adults in the context of various psychological concepts and current sociological research.

1. CONSCIENTIOUSNESS AS A PERSONALITY TRAIT

Traits, as nomothetically captured interpersonal characteristics, have become one of the basic concepts used in the psychology of individual differences, as well as in personality psychology. It is assumed that by means of a common set of traits shared by all people, it is possible both to compare people among themselves and to characterize individuals (Cieciuch and Łaguna 2014, 240).

The model using trait theory that is currently most popular is the Five-Factor Model of Personality. As early as the 1960s, in the first phase of research on this concept, that Warren Norman, after conducting a factor analysis of the results of research previously conducted by Ernest Tupes and Raymond Christal, obtained five factors, among which he distinguished conscientiousness. They became part of the basic taxonomy of personality (Siuta 2006, 12). Meanwhile, from the late 1970s, questionnaires began to be constructed to measure the five personality factors. The authors of the best-known tool were American researchers Paul Costa and Robert R. McCrae, who in 1992 constructed the Revised NEO Personality Questionnaire, abbreviated NEO PI-R (Siuta 2006, 15). The conscientiousness dimension, which is part of the Big Five, can be divided in this approach into the following sub-dimensions: Competence, Orderliness, Dutifulness, Achievement Striving, Self-Discipline and Deliberation.

In 1995 Piotr Szarota developed the Polish Adjective List, characterizing the individual factors of the Five-Factor Model of Personality in a unipolar manner. These adjectives best reflect the content characteristics of each of the identified factors. With regard to conscientiousness, the following adjectives were used: diligent, meticulous, thorough, systematic, reliable, diligent, dutiful, conscientious, precise, hardworking, prudent, responsible (Szarota 1995, 234).

There is also a bipolar characterization of NEOAC factors (Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness to Experience, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness), where conscientiousness is characterized in terms of

trait severity. "Individuals with high conscientiousness show a strong will, are motivated to act and persistent in achieving their goals. They are also usually meticulous, dutiful, punctual, considerate and reliable in their work, and have high academic and professional achievements. A high intensity of this trait is also associated with workaholism, a tendency to keep things in order and perfectionism" (Zawadzki et al. 1998, 94). At the other extreme are people with low conscientiousness, who "tend to show low conscientiousness in fulfilling duties and low motivation for social achievement, a hedonistic attitude toward life, a lack of clearly defined life goals and laziness, and impulsiveness in decision-making and spontaneity in action" (Zawadzki et al. 1998, 95).

Some theorists link conscientiousness with Cattell's g-factor, or "superego force." This dimension, however, focuses more on a person's attitude to work, so some researchers are reluctant to explicitly identify it with at least such an area of human action as morality. It seems, however, that a well-organized, disciplined and meticulous person is likely to be more scrupulous in adhering to the moral code than a person with the opposite personality traits (Szarota 1995, 234), especially when this system of rules is internalized by this person.

Numerous studies conducted in the United States on behavioral criteria in work organization have shown a significant relationship between personality dimensions from Big Five and work efficiency. Stephen P. Robbins and Timothy A. Judge (2012, 47) report that "each of the five traits has been shown to be useful in understanding individual behavior in organizations." Conscientiousness as a personality trait is most strongly associated with efficiency at work. It also regulates behavior in the context of achieving long-term goals. However, due to their high degree of orderliness and organization, conscientious individuals are less able to adapt to new environmental conditions (Kraczla 1993, 204).

On the Polish ground, a study was conducted, which sought answers to the question of whether personality type, related to the traits an employee manifests, is related to the professional path chosen by the employee. To this end, 113 employees of the Accounting, Finance and Sales Departments were surveyed according to the MBTI model. The study showed that there is a link between an employee's

personality traits and the choice of occupation. The conscientiousness factor was found to be a desirable competency in the finance profession (Kilian 2020).

Research on conscientiousness is not limited to a person's attitude to professional work. A group of 111 second-year psychology students were surveyed at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań. The study found that the higher the level of conscientiousness in the students, the better their academic performance, as measured by average exam grades. Conscientiousness is also a predictor of transitive and moratorial orientation (the higher the conscientiousness, the stronger the transitive orientation and the weaker the moratorial orientation). On this basis, it is predicted that people with high conscientiousness will enter adulthood with greater self-discipline (Rękosiewicz 2020).

The theme of conscientiousness also appears in research on quality of life. To this end, a group of 219 students at the Gdansk University of Technology were surveyed in an attempt to explain the psychological determinants of the feelings of the quality of life. The research confirmed the hypotheses established at the beginning, namely, conscientiousness is associated with the quality of life (positively with well-being in both genders, and negatively with depression tendencies in women) and conscientiousness influences the choice of task-based coping with stress (Mroczkowska 2013).

The above-mentioned examples of research show that, in addition to the basic reference of conscientiousness to a person's work and his or her drive to gain achievements, this trait can also be related to other psychological characteristics. This is evidenced, for example, by quantitative studies on the relationship between moral and spiritual intelligence and personality traits, which have recently been conducted in Poland on a sample consisting of 160 young adults aged 18-35. They showed that conscientiousness is an important predictor of the personal dimension of spiritual intelligence, and that a conscientious person relates his or her actions to professed values (Dacka and Rydz 2023). This, therefore, provides an opportunity to broaden this topic to include the concept of morality and religiosity as well.

2. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE EARLY ADULTHOOD PERIOD

The period of early adulthood is between the ages of 20/22 and 35/40 (Gurba 2011, 287). This entire developmental stage, especially the first part of it, is the period when the individual has the greatest physical and mental capabilities. Physical development during this period is noticeable in both women and men. This can be seen, among other things, in studies of men's grip strength and women's reproductive abilities (Kallman, Plato and Tobin 1990; Bee 2004).

In addition to physical development, young adults are also affected by changes related to their sense of identity. Individuals at the stage of early adulthood are forming their own self, searching for their place in the world, entering various life roles and facing specific developmental tasks, mainly related to the performance of these roles (Gurba 2011, 287). Identity assessment is then necessary, as individuals may need to make adjustments to previously established commitments when confronted with the new realities of work and family life (Eriksson et al. 2020, 1968). Difficulties in making necessary life changes in the face of new tasks in daily life can lead to a "crisis of closure," characterized by a sense of being stuck in a relationship or trapped at work (Robinson and Wright 2013, 413). In addition, many young adults when they become parents face the problem of how to balance work and family life, which can promote the emergence of role conflicts (Amstad et al. 2011, 164). Adjusting commitments made and developing an identity can continue to be a challenge during this period.

During early adulthood, moral development is dominated by the Kohlbergian conventional level (relating to social conventions). The moral order at this stage takes on a form that is supra-individual, but consistent with the social group. Characteristic of an individual functioning at the level of this stage is an attitude of loyalty to society and, at the same time, perpetuation and strengthening of the social order (Spławska 2008, 108). However, an individual at this stage of life has the opportunity to develop toward the post-conventional level. This type of development is mainly influenced by cultural factors, such as the vision of social relations or the idea of a certain ideal state in this area held by the person under study (Czyżowska 2008, 98). Post-conventional moral development and post-formal reasoning (i.e., transcending the reductionism of the level of formal operations, but preserving its achievements) is

illustrated, among other things, by the growing ability to understand and peel off the perspectives of other entities, the progressive hierarchical complexity of thought work, contextual thinking, wisdom, spirituality, pluralism, dialogicality, integrative consciousness or a high degree of maturity (Kielar 2016, 171). Thus, when attempting to solve moral problems, young adults appeal mainly to the wisdom and knowledge they possess. Gilligan and Attanucci (1988, 223) conducted a study differentiating by gender the level of morality of young adults. According to them, men are more likely to use an orientation of justice (emphasis on reciprocity, equality, respect), while women are more likely to have an orientation of concern and responsibility for the other person (Czyżowska 2008, 97). Current research, however, does not make it clear whether there are significant differences between males and females in moral reasoning during this period (Gurba 2011, 304).

In addition to the moral sphere, the religious sphere also undergoes specific development during this period. The period between the ages of 19 and 25 is associated with an increased intensification of exploratory dimensions. The variety of social, relational and professional interactions that a person experiences during this period projects on the individual not only from the outside, but also touches the person's interior. This includes the area of his or her religious experiences. Leaving the family home provides new opportunities for exploration of the world, including new ways of thinking about one's own existence and religious reference (Wieradzka-Pilarczyk 2015, 107). Some people move away from religious practices or seek other forms of spirituality. The religiosity of people at this time is very often individual and fluid in nature. In practice, it is expressed in the attitude of seeking religious impressions or discovering them in religious events. It is difficult in this case to speak of an intense commitment based on an internalized and stable system of values (Wieradzka-Pilarczyk 2015, 108). At a later stage of early adulthood (usually the moment of establishing one's own family or the appearance of children), an individual who perceives himself or herself as a religious person seems to return to the religiosity brought from his or her own family home, motivated by the need to pass on moral and religious values to the next generation. Individuals are also able to achieve the so-called mature religiosity, based on the autonomy, centrality and authenticity of religious beliefs (Roof 1993). This is fostered by an ongoing

process of cumulative vitality and maturation of the personality to achieve an Erikson's sense of intimacy, allowing the individual to form the capacity for love, including with regard to God (Zagórska and Łączynski 2020, 71). Studies have been conducted, among others, on the phenomenon of religious experience, which have shown that it occurs in young adults as an experience of God's presence and reality, as God's action in difficult moments, or as an experience of His attributes. However, these experiences are not as well-established as in middle or late adulthood, but are subject to constant change (Rydz 2012).

When looking at morality and religiosity in early adulthood, it seems helpful to observe the changes that also occur in the structure of personality during this time, especially juxtaposing them with those seen in the adolescent stage. This is because they contribute to more positive relationships, professional success and better health. Among other things, conscientiousness plays a significant role here (Roberts et al. 2007, 338). An analysis from the theoretical side of the fundamental processes taking place in the moral sphere in early adulthood allows us to see if and how they are connected in young adults with conscientiousness as a personality trait.

3. Conscientiousness and the religious-moral functioning of people in early adulthood

Among the numerous attempts to define the personality dimension of conscientiousness, most treat this trait as the individual's degree of organization, persistence and pursuit of his or her chosen goal (Cervone and Pervin 2011, 313-362). The components of conscientiousness, such as orderliness, dutifulness, self-discipline or deliberation, appear to be consistent with the moral principles present in most religions and faiths. Framed in this way, the issue allows researchers to look at it from many different perspectives. Among them may be religious and moral aspects. Furthemore, certain psychological theories and sociological studies establish a foundation for associating the moral-religious realm with the notion of conscientiousness and expand prospects for subsequent investigation.

3.1. Conscientiousness and selected concepts of personality

One of the basic theories on the concept of personality is the theory of internal consistency and congruence (Rogers 1950). It assumes that proper functioning of a person is conditional to consistency between the image derived from self-perception and that person's individual experience (Oleś 2003, 304). A person, striving to maintain homeostasis, experiences reality, but also has the ability to transcend it in order to construct the most effective solutions to achieve this balance again. Another theory, namely the theory of cognitive dissonance (Festinger 1957), leads to similar conclusions. It assumes that people perceive as unpleasant the state when the cognitive contents they process are contradictory. The dissonance is greater the more important the cognitive data are in relation to one another (Łukaszewski 2004, 436). In this case, the psychological mechanism responsible for this kind of attitude may be the aforementioned self-perception (Bem 1967) and the rule of commitment and consistency based on it (Cialdini 2009). People agree with certain theories and make specific decisions in their lives. Some choices may turn out to be wrong in retrospect, but the sheer commitment to previously propounded ideas causes them not to back down from their position. Finding no sensible external explanation, people tend to conclude that their own views underlie the decisions they make (Doliński 2005, 84-85). Studies of the relationship between cognitive dissonance and the Big Five personality traits in college students have shown that the conscientiousness dimension cofirms the logical relationship between conscientiousness, as a positive trait, and its inverse relationship with the cognitive dissonance, as a process motivative to anxiety and mental imbalance (Al Otaibi 2012, 623).

In both psychological and religious contexts, coping with cognitive dissonance can be done at the level of valuation. This is clearly seen when that highest value for a person is God, the Absolute, the sacred. Research suggests that such factors as the feminine dimension of psychological gender, sensory sensitivity, agreeableness, extroversion, but also conscientiousness can facilitate the expression of a person's spiritual life (Mateusiak 2004). In connection with the previously mentioned rule of reciprocity and consistency, the religious choice prompting a person to show love and respect to God (as the highest

accepted value), at the same time demands from him the realization of obligations flowing from the accepted faith and professed worldview.

3.2. Dutifulness

The component of dutifulness is particularly noteworthy here, as it is based on the guidance of conscience, and people scoring high on it, among other things, adhere to ethical standards in their lives (Mroczkowska 2013, 206). During early adulthood, we can speak of stabilization of the identity of the self (Bockneck 1986). It consists in the fact that the individual acquires greater independence from transient influences and the ability to better define his or her attitudes and preferences (Matuszewska 1997, 36). This stabilization also translates into an understanding of concepts and the guidance of principles derived from them - including moral norms. Although quantitative studies conducted in Poland in recent years show that in many situations of ethical dilemmas, the choices made by adolescents and young adults contradict the principles of their professed faith, the percentage of such inconsistencies is significantly lower in those who declare themselves to be deeply believing and practicing (Boguszewski and Bożewicz 2019, 48). In the process of identity formation in early adulthood, there may be a clash between previous norms and the demands imposed by the new situation in which the individual finds himself. Moral and religious values are also subjected to this test, and they slowly begin to take on an autonomous character, although in emerging adulthood they will still be strongly influenced by the individual's environment and surroundings.

With regard to religious-moral functioning and conscientiousness, the 2020 CBOS (Bożewicz 2020) survey may prove helpful. They included questions about the characteristics of one's faith. 66% of respondents said: "I was taught my faith at home and uphold the tradition handed down to me", but more key to conscientiousness are statements like "My faith once weakened, once strengthened, and today I know that the principles of faith must be reconciled with life" (12% of all respondents, of which ¼ were responses from students) and "Under the influence of a deep experience, I chose faith and decided to subordinate my life to it" (3% of respondents). Also, the results of Boguszewski and Bożewicz's (2019, 49) analysis, based on sociological research, enrich this issue with important information. Although they

show that in many ethical issues in young people there is usually a separation of the moral and religious spheres, this split is not so great in those who are deeply religious and who practice regularly. With greater consistency in declarations of faith and moral attitudes, the correlation of the attitudes of non-believers and believers is gaining strength, which may indicate, on the one hand, secularization, atheization and anti-clericalism, and, on the other hand, a religiosity that is more aware, deeper and consistent (Boguszewski and Bożewicz 2019, 50).

Analysis of quantitative research conducted among Polish youth shows that while the number of non-believers and non-practitioners is increasing, the percentage of firm believers and those who practice several times a week remains stable (Boguszewski and Bożewicz 2019, 38). Thus, it seems that the component of dutifulness could help young adults put into practice accepted and already well-known moral-religious norms and protect them from inconsistency and dissonance when confronted with new developmental challenges.

3.3. Self-discipline

Another psychological component that is realized in moral life is self-discipline. This dimension is inextricably linked to conscientiousness, as it requires an individual to be self-controled and deliberate, which are key components of this personality trait (Mroczkowska 2013, 206). The ability to make prudent decisions and persistently pursue designated goals, including those of a moral nature, often goes hand in hand with a personal struggle with various distractors, often hindering the realization of the individual's goals. The source of these distractors can be external (negative stimuli), but also internal (cognitive dissonance, problems with one's own identity). Helpful in solving such problems can be, for example, properly formed moral intelligence, along with its essential components (Lennick and Kiel 2007; Kornas-Biela 2020; Śmiałek 2023). The time of early adulthood is fraught with a number of developmental tasks that, on the one hand, put the individual's hitherto formed principles and views to the test, and, on the other hand, provide an opportunity to use the physical, mental or moral resources acquired, and, as a result, can lead to the formation of a mature personality. As Lennick and Kiel (2005, 7) point out, moral intelligence during this period does not refer only to knowledge of moral principles but enables their

practical application in real situations. Tanner and Christen (2013, 120-121), on the other hand, add that a morally intelligent person is someone who is endowed with the desire to pursue moral goals and use moral principles and self-regulation skills to do what is good for society and individual humans and living beings. The developmental tasks of the early adulthood period touch the personal sphere of the young person, but they also challenge the young person to find his or her place in society. Thus, they make it possible to achieve an appropriate level of self-knowledge and self-identification in dealing with others (Sikorska 2003, 5). Conscientiousness (including self-discipline), therefore, is a trait that can help accomplish these tasks, both in the personal and social space, while taking into account the religious and moral sphere.

Consequently, conscientiousness can refer to the issue of professing faith and consistently embodying the norms contained in it. Religiosity and morality combined with conscientiousness allow a person, on the one hand, to assimilate certain norms and values flowing from a previously formed conscience, and on the other hand, to realize these norms in the form of empathetic behavior towards other individuals.

At this point, questions may arise: Do people who differ in their level of conscientiousness also differ significantly in their practice of the faith and fidelity to their faith commitments? If so, can regular practice and living in accordance with the requirements of faith influence the growth of conscientiousness in these individuals? What level of conscientiousness and religiosity is optimal for proper functioning in early adulthood? This issue is so broad that it continues to open up the field for new research, and at the same time offers hope for the creation of effective forms of assistance in life tasks for young adults.

CONCLUSION

The theoretical juxtaposition of conscientiousness as a personality trait with the religious and moral development of a person in early adulthood can provide important practical implications:

(1) Consistency and congruence between self-image and self-experience appear to be helpful in proper human functioning. On the moral and religious level, the lack of dissonance between professed norms and decisions made can lead a young adult to personal development, but also affect the transition from a lower moral level to a higher one, not excluding the achievement of a post-conventional level. The conscientiousness component of dutifulness can play a significant role in this process.

(2) The period of early adulthood is associated with the prospect of undertaking developmental tasks, such as starting a family or starting a job. These tasks also require the individual to be able to make the right choices, in accordance with the accepted hierarchy of values or the religious system being pursued. In this area, it seems useful to develop moral intelligence, which helps the individual develop in accordance with moral norms, both personal and social. Meanwhile, among the components of conscientiousness that young adults can also use in this aspect is self-discipline. It allows the realization of norms, especially when a person has to confront them with demanding life challenges.

(3) In individuals in early adulthood who have already developed a stable self identity, one can see the ability to consistently follow one's own beliefs and preferences. On the moral and religious level, this can translate into acting in accordance with professed norms that have been reasonably adopted by the individual. As indicated, among other things, by a study conducted in Poland in 2020, this type of consistency applies primarily to such young adults for whom God is a supreme value and whose faith goes hand in hand with regular participation in religious practices. The question arises, however, whether, in these individuals, it is not precisely a strong and consistent religious faith that is a morally motivating factor, and at the same time enhances conscientiousness...?

The way young adults combine the religious and moral spheres with conscientiousness, and the way this translates into their daily functioning in the environment, can help create effective forms of psychological and therapeutic assistance, as well as pastoral care. By reaching out to the psychological mechanisms that support the moral-religious area, as well as using personality traits such as conscientiousness, it is possible to help young people perform their life tasks to the best of their ability.

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