

# The Phenomenon of Atrophy of the Role Among Working Students and Its Determinants



**Łukasz Kutylko,**  
PhD, Faculty of Economics and Sociology,  
University of Łódź, Poland  
lukasz.kutylo@uni.lodz.pl

## Abstract

The paper addresses the phenomenon of atrophy of the social role among working full-time students. The term 'atrophy' must be understood as the disappearance of duties binding upon the individual that regulate his/her role. In the case of students, this phenomenon may result in the noticeable decrease of their commitment in education process. For the purpose of identifying the origins of the atrophy, a survey was conducted among undergraduate students (N=306) from Faculty of Economics and Sociology at University of Łódź. The analysis of data acquired from this survey shows that the atrophy may be influenced by the weakening of these cognitive structures that are responsible for the formation of the sense of meaning, sense of belonging and belief about compliance with these duties by others. In addition, it seems that impact on atrophy has an intensity of students' social life.

**Keywords:** atrophy, higher education, social norms, social role, students.

## Introduction

The subject of interest in the paper is the phenomenon of role's atrophy among working students as well as the factors that can potentially influence it. Because atrophy means the disappearance of obligations binding upon individuals fulfilling a given social role, in the case of students it manifests itself in a decrease of commitment and in the non-fulfilment of expectations set towards them. The phenomenon in question seems particularly significant in the case of those young persons who fulfil two social roles at the same time: a student of full-time studies and an employee, dividing their time between professional duties (concerning casual paid work) and university duties. There is a question whether the fulfilment of the former does not occur at the expense of the latter (Parchomiuk, 2017<sup>1</sup>). Although universities have mechanisms organising students' behaviour, it is unclear to what extent they are effective in the case of students performing paid work. As a consequence of the fact that the phenomenon of reconciling work and studies is increasingly frequent, universities face the need to elaborate new strategies that allow them to maintain ties with students and, therefore, affect their involvement in the education process.

The issue of atrophy of the role among working students is reflected in this paper. It presents the results of an empirical study carried out among students of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> year (undergraduate studies) of the Faculty of Economics and Sociology of the University of Łódź in 2017. In the first part, I focused on theoretical issues concerning the phenomenon of atrophy. In the second part, I dealt with methodological issues. In the third part,

<sup>1</sup> Parchomiuk, M., Zubrzycka-Maciąg, T. (2017). Pracujący studenci. Wybrane korelaty konfliktu i wzbogacenia. Forum Oświatowe, vol. 29(1), 149-166.

I presented the results of the study, and in the fourth, I interpreted them. The paper is concluded with a summary containing general reflections.

### The atrophy of the social role of the student

The term “atrophy” should be understood as the disappearance of obligations binding upon individuals playing a given social role. This phenomenon manifests itself, among others, in the non-fulfilment of social expectations that are expressed towards them or in the decrease of their involvement. Although we have become accustomed to looking at human behaviour from the nominalist perspective, treating them as a consequence of individual processes in this way, this perspective is not only superficial but fundamentally false in the case of socially important activities that are normatively regulated by the society. Atrophy is a good example of this. Because this phenomenon means the deregulation of the given social role, its reasons should be attributed not only to the individual, but mainly to the social environment in which he/she functions.

Assuming that atrophy manifests itself in the disappearance of obligations inscribed in a given social role, we should begin by focusing on what these obligations mean. This concept implies social norms. Before I start reflecting on them, it is worth realising the ambiguity of this concept, which results not only from its common use in colloquial speech, but also from a multitude of definitions existing within the scope of particular branches of science that often significantly differ from one another (Bicchieri 2005<sup>1</sup>, 2010<sup>2</sup>). In this paper, I have assumed that the social norm is a set of expectation formulated by the society towards the individual occupying a given social position or functioning in a certain social context. More importantly, this expectation becomes institutionalised and ultimately turns into a pattern of behaviour — a pattern for which a certain social consensus exists (Hechter, 2001<sup>3</sup>, Horne, 2001<sup>4</sup>, Sztompka, 2012<sup>5</sup>).

The social role consists of a series of such institutionalised expectations and instructions how it should be played (Loudfoot, 1972<sup>6</sup>, Merton 1957<sup>7</sup>). These social dispositions are characterised by various levels of detail, thereby creating space for individual interpretations and, to some extent, making it possible to experiment with the role (Bandura, 1986<sup>8</sup>, Turner, 1996<sup>9</sup>). In the case of students, these expectations can be formulated both by the university and by various groups in which they function. What bears relevance to our considerations, is not any kind of obligations set towards students, but obligations related to their education and their process of acquiring knowledge, skills and competence. Decisive norms in this respect, which are responsible for the student's involvement in learning and guide his/her activity to the education process, not only make it possible to fulfil individual plans, e.g. involving the will to obtain higher education, but also to achieve collective goals (e.g., concerning the formation or reproduction of the elite, or providing members of the community with relevant qualifications). When considered in this context, atrophy means the disappearance of these standards that put the student under an obligation to attend and participate actively in classes or to become familiar with the literature of the subject required within a given course. This phenomenon makes the education process difficult or impossible. Because norms being in the centre of our attention are a social rather than individual product, origins of the atrophy should rather be sought in the environment in which the role is played.

An element of essential importance for compliance with norms by members of the society is the institutionalisation process that gives sense to a certain social expectation, and the expectation itself is sanctioned and disseminated. In the case of students, an important role in this process is played by universities, which have relevant mechanisms of social control at their disposal (Braxton, 2010<sup>10</sup>). Among them, we can distinguish discursive mechanisms — which are probably more important because they

<sup>1</sup> Bicchieri, C. (2005). *The grammar of society: The nature and dynamics of social norms*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>2</sup> Bicchieri, C. (2010). Norms, preferences and conditional behavior. *Politics, Philosophy & Economics*, 9(3), 297-313.

<sup>3</sup> Hechter, M., Opp, K. (2001). Introduction. In M. Hechter, K. Opp (eds.), *Social Norms* (pp. xii-xiii). New York: Russel Sage.

<sup>4</sup> Horne, Ch. (2001). Sociological perspectives on the emergence of norms. In M. Hechter, K. Opp (Eds.), *Social Norms* (p. 5). New York: Russel Sage.

<sup>5</sup> Sztompka, P. (2012). Normy społeczne i ich respektowanie. In G. Mazurkiewicz (ed.), *Jakość edukacji. Różnorodne perspektywy* (pp. 180-184). Kraków: Wyd. Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego.

<sup>6</sup> Loudfoot, E. M. (1972). The Concept of Social Role. *Philosophy of Social Science*, vol. 2(1), 133-145.

<sup>7</sup> Merton, R. (1957). The Role-Set: Problems in Sociological Theory. *The British Journal of Sociology*, vol. 8(2), pp.110-111.

<sup>8</sup> Bandura, A. (1986). *Social Foundations of Thought and Action*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall.

<sup>9</sup> Turner, J.C. (1999). Some current issues in research on social identity and self-categorization theories. In N. Ellemers, R. Spears (Eds.), *Social identity: context, commitment, content* (pp. 6-34).

<sup>10</sup> Braxton, J.M. (2010). Norms and the work of colleges and universities: Introduction to the special issue — Norms in Academia. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 81(3), 243-250.

produce a sense of meaning among members of the society and, therefore, make it possible to internalise norms — and non-discursive mechanisms (“last chance” mechanisms). Among the former, we can distinguish, e.g., group prototypes that are decisive for the formation of the collective identity and a sense of belonging (Hogg, Reid, 2006<sup>1</sup>; Tajfel, Turner, 1986<sup>2</sup>; Turner et al., 1999<sup>3</sup>). They consist, e.g., of cognitive representations of social norms that allow us to distinguish a given social group (e.g., students of a prestigious university) from other social categories (Reynolds et al., 2014<sup>4</sup>). Other examples of discursive mechanisms are role models that cause the exemplification of social expectations. They provide a description of individuals who should serve as role models along with relevant repertoires of behaviours (Lockwood et al., 2002<sup>5</sup>). Although the media often serve as sources of these models today, we must not forget about teachers and about their impact on students (Braxton et al., 1996<sup>6</sup>). Among non-discursive mechanisms, we can mention social sanctions — these are triggered when the individual fulfils expectations expressed for him/her (positive sanctions) or fails to fulfil them (negative sanctions). They serve as a stimulus (a gratification stimulus or an aversive stimulus) that is supposed to reinforce or correct the behaviour manifested by the individual (Chekroun, 2008<sup>7</sup>). In the literature of the subject, more attention is devoted to negative sanctions — maybe because they surround mainly the norms that are particularly important for the fulfilment of collective goals (Chekroun, Brauer, 2002<sup>8</sup>; Williams, 2007<sup>9</sup>).

<sup>1</sup> Hogg, M.A., Reid, S.A. (2006). Social identity, self-categorization, and the communication of group norms. *Communication Theory*, 16(1), 7-30.

<sup>2</sup> Tajfel, H., Turner, J.C. (1986). The social identity theory of intergroup behavior. In S. Worchel, W.G. Austin (Eds.), *Psychology of intergroup relations* (pp. 7-24). Chicago: Nelson Hall.

<sup>3</sup> Turner, J.C. (1999). Some current issues in research on social identity and ...

<sup>4</sup> Reynolds, K.J., Subaić E., Tindall K. (2014). The problem of behavior change: From social norms to an ingroup focus. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, 10(1), 1-12.

<sup>5</sup> Lockwood, P., Jordan C., Kunda Z. (2002). Motivation by positive and negative role models: Regulatory focus determines who will best inspire us. *J. of Person. & Soc. Psych.*, 83(4), 854-864.

<sup>6</sup> Braxton, J.M., Eimers, M.T., Bayer, A.E. (1996). The Implications of Teaching Norms for the Improvement of Undergraduate Education. *The Journal of Higher Education*, vol. 67(6), 603-625.

<sup>7</sup> Chekroun, P. (2008). Social control behavior: The effects of social situations and personal implication in informal social sanctions. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, 2(6), 2141-2158.

<sup>8</sup> Chekroun, P., Brauer, M. (2002). Reactions to norm violations and the number of bystanders: ... *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 32, 853-867.

<sup>9</sup> Williams, K.D. (2007). Ostracism: The kiss of social death. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, 1, 236-247.

The institutionalisation process is not completely exogenic towards the individual. It has a substantial impact on the formation of intermediary structures — cognitive scripts intermediating between the social expectation formulated towards the individual and his/her actual behaviour. They activate and support certain modes that are ultimately responsible for compliance with social norms. The first of these modes is the personal mode. It consists of structures that give sense to the given activity or the playing of a certain social role. They result not only from the individual's rational calculations — an important role in their formation is played by the society, which, for example, puts more emphasis on some values and depreciates others. More importantly, the personal mode and the structures of which it consists should not be identified with the concept of the personal norm (Schwartz, 1977<sup>10</sup>). Attempts to define this concept in the literature of the subject, which emphasise that this norm is a strictly internal method of regulating the behaviour (Kallgren et al., 2000<sup>11</sup>), seem to be a symptom of excessive reductionism — this norm is usually created as a result of the internalisation of social expectations (Etzioni, 2000<sup>12</sup>). However, even if we take this remark into account, it is worth remembering that this kind of norm can be only one of the consequences of the impact of structures forming the personal mode. They do not need to result in the internalisation of a given pattern of behaviour, but only in its assimilation as an exogenic rule with which we comply because it makes sense and leads to desirable results.

The two other modes include the injunctive mode and the descriptive mode. The former consists of structures that cause us to believe that a given behaviour meets with a certain reaction from the environment. Although the concept of the injunctive norm is present in the literature of the subject (see Cialdini et al. 1990<sup>13</sup>:1015; Lapinski, Rimal, 2005<sup>14</sup>), it does not fully overlap with the term “injunctive mode” or with scripts creating it.

<sup>10</sup> Schwartz, S.H. (1977). Normative influences on altruism. In L. Berkowitz (Ed.), *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* (Vol. 10) (pp. 221-279). New York: Academic Press.

<sup>11</sup> Kallgren, C.A., Reno, R.R., Cialdini, R.B. (2000). A focus theory of normative conduct: When norms do and do not affect behavior. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 26(8), 1002-1012.

<sup>12</sup> Etzioni, A. (2000). Social norms: internalization, persuasion and history. *Law & Society*, 34(1), 157-178.

<sup>13</sup> Cialdini, R.B., Reno, R.R., Kallgren C.A. (1990). A focus theory of normative conduct: Recycling the concept of norms to reduce littering in public places. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 58(6), p.1015.

<sup>14</sup> Lapinski, M.K., Rimal, R.N. (2005). An explication of social norms. *Communication Theory*, 15, 127-147.

The definition of this norm, which assumes that it reflects the individual's belief concerning the kind of behaviour expected from him/her in a given situation, emphasises an important element of norms that is the essence of the mode discussed here — i.e., social responsiveness (both the positive one and the negative one). In turn, the descriptive mode consists of the scripts that cause us to believe to what extent other persons in our environment comply with these institutionalised expectations. Again, this term is not identical to the concept of the descriptive norm (see Cialdini et al. 1990<sup>1</sup>:1015). It only specifies the contradiction existing between expected patterns of behaviour and patterns under fulfilment in the given environment.

When looking for reasons of the atrophy among students, it is important to consider the factors that are responsible for the institutionalisation of norms. Taking into account methodological limitations of sociology, particularly its characteristic methodological individualism, intermediary structures have ultimately become the subject-matter of research. In other words, I assumed that atrophy is determined by the deactivation of modes responsible for compliance with norms. Moreover, I assumed that this phenomenon may also be influenced by excessively intense social life. In certain situations, rather than serving as a respite from learning, this kind of activity distracts students, particularly those additionally charged with paid work, from the fulfilment of their obligations inscribed in the role (the obligations that determine their involvement in education). I subjected these assumptions to empirical verification.

## Method

### Participants

The study was conducted among 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> year students of the undergraduate full-time studies at the Faculty of Economics and Sociology of the University of Łódź. First, dean's groups were drawn, and then the study covered all students that were present in them during its course. The study was conducted using the auditorium questionnaire technique. The questionnaire consisted of 23 general questions and 6 additional questions referring to social & demographic characteristics. The study covered 350 students. Eventually, 306 questionnaires were filled in. In the entire group, 38.2 per cent (N = 177) of respondents not only studied, but also worked.

### Operationalisation of variables

*Non-compliance with norms forming the role of the student.* Before the study was completed,

4 group interviews with students from the Faculty were conducted. They served as a basis for elaborating a set of norms making up the role of the student that guide him/her towards the acquisition of knowledge, skills and competence. It covered patterns suggesting that a student *should*: pay attention during classes; attend classes or lectures even when the attendance list is not checked there; make notes during classes and lectures; actively participate in exercises (e.g., take part in discussions); prepare for examinations and credits as best as possible; read texts required for classes and publications assigned by teachers. Participants of the interviews also thought that a student *should not*: copy assignments from the Internet or use the phone, the Internet or social media during classes. In order to obtain information about to what extent students comply with these norms, the following question was expressed in the relevant study: "Please specify to what extent the behaviours listed below, reflecting your attitude to studying, are or are not true for you?" Then respondents were asked to express their opinions on the statements listed below (e.g., "I make notes during classes, lectures, etc.") that help to measure the level of their compliance with norms regulating the role of the student. The scale created in this way proved to be reliable ( $\alpha = 0.751$ ). Having recoded their answers, I obtained the variable I was interested in — *non-compliance with norms*. The subject of attention was its average value, which ranked in the range from -3 to 3. The higher it was, the lesser was the degree to which the respondent complied with norms regulating the role of the student.

*Sense of meaning.* The structures that form the personal mode are responsible, e.g., for creating a sense of meaning of the role being played. Eight statements were used for measuring this variable. The respondents were asked to specify to what extent studies taken up by them at the Faculty would: make it easier for them to find a job in the future; allow them to find a well-paid job; allow them to meet interesting people; help them to build plans for the future; increase their self-confidence; help them to acquire practical skills. The scale built on the basis of these statements proved to be reliable ( $\alpha = 0.783$ ). The subject-matter of the analysis covered the average value of the variable, which ranked in the range from 1 to 5. The higher it was, the higher was the sense of meaning of the role felt by the respondent.

*Sense of belonging.* The study conducted by M. Walker and F. Lynn (2013<sup>2</sup>) was a source

<sup>1</sup> Cialdini, R.B., Reno, R.R., Kallgren C.A. (1990). A focus theory of normative conduct..., p.1015

<sup>2</sup> Walker M.H., Lynn F. (2013). The embedded self: A social network approach to identity theory. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 76(2), 151-179.

of inspiration in the creation of this variable. First, the respondents were asked to imagine that they meet someone for the first time in their life, they meet an old acquaintance, they are supposed to give a speech and to start by saying a few words about themselves. Then, they were asked how likely it was that in each of these cases they would mention their university studies. The scale elaborated in this way did not prove reliable to a sufficient degree ( $\alpha = 0.656$ ; below Nunnally's criterion). However, I decided that it was worth using in the study. The subject-matter of the analysis was the average value of the variable, which ranked in the range from 1 to 5. The higher it was, the larger was the degree to which the respondent identified with the role of the student.

*Negative responsiveness.* In the case of structure forming the injunctive mode, my analysis covers only those that are responsible for negative responsiveness. This concept reflects the feeling that the violation of norms inscribed in the role of the student meets with a negative reaction from the environment (e.g., academic teachers, other students). In order to measure this variable, I created eight statements containing the aforementioned norms. The respondent was asked to specify to what extent their violation exposes him/her to negative sanctions from the environment. The scale built in this way proved to be reliable ( $\alpha = 0.729$ ). The subject-matter of the analysis was the average value of the variable, which ranked in the range from 1 to 5. The higher it was, the more strongly the respondent felt that the violation of norms inscribed in the role of the student meets with a negative reaction from the environment.

*Compliance with norms by others.* The structures activating the descriptive mode were measured by means of the question in which the respondent was asked to specify to what extent students from his/her environment comply with the aforementioned norms. As previously, I created eight statements that contain indicated patterns of behaviour. The scale built in this way proved to be reliable ( $\alpha = 0.756$ ). The subject-matter of the analysis was the average value of the variable, which ranked in the range from 1 to 5. The higher it was, the more strongly the respondent believed that other students in his/her environment use norms regulating the role played by them.

*Intensity of social life.* In order to measure this variable, I used the following question: *Imagine that we have created a "thermometer" for the measurement of "party life"? What value would it show for you?* The respondent could choose from the following categories

of answers: "above 38 degrees — I party very often", "37-38 degrees — I often party", "36-37 degrees — I party moderately, neither rarely nor often", "35-36 degrees — I rarely party", "34-35 degrees — I party very rarely", "below 34 degrees — I never party". To each of these categories, a certain value has been assigned in the range from 1 ("below 34 degrees — I never party") to 6 ("above 38 degrees — I party very often").

#### Data analysis

For the analysis of the acquired data, the SPSS program have been used. In the first place, the subject-matter of research attention were differences in the values of variables existing between groups of working and non-working students. Techniques such as a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) were used here. Then I went on to build the linear regression model concerning only working students and the occurrence of atrophy among them, where the dependent variable was the average level of *non-compliance with norms* and independent variables: *sense of meaning, sense of belonging, negative responsiveness, compliance with norms by others, and intensity of social life*. Before going on to verify the model, I analysed the correlation between independent variables.

#### Results

At the beginning, my analysis covered differences existing between groups of only studying students and studying and working students with regard to: *non-compliance with norms, sense of meaning of the role being played, sense of belonging, negative responsiveness, compliance with norms by others* (in their subjective sense) and the declared *intensity of social life*. Data concerning this issue are presented in Table 1.

The analysis of variables shows that the significantly statistical difference could be observed only in the case of *non-compliance with norms*. It turned out that students who only study fulfil obligations inscribed in their role to a slightly larger extent than students who study and work ( $p < 0.03$ ).

Then I focused only on this second group. I elaborated the linear regression model where the dependent variable was the average level of *non-compliance with norms regulating the role of the student* and independent variables: *sense of meaning, sense of belonging, negative responsiveness, compliance with norms by others, intensity of social life*. Before going on to verify this model, I analysed the correlation between independent variables. The results of the analysis are presented in Table 2.

Table 1

VALUES OF SELECTED VARIABLES IN DIVISION INTO GROUPS OF ONLY STUDYING STUDENTS AND STUDYING AND WORKING STUDENTS

Variable:	Only studying students (N=189)	Studying and working students (N=117)	Total (N=306)
	Average values		
Non-compliance with norms <3,3>	-0.47	-0.18	-0.36
Sense of meaning* <1,5>	3.15	3.13	3.14
Sense of belonging* <1,5>	3.39	3.38	3.38
Negative responsiveness* <1,5>	2.81	2.74	2.78
Compliance with norms by others* <1,5>	2.07	2.04	2.06
	Percentages		
Intensity of social life*			
Above 38 degrees — “I party very often”	3.20	2.60	3.00
37-38 degrees — “I often party”	4.30	8.50	6.00
36-37 degrees — “I moderately party”	37.30	31.60	35.10
35-36 degrees — “I rarely party”	23.20	22.20	22.80
34-35 degrees — “I party very rarely”	18.90	23.90	20.90
Below 34 degrees — “I never party”	12.90	11.10	11.90

\* $p > 0.05$ .

Table 2

RESULTS OF THE CORRELATION BETWEEN INDEPENDENT VARIABLES INCLUDED IN THE REGRESSION MODEL

Variables:		Sense of meaning	Sense of belonging	Negative responsiveness	Compliance with norms by others	Intensity of social life
Sense of meaning	<i>r</i>	1	0.48	0.13	0.10	0.13
	<i>p</i>		0.01	0.16	0.27	0.11
	N	117	115	116	117	117
Sense of belonging	<i>r</i>	0.48	1	0.17	0.20	0.16
	<i>p</i>	0.01		0.06	0.03	0.09
	N	115	115	114	115	115
Negative responsiveness	<i>r</i>	0.13	0.17	1	0.16	0.10
	<i>p</i>	0.16	0.06		0.09	0.29
	N	116	114	116	116	116
Compliance with norms by others	<i>r</i>	0.10	0.20	0.16	1	0.05
	<i>p</i>	0.27	0.03	0.09		0.57
	N	117	115	116	117	117
Intensity of social life	<i>r</i>	0.13	0.16	0.10	0.05	1
	<i>p</i>	0.11	0.09	0.29	0.57	
	N	117	115	116	117	117

Legend: *r* — Pearson correlation coefficient; *p* — significance (two-tailed); N — number of respondents.

The data suggest a relatively strong relationship between the *sense of meaning* and the *sense of belonging* ( $r = 0.477$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ). This result is not very surprising — after all, both of these variables reflect structures that make up the same mode: the personal mode. Moreover, it turned out that there is a moderate relationship between the *sense of belonging* and

belief about *compliance with norms by others* ( $r = 0.20$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ). Finally, having analysed these results, I focused on the outcomes of the multiple linear regression. They are presented in Table 3.

The analysis shows that, in the case of studying and working students, statistically important predictors of *non-compliance with*

Table 3

RESULTS OF MODELLING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN NON-COMPLIANCE WITH NORMS BY STUDENTS AND SELECTED INDEPENDENT VARIABLES

Predictors:	MODEL I			MODEL II		
	B	SE	BETA	B	SE	BETA
Constant	2.035	0.635		2.218	0.066	
Sense of meaning	-0.369	0.141	-0.245	-0.364	0.140	-0.242
Sense of belonging	-0.379	0.152	-0.236	-0.372	0.151	-0.232
Negative responsiveness	0.093	0.165	0.047*			
Compliance with norms by others	-0.425	0.159	-0.223	-0.414	0.158	-0.217
Intensity of social life	0.268	0.066	0.338	0.271	0.066	0.342

Legend: B — unstandardized coefficient; SE — standard error; BETA — standardized coefficient; \*p>0.05.

*norms regulating their role* include such variables as: *sense of meaning, sense of belonging, compliance with norms by others* and *intensity of social life*. The relationship between the dependent variable and *intensity of social life* turned out to be the strongest and most positive. Here, Pearson's coefficient was  $r = 0.39$  ( $p < 0.001$ ). Thus, it can be expected that the inclination of a student from this group to fulfil obligations inscribed in the role will gradually decrease along with an increase of intensity of his/her social life. More interestingly, it turned out that there are moderate and negative relationships between *non-compliance with norms* and the variables reflecting structures of which the personal mode consists, including the *sense of meaning* and *sense of belonging*. Here, Pearson's coefficient assumed the following values:  $r = -0.24$  ( $p < 0.03$ ) and  $r = -0.23$  ( $p < 0.03$ ). Eventually, it turned out that there is a moderate and negative relationship between the dependent variable and belief about *compliance with norms by others*. Here, Pearson's coefficient was  $r = -0.22$  ( $p < 0.03$ ). Along with a loss of the sense of meaning, sense of belonging and belief about compliance with these norms by others, it is increasingly likely that students from this group will not comply with obligations inscribed in their role. The prognostic value of the model itself proved moderate. The adjusted coefficient of determination was  $R^2 = 0.27$ . This means that the model explains 27 per cent of the variance of the dependent variable.

**Discussion**

Norms inscribed in the role can be treated as socially elaborated instructions that make it possible to fulfil collective goals and usually also, somewhat incidentally, individual plans. Their effectiveness is indirectly communicated by results of research concerning self-discipline (Duckworth,

Seligman, 2006<sup>1</sup>). It turns out that students who displayed this quality to a larger extent had better school results and broke the law less frequently, were healthier and more satisfied with their life in adulthood (Moffit et al., 2011<sup>2</sup>). Although the concept of self-discipline seems enticing in the context of the analysis of students' behaviour, it is worth remembering that their activity is defined within the scope of the role played by them, which means that it is largely determined by social factors.

Understood here as the phenomenon of normative deregulation of the role, atrophy makes the acquisition of knowledge, skills or competence by students difficult or virtually impossible. The opinion expressed at the beginning that atrophy affects more strongly working and studying persons than only studying persons was confirmed by the results of the study. Moreover, it suggests that in this first group, which is of particular importance to me, three factors are ultimately decisive for the deinstitutionalisation of norms (the norms of which the role of the student consists). Firstly, the intensity of social life is significant here. It can be assumed that working students who often party will have little time for learning. Secondly, the study shows that the deactivation of the personal mode in this group leads to atrophy. It seems that universities are able to react to this kind of threat, at least theoretically. However, the problem can be more complex. In the last few years, we can observe an increasingly advanced process of market orientation of Polish universities (Rydliński, 2017<sup>3</sup>). We can get the impression

<sup>1</sup> Duckworth, A.L., Seligman, M.E.P. (2006). Self-discipline gives girls the edge: Gender in self-discipline, grades, and achievement test scores. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 98(1), 198-208.

<sup>2</sup> Moffit, T., etc. (2011). A gradient of childhood self-control predicts health, wealth, and public safety. *PNAS*, 108(7), 2693-2698.

<sup>3</sup> Rydliński, B.M. (2017). Economic Crisis as a Factor of Neoliberal Policy in Poland. *Prakseologia* 159, pp.49-50.

that they are dominated by the neoliberal model where students are customers entering the university walls only in order to receive a specific service within them. Such an approach not only contradicts the academic tradition, but also, assuming the transactional character of the relationship between the student and the university, does not allow for the development of a deeper sense of meaning concerning education or a sense of connection with their *alma mater*. It must be assumed that these processes affect to an increasingly larger extent the persons who both study and work and hypothetically are present less frequently at university. Thirdly, the deactivation of the descriptive mode is also responsible for atrophy in the group under analysis, when the individual becomes increasingly convinced that other students do not comply with norms regulating the role played by them. A series of questions arises here. To what extent does this belief arise from the fact that, e.g., the individual is surrounded by certain persons? Can his/her opinion on that subject be a consequence of cognitive biases, e.g., filtering, that cause him/her to perceive only selected behaviours and ignore others? Can this belief be a form of rationalisation that helps the student to justify non-compliance with norms to himself (and maybe to others)? It is worth looking for answers to these questions in further studies concerning the phenomenon of atrophy.

Finally, I would like to consider certain shortcomings that characterise the research discussed in this paper. Firstly, it must be remembered that the analysis carried out by me was based on declarations of respondents. It is unknown how much these declarations agree with the reality. Secondly, it seems worth including a larger number of norms in the measurement of the atrophy and specifying their individual importance (some of them may be more significant for the fulfilment of the role of the student and others may be less important). Thirdly, the research did not cover positive responsiveness. It may have a significant impact on the sense of meaning or sense of belonging and, consequently, affect compliance with norms. Fourthly, it would be useful to analyse issues concerning work performed by students and to specify how much exhausting it is in a physical and mental sense and how much its character affects involvement in the education process.

### Conclusions

The subject of my attention in the paper is the phenomenon of the role's atrophy among students of full-time studies who both study and work. According to the study conducted among persons studying at the Faculty of Economics and Sociology of the University of

Łydz, students from this group comply with the norms that guide them towards the acquisition of knowledge, skills and competence to a significantly lesser extent than only studying persons. More importantly, the likelihood of non-fulfilment of obligations inscribed in the role by representatives of this group increases along with the loss of their sense of meaning concerning education or their sense of connection with the role and along with their growing belief that others do not comply with the norms, either. Another crucial factor that potentially disorganises the playing of the student role seems to be too intense social life.

### References

- Bandura, A. (1986). *Social Foundations of Thought and Action*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall.
- Bicchieri, C. (2005). *The grammar of society: The nature and dynamics of social norms*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bicchieri, C. (2010). Norms, preferences and conditional behavior. *Politics, Philosophy & Economics*, 9(3), 297-313.
- Braxton, J.M. (2010). Norms and the work of colleges and universities: Introduction to the special issue — Norms in Academia. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 81(3), 243-250.
- Braxton, J.M., Eimers, M.T., Bayer, A.E. (1996). The Implications of Teaching Norms for the Improvement of Undergraduate Education. *The Journal of Higher Education*, vol. 67(6), 603-625.
- Chekroun, P. (2008). Social control behavior: The effects of social situations and personal implication in informal social sanctions. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, 2(6), 2141-2158.
- Chekroun, P., Brauer, M. (2002). Reactions to norm violations and the number of bystanders: Evidence for the bystander effect in social control behavior. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 32, 853-867.
- Cialdini, R.B., Reno, R.R., Kallgren C.A. (1990). A focus theory of normative conduct: Recycling the concept of norms to reduce littering in public places. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 58(6), 1015-1026.
- Duckworth, A.L., Seligman, M.E.P. (2006). Self-discipline gives girls the edge: Gender in self-discipline, grades, and achievement test scores. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 98(1), 198-208.
- Etzioni, A. (2000). Social norms: internalization, persuasion, and history. *Law & Society*, 34(1), 157-178.
- Hechter, M., Opp, K. (2001). Introduction. In M. Hechter, K. Opp (eds.), *Social Norms* (pp. xi-xix). New York: Russel Sage.
- Hogg, M.A., Reid, S.A. (2006). Social identity, self-categorization, and the communication of group norms. *Communication Theory*, 16(1), 7-30.

- Horne, Ch. (2001). Sociological perspectives on the emergence of norms. In M. Hechter, K. Opp (Eds.), *Social Norms* (pp. 3-34). New York: Russel Sage.
- Kallgren, C.A., Reno, R.R., Cialdini, R.B. (2000). A focus theory of normative conduct: When norms do and do not affect behavior. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 26(8), 1002-1012.
- Lapinski, M.K., Rimal, R.N. (2005). An explication of social norms. *Communication Theory*, 15, 127-147.
- Lockwood, P., Jordan C.H, Kunda Z. (2002). Motivation by positive and negative role models: Regulatory focus determines who will best inspire us. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 83(4), 854-864.
- Loudfoot, E. M. (1972). The Concept of Social Role. *Philosophy of Social Science*, vol. 2(1), 133-145.
- Merton, R. (1957). The Role-Set: Problems in Sociological Theory. *The British Journal of Sociology*, vol. 8(2), 106-120.
- Moffit, T.E., Arseneault, L., Bielsky, D., Dickson, N., Hancox, R.J., Harrington, H.L., Houts, R., Poulton, R., Roberts, B.W., Ross, S., Sears, M.R., Thomson, W.M., Caspi, A. (2011). A gradient of childhood self-control predicts health, wealth, and public safety. *PNAS*, 108(7), 2693-2698.
- Parchomiuk, M., Zubrzycka-Maciąg, T. (2017). Pracujący studenci. Wybrane korelaty konfliktu i wzbogacenia. *Forum Oświatowe*, vol. 29(1), 149-166.
- Reynolds, K.J., Subaić E., Tindall K. (2014). The problem of behavior change: From social norms to an ingroup focus. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, 10(1), 1-12.
- Rydliński, B.M. (2017). Economic Crisis as a Factor of Neoliberal Policy in Poland. *Prakseologia* 159, 39-62.
- Schwartz, S.H. (1977). Normative influences on altruism. In L. Berkowitz (Ed.), *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* (Vol. 10) (pp. 221-279). New York: Academic Press.
- Sztompka, P. (2012). Normy społeczne i ich respektowanie. In G. Mazurkiewicz (ed.), *Jakość edukacji. Różnorodne perspektywy* (pp. 180-184). Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego.
- Tajfel, H., Turner, J.C. (1986). The social identity theory of intergroup behavior. In S. Worchel, W.G. Austin (Eds.), *Psychology of intergroup relations* (pp. 7-24). Chicago: Nelson Hall.
- Turner, J.C. (1999). Some current issues in research on social identity and self-categorization theories. In N. Ellemers, R. Spears, B. Doosje (Eds.), *Social identity: context, commitment, content* (pp. 6-34). Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd.
- Walker M.H., Lynn F. (2013). The embedded self: A social network approach to identity theory. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 76(2), 151-179.
- Williams, K.D. (2007). Ostracism: The kiss of social death. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, 1, 236-247.