

CHAPTER I

Subjective and Objective Indicators of Adulthood

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INTRODUCTION

Adulthood is very important and also the longest period in the life cycle (Harwas-Napierała, 1996) in which the following three stadiums of adulthood can be distinguished: early, medium and late one. It is assumed that adulthood begins between the ages of 18/20 and 23/25 (Bee, 2004; Gurba, 2007; Oleś, 2011). Such discrepancies concerning the beginnings of adulthood are connected with the fact that it is very difficult to find and define one moment in a person's life in which he or she reaches the stage of adulthood. What is more, although the literature points out that there is certain life period which is regarded as the beginning of adulthood, many authors (e.g., Badziąg, 2002) emphasize that adulthood should not be discussed in the context of an individual's age because of the fact that it is not the age which decides, to a large degree, whether the person reaches the stage of adulthood. Therefore, some of the authors try to define the so-called adulthood threshold stating that one or a few life events such as, for example, getting married, getting financial independence or giving birth to the first child could be defined as this threshold (compare Appelt, & Wojciechowska, 2002). These are the events that symbolize the moment of adulthood beginning, according to social expectations towards an adult individual (Gurba, 2011). As it is written by Pietrasiniński (1990) periodization of adulthood is quite arbitrary since the only changes that are clearly connected with age in this period of life are the indications of ageing. That is why researchers refer to the so-called "social calendar". However, uncritical acceptance of such social indicators of adulthood would mean that people who never get married,

which is more and more common nowadays, (see GUS, 2003, 2011), never become adult, and students, who are provided for by their parents, reach adulthood later than the rest of the society. It should be remembered that nowadays, because of the numerous socio-cultural changes of last decades, young people in western societies (e.g. in Italy, Czech Republic, Poland) postpone taking on adult roles in time. Such phenomenon is defined as adulthood postponement (Arnett, 2000). In order to get satisfying occupational and social position young people have to devote many years to getting education and experience which causes that they make decisions about setting up home or having children much later. Therefore, adulthood is much more often perceived with reference to psychological changes (intraindividual ones) in the context of individual's subjective perceptions of being adult. Arnett (1997), for example, asking people in the ages of 18–28 about the characteristics of adulthood indicated that the interviewed were most frequently choosing such definitions as “responsibility for one's own actions”, “one's own system of values and taking decisions according to it”, “partnership in relations with one's parents”. The results above point out crucial importance of psychological characteristics as adulthood criteria.

The problems with determining one moment in which a person reaches adulthood disappear when adulthood is treated as the process of becoming an adult person which happens slowly and gradually and is characterized by great individual diversity as far as the changes rate is concerned (Appelt & Wojciechowska, 2002). It is postulated in the subject literature that crossing the threshold of adulthood should not be identified with particular life events but treated as the process of “becoming an adult person” (Gurba, 2011) which means rather entering adulthood that consists of many mental and social changes. Research shows that both teenagers and adults regard entering adulthood in terms of a process or intramental changes and not in terms of particular life events which were to determine entering the world of adult people (Gurba, 2011). In the subject literature the answers for such questions as “Who is an adult person?” and “Where should the so-called adulthood threshold be placed?” are looked for. As it is indicated by Dubas (2001) the description of adulthood always caused difficulties for researchers and in the face of social changes that might be observed nowadays, adulthood becomes a term which is even more difficult to be defined precisely (see Kaczor, 1996). However, in the scientific context of interest in specific character of an adult person functioning and scientific research concerning this stage of a person's life, the answers for the questions stated above should be looked for. Perhaps criteria for adulthood determining, which were used two decades ago, are out-of-date today and using them

in research on an adult may lead to scientific faults. Therefore, considerations presented in this article have the aim of showing the need of careful thought that should be given to definition of adulthood and its criteria in the context of new and changing socio-cultural reality.

ADULTHOOD – TWO PERSPECTIVES IN SOCIAL SCIENCE

In social science, adulthood is most often defined as 1. social category (praxeological perspective), 2. mental category/competence (anthropological perspective) (see Czerka, 2007; Malewski, 1991; Przyszczykowski, 2003; Urbański, 1991).¹ In different words, as Pichalski (2003) states, adulthood includes in itself the importance of both objective and subjective context.

When it comes to the first perspective, adulthood is referred to as specific social state determined by the level of social expectations and tasks accomplishment of an individual. Getting the status of an adult person depends on the level of these expectations fulfillment (Piotrowski, 2010). Therefore, adulthood will be marked by such factors as: economic independence, carrying out family duties (father and mother's roles) or civil ones (Czerka, 2007). According to this understanding of adulthood, a person becomes an adult when he or she is able to go through the series of social standards which he or she meets in each stage of life (Malewski, 1991). Thus, the objective dimension of adulthood refers to certain social standard ascribed to this stage of life and usually determined by the age limits.

In the second conception attention is drawn to the necessity to free "adulthood" from any social convention (Przyszczykowski, 2003). This perspective assumes that a person is not an adult thanks to the roles he or she takes or social expectations he or she fulfills, but becomes an adult by acquisition of mental competencies, for example, the increase of self-awareness and the adequacy of self-assessment. It is presumed that an individual reaches adulthood by achieving mental maturity (Czerka, 2007). In other words adulthood is referred to as the process of mental development at certain, defined levels and in relation to particular aspects (more will be written about it in the next parts of the article). Therefore, according to Pichalski (2003), subjective dimension of adulthood is

¹ In pedagogy actualistic perspective is also used, although it does not define directly what adulthood is, but rather answers the question about the form of time that is the most intensely sensed by an adult person which means that it has the greatest value for him or her (Urbański, 1991). Therefore actualistic perspective has been omitted in the analysis concerning the criteria of adulthood which are the subject of present chapter.

expressed in an individual's feelings which are influenced by individual experiences being connected with self-perception.

Some of the authors (e.g., Gurba, 2011) state that in post industrial societies which do not formulate definite and straightforward expectations towards their members, referring to adulthood as to the social category, determined by the level at which an individual fulfills the social expectations and by the roles he or she takes, is less and less common. On the other hand, others (e.g., Piotrowski, 2010) claim that the categories of developmental tasks of adulthood (or social expectations towards an individual) are still frequent. However, nowadays we face the phenomenon of delayed accomplishment of the expectations by contemporary young people. Thus, adulthood appears much later than several dozen years ago (Piotrowski, 2010).

In the context of the topic considered in the article we are to deal with two ways of understanding of what adulthood is. These are, in other words, two main domains of scientific analysis- adulthood in social aspect which is visible in the life tasks undertaken and done by an individual (objective/ social adulthood), and adulthood in psychological aspect (subjective/ intramental adulthood) which is manifested by such characteristics as independence, responsibility for one's own decisions, self-reliance and being ready to face the consequences of one's own choices (Brzezińska, Kaczan, Piotrowski, & Rękosiewicz, 2011). According to Oleś (2011) both perspectives are to be treated as complementary to each other and not as mutually exclusive. In the definition proposed by the author both objective (social) and subjective (mental) adulthood criteria are taken into account. These are: 1) a kind of life tasks being done (setting up home, beginning professional activity), 2) responsibility for oneself and others, 3) emotional independence, 4) feeling free to make choices and being independent when it comes to decision making.

Oleś (2011) states that undertaking the life tasks typical for an adult person decides, among others, about the fact that a person is an adult. However, as the author notices socio-cultural changes, that took place in our cultural circle during the last decades, make us to look in a new way at the issue concerning reaching adulthood by young people. As Bynner (2005) emphasizes, the process of becoming an adult person has changed significantly for the last 20–30 years. Nowadays young people decide to get married, leave home or having babies much later. An interesting fact is that at present the process of entering adulthood is characterized by great individualism. Gurba (2011, p. 289) claims that age borders of adulthood “are blurred in individual stories of adolescents' lives”. Socially determined structure of human life's course, which is regulated by the

norms and society's expectations, has undergone considerable destabilization for the last decades. A person can currently in an individual way set goals and develop their wider range than it would result from developmental tasks. What is more, he or she can do it at any time. Nowadays an individual is given broader range of freedom and consent when it comes to making choices and decisions. Such situation makes it more difficult to predict individual life standards (Oleś, 2011). Thus we can meet a twenty-eight-year-old man who set up home and his peer who still lives with his parents or in a student flat with his friends. We can also more often find relationships that are called partnerships "for a trial" instead of traditional marriages. These partnerships (contrary to their definition) often last many years. There are also singles who are not married and live alone because of their own choice and who also (also by their own choice) from time to time (for long or short period of time) strike up a relationship based on intimacy (Oleś, 2011). In connection with all the above, Oleś (2011) postulates that adulthood criteria should be formulated differently using the perspective of subjective determinants.

According to Piotrowski (2010), both ways of adulthood interpretation described above (social- objective and psychological- subjective) are very often connected with each other. The author states that "people who began or are beginning doing developmental tasks ascribed to adulthood, acquire reflexively (maybe because of self-observation) feeling of being an adult person; at the same time possessing such a picture of oneself can make it easier to take adult social roles" (Piotrowski, 2010, p. 14). Research conducted in Poland and abroad confirm a reflexive character of relation between the sense of adulthood and taking social roles ascribed to adulthood (Brzezińska, & Piotrowski, 2010; Fad-jukoff, Kokko, & Pulkkinen, 2007; Luyckx, Schwarz, Goossen, & Pollock, 2008).

SOCIAL (OBJECTIVE) CRITERIA OF ADULTHOOD

Objective criteria, considered from praxeological point of view, may be the basis for conclusion whether or not an individual got the status of an adult person. These criteria are connected with fulfilling particular social expectations and performing developmental tasks, ascribed to adulthood, by an individual (Brzezińska, 2007). These tasks, in turn, define normative model of adulthood and an adult person (Garlej-Drzewiecka, 2003). As Pichalski (2003) states, the term 'adulthood' is often used as 'adulthood for something' (see Urbański, 1991). Such interpretation of adulthood includes particular tasks, roles and functions, ascribed to this stage of life, for which a person becomes or is adult. Defini-

tion of adulthood by Tyszkowa (1987, p. 67) also belongs to this mainstream. According to this definition “adulthood is this part of an individual’s life cycle which follows growth and puberty that prepare an individual to perform all essential life functions”.

According to praxeological approach it’s the society that labels particular person as an adult using, for example, the criterion of age. It is the most frequently assumed that adulthood begins at about the age of 18–23. The second determinant of adulthood is readiness to undertake and ability to perform increasing amount of more complicated tasks, roles or social functions by an individual (Urbański, 1991). Thus adulthood is often defined as “social competence connected with possession of resources that enable an individual to carry out particular social tasks” (Czerka, 2005). Dubas (2001, p. 79) claims that “an adult is a person who grew up to requirements that the society sets”. Society labels particular person as an adult if the people see that the person performs the majority of tasks ascribed to adult citizens (Czerka, 2005). Moreover, because of the fact that an adult person does particular tasks for the benefit of society in which he or she lives, an essential social status is ascribed to an adult’s role (Dubas, 2001).

Both determinants (age and taking social roles) do not fully overlap since an individual may be identified as an adult person thanks to taking adult roles even though he or she is not old enough (e.g. juvenile parents). Similarly, a person who, in spite of appropriate age (18–23), does not take social roles ascribed to adulthood may not be identified as an adult person and society may question his or her participation in adult life. That is why it is more and more often observed that adulthood is something more than crossing certain age border or taking social roles.

According to this approach, the main criterion of adulthood lies in social convention which relates to noticing and classifying people to the category of adult individuals. In accordance with this conception, the following criteria are taken into account when it comes to defining adulthood: financial independence, family duties, legal, occupational and defensive duties, social activity etc. (Urbański, 1991). If we regard social convention as the main criterion of adulthood in an individual biography of each individual person, we can easily distinguish the moment at which he or she became an adult. In this context adulthood is a category ascribed to individual forever with the use of zero-one method, where ‘0’ signifies lack of adulthood and ‘1’ stands for adulthood. It’s a static model of adulthood- the model of taking roles which are socially important (Sadowska, 2003).

Classical conception of developmental tasks in the life cycle proposed by Hevighurst (1981) is worth presenting in the context of objective criteria of adulthood. According to it, entering adulthood can be reduced to the following tasks: the start in the field of family roles (wife, husband, mother, father), in occupational life (in the job market) and widely understood social activity (finding similar social group and developing civil attitude (Czerka, 2005).

In order to carry out the analysis of the process of entering adulthood psychologists nowadays use indicators that take into account the following five ranges of an individual's functioning: a) housing situation, b) education, c) marital status, d) having children, e) occupational activity (Fadjukoff, 2007). When it comes to the first range, independence from family in which a person was born, which means changing the place of residence and setting up one's own household, is considered as the indicator of adulthood. Taking education into account, finishing the education process is adulthood indicator. In the next area, the fact of getting married and also having children is regarded as criterion of adulthood whereas in occupational activity, taking up a job is an indication of adulthood (Piotrowski, 2010). Beginning the activity in a job market is considered as a fundamental step in the process of entering adulthood. It is also believed that this step influences the rest of adulthood indicators which are: independence from family, leaving home (setting up one's own household) and making decision about getting married and having children (Guerreiro, & Abrantes, 2004).

MENTAL (SUBJECTIVE) CRITERIA OF ADULTHOOD

As it turns out, adulthood is not only young person's performance of the tasks ascribed to this stage of life and taking adult social roles such as wife or husband, mother or father, thanks to which he or she is labeled as an adult. Adulthood can be assessed (as it was described above) on the basis of objective indicators such as getting married or having children. However, nowadays young people's developmental paths are so much diversified that adulthood is much more often analyzed in the context of mental characteristics and competencies which are indicators of adulthood, for example sense of responsibility, independence, self-reliance, and in the context of identity development or sense of adulthood in general. With regard to extending education period², young

² The percentage of people with higher education increased from 9.9% in 2002 to more than 17.5% in 2011 among the people aged 13 and more. In the years 1990–2004 the percentage of studying people

people decide on getting married and having children much later. That is why they do not consider their own adulthood in the context of objective and straightforward chronologically-legal attributes, but in the context of an adult person's characteristics, individual features such as ability to support for family (not only having a family), financial independence (not only having a job), and psychological characteristics such as acceptance or responsibility (Gurba, 2011). Research conducted by Gurba (2008) showed that 90% of young people entering adulthood consider responsibility for one's own actions as the attribute of adulthood. Sadowska (2003) claims that an individual's personality variables such as responsibility, maturity, self-reliance seem to be the most important when it comes to defining the threshold of adulthood. The author points out that it is emphasized not only by the researchers dealing with adulthood stage and developmental changes of adult people, but also members of society who have nothing to do with scientific analysis of the issue.

Anthropological perspective assumes that "a person is 'is not an adult' but 'becomes an adult', does not take and 'play' social roles which testify to his adulthood, but constantly learns to be real and equal" (Urbański, 1991, p. 10). The process of entering the adulthood stage is at the same time the process of an individual's psycho-social maturation. In other words, a person becomes an adult through acquisition of mental competencies and individual characteristics such as self-reliance or responsibility (Czerka, 2007). Then it is a dynamic model of adulthood.

The issue of identity must not be omitted while analyzing the adulthood issue from anthropological perspective. As Sęk and Sommerfeld (1990) state, the adulthood roots are stuck in the sense of identity which consists of the sense of stability, inner cohesion and autonomy. "It is only possible to become an adult on condition that we generally know or rather feel who we are (...)" (Sęk, & Sommerfeld, 1990, p. 14). Oleś (2011) names the process of identity formation a challenge which is faced on the threshold of adulthood. Moreover, identity is not only the basis/the beginning of the process of adulthood entering (becoming an adult individual), but also an important determinant or criterion of adulthood. Until recently it was believed that identity built at adolescence stage is relatively stable (Brzezińska, & Piotrowski, 2009). Marcia (1966) was of the opinion that

rose to 46.4% from 12.9% (Central Statistical Office, 2003, 2011). In academic year 1997/1998, in Poland, there were 146 universities at which 226 929 students were educated whereas in academic year 2010/2011 there were 328 universities at which altogether 580 076 people studied (Central Statistical Office, 2010).

the structure of needs, aspirations, aims and opinions of a person who finishes adolescence stage of life is relatively constant. However, Bosma and Kunnen (2001) show in their research that another process of identity formation and transformation appears after adolescence. Newer research results point out that it is not the stage of adolescence, but the stage of early adulthood, that is a key one in identity formation (e.g., Erikson, 2000). Growing up and adolescence are no longer considered as life stages in which basic issues connected with identity processes are determined (Harwas-Napierała, 2012). Research based on a two-stage model of identity formation proposed by researchers from Catholic University in Leuven, Belgium, conducted abroad (e.g., Luyckx et al., 2008) as well as in Poland (e.g. Brzezińska, Piotrowski, Garbarek-Sawicka, Karowska, & Muszyńska, 2010) show that together with the age (difference between people at the age of 20–23 and people who are older) the intensity of exploration decreases whereas the level of taking on obligations and identifying with them increases. It is essential that the changes described above cause increase of the sense of adulthood among individuals (Brzezińska, & Piotrowski, 2010). Taking into account that the roots of adulthood are stuck in the sense of identity, the issue should be of key importance in the context of considerations concerning the process of entering adulthood (becoming an adult person).

Definition by Oleś (2012), mentioned earlier, is worth being developed here. According to the author, an adult is a person who takes on life tasks typical for adulthood, is responsible for oneself and others, independent and makes free choices that are supported by the strength to carry them out. Responsibility is nothing else than awareness of consequences of one's own actions for both oneself and others. An adult can experiment, seek, make mistakes but responsibility does not let him cross the borders of reasonable risk, irrational costs or obvious harm caused oneself or others. Independence, in turn, relates especially to emotional independence from parents or others who take care of a person. Objectively, such emotional independence appears when a person moves out from home. However, this physical sign is not as important as the ability to make choices and decisions without the necessity of being supported or accepted by an adult. As the author emphasizes, such emotional independence is a basis for ability to decide about oneself and form one's own life according to one's own desires and needs. Besides, emotional autonomy is also basis for mature intimate relationship with another person. According to conception by Oleś (2012) an adult is also a person who makes free choices accompanied by the strength to make dreams come true and achieve aims. Becoming aware of this dimension of adulthood may be cheerful and creative experience for an

individual, motivating him or her to live an interesting and creative life. On the other hand, however, it may cause anxiety connected with the usage of this freedom and its consequences. Freedom characteristic for an adult person involves persistence in undertaking tasks, overcoming difficulties and bearing hardships of everyday life. In connection with this an adult person, who faces difficulties, is not discouraged by tiny failures, but modifies his or her aspirations and aims and adjusts actions to changing circumstances and situations.

Szewczuk (1961, p. 40) also believes that self-reliance, independence and responsibility are important attributes of an adult person. The author provides the following definition of an adult person: “an adult person is responsible for oneself, is the subject of productive activity, decides about his life plan himself and must overcome the difficulties connected with its implementation on his own and is responsible for his activity in the face of society”. It is also pointed out that before a person grows up, he or she always lives among the people who look after, teach, bring up, guide and care about him or her. People who take care of a child or a teenager are guaranteed the supervision over him or her according to the law. They are responsible for his or her life in terms of finances and parenting whereas an adult person is shaped in such a way that “he can be an independent subject of socio-productive activity” (Szewczuk, 1961, p. 42). Byczkowska, Nosarzewska and Żyta (2003, p. 264) are of the opinion that “adulthood can be noticed when a young person begins planning his place in the society, becomes aware of his subjectivity, opportunity to make choices and decisions”.

Adulthood is very often discussed in the context of “maturity”. These two concepts are frequently considered to be equal, especially in common usage. Adulthood is often regarded as equivalent of maturity and the other way round (Garlej-Drzewiecka, 2003) especially when maturity is identified with biological element. Tyszkowa (1987, p. 67) provides the following definition of adulthood: “adulthood is a part of an individual’s life cycle which follows the process of growth and becoming biologically mature to perform all significant life functions”. However, if the concept of maturity is introduced into the discussion about adulthood, it needs to be pointed out that subject literature distinguishes biological, mental and social maturity. The term “adolescence” is often used to define the process of maturation in terms of psycho-social aspects. It is the time during which a young person enters people’s social life and becomes an adult person (Obuchowska, 1982). “Adolescence is the time of changes in person’s mental development, which is initiated by puberty, and is individually differentiated under the influence of social factors. Its completion

is accomplishment of such state of mental development that is characterized by the ability to take an adult person's roles (Obuchowska, 1982, p. 134). As we can see, adolescence (between the ages of 12 and 18) is assumed to finish with the achievement of psycho-social maturity. However, it has to be pointed out that nowadays complete mental and social maturity is achieved much later (Ruda, 1996). When it comes to biological maturation, Obuchowska (1982) emphasizes that a person matures much earlier whereas he or she becomes mature in terms of psycho-social aspects much later. Therefore, it needs to be remembered that in psychology adulthood is usually considered with reference to age whereas maturity is analyzed with reference to personality (Obuchowska, 2007). According to Pichalski (2003, p. 80), for example, mature personality "possesses inner independence, ability to endure and soothe the feeling of loneliness and isolation, communicate with another person without difficulties, build interpersonal relationships that are good for both sides, treat, in a mature way, any kinds of conflicts as tasks to be done and overcome difficulties and obstacles instead of avoiding them".

Pichalski (2003) states that mature person possesses appropriate attitude towards oneself and accepts one's own limitations. Rzedzicka (2003), in turn, proved in the research conducted among disabled people that in participants' opinion the following features (assessed positively by them) are attributes of maturity: responsibility, ability to make decisions, cognitive-emotional decen-tration, sense of one's own autonomy and mature relationships with others. Kowalik (2003) introduces the term of "developmental maturity" in the context of considerations concerning adulthood. The author states that this maturity is made up of achieved social competencies and acquired knowledge that enable an individual to take social tasks and fulfill his or her needs in an effective way. Gałdowa (1990), in turn, emphasizes the role of feelings and emotions in person's development and claims that a mature person is able to control the influence of his or her mood and surroundings on decisions that he or she makes and does not subject to destruction under the influence of primitive feelings. A mature person is able to control emotions that he or she feels and achieve dominance of rational behaviours and actions towards other people (Pichalski, 2003). A person can be mature in one sphere and immature in others (Pichalski, 2003). That is why Kaczor (1996, p. 22) points out that an adult is someone who "is biologically, intellectually and emotionally mature to act in society and be responsible for the consequences of his or her actions".

It is emphasized in literature that achievement of certain level of mental maturity (and social one as well; personal maturity = mature personality) is

a necessary condition for coping with tasks that are characteristic for adulthood period (Gurba, 2011; Harwas-Napierała, 2012) which in other words means taking social roles characteristic for adulthood. Oleś (2012, p. 16) is of the opinion that psycho-social criteria of adulthood can (or should?) decide about adulthood because “it is not biological age that determines the borders between particular periods in the person’s life but the type of interactions between the person and the environment, although, on the other hand, the aspect of age cannot be omitted (...). That is why a person can enter adulthood stage when he or she is 18, 25, 30 or even 35 years old”.

An interesting conception of mental maturity is presented by Chlewiński (1991) who distinguished three dimensions of mental maturity on the basis of Allport (1961) conception of mature personality. These dimensions are: 1) autonomy which appears when a person can carry out subjective actions regardless of different factors that could influence them, 2) insight into one’s own motives, 3) attitude towards others, described as attitude of responsibility and respect for another person.

In Rostowska (2001) opinion personal maturity consists of the following types of maturity: intellectual (which is, in other words, rational thinking), social, emotional and moral. Harwas-Napierała (2012) believes that personal maturity determines essential forms of behaviors which favor taking on developmental tasks of adulthood and thereby make the course of individual development process easier. Among these forms the author enumerates: 1) mature forms of communication, 2) emotional stability, 3) stable system of values which ensures predictability of behaviors, 4) competent formulation of aims and making choices important for an individual’s development as well as stability in the accomplishment of these choices. Personal maturity determines skilful way of performing family as well as occupational roles by adult individuals.

Piotrowski (2010) states that general sense of being adult should be placed among subjective criteria of adulthood. It has been proved in the research (Brzezińska, & Piotrowski, 2010) that there is a strong connection between the sense of adulthood and the age of an individual and his or her present living situation. The sense of adulthood increases linearly between the ages of 20–23 and 30–40. What is more, the sense of adulthood also rises together with readiness to strike up close relationships.

McCrae and Costa (2005) analyze adulthood in the context of personality features structure. It turns out that few changes occur at the intermediary levels of particular personality features between the ages of 12 and 16 whereas between the ages of 20 and 30 people achieve such configuration of features that will

characterize them in the next years of their life. Thus the authors believe that this is the moment at which, from the psychologists perspective, adulthood begins. These changes in the personality features sphere that occur between the ages of 20 and 30 are connected with the changes in the sphere of social roles taken by an individual at this particular stage of his or her life.

SUMMARY

All the considerations presented above show that at present it is very difficult to form one, commonly used and approved definition of adulthood and a list of its criteria which could be used in research on this stage of life. The direction of changes in understanding the notion of adulthood, presented in the present chapter, opens very important, interesting and wide range of analysis for researchers who work on this concept and shows relevance of using some criteria of adulthood and rejecting others in research concerning the issue discussed. As it turns out “conventional, formal, common adulthood describes an adult of the second and third millennium in much lesser degree. It is confronted with extremely complex subjective adulthood which is defined and felt internally by an individual oneself: nowadays adulthood is rather a part of an individual than a part of society” (Dubas, 2001, p. 86). This shift (Czerka, 2005) became the cause of changes of adulthood attributes. Moreover, it also caused rejection of some indicators of adulthood (getting married, having children) and taking into account other ones (responsibility, sense of autonomy, independence or generally sense of adulthood). Nowadays one’s own mood or self-esteem are more important than the assessment made by society in which an individual lives (Dubas, 2011). Accepting the above (psychological) criteria of adulthood generates a problem connected with the fact that there is no punctuality in entering particular life stages. People do it either too late or too early in relation to their peers (Oleś, 2012). That is why accuracy or relevance of using the term ‘the sense of punctuality of life events’, understood as the feeling of appearance of life event and necessity of performing tasks connected with the event at the time which is similar to the time at which peers do the same tasks, is doubtful (Brzezińska, & Kaczan, 2011). Nowadays definition of the concept should rather put emphasis on an individual’s inner feeling of readiness to perform particular tasks (marriage, children, occupational job) which is closely connected with a person’s conviction that he or she possesses appropriate competencies and features.

Adulthood can now be identified with subjective sense of being an adult person. It seems that the acquisition of this feeling is, or can be, determined

by or connected with acquiring or possessing by an individual a number of mental characteristics and competencies such as the sense of responsibility, autonomy, independence, self-reliance and also with possessing definite status of self-identity. As a result of introspection or evaluation of one's own supplies and features, an individual can reflexively define oneself as an adult or no. The sense of being adult (and the conviction about possessing appropriate competencies and characteristics) may, in turn, determine individual's own decisions about taking on particular life tasks, ascribed to adult people by virtue of social convention, having the sense that these event/s occurred at the right moment in his or her biography. The direction of relationships indicated above is only a theoretical proposition which should be tested in scientific research.

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