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Sexual awareness and time structuring in the light of transactional analysis. Research report

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Abstract

The article is a report on the research conducted as part of the bachelor thesis, based on the concept of time structuring. The author is looking for an answer to the question: What is the relation between young people's ability to build intimate relationships, in the meaning of transactional analysis, and their level of sexual awareness? The research was conducted on a sample of 312 people aged 18-22 using questionnaire techniques. The main conclusion from the research indicates the existence of a correlation between the respondents' gender and building intimate relationships. However, no relationship was detected between the level of sexual awareness and building intimate relationships by adolescents.

Keywords: transactional analysis, time structuring, sexual awareness, intimacy, adolescence, relationships.

Introduction

According to the WHO definition, sexuality “constitutes a natural part of human development at each stage of one's life and encompasses physical, psychological and social factors” (WHO and BZgA, 2012, p. 17), thus it is an integral part of human life. It should be noticed that nowadays it undergoes certain changes like the whole world. These changes are described by e.g. Krzysztof Nowosielski (2010), who tackles the question of the development of modern technologies in

the context of sexuality. They are of utmost importance, especially as far as adolescents are concerned as they are only beginning to learn about that area of human life. A young person has unlimited access to the content that frequently does not fully reflect reality. They should have comprehensive knowledge that contributes to their development and creating healthy, responsible and appropriate models. However, as Beata Gola (2008, pp. 53–61) points out, media may make them follow stereotypes, create a distorted image of the world and promote hazardous behaviours. Thus, a question arises how omnipresent sexuality created by that young person's environment impacts their development.

The research shows that young people aged 13–26 positively assess their knowledge about sexuality. However, it raises doubts as in the same research the sexual education classes (in Polish called Preparation for Family Life) were evaluated negatively by the respondents, both regarding their content and the way the lessons were run. The respondents stated that important topics were omitted and the teacher was spoon-feeding them with myths and moralising stories instead of sound knowledge (Muczko, Wilk, Lewandowska, 2023, pp. 5–7).

Pursuant to the WHO guidelines, sexual education should be based on the following standards:

1. Sexual education should be adjusted to young people's age, developmental stage and their comprehensive skills, as well as culture they have been brought in, taking into account socio-cultural gender identity. It should also reflect the circumstances those young people live in.
2. Sexual education is based on human rights (sexual and reproductive ones).
3. Sexual education is based on the concept of holistically comprehended well-being, including health.
4. Sexual education is firmly based on gender equality, self-determination and acceptance of diversity.
5. Sexual education begins at birth.
6. Sexual education should be understood as contribution into just and self-determining society, both with regard to individuals and the community.
7. Sexual education is based on current/verified scientific information (WHO and BZgA, 2012, p. 27).

The research shows that sexual education is not detrimental to children and adolescents. On the contrary, good-quality sexual education may delay sexual initiation and support responsible sexual behaviours, it also helps recognize harming people and situations as well as contributes to promoting health (BZgA, WHO, 2016).

This article shall present the results of the research conducted on the basis of the concept of time structuring viewed from the perspective of transactional analysis. During the research, the author was looking for the answer to the question on the relation between the ability to create intimate relationships by

young people and their level of sexual awareness. The following part of the article briefly presents the concepts of time structuring and sexual awareness in order to make the reader familiar with the thematic scope of the paper. It should be mentioned that the research was conducted during the pandemic of COVID-19, which might have impacted the obtained results.

The concept of time structuring

The analysis of time structure is part of the transactional analysis concept developed by American psychiatrist Eric Berne (Jagięła, 2012b, p. 24). The founder of TA thought that once people lack any structure, they feel discomfort deriving from lack of time structuring. Most probably the first thing they will do in such a situation will be structuring the situation in their own way. This is how the need of structure shall be satisfied (Stewart, Joines, 2016, p. 115). Anna Pierzchała pays attention to the fact that the concept of TA encompasses the need called time structure hunger. This need can be satisfied by relations with other people, which, if properly structured, reflect the intensity of interpersonal contacts (Pierzchała, 2013 p. 59). Eric Berne (2018, p. 8) himself compares stimulus hunger to food hunger, both biologically, psychologically and socially. The founder of TA emphasises that time structuring in its operational aspect can be called programming. It has three dimensions: material, social and individual. The most common method of time structuring consists in creating an action plan located in the outside world (Berne, 2018, p. 12). There are the following forms of time structuring in transactional analysis: withdrawal, rituals, activities, pas-times, psychological games, intimacy (Stewart, Joines, 2016, p. 115).

Withdrawal is lack of response to transactional stimuli, which consists in physical or mental distancing from one's environment (Jagięła, 2012a, p. 21). When an individual withdraws, they can physically stay among others, yet they do not cooperate with them. During that activity there are no external hints showing that individual's current Ego state and one can cathexise any one of them. During withdrawal, one does not receive any recognition strokes and they do not grant them either. Recognition strokes exchange can take place solely within oneself (Stewart, Joines, 2016, pp. 116–117).

Rituals are a form of time structuring that is expressed by conventional and artificial contacts with the environment (Jagięła, 2012a, p. 79). As Eric Berne writes, a ritual is "a stereotypical sequence of simple complementary transactions programmed by external social factors" (Berne, 2018, p. 27). The programme of those rituals is realized in accordance with the assumptions represented by the Parent ego state, but the Child ego state, especially the Adaptive Child ego state, is responsible for its execution (Stewart, Joines, 2016, pp. 117–118).

Activities are an omnipresent form of time structuring both at one's workplace and in their private life. They focus on acting "here and now" and realizing a certain goal. That is why the Adult ego state is dominant here (Stewart, Joines, 2016 p. 124). Activities constitute a kind of skeleton for other forms of time structuring (Berne, 2018, p. 12).

Pastimes, similarly to rituals, proceed in a well-known, schematic way. However, they differ in the level of programming. Pastimes offer more freedom and include more content coming from an individual. A conversation in that form often refers to the past, light and superficial exchanges are typical here (Stewart, Joines, 2016, pp. 118–119). They are often used at parties, differing in topics but having the same pattern. Due to their form, they can constitute a selection stage preceding games as an individual intuitively states who they shall play with in the future. Pastimes can often evolve into friendship (Berne, 2018, pp. 31–35). They make it possible to receive positive support and confirm one's life position. Most frequently, they are executed from the Child ego state level. What is important, people who seek entertainment in conversation do not look for a solution of a given situation, they do not plan any actions either (Jagięła, 2012a, p. 22).

Psychological games and their analysis are the main element of transactional analysis. They are described by Eric Berne as complementary and hidden transactions which lead to a certain, predictable outcome. Out of other forms, they stand out due to their hidden quality and compensation. By definition they are unfair and their result has a dramatic overtone. As Ian Stewart and Vann Joines (2016, pp. 122–123) emphasise, games are executed from negative aspects of the Child and the Parent ego states.

Intimacy, as the founder of the concept claims, is the only fully satisfying response to hunger. It begins when individual programming becomes more intense and social modeling as well as hidden limitations and motives weaken. Moreover, the author claims that a sexual intercourse is a prototype of intimacy (Berne, 2018, p. 12). Yet, intimacy should not be comprehended only in the context of sexual activity. People in personal and sexual relationships are likely to openly share their feelings and desires. If they experience that, they shall find intimacy. Yet, as Ian Stewart and Vann Joines (2016, p. 124) stress, it often happens that emotionally intense relationships are based on a game rather than intimacy (Berne, 2018, p. 7). Analysing intimacy through the context of ego states, it should be noticed that it is an honest Child-Child relationship realized by the Adult ego state (Berne, quoting: Stewart, Joines, 2016, p. 124). J. Jagięła, on the other hand, claims that the Adult ego state displays autonomy which allows for experiencing real emotions by the Child ego state (Jagięła, 2012a, p. 22). Intimacy lets an individual express their desires and emotions without any censorship. It has no hidden messages and it is not its goal to make the other party behave in a certain way (Stewart, Joines, 2016, pp. 123–124). However, it

is not a fully unambiguous concept as it has two sides. As Berne states, we can deal with both two-sided or one-sided intimacy.

Two-sided intimacy is defined as a relationship between people that does not use games, is open, honest and characterized by mutual, non-abusive, non-enforced sharing. Intimacy though can be also one-sided as one party may be open and honest, ready to give, whereas the other one may be misleading and abusive (Berne, 2021, p. 45).

Considering the above, intimacy can be perceived as a risky way of staying in a relationship, especially if we perceive it from the perspective of the Child ego state. One may be afraid that their honesty and openness will not be reciprocated. However, when intimacy is reciprocated, it is the least risky as its value stays the same and the people engaged in that relationship feel comfortable (Stewart, Joines, 2016 p. 125).

The founder of transactional analysis also emphasizes that the multitude of social behaviours is reflected in examples deriving from the sexuality area. Sexual relationships may be acts of true intimacy. They may also be a way to spend one's free time, a certain ritual, work, game or even take place in withdrawal (Berne, 2021, p. 45).

Sexual awareness

In this paper, sexual awareness is understood in accordance with the assumptions of Maria Beisert (2004, p. 5 quoting: Imieliński, 1990, Money, 1999). This author claims that limiting the concept of sexuality to biological characteristics does not allow for proper explanation of that concept. She suggests taking into account the influence of feelings, cognitive processes and social surroundings. Describing the concept of sexuality, Maria Beisert would like to draw the reader's attention to its innate function, treating it as an integral element of the human body, part of a bigger whole, and its modality when an individual proceeds from one life phase into another (2004, pp. 6–7 quoting: Imieliński, 1990, Money, 1999). The author's attention drawn to the question of satisfying one's mental needs is directly linked to the views deriving from the concept of transactional analysis. Eric Berne (1994, pp. 169–170) emphasises the fact that relationships are a key element of human life. Without them, the human nervous system is hungry for stimuli without which the body does not function properly. These are among others: hunger of sensual stimulation, hunger of acceptance (warmth and physical or verbal contact), hunger of physical contact and sexual hunger which is, at the same time, able to satisfy all other types of hunger (Berne, 1994, pp. 172–175).

Sexual awareness is directly linked with the knowledge of the biological dimension of sexuality, i.e. the knowledge about sex drive. In the research dis-

cussed, this term was based on the concept by Carl Jung. As Jolande Jacobi explains (2014, p. 77), Carl Gustav Jung understands sex drive as mental energy, the sum of all powers flowing through all the forms and activities, united with each other in the mental system. This energy is the intensity of all the processes. The author also draws our attention to the fact that Jung attributed broader meaning to sex drive than Freud.

Moreover, the research assumptions stated that sexual awareness is also defined by exploration and awareness of one's own body in its sexual dimension. A. Stein understands body awareness not only as the knowledge about biological factors but also as gender awareness (Stein, 2018, pp. 210–211). As Erik Erikson writes, the acceptance of one's gender and body is one of the conditions for reaching psychosexual maturity, which is indispensable for creating future tasks regarding sexuality (Erikson, 2000, pp. 272–274).

The theoretical assumptions mentioned above were the foundation of methodological assumptions of the research conducted in 2021, which concerned the relation between time structuring in the context of transactional analysis and sexual awareness.

Methodological assumptions of the research

Formulating research assumptions, the following research problem was defined: *Is there, and if, what kind, any relation between young people's sexual awareness and declared forms of time structuring in the light of transactional analysis?* The aim was to attempt to answer the question how adolescents spend their time in relationships with others and whether it is connected with their sexual awareness. Taking into account the assumptions of transactional analysis, the following hypothesis was made: intimacy should favour high sexual awareness.

The research used two questionnaire research tools constituting one set. The first one was developed by the author. It consists of 30 statements describing instances of a respondent's behaviour pointing to their preferences concerning time structuring in their relationships with other people. Each structuring form is described by five statements. The response formula is based on the 5-point Likert scale. Coding assumes translating the responses into the values 0–4.

The other questionnaire entitled "Sexual awareness" was developed by a five-person team whose members were Marta Wilczyńska, Iga Kobylkiewicz, Olga Bednarek, Katarzyna Piasecka and Weronika Karaś. Its theoretical foundations included the aforesaid concepts of the following authors: C.G. Jung (Jacobi, 2014), S. Freud (Małyszczek, 2014), M. Beisert (2004), Z. Lew-Starowicz (1988), E. Fromm (2004), E. Berne (1994), A. Stein (2018), E. Erikson (2000), M. Wiśłocka

(2016), and others. The questionnaire consists of 24 statements, based on the 5-point Likert scale. 14 statements require reverse coding. The statements characterize the respondents' beliefs concerning various aspects of sexuality – both those that are directly linked with psychical needs, relationships, feelings, and those which concern the physical side of sexuality (sexual drive, body awareness, gender).

The research was conducted from 22 March 2021 to 6 April 2021, with the help of an anonymous online questionnaire, whose components were the aforementioned questionnaires. The research used random selection of the research sample. The invitation to fill in the questionnaire was uploaded on social media. 710 respondents took part in the research. They were all late adolescents (aged 18–22). Finally, there were 312 completely filled questionnaires used in the research analysis (a significantly smaller number of complete questionnaires could be linked with a vast range of the research). There were 282 female respondents constituting 90.38% of the research sample, and 30 men constituting 9.62% of the research sample. 144 respondents (46.15%) lived in the countryside, whereas 168 of them (53.85%) were city inhabitants. The statistical programme Statistica was used during the analysis of the research results coded in the 5-point Likert scale. There was a one-factor variance analysis performed (ANOVA test) and correlation coefficients were calculated for selected variables.

Analysis of the research results

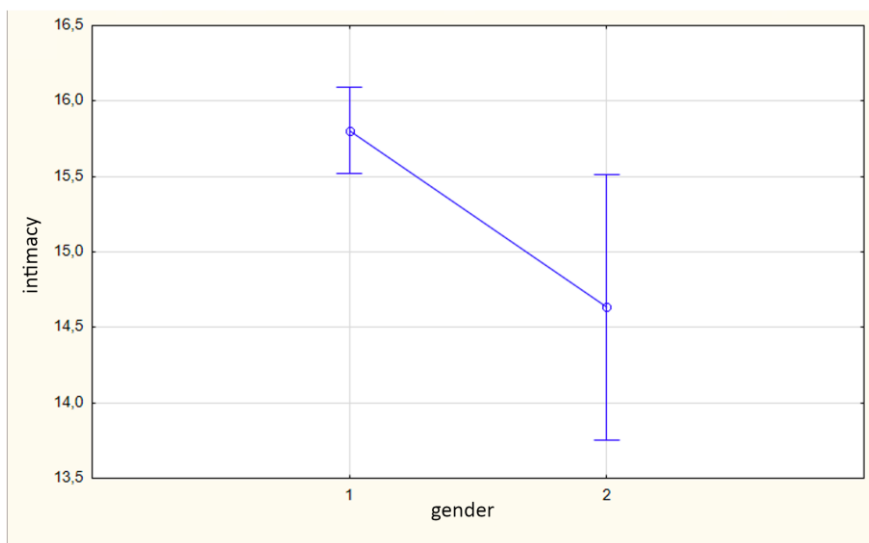
The analysis of the research results shows that the adolescents favoured the following forms of time structuring: *intimacy*, *pastimes* and *withdrawal*. The last place was occupied by *games*.

As the research shows, the respondents' ability level of building intimate relations has a high mean value. Therefore, it can be concluded that young people, to a large extent, declare the ability to build intimate relationships within the meaning of transactional analysis.

Considering the above, there was further analysis performed and it was established that gender significantly correlates with building intimate relationships. The result obtained within this range was significantly higher among the women than among the men. On the other hand, intimacy does not correlate with such variables as age and place of residence.

The relation shown above may derive from gender developmental differences in the period of adolescence. Most probably, young women might possess bigger emotional maturity than young men. Due to that, women in the adolescence period find it easier to develop intimate relationships. It may also be connected with a declarative nature of the research. Women are to a higher extent

focused on relationships and empathy. They find it also easier to admit it during the research. In society, there are stereotypes of “tough men” and “emotional women”. Probably due to that fact, men find it harder than women to declare functioning in this form of time structuring.



Graph 1

The respondents' gender and building intimate relationships (N = 312; p = 0.01360)

Source: own research.

As for time structuring forms, the research shows that the strongest relation occurs between sexual awareness, withdrawal and activity. The higher sexual awareness of an adolescent, the bigger the tendency to withdraw. At the same time, the less sexual awareness there is, the more willingness there is to act.

Table 1

Time structuring of the respondents, their sexual awareness and its categories (N = 312; p < 0.05)

SEXUAL AWARENESS	WAYS OF TIME STRUCTURING		
	Withdrawal	Rituals	Activity
Sexual awareness – sum of values	0.12	0.06	-0.14
Stereotypes and myths	0.03	-0.03	-0.15
Need of intimacy and building relationships	0.16	0.14	-0.01

Source: own research.

The table above demonstrates that sexual awareness in its general dimension correlates with withdrawal, i.e. the higher sexual awareness is, the bigger withdrawal can be noticed among the respondents. It may be related to the fact that young people possessing vast knowledge do not feel the need to broaden it and experience all kinds of sensations. Moreover, the very time of conducting the research might have had an impact on its results. The studies were carried out during the pandemic of COVID-19, when the whole society might have favoured withdrawal by limiting social contact and changing everyday routine used so far, which should be considered as a significant disturbance variable.

The research also uncovered the relation between sexual awareness and activity, i.e. the higher the respondents' sexual awareness is, the lower activity level can be noticed. This correlation might complete the aforementioned link between sexual awareness and withdrawal. Activity can be understood as an opposite of withdrawal. The detected correlation can be explained by young people's willingness to develop and broaden their knowledge. The respondents in the adolescence period making their first steps in the adult world might be willing to learn more by contacts with others.

As it has been mentioned before, the questionnaire used in the research makes it possible to diversify sexual awareness into its physical and psychological dimension. It shows, among others, to what extent a given respondent makes use of myths and stereotypes concerning sexuality (diversely coded statements), and shows the respondents' declarations regarding their need of intimacy and developing relationships with other human beings. Significant correlations can be discerned there. It turned out that the less the respondents use myths and stereotypes, the more active they are. It may point to the fact that following myths and stereotypes hinders adolescents' activity, and the less they use them, the more they are encouraged to act and explore.

On the other hand, the bigger the need for intimacy and developing relationships is, the bigger the respondents' tendency to withdraw is. The data analysis shows that although the respondents demonstrate the need for intimacy and developing relationships, they remain passive in satisfying it. This relation may be linked both with the respondents' age and the pandemic situation of that time, which might leave its trace in the way society functions for many years to come. At the same time, the respondents who are late adolescents strive for individualisation by the development of their thinking capacities. Their developmental challenge is ego consolidation and integration as they want to become independent, which might require an increased intrapsychic process (M. Beisert, 2006, p. 146). This might result in resorting to withdrawal more frequently. Probably the respondents do not possess a strong and autonomous Adult ego state which would allow for satisfying their needs.

The next revealed relation shows that the bigger the need for intimacy and developing relationships is, the bigger the respondents' tendency to use rituals is. This correlation is somehow connected with the previous one. The respondents feel lack of intimacy and building relationships, and, at the same time, try to satisfy these needs via rituals that to a great extent derive from the Parent ego state and are realized from the Child ego state, without functioning autonomy deriving from a strong Adult ego state. These young respondents are still in the phase of ego consolidation. They might also have difficulties in building a close and involving relationship. The research results show that the respondents use certain patterns such as rituals instead of letting themselves be spontaneously close with another person, which is the key of intimacy.

As far as time structuring methods such as pastimes, games and intimacy are concerned, the research shows no statistically relevant relations with sexual awareness.

Conclusions and Summary

The results of the conducted research let us form the following general conclusions:

- The research shows that the adolescents' sexual awareness reaches quite a high level, similarly to their ability of building intimate relationships in the light of transactional analysis. Despite these satisfactory results concerning sexual awareness and intimacy, these variables do not correlate with each other.
- Among time structuring forms chosen by the adolescents, intimacy occupies the first place. The data analysis shows that young people, to a large extent, build intimate relationships. The other time structuring forms preferred by them are pastimes and withdrawal. Games were chosen the least frequently.
- The research shows that gender significantly correlates with building intimate relationships. The result obtained in this area was much higher for women than for men. On the other hand, intimacy does not correlate with such variables like age and place of residence.
- As for time structuring forms, the research shows that the strongest relation occurs between sexual awareness, withdrawal and activity. The higher an adolescent's sexual awareness is, the bigger the tendency to withdrawal is. At the same time, the less sexual awareness there is, the more willingness there is to act.

In conclusion, it can be stated that there are statistical relations between sexual awareness and a dominating way of time structuring chosen by the re-

spondents. The research shows the benefits of young people's sound knowledge. A positive correlation with withdrawal might point to the fact that some sexually aware young people might avoid or deliberately resign from relationships with other people. This is compatible with worldly trends showing that nowadays young people decide on relationships much later or completely give them up. However, choosing such a lifestyle does not belie their sexual awareness. The research presented might even suggest that life without any stable relationship is a conscious choice of these young people. On the other hand, a negative correlation with activity might point to the fact that sexually aware people that decide to build a relationship might be more geared towards relationship, experiencing things and consonance with one's partner than towards common realization of their goals. The research might also show that when a young person follows myths and stereotypes that are the source of false information, their activity and willingness to explore can be hindered. An adolescent might face false information alone, which most probably distorts their real perception of the world. It should be also emphasized that the respondents demonstrate the need for intimacy and building relationships, but they remain passive in satisfying them, which is shown by positive correlations with withdrawal and rituals. These are safe substitute forms of real contact, however, it seems probable that they do not satisfy real needs of adolescents.

In the author's opinion, it would be worth equipping adolescents with sound knowledge, which contributes to understanding one's needs, demonstrates safe forms of satisfying them, and provides information about the surrounding world and relations occurring in it. Thanks to that, a young person should be more aware of what could help them in building satisfying future. The research conducted is the first attempt to combine the matters presented, constituting an interesting starting point for further exploration, both in the area of time structuring and sexual awareness.

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Świadomość seksualna a strukturalizacja czasu rozumiana zgodnie z założeniami analizy transakcyjnej. Raport z badań

Streszczenie

Artykuł stanowi raport z badań prowadzonych w oparciu o koncepcję strukturalizacji czasu w ujęciu analizy transakcyjnej. Autorka szuka odpowiedzi na pytanie o związek łączący umiejętność budowania relacji, szczególnie tych o charakterze intymnym, przez młodych ludzi z ich poziomem świadomości seksualnej. Badania przeprowadzono na próbie 312 osób w wieku 18–22 lata z wykorzystaniem technik kwestionariuszowych. Główny wniosek z badań wskazuje na występowanie korelacji pomiędzy pięcią respondentów a budowaniem relacji o charakterze intymnym. Pomimo tego, iż nie wykryto związku pomiędzy poziomem świadomości seksualnej a budowaniem relacji intymnych przez adolescentów, to ujawniono jej związek z innymi sposobami strukturalizacji czasu.

Słowa kluczowe: analiza transakcyjna, strukturalizacja czasu, świadomość seksualna, intymność, dorastanie, relacje.