



Aleksandra Chmielińska

ORCID: <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-2362-6546>

University of Lodz, Poland; e-mail: aleksandra.chmielinska@uni.lodz.pl

Monika Modrzejewska-Świgulska

ORCID: <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-3133-0443>

University of Lodz, Poland; e-mail: monika.modrzejewska@uni.lodz.pl

Women's Life (Re)decisions. Report from Biographical Narratives

<http://dx.doi.org/10.12775/PBE.2020.005>

Abstract

The article is an introductory note from biographical narrative studies among women who declare making significant life changes. The authors wish to examine and describe the mechanisms of life re-decisions whose purpose is a multi-aspect reorientation of one's life, and which was interpreted as the processes of making significant ideological, emotional, spiritual, relational, and professional changes or decisions involving a radical change of one's environment. Qualitative data was obtained by means of narrative interviews and all the tools used to study the changes in biographical perspective of the Life Lines were also applied by the authors in building a hypothetical model of life re-decisions, which describe four tips of re-decisions. Studies were conducted from 2016 to 2019, in various Polish cities: Lodz, Warsaw, Cracow, Gdansk.

Keywords: biographical studies, life re-decisions, women, life changes, model.

Introduction

What inspired us to do biographical narratives research into the processes of life changes was a coverage in one of the Polish magazines¹. The heroines of that

¹ This is a magazine that has been published in Poland for many years and has many regular readers.

coverage were 25 women who “made their lives up”, “transformed their passion into profession”, “live the way they have always wanted to live”, “are not any richer now but free and happy”, “follow their own path”, “changed their lives”, “made decisions that would transform the shape of their to-date life”. Those women’s biographies, however brief and recalling only the facts and generally outlining the change made, did not allow us to recreate biographical processes of life changes that intrigued us the most. Thus we decided to find them and interview again, so as to understand what the categories into which they were placed, mean to them. We became curious about the stories we would hear and what were the courses of life re-decision processes that led to the significant life changes mentioned in the coverage.

Life changes may occur by way of continuity or in leaps and bounds. The former are a consequence of previous and current aspirations, development tendencies, or the pursued professional and personal activities. The latter type of life changes takes the form of a revolution, a turning point in life, a major/momentous life change. Consequently, in biographical research, the reconstructed mechanisms and processes of life changes include both:

- the gradual, predictable changes, which form part of the daily life, following traditional and anticipated life patterns as well as,
- the unpredictable, surprising ones which radically alter the routine order of the subject’s life so far. The research into life re-decisions is associated with the latter category of life changes (Nowak-Dziemianowicz, 2006; Giddens, 2007; Zajac & Kos, 2013; Modrzejewska-Świgulska, 2014; Chmielińska, 2017; Szmidt, 2017).

In lifespan psychology, sudden life changes were described as *Gauguin syndrome*. It was identified based on the following defining criteria: it is associated with mid-life crisis; subjects pursue new activities which give their life meaning (e.g. ones associated with creative, artistic activity); it is accompanied by the redefinition of one’s own weltan schauung; decisions are made autonomously, without any family involvement. The changes may be surprising to one’s immediate environment, as the subject’s lifestyle changes drastically in terms of their views, occupation and physical surroundings. The syndrome is believed to result from the situation in which one is disappointed with one’s current life, has a negative interpretation of his/her own life, wishes to live life according to his/her own scenario, he/she experiences deteriorating life circumstances (e.g. financially, interpersonally, professionally) (Oleś & Kłosok-Ścibich, 2009; Oleś, 2015; 2019).

By contrast, sociologists and educationalists who conduct biographical research refer to Fritz Schütze's theoretical and investigative framework. The author distinguishes four basic biographical process structures to organise one's life story: biographical action schemes, trajectories of suffering, institutional expectation patterns and creative metamorphoses of biographical identity. From the above list, the concept closest to life re-decisions appears to be the notion of metamorphoses of biographical identity interpreted as momentous life changes manifested through the initiation of a new path of development, engagement in new and meaningful activities. Changes are achieved via work on self-improvement and on one's own potential, or by courageously embracing emergent creative life opportunities. According to this concept, man's biography may be perceived as a sequential combination of biographical process structures (Schütze, 2012).

As part of biographical research into changes which prove significant and surprising for the subject's immediate environment, investigators look for the pivotal events and people that determine the course of the subject's life. In literature, such biographical turning points are referred to as defining moments, life's thresholds, creative transgressions (Kozielecki, 1997; 2007), epiphanies (Denzin, 1989), or crystallizing experiences (Walters & Gardner, 1986). The re-decisions discussed in this article are closest to the categories of epiphany and crystallizing experiences. They are defined as events which divide one's life into the periods before and after such momentous experiences. They are events and encounters with people, ideas, religious systems, which inspire changes and subsequently result in fundamental transformations of one's perception of themselves and the world, redefinition of one's values which leads to a change of the current life routine, views, or career path. An epiphany may be a difficult experience, but it strengthens the subject and inspires him/her to undertake new developmental challenges, it often appears in a moment of crisis and while suffering its consequences (Denzin, 1989; Miller & Baca, 2001; McDonald, 2005; Gibbs, 2011; Kafar, 2011; Szmids, 2017). An interesting suggestion are the types of epiphany put forward by Denzin (1989). Apart from major epiphanies, which fundamentally alter one's life, the researcher distinguishes cumulative epiphanies, which form part of the existing course of life by way of cumulative activities, expanding one's knowledge, investigative or artistic work. The theme of crystallising experiences is present in the research into the biographies of leading artists and their work. Walters and Gardner (1986) distinguish crystallising experiences which define the course of one's creative work, refine it and make the artist more sensitive to new dimensions of creative work (Stasiakiewicz, 1999; Szmids, 2017).

In this study, the authors wish to examine and describe the mechanisms of life re-decisions whose purpose is a multi-aspect reorientation of one's life, and which was interpreted as the processes of making significant ideological, emotional, spiritual, relational, and professional changes or decisions involving a radical change of one's environment. The authors perceive life re-decisions as a process of systemic changes which are: quantitative – the cessation, intensification, minimisation of activities in various areas of life, but more importantly qualitative – the introduction of completely new elements into one's life system which are associated with the redefinition of one's hierarchy of values, beliefs, plans, and the subsequent engagement in new activities.

The aim of this study is not to test or apply the theories concerning the psychology of decision making which analyse the problem of the influence of psychological mechanisms on one's decisions. The authors interpret decisions as an activity resulting from one's personality as well as one's relationships with family, culture, and society. Furthermore, decisions are an existential expression of free will and autonomy, they define one's individuality and uniqueness (Biela, 2014). In the context of this study, particularly noteworthy is the category of decisions which are significant existentially, such as major life decisions (MLD). The most important criteria defining MLD are the following: redefining one's sense of life; as a result, the choice of opportunities which significantly influence one's life; the moment of restructuring one's life and the momentous consequences it involves; orientation towards a long-term goal; perseverance in one's choice and implementing it into life practice (Walesa, 2010; Biela, 2014). Major life decisions are transgressive by nature as they set new development paths, one transcends what he/she is and what he/she possesses. Research into major life changes focuses on their cognitive aspect (Mac-Czarnik, 2000), long-term plans at various stages in life (Rydz, 2001; Rydz & Ramsz, 2003), decisions made within one's family (Biela, 2014), or one's religious choices (Tatala & Walesa, 2016).

Method

Below, the authors present research assumptions and methodological decisions that resulted from them, as well as interpretation of qualitative material. The results of studies are of preliminary outlined typologies and models of re-decisions because we are still in the process of collecting and analysing data.

Research participants

The subject selection criteria included: (1) age – at least 30 years of age, since – based on the development stages of an adult – people at this age reach their full physical and psychological potential, which enables them to become economically independent and responsibly fulfil their family and professional obligations (Harwas-Napierała & Trempała, 2004); (2) a major life change (each woman's personal statement confirming she did change her life significantly); (3) eight of the interviewees were the protagonists of an article in a women's magazine (as mentioned in the introduction); (4) the two remaining interviewees were selected with the use of the snowball recruitment method having been recommended as persons who had made major changes to their lives, each candidate did confirm such nomination (the second subject selection criterion). All participants were from Poland.

Table 1. The changes in the professional sphere

Initial occupation	Interviewee's age (at the time of the interview)	Occupation after transition*
Banking expert/CEO	55 years	Yoga instructor
Artist (easel painting)	45 years	Academic teacher, social science researcher
Lawyer	40 years	Lawyer, photographer, coach
Musician	33 years	Traveller, guide
Publishing specialist, corporate marketing	36 years	Traveller, author
Marketing specialist for Polish National Television (TVP)	30 years	Guide
Corporate accountant	52 years	Rural tourism homestead owner, cheesemaker
Psychologist	46 years	Graphic artist/illustrator
Engineer	75 years	Accountant
Lawyer	45 years	Confectioner, cafe owner, confectionery instructor

* The process of career changes will be discussed in a separate article.

Source: Authors' research.

Research instruments

As researchers with quality history, we wanted to concentrate on unique biographical experiences and their meaning when making life changing decisions.

We assumed that to achieve our aim, we should collect stories on lives, which would help us capture the processes, i.e. chains of situations, interactions and activities (reactive and pro-active ones) that are inscribed into a biography, and also the social context (Bertaux, 2012). That is why the attempt to understand life re-decision processes required a biographical narrative approach, which concentrates on uniqueness but also includes historical and social conditions (Lalak, 2010; Gibbs, 2011).

While choosing a research approach and the methods of collecting data, we were driven by two ontological assumptions in any biographical-narrative research: (1) social reality is of process character, whereas biographical processes are of systemic nature; (2) there is a certain compliance/homology between a spontaneous narration about life and its actual course (Urbaniak-Zajac & Kos, 2013). The above assumptions required certain appropriate methods of collecting data that would allow us to become familiar with the perspective and system of symbols for the interlocutor, and – as a consequence – create a theory based on biographical data. We decided to apply qualitative research tools: the basic method of collecting data was based on a narrative interview (Wengraf, 2001; Kvale, 2010). It was supplemented with a technique such as Life Line, which has a form of a sheet that was filled in independently by the studied women.

1. Narrative interview would always begin with the following encouragement to tell a story/respond to the questions: *Please, think about what breakthrough moments you can distinguish in your professional and personal life. By breakthrough moments we understand both good and bad decisions, events or choices which you made while making a change significant for you. A change that had a major influence on who you are today and what you do professionally, and a change thanks to which you were able to create space in your life to help you experience something absolutely new in your life.*

2. Life Line was based on marking the age of the narrators on a time line and the moments/events that they thought were breakthrough ones in their biographies. The following constituted guiding questions:

- *Describe the professional path that led you to the place you are in today.*
- *What did you have to do to find yourself in this place? What were the specific activities you undertook?*
- *Which of the events appeared as most important ones when you look at them from today's perspective?*
- *What obstacles did you have to face on your way?*
- *Do you see any similarities or differences between you and other women of your generation?*

- *What do you consider really important for the life change you have made?*

We met our narrators in places of their choice (e.g. Łódź, Warszawa, Kraków, Gdańsk in Poland). Interviews lasted between 2 to 4 hours, we would contact them additionally through e-mails or telephone each time some questions or doubts occurred. Interviews were recorded using a Dictaphone and then copied. The analysis was performed on the already prepared transcript.

Procedure for the interpretation of the research material

The basis for the interpretation of results was an in-depth analysis of the whole series of narrative interviews. Interpretation was three-fold, basing on the suggestion of Denzin (1989): (1) analysis of narration on one life story/case interpretation; (2) collecting group narrations that would be grouped around common biographical threads; (3) comparative analysis of life stories of the studied people. The stories we heard were analysed basing on biographical categories that were reconstructed from subsequent life stories of the women. The categories below serve as key words that would saturate the theory of life re-decisions:

- diachrony (concerns events in the report that were prior to and following it, biographical time) and synchrony of life events (simultaneous process taking place during a certain period of time);
- recurring life processes, frequently recurring mechanisms of life changes;
- people and key/breakthrough events understood as those that would re-define women's biographies;
- life aims/tasks realised throughout life and the methods of their realisation;
- choices (criteria of making decisions), alternatives.

While making analyses, individual stories of life were inscribed into a broader historical context so that the issues connected with the courses of individual biographies could be related to appropriate social/group contexts. We treated those women's stories as descriptions of historical time experiences, as reports on social changes, which would mark biographies of people born at a similar time (e.g. economic recessions, system changes, marital or sexuality issues, problems of making a living at given time) (Olesen, 2009; Dubas, 2011).

The procedure applied in the analysis of the interview transcripts as a co-operative study by two researchers (Charmaz, 2009):

1. Researchers' individual work:
 - initial coding – primary hypotheses regarding each subsequent narrative.
2. Joint analytical and interpretational work:
 - formulation of hypotheses, comparison of the conclusions as well as their substantiation with data (e.g. frequently appearing statements, codes, contexts in which threads appeared);
 - focused coding – the use of the most frequent codes, hypotheses regarding the researched subject, and therefore vital given the assumptions and aims of the study.

Results of research. Model of life re-decisions

The presented model was created basing on a certain repetitive scheme in the narration of the women, which occurred rather frequently while reading the transcript and which is their way of describing the undertaken decisions. This recurrence concerned primarily the word choice, appearance of certain elements in biographies, recalling people who had some impact on life or acknowledging the sources of their own efficiency. The model of re-decision was built on the basis of a category of human autonomy and can be inscribed in the psycho-social cycle of development. Seen as such, any re-decision is understood as making a change that would metaphorically begin the exit from a known story through: obtaining feminine maturity in order to achieve something new; changing the previous model and lifestyle; rejecting family patterns, e.g. when it comes to choosing a career; breaking the vicious circle of the same habits and undertaking the same decisions when despite the illusion of being different, a person always obtains the same results. Making a change that is of a re-decision character makes a person leave their comfort zone, is connected with a temporary lack of stability in a relation, emotion or in finances. Simultaneously, the same change makes the following ones much easier because they are in compliance with a person who makes them. These are ambiguous changes because they cannot be determined as good or bad ones in the context of life, because they are both risky and liberating, connected with maturing and transitioning from others towards ourselves, from losing something/somebody and going towards recovering yourself. A change of a re-decision character leaves also a very obvious mark in the environment of a person who makes it because it is connected with questioning previous order of life. These are such changes that are met with raised eyebrows and disbelief or even indignation of people

who may feel cheated while saying: “I did not know her like that”, “I realized I had known nothing about her”.

The model of life re-decisions (Fig. 1) is based on two dimensions that outline the two directions of development in the autonomy of man: the ability to read your own needs and professional preferences (the *I don't know what I want – I know what I want* dimension) and following that when making decisions (the *Not my own voice – My own voice* dimension)

The first dimension, *I don't know what I want – I know what I want*, creates a dimension from the lack of clearly voiced needs and professional aims to very specific image of one's own needs and professional preferences. In our research, this dimension referred primarily to the decisions connected with choosing education and profession.

The very ending of *I don't know what I want* is marked by the attitude that can be characterized by the following properties:

- divergent and multidirectional path of professional search;
- being open to experiments in various professions, often not consistent, e.g. “it is such a place where you can try out different things and choose later”, “generally, I can't really picture myself in that role permanently”;
- choosing a university major randomly, without bearing in mind one's interest or professional plans, e.g. “my best friend chose the same”; “some-where furthest from home as possible”; “I had no idea what I wanted to do for ages and so I chose something that would let me make up my mind later”; “I started journalism and history, and then traded history for English; I should have done the same with journalism, but it doesn't matter now”;
- making decisions about undertaking a certain job in a situational context, e.g. after meeting someone by chance and agreeing to do what that person asked; undertaking a profession that does not comply with previous education or previous work experience;
- repetitive experience of “learning something from scratch” either due to a lack of qualifications or skills, e.g. frequently enrolling on courses, post graduate studies that would not really follow the previous professional path, e.g. a journalist – a tourist guide: “I started completely from scratch”;
- low persistence in sustaining a decision once made and committing to something for a longer period, which would be manifested in a periodic change of a place of living, work or people with whom a task should be performed, e.g.: “that was fun, I'm off now”, “I gave it up with no regrets”;

- having various professional experiences, frequently giving the impression of “a Jack or Jill of all trades”; combining different interests in one personality, e.g. an engineer, a mathematician, an actress, a poet and a singer in one;
- summary – key resource: courage and high openness to experiences and novelty; limitation: lack of persistence, no continuation in the undertaken decisions, starting many new professional projects without finishing them; challenge: “stick to it”, “persevere”, “see where it leads you”.

The end of *I know what I want* is marked by the attitude characterised by the following properties:

- convergent and unidirectional path of professional search;
- building a professional biography through a narrow specialisation in a particular profession, e.g. “the decision to apply is also some sort of a strong orientation towards performing that profession because it means a lot of time and years, and money, and it’s very time-consuming”;
- re-decisions in a professional biography are not frequent and are usually one-time;
- choosing what major to study considering one’s interests and visualising oneself in a particular profession;
- undertaking any occupation that would remain in compliance with education, choosing a place would be determined by the possibility of further specialisation and education in a given profession;
- experiencing great effortless effort in order to broaden one’s horizons and master the skills heading towards one direction or in order to realise a specific goal and professional scheme. Realising that aim is described as “a cherry on top”, “a crown after years of effort”, “choosing what I’d always wanted to do”;
- summary – key resource: perseverance while continuing an undertaken task, finishing tasks and life projects or devoting to just one; limitation: a problem in interrupting a task despite the lack of pleasure or benefit, inner obligation to finish it off and being consequent in realising one thing; challenge: “change”, “stop it if you don’t want it”, “try something new – experiment”, “quit”.

Another dimension of the model –*not my own voice*– *my own voice*–concerns sources from which those women drew content and ideas for their life. This dimension outlines the origin, the beginning of dreams and wishes, professional aspirations. What is characteristic about those narrations, are two cognitive representations that determine that dimension.

In the first one – *not my own voice* – person takes decisions based on convictions and feelings that come from Significant Others (parents, grandparents, other role models). It is presented throughout the narration in constant recalling of the voices and mottos from the dearest ones: mother/father or family mottos/intergeneration ideas which, as if they were some inner injunction, determine the values, the best mode of conduct and also become an inner imperative when taking decisions. This occurs when a woman, for instance:

- builds up her professional biography in a way that seems an attempt to prove something to their parents, mostly one of them (“secondly, I guess I wanted to prove to myself, to everybody, to my dad, that it had been a good decision to stay, that I hadn’t begun my studies but am doing fine nevertheless”);
- continues and fills up the inter-generation professional pattern, particularly in professions described as “elite”, i.e. as a lawyer or a doctor;
- chooses her university studies under the influence of a person significant to her, someone who “knows better what’s best for her” – “I probably was driven more by my parents’ opinions than my own”.

During the interview, one may have an impression that the person being nearer the end *not my own voice*, uses clichés of certain opinions overheard at home and which were accepted and adopted as her own with no period of “rebellion”, questioning or choosing her own path. There appears a massive clash between *what I want for myself* and *what others want for me* (“this latter element is more mine, it is more that I’d never admitted to my parents that I was preparing for the exam or that I was going to take it”). In this case, **re-decision** is most often parallel, i.e. it means introducing something completely new right next to the main professional path. At the same time, there is something happening in the life of that person, something which allows her to make her dreams come true and be herself, but without giving up the “good” profession/life model, e.g. a professionally active lawyer begins to educate herself towards photography and painting. Another type of a re-decision may be conscious integration and accepting mottos from the significant people/family and combining them with her own. In this case, a change made on the basis of convictions taken from Others would be a re-decision, however, it would have to be made from the perspective of the person’s own experience. Such **re-decision**, metaphorically described in the model as “**coming back home**”, requires stepping away from family, setting off on a journey just to come back changed to a similar model of life, but consciously and as a result of our own choice.

Another end of the dimension – described as *my own voice* – determines the way of conduct based on discovering one's own/individual image of oneself, from which content for life choices as well as professional ones is drawn. Convictions and feeling as to who the woman should become are updated by her in response to her needs, i.e. they are not clichés of convictions and feelings taken from family/role models. The person is driven by her own needs, wishes, fantasies, in other words she is “close to herself”. There are certain characteristic sentences in such a narration: “no one ever told me how to live”, “no one ever travelled in my family before”. Another frequent element in this group of women, is the lack of memories or not including any significant person on their way of life. Such narrations give the impression that the beginning of the idea or a life project grew in that person. This clash is of a different nature to the previous one *not my own voice*, because it is based on not so much the confrontation *mine – not mine*, but on *known – unknown*, which means going not to a better or a worse world, but a different one, a new world (referred to often as quality changes instead of quantity). This “journey into the world” often takes place not just metaphorically. It is characteristic for women from this group to undertake a distant journey and, also rather frequently, live while travelling. **Re-decisions** in this case do not take place in parallel but they are rather **dispersed** possibilities and options, each of whom is within reach. A closure of one story – a life chapter before beginning another one, Recognized Again is a mature type of this re-decision: “that was a moment of great satisfaction, some sort of a great exhaled breath, a sense of beginning a new life path”. Thus, this decision is frequently referred to as **a closing/opening re-decision**.

Not my own voice dimension makes us reflect whether a re-decision is independent, i.e. it is really “something of our own and discovered” or perhaps it is a manifestation of a reverse lifestyle, an activity that is in opposition to a pattern found at home and in strong relation to a rebellious attitude, e.g. “I’ll never be like my mother”. In this case, a re-decision would be the anti-copy and not an autonomous step away from the known system towards something independent.

At the intersection of the two dimensions described above, there are **four categories of re-decisions that create the model of life re-decisions**. They may be treated processively or in a developing manner by placing motion between the quarters, which would show the transformations in female pictures of themselves and in shaping their autonomy. Every category of re-decisions may be treated independently and in a situational way by determining its meaning at a given moment of life and what kind of a process it finishes off or begins.

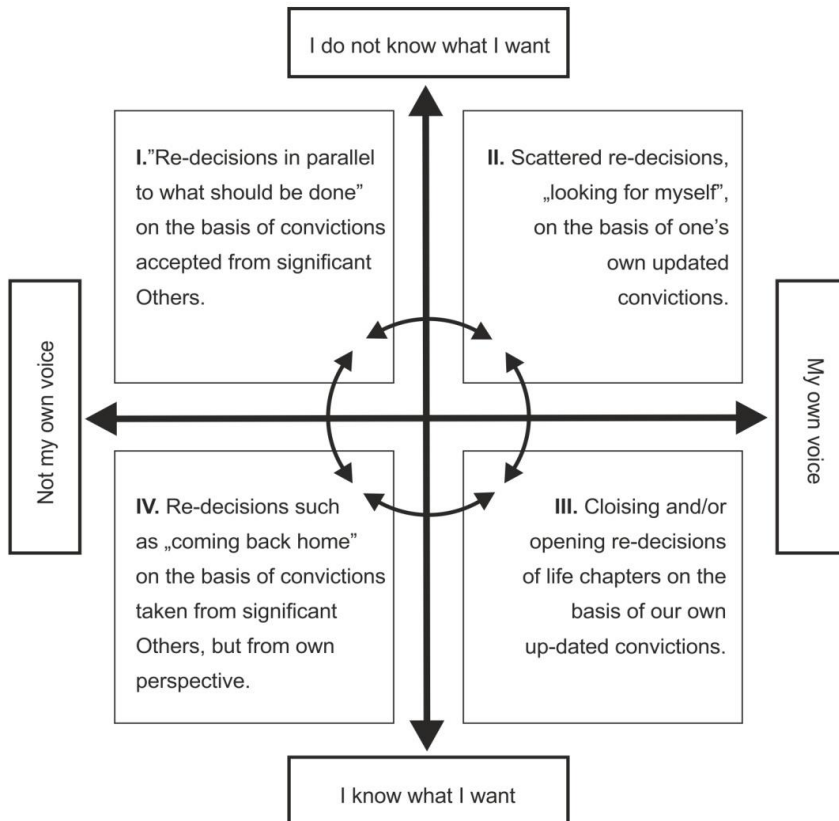


Figure 1. Model of life re-decisions.

Source: Authors' research.

Type one – **parallel re-decisions** – seems less independent and autonomous, they are made within security borders, i.e. next to what is defined and what we feel obliged to do (“because that’s the thing to do, because I’ve been taught so, because that’s the role of a woman in my family”). This stage is filled with family, social and cultural orders and prohibitions, yet not strong enough to prevent a person trying themselves out in a different context.

The second category– **scattered re-decisions** – this is a stage of searching for identity in isolation from others, from the family, from the group, the stage of “personal” wishes being born, often extremely diverse, difficult to reconcile and inconsistent, the numerous examples of which have already been quoted.

This is the stage where a person wants to try out literally everything and it is extremely hard to give up anything, moreover, such a person would love not to commit to anything permanently. This re-decision is more independent than the previous one, yet it is filled with fear of stepping away from the community but also courage to experiment and going into the world, because the world built on the basis of one known scheme is not enough anymore.

The third category – **closing/opening re-decisions** – life/professional chapters, this is the stage where a person allows themselves to exit the old context in a nonconformist way, or enter a completely new context, make a decision not grounded in others but the one close to them and their longing. In all of the narrations, this is the stage which gives courage, the sense of absolute freedom from everything, where a person realizes that “it wasn’t at all difficult”, “I shouldn’t have waited so much time”.

The fourth stage – **“coming back home” re-decisions** – this is integrating one’s own image as opposed to others’ image of ours and among other, the stage of breakthrough decisions, though of a community character. These could be re-decisions thanks to which a woman discovers that she may be independent and free also among other people, in their family.

Summary

From the perspective of life-span psychology and biographical research we refer to in the introduction, it is apparent that in the middle adulthood multi-dimensional actions and biographical threads incompatible with one’s previous lifestyle are the most representative. A growing number of studies on adult developmental psychology, including the authors’ work, show individuals who continue and develop their interests, but also abandon them in favour of new activities (Giddens, 2007; Oleś, 2011). The main tendencies present in the re-decision model discussed here include: the choice of different goals, i. e. ones that are alternative and competitive in comparison to those from the period preceding the re-decision; substitution of familiar activities with completely new ones, requiring the individual to learn from the start; a contrasting/radical change in one’s line of action both in private as well as professional life; coping with life’s difficulties through seeking new options of personal development, instead of the persistence in the advanced context of personal and professional life one has “domesticated” over the years.

An important criterion in the discussed model is the issue of autonomy interpreted as a gradual liberation from environmental pressure and a growing need

for the fulfilment of one's own life project (Dimension *Not my own voice – my own voice*). It confirms our intuition regarding a necessity for systemic thinking about life changes and considering them in the context of a family system as well as their socio-cultural aspect (e.g. generation patterns and tendencies). The family aspect is highly representative in this model with respect to the conclusions:

- In the collected women's biographies, the most significant relationship while making life re-decisions was that between the mother and daughter, in the light of what the narrators identified as a non-existent or extremely poor relationship with a father who was "absent" (either physically or emotionally).
- Among the narrators, there are two types of reaction to the life and career patterns present in their families of origin: continuation/reproduction and oppositional actions undermining those patterns. A question may be asked as to whether the narrators' decisions were fully autonomous, leading them to choose "their own way", and not a result of following a "family myth" or a rebellious, i.e. relational, objection to the pressure exerted by one's family.
- Among the interviewees who had made re-decisions, there were women without their own families, or remaining in a steady, childless relationships. Crucial female research topics can be identified here regarding: the significance of deliberate or unintentional solitariness and childlessness in the process of re-decisions as a choice of an alternative creative life path to replace motherhood or re-decisions as a way to compensate for unattainable/unfulfilled forms of activity with different ones.

Beyond doubt, the re-decision discussed here falls into the category of Major Life Changes as their definition includes the criterion of reevaluation of the meaning of life; a choice of life opportunities which have a significant impact on one's life; restructuring life and assertion of one's decision including its application in life practice (Walesa, 2010; Biela, 2014). Such description matches the general assumptions regarding re-decisions.

The emerging picture of women's lives also appears to coincide with scientific theories on creative attitudes and their categories of *self-actualization* (Davis, 2004), *everyday creativity* (Richards, 2007) (in English-language literature), or *self-creation* in Polish literature². Self-actualisation and self-creation

² The problem of self-creation is discussed more thoroughly in: Aleksandra Chmieleńska, & Monika Modrzejewska-Świągulska (2020), *Spreading Your Wings, Milestones, Deus et Machina*. Self-creation as a process of changing in women's narrations (paper submitted for publication).

processes are typically given a positive meaning and associated with agency and awareness of the fulfilled life tasks. Self-creation is perceived by authors as part of the life-long development of one's personality and control over the course of one's own life, it is described as the formulation of the self (self-formation), creation of one's own life path, self-realization (Uszyńska-Jarmoc, 2007; Pietrański, 2008; Szmidt, 2013; Chmielińska & Modrzejewska-Świgulska, 2020).

The presented model is currently applied by the authors in training and educational practice which focuses on the problem of biographical self-creation, fulfilment of one's dreams and the creation of one's own well-being among women.

References

- Bertaux, D. (2012). Analiza pojedynczych przypadków [Case Studies (*au cas par cas*)]. In: K. Kaźmierska (Ed.), *Metoda biograficzna w socjologii* [Biographical Method in Sociology], (pp. 309–333). Kraków: Zakład Wydawniczy NOMOS.
- Berne, E. (2013). *Dzień dobry... I co dalej* [What Do You Say After You Say Hello?]. Poznań: Dom Wydawniczy Rebis.
- Biela, A. (2014). Decyzje w rodzinie w interpretacji nauk psychologicznych i ekonomii behawioralnej [Family Decision Making in the Interpretation of Psychological Sciences and of Behavioral Economics]. *Polskie Forum Psychologiczne*, 19(22), 229–242, doi: 10.14656/PFP20140204.
- Charmaz, K. (2009). *Teoria ugruntowana. Praktyczny przewodnik po analizie jakościowej* [A Practical Guide Through Qualitative Analysis]. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN.
- Chmielińska, A. (2017). *Dynamika transgresji twórczych. Studia przypadków pedagogów* [The Dynamics of Creative Transgression. Case Studies of Educators]. Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego.
- Chmielińska, A., & Modrzejewska-Świgulska, M. (2020). *Spreading Your Wings, Milestones, Deus et Machina*. [Self-Creation as a Process of Changing in Women's narrations] (paper submitted for publication).
- Denzin, N.K. (1989). *Interpretative Biography*. Newbury Park: Sage Publications, doi: 10.4135/9781412984584.
- Davis, G. A. (2004). *Creativity is Forever*. Dubuque: KENDALL/HUNT Publishing Company.

- Dubas, E. (2011). Jak opracowywać materiał narracyjno-biograficzny? (Propozycja) [How to Elaborate on Narrative-Biographical Material? (A Proposal)]. In: E. Dubas, & W. Świtalski (Eds.), *Uczenie się z (własnej) biografii* [Learning from (Own) Biography], (pp. 241–247). Łódź, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego.
- Gibbs, G. (2011). *Analizowanie danych jakościowych* [*Analyzing Qualitative Data*]. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN.
- Giddens, A. (2007). *Nowoczesność i tożsamość. „Ja” i społeczeństwo w epoce późnej nowoczesności* [*Modernity and Self-Identity. Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*]. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN.
- Harwas-Napierała, B., & Trempała, J. (2004). *Psychologia rozwojowa człowieka. Charakterystyka okresów życia człowieka* [*Developmental Psychology. Characteristic of Human Life Periods*]. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN.
- Kafar, M. (2011). Biograficzne epifanie w kontekście tworzenia podstaw jakościowego kolektywu myślowego [Biographical Epiphanies in the Context of Laying the Foundations of Qualitative Thought Collective]. In: M. Kafar (Ed.), *Biografie naukowe. Perspektywa interdyscyplinarna* [Scientific Biographies. Interdisciplinary Perspective], (pp. 37–66). Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego.
- Kozielecki, J. (1997). *Transgresja i kultura* [*Transgression and Culture*]. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Akademickie Żak.
- Kozielecki, J. (2007). *Psychotransgresjonizm. Nowy kierunek psychologii* [*Psychotransgressionism. A New Direction in Psychology*]. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Akademickie Żak.
- Kvale, S. (2010). *Prowadzenie wywiadów* [*Doing Interviews*]. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN.
- Lalak, D. (2010). *Życie jako biografia. Podejście biograficzne w perspektywie pedagogicznej* [*Life as a Biography. Biographical Approach in Pedagogy*]. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Akademickie Żak.
- Mac-Czarnik, L. (2000). *Procesy poznawcze w planowaniu własnego życia u młodzieży: badania rozwojowe osób w wieku od 12 do 25 lat* [*Cognitive Processes in Planning Own Life in Young People: Developmental Studies of People Aged 12 to 25 Years*]. Rzeszów: Wydawnictwo WSP.
- McDonald, M.G. (2005). *Epiphanies: An Existential, Philosophical and Psychological Inquiry*. Sidney: University of Technology.
- Miller, W.C., & Baca, C.J. (2001). *Quantum Change: When Epiphanies and Sudden Insights Transform Ordinary Lives*. New York: The Guilford Press, doi: 10.1080/00091380109601812.

- Modrzejewska-Świgulska, M. (2014). *Twórczość codzienna w narracjach pedagogów* [Everyday Creativity in Teacher's Narrations]. Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego.
- Nowak-Dziemianowicz, M. (2006). Czy świat człowieka ma postać narracji? O możliwości badania, rozumienia i zmiany [Does the Human World Have a Narrative Form? The Possibility of Research, Understanding and Change]. *Teraźniejszość – Człowiek – Edukacja*, 4, 37–47.
- Oleś, P.K. (2015). *Psychologia człowieka dorosłego* [Adult Psychology]. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN.
- Oleś, P.K. (2019). The Paul Gauguin Syndrome: A Great Life Change. In: I. Lebuda, & V.P. Glăveanu (Eds.), *The Palgrave Handbook of Social Creativity Research* (pp. 317–334). Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, doi: 10.1007/978-3-319-95498-1_20.
- Oleś, P.K., & Kłosok-Ścibich, M. (2009). Syndrom Gauguina – zmiana tożsamości czy mit? [Gauguin Syndrome – the Change of Identity or Myth?]. *Psychologia Rozwojowa*, 1(14), 9–25.
- Olsen, V. (2009). Feministyczne badania jakościowe u progu milenium. Zarys i wyzwania [The Qualitative Feminist Research on the Threshold of the Millennium. The Outline and Challenges]. In: N. K. Denzin, & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Metody badań jakościowych* [The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research], (pp. 341–398). Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN.
- Pietrasiniński, Z. (2008). *Ekspansja pięknych umysłów. Nowy Renesans i ożywcza autokreacja* [The Expansion of Beautiful Minds. The New Renaissance and Self-creation]. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo CIS.
- Richards, R. (2007). *Everyday Creativity: Our Hidden Potential*. In: R. Richards (Ed.), *Everyday Creativity and New Views of Human Nature. Psychological, Social, and Spiritual Perspectives* (pp. 25–53). Washington DC: American Psychological Association, doi: 10.1037/11595-000.
- Rydz, E. (2001). Plany życiowe młodzieży w aspekcie antycypacyjno-realizacyjnym [The Life Plans of Young People in Anticipation and Implementation Aspect]. *Psychologia Rozwojowa*, 6(3–4), 289–307.
- Rydz, E., & Ramsz, J. (2003). Przedmiot decyzji życiowo doniosłych. Badania rozwojowe osób od 12 do 80 roku życia [The Subject Matter of Life-important Decisions. Developmental Studies of People Aged 12 to 80 Years]. *Psychologia Rozwojowa*, 8(2–3), 71–81.
- Schütze, F. (2012). Analiza biograficzna ugruntowana empirycznie w autobiograficznym wywiadzie narracyjnym. Jak analizować autobiograficzne wywiady narracyjne [Em-

- pirical Based Biographical Analysis in an Autobiographical Narrative Interview. How to Analyze Autobiographical Narrative Interviews]. In: K. Kaźmierska (Ed.), *Metoda biograficzna w socjologii* [Biographical Method in Sociology], (pp. 141–278). Kraków: Zakład Wydawniczy NOMOS.
- Stasiakiewicz, M. (1999). *Twórczość i interakcja* [*Creativity and Interaction*]. Poznań: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu im. A. Mickiewicza.
- Szmidt, K.J. (2013). *Pedagogika twórczości* [*Pedagogy of Creativity*]. Sopot: Gdańskie Wydawnictwo Psychologiczne.
- Szmidt, K.J. (2017). *Edukacyjne uwarunkowania rozwoju kreatywności* [*Educational Conditions for the Development of Creativity*]. Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego.
- Tatała, M., & Walesa, Cz. (2016). Religijne decyzje życiowo doniosłe w okresie wczesnej, średniej i późnej dorosłości [Life-important Religious Decisions in Early, Middle and Late Adulthood]. *Horyzonty Psychologii*, 4, 15–29.
- Urbaniak-Zajac, D., & Kos, E. (2013). *Badania jakościowe w pedagogice* [*Qualitative Research in Pedagogy*]. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo naukowe PWN.
- Uszyńska-Jarmoc, J. (2007). *Od twórczości potencjalnej do autokreacji w szkole* [*From the Potential Creativity to Self-creation at School*]. Białystok: Trans Humana.
- Walesa, Cz. (2010). Zasady dokonywania decyzji życiowo doniosłych [The Principles of Making Life-important Decisions]. *Zeszyty Naukowe Wyższej Szkoły Ekonomii i Innowacji w Lublinie*, 1, pp. 149–165.
- Walters, J., & Gardner, H. (1986). The Crystallizing Experience: Discovering a Intellectual Gift. In: R.J. Sternberg, & J. Davidson (Eds.), *Conceptions of Giftedness* (pp 306–330). New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Wengraf, T. (2001). *Qualitative Research Interviewing*. London–Thousand Oaks–Delhi: SAGE Publications, doi: 10.4135/9781849209717.