

# Exploring the Intersection of Personal and Collective Meanings: 'Responsibility' in the Transition to Adulthood

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The notion of 'responsibility' refers to one of the fundamental aspects that one must develop to be considered as a virtuous person. 'Responsibility' has been usually regarded as a personal trait or an individual competence, however, from a cultural psychological perspective it can be conceived as an affective semiotic field that operates as a value orientation of human actions. The construction of values is an intensely dynamic process, involving internalization and externalization of collective meanings, and is central to what we refer to as personal culture. In this study, we depart from the perspectives of the *cultural psychology* and *dialogical self theory*, and explore how a young woman navigates into collective culture and constructs a new personal meaning of herself as a "responsible person". We investigate how the value of 'responsibility' becomes progressively integrated into her personal system of values. We focus on the trajectory of Jane, exploring continuity and change in self-positioning over time as she participates in different contexts of life, specifically, family, work and religion. We constructed data through three rounds of in-depth interviews lasting approximately two hours each. Data analysis consisted of narrative analysis, followed by mapping of tensions between self-positions, and analysis of how these tensions evolve. Findings illustrate the dynamic transformation of self-positions over time, and show how 'responsibility' emerges as a new meaning that provides integration of different spheres of Jane's life along her flux of experience (past-present-future), contributing to the emergence of new perspectives towards the future.

Keywords: meaning making, values, responsibility, personal culture, collective culture

Transition to adulthood is considered a critical developmental passage for a significant number of Brazilian youth who enter the labor force to help support themselves and their families before the age of 18. Research on the transition to adulthood is critical to understand how young people become able to produce and reproduce social and cultural life (Nurmi, 2004), and also to explore how they construct and negotiate their identities in the process (Zittoun, 2007). To date, however, research on transitions to adulthood among Brazilian youth has been scarce. Moreover, few Brazilian studies have investigated one aspect that seems to be central to identity in transition: the construction of a system of values.

Several authors indicate that a system of values serves to guide developmental pathways (Branco, 2012; Branco & Madureira, 2008; Branco & Valsiner, 2012) contributing to the person's dialogical self development. However, as suggested by Branco & Valsiner (2012), a reductionist perspective on values has been traditionally dominant in psychology

(Minkov & Hofstede, 2014). The mainstream perspective understands values as a sort of stable traits, or fixed categories, which can be “extracted” from individuals through the use of questionnaires and rating scales, and then classified and/or compared (Branco & Valsiner, 2012). Alternative approaches to the study of values have been used by some theorists (Bamberg, 2004; Paolicchi, 2007; Ratner, 2002; Rosa & González, 2012), grounded in a cultural and/or narrative paradigm. From a semiotic cultural perspective, we are investigating the issue of human values (Branco & Madureira, 2008; Branco and Valsiner, 2012; Mattos, 2013; Rengifo-Herrera & Branco, in press) within a theoretical framework that stresses both the roles of cultural canalization processes and of human agency. According to this approach, values are conceived as motivational dispositions deeply rooted in the person’s affective semiotic self system. Values are crucial to guide one’s interpretations of the world, and to orient the person’s conduct towards the accomplishment of the expected and desirable goals (Branco, 2012; Branco & Madureira, 2008; Branco & Valsiner, 2012; Rosa & González, 2012).

The construction of a value system can be regarded as one of the cornerstones of transition to adulthood, which is understood as a period of life where individuals participate in new spheres of experience, in which they are required to integrate new meanings concerning self and the world where self develops. Being young implies subjective processes leading individuals to seek continuity of self in the midst of transformations (Zittoun, 2006; 2012). Often young people have to confront ideal expectations with real life choices and circumstances. The construction of personal values thus becomes relevant when youth are confronted with cultural values and beliefs coming from different spheres of experience, what leads them to question previous values that were taken for granted, or idealized by family or community members. As suggested by Zittoun (2007), contemporary youth face a world in which there is no single symbolic system that provides a coherent set of values and beliefs capable of guiding their life pathways. They have to create a “collage” (or a “*bricolage*”) with the elements/features that are made available to them by their contexts, producing ever new meanings along the way (Zittoun, 2006). As this creative process occurs simultaneously within and outside the individual’s domains of awareness, we witness a process of co-construction of both personal and collective cultures along irreversible time.

## **A SEMIOTIC VIEW OF DEVELOPMENT**

A few words on the Semiotic Cultural Psychology approach to human development are required to build the arguments put forth in this article. This approach builds on a dynamic system perspective characterized by processes such as cultural canalization and human agency, both lying at the core of the semiotic cultural psychology. In other words, individual development occurs through the operation of cultural canalization processes and personal agency.

Cultural canalization processes are social suggestions that are explicitly or implicitly presented to individuals in their surrounding sociocultural environment. They occur as verbal and nonverbal encouragement and/or inhibition provided by social others and all sorts of cultural features of the specific developmental context. Such canalization forces operate in concert with human agency and the constructive internalization mechanisms it sets forth through complex and intricate processes. Similarly, cultural practices and psychological meanings—found in collective and personal cultures—co-construct each other along microgenesis, mesogenesis, and ontogeny.

In this paper, we want to contribute to a better understanding of the dynamic construction of a personal system of values, addressing how, in a specific time in ontogeny – transition to adulthood – cultural canalization processes interact with human agency to produce specific meanings (i.e. values) that regulate human conduct. The paper has three sections. The first section draws on the theoretical foundations of *Semiotic Cultural Psychology* and *Dialogical Self Theory* to highlight this new understanding of human values from a developmental perspective, focusing on the value of responsibility, which seems to be scarcely studied. The second section presents the case study of a young woman – throughout a developmental time frame going from 16 to 23 years of age. We analyze how she negotiates the value of responsibility as she interacts with different spheres of her life (i.e. work and family), and elaborates a new relevant synthesis within her self-system (i.e. her self-perception as a responsible person). The third section elaborates on the dynamics underlying the processes leading to the construction a values system that ends up orienting her actions in the world.

### **Concept and development of values**

Traditionally, values and beliefs were used by mainstream social psychology as psychological constructs inferred from the application of statistical procedures on obtained “raw data”. In terms of methodology, these studies use questionnaires, rating scales, and structured interviews in both cross-sectional and longitudinal designs (Minkov & Hofstede, 2014; Schwartz, Melech, Lehmann, Burgess, Harris & Owens, 2001; Tamayo, 2007). Along these lines, values are conceived as individual “acquisitions” of moral traits or moral competences.

Within the context of developmental psychology, the notion of values has been linked to the study of moral development (Gilligan, 1982; Kohlberg, 1984; Piaget, 1997). The bulk of research in the field followed Kohlberg’s lead and focused on the construction of children and adolescent’s cognitive reasoning about topics such as rights, responsibilities and justice (Rest, Narvaez, Thoma & Bebeau, 2000), emotional regulation of moral behavior (Eisenberg, 2000; Eisenberg, Fabes, & Spinrad, 2006), and civic engagement (Flanagan & Faison, 2001; Metzger & Smetana, 2009).

From the perspective of Semiotic Cultural Psychology, however, a complementary line of research can be proposed, based on the conceptualization of human values as affective-semiotic meaning fields that operate throughout ontogenesis (Branco & Valsiner, 2012). Along these lines, values are not conceived as personal traits or psychological characteristics, but as powerful affective-laden meaning fields that emerge from the person's social interactions within different contexts, and guide semiotic processes, generating the motivation for action. In order to understand how these meanings become progressively organized throughout ontogeny, it is necessary to take their field-like quality into consideration, and to pay close attention to the dynamic hierarchies that grow out of meaning constructions (Branco & Valsiner, 2012; Valsiner, 2007).

From a developmental point of view, it becomes important to investigate the dynamic construction of the personal system of values throughout ontogeny. This paper will address this issue showing how, in a specific time in ontogeny – transition to adulthood – cultural canalization processes interact with human agency to produce specific values (in this case, the value of *responsibility*) that regulate human conduct.

In much the same way as Vygotsky (1978) understands the sociogenesis of human higher mental functions, we perceive the dynamics taking place in the semiotic construction of a system of personal values as resulting from the active internalization of social interaction processes occurring within specific cultural contexts. The system of personal values is seen here as continuously configured and (re)configured according to the principles of the dialogical, mutual constitution of individuals within society (Branco & Valsiner, 2012; Valsiner, 2007). This system is especially laden with powerful emotions and affect that make values resistant to change. Despite their relative stability, however, values may change under specific conditions, by reducing, increasing or transforming their major characteristics.

As suggested by Branco, Palmieri and Pinto (2012), values are deep-rooted within the dynamics of the self-system, guiding and orienting the person's conduct along the flux of life experiences:

*“Human values arise from meanings co-constructed along life experiences in ontogeny, and they define the moral dimension of human interactions regarding family, work, and everyday interactions. Values also help building the sense of self and identity of each person, along a range of social responsibility, social belonging and citizenship.” (p. 34)*

In order to understand how personal motivation meanings (especially *values*) become laden with powerful emotions and affect we build on Valsiner's (2007) theoretical model of *Semiotic Regulation of Human Experience*. This model shows how processes of semiotic emergence function amidst affective fields in the regulation of personal conduct.

According to the model, human selves and experiences are semiotically mediated, and psychological processes such as thinking, affect, imagination and action form a complex and whole dimension – the individual’s personal culture. In this perspective, the highest level of the semiotic mediation hierarchy – one’s values– cannot be easily translated into verbal categories, but they exert an orienting function in guiding the person’s actions and interactions with the world. This means that our relations with others, our positionings towards others and ourselves, and in relation to events in the world, are not just rational and linguistic, but affectively embodied. Hence, values are central to orient our acting in the world.

Valsiner (2007) proposes that human experience is organized into five levels of the affective regulation, all interdependent and interconnected, but pertaining to a hierarchical order. The five levels are conceptualized as such:

Table 1.

*Levels of Affective Semiotic Fields of Regulation of Human Experience (adapted from Valsiner, 2007)*

<b>Level</b>	<b>Characteristics</b>
<b>Level 0:</b> Physiological	It is the level of physiological and undifferentiated sensations, awareness, that are present in all animal species, and is not specific to human beings.
<b>Level 1:</b> General, immediate presemiotic feelings	Feelings without semiotic mediation, pre-verbal feelings that allow organisms to maintain previous experiences for further use. They do not require encoding of experience through signs. Episodic memory.
<b>Level 2:</b> Specific categories of emotion	Transition to semiotic mediation. The emotions are named and experienced “by” the person. This level is specific to humans and is verbally articulated.
<b>Level 3:</b> Generalized categories of emotions	General description of emotions through a cognitive system. The person arrives at a generalized, but ill-defined definition of her emotions. For example: “I feel bad”.
<b>Level 4:</b> Hyper-generalized affective semiotic field	The mediated feelings are definitely in the form of generalized fields – not categories – due to abstraction. This kind of feeling-field is hierarchically superior in terms of regulating other levels of experience as well as orienting human conduct. Such fields may become what we call values. For instance honesty, and work ethics, or aesthetic feelings such as the feeling of beauty that overcomes a person contemplating a painting are good examples of this level. Their intensity has the power to overcome the person’s thinking and feeling, and yet they are shared and embedded in collective meanings that are relevant for the community.

In Table 1, at the lowest level (Level 0), one finds the physiological events and their effects on the body-psychological complex dimension of the individual. At the next level (Level 1), one observes general affective feelings that are immediate and pre-verbal. At level 2, there is the flux of categorized emotions, such as anger, sadness, joy or disgust. At level 3, the person starts to generalize what he/she is actually feeling, has difficulties at describing such feelings, and use broader categories. Finally, at the highest level (Level 4), one arrives at hypergeneralized semiotic affective fields that can be inferred but are difficult to define by either person and/or observer, due to its fuzzy quality that resist most verbal attempts of accurate description. At level 4, one may find the operation of hypergeneralized orienting signs, such as human values, which guide the person's conduct, but can only be tentatively inferred from his/her actions and interactions in cultural contexts. Level 4 is the domain of overwhelming affective experiences, that values are a good example. Values are conceived as higher motivational dynamic constructs, that are powerful enough to guide our conduct and that are deeply embedded with affection. Their full psychological significance cannot be described with words. In our view, Valsiner's model of semiotic regulation reflects the hierarchical organization of a person's motivational system. It provides a unique way to understand how values are forged, a way that is different from traditional "trait" or "dispositional" perspectives on values, because it emphasizes the affective-semiotic nature of the meanings created to mediate human experience in the world.

The scope of human values is vast, complex, and plural. Depending on the cultural context, the hierarchical organization of the motivational system – consisting of values and goal orientations – may dynamically change, due to particular needs and situational circumstances, which put in motion negotiation processes at both inter and intra-personal levels. At the interpersonal level, communication and metacommunication allow for meaning constructions (Branco & Valsiner, 2004; Fatigante, Fasulo & Pontecorvo, 2004); as for the intrapersonal level, internal dialogues between different I-positions, as proposed by the Dialogical Self Theory (Hermans, 2001; Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010), also participate in change and maintenance of the motivational system. Changes within the system may be temporary, but can also persist and lead to actual developments along ontogeny.

The role of the individual's values system in promoting the development of the self cannot be overestimated. Many theorists point to the major function of values in promoting a relative stability to the self (Blasi, 2004), and this is particularly true among those adopting a dialogical self perspective (Branco & Madureira, 2008; Branco & Valsiner, 2012). This happens because values provide a relatively solid psychological basis to keep the sense of self over time, despite actual changes in the self-system. Thus, the relevance of their study.

Our argument also draws on the concept of self articulated by the *Dialogical Self Theory*, elaborated by Hermans and colleagues (Hermans, 2001, 2002; Hermans & Hermans-Jensen, 2003; Salgado & Gonçalves, 2007; Salgado & Hermans, 2005). This theory

highlights a dynamic and multivocal movement of construction and re-construction of meanings inside the self-system. Unlike a *unified static entity* or an *internal essence* of the subject to be *revealed* through language exchanges, the *dialogical self* maintains its unity through dialogue, and is produced as plural and polyphonic through communication interactions (Hermans, 2001). The *dialogical self* is multifaceted and complex, endowed with multiple voices and different positions that co-exist and hold different perspectives about the world. (Hermans, 2001; Ribeiro & Gonçalves, 2010; Salgado & Gonçalves, 2007). This approach to the self emphasizes the role of interactions with social others in facilitating the emergence of personal regulatory processes capable of promoting the emergence of values.

A special emphasis on the *ontogenesis* of human values within culturally structured contexts demands a careful and in-depth analysis of the dynamics of the internalization-externalization semiotic processes that lie at the basis of values' co-construction along lifelong experiences. This analysis requires a close scrutiny of how cultural canalization processes are put in motion within diverse cultural developmental contexts, and how such processes work together with the person's agency to promote the emergence, stability and changes in values and self development.

### **Responsibility and transition to adulthood**

One important value that is still scarcely studied is *responsibility*. Generally regarded as a personal capacity or competence (Zittoun, 2007), *responsibility* is taken in this study as a core value or virtue (Rosa & González, 2012) that emerges and is consolidated particularly in the transition to adulthood. As Rosa and González (2012) point out, in our culture the notion of responsibility refers to one of the fundamental aspects that one must develop to be considered a *virtuous person*. Responsibility requires a continuous sense of awareness concerning a permanent assessment and evaluation of one's goal orientations and conduct. Responsibility implies taking into account the consequences of one's conduct regarding self and others, in association with a readiness to face these consequences. The person, conceived as an agent, actively moves along life in different contexts, making the right choices according to moral principles related to a commitment with the promotion of self and collective well-being. Responsibility very likely encompasses a personal synthesis, an operation that takes place within the field of self that implies a reconfiguration of the person's meanings of herself and the world. This process facilitates the emergence of one's self-perception as *responsible* – which has significant consequences in terms of actions. It is this synthesis that seems to occur when a person has to face new experiences, often involving significant others who participate directly or indirectly in such experiences. The very meaning of 'responsibility' – as a new hypergeneralized sign emerging in level 4 of the personal motivational system – seems to be particularly forged during the transition from youth to adulthood.

As an individual's life course progresses, their self-configuration undergoes constant changes, thus altering previous patterns of stability (Valsiner, 2007). The self is configured and reconfigured in negotiation processes among culturally canalized values, beliefs and significant meanings emphasized by specific contexts. For most Brazilian youth, transitions occur within the context of economic difficulties and a low quality educational system, and public policies concerning youth are few and fragmented. An excluding labor market, with high youth unemployment and underemployment rates contributes to a scenario of scarce opportunities and social inequity. In such context, two relevant cultural meanings are attributed to adulthood in Brazil: autonomy and responsibility (Camarano, 2004).

In Jane's case study, presented next, we will explore how young people living in a poor neighborhood of a large Brazilian city (Salvador) may construct the meaning of "*being responsible*," and how they can achieve greater self-stability over time, guiding their present actions towards the future, in the midst of significant life changes (Mattos, 2013).

## **METHOD**

The present study is part of a longitudinal research on youth self development carried out by the first author of this paper (Mattos, 2013). This research investigated, among other phenomena, the process of co-construction of values – more specifically, the value of responsibility – among disadvantaged Brazilian youths. In the five-year longitudinal investigation, the researcher followed a group of six young people between 16 and 24 years-old (four male and two females), who participated in an apprenticeship program developed by an NGO. Three rounds of in-depth interviews were conducted along the broader study (Mattos, 2013): the first round took place when participants were 18 years old; the second round of interviews took place when participants were 21 years old, and the third round took place when they were 23 years old.

The interpretive analysis identified critical moments emerging in their transition process, and explored the ways through which they coped with these moments, as well as the core meanings they constructed over time in relation to their life trajectories. In this article, we will explore the trajectory of a young female – Jane – and show how she negotiated the value of responsibility in different spheres of her life along her transition to adulthood. Exploring the trajectory of a single individual over the course of five years has been a powerful methodological catalyst for unpacking the dynamic construction of her personal system of values, and for addressing how, in a specific time in her life, cultural canalization processes were activated by her interactions with family and people at work. We demonstrate how both dimensions of her life were central to the emergence of the value of responsibility, which then started to regulate her actions and feelings towards herself and the world.

## **Jane's Case Analysis**



Jane's case illustrates the process of construction of a values system, more specifically, of the value of *responsibility*. Jane is a young woman of African descent who lives with her parents and one sister in a poor neighborhood in the city of Salvador, in the Northeast of Brazil. Her father is an auto mechanic and her mother is a housewife.

At the beginning of the study, when Jane entered the work environment as an apprentice, she faced a *critical moment* as she felt discriminated by her co-workers. She thought that being an "apprentice" was not a valued position. Moreover, she did not trust her ability to take on the various tasks and responsibilities of her job. As Jane says:

*"I think that people [co-workers] made a distinction because I was an apprentice. They didn't treat me as a real worker. When someone from outside asked who I was, they said that I was a 'young apprentice.' They didn't consider me as an employee. As for myself, I thought I wouldn't be able to do all the work I had to do."*

As time passed, however, Jane looked for adult support in an older employee, Elena, who then acted as her mentor. Every time she had a problem or a doubt, Jane turned to Elena, who encouraged her and gave her support and advice to overcome these challenges. Jane said that Elena trusted her more than she trusted herself. Through her relationship with Elena, Jane was able to build self-confidence and to position herself as a *responsible worker*. At this time, Jane developed a *personal sense of responsibility*, regarded as:

*"An ability to commit to something that I was doing, knowing that what I was doing was something important, something that was helping me grow, which would influence my future."*

After some time, Jane started to take on more responsibilities at work, and began to trust her new abilities. She got hired by the company at the end of the apprenticeship contract, and took on a new function at the secretarial level, and started to perform more complex tasks. By this time, Jane regarded herself as "*one of those people with more responsibilities in the department.*" She believed she was doing a good job and felt more adjusted to work. Progressively, Jane built a sense of autonomy and felt she had become more independent from the influence of adults. She was "*acting with more freedom,*" beginning to "*do things for [herself],*" not relying as much as she used to on the "*advice and opinions of adults.*" She stopped doing what "*adults told [her] to do.*" At work, Jane said she could "*see people seeking [her] to help them solve their problems,*" and began to feel that she "*was not only responsible for [her]self but also for others.*" As she struggles with different meanings of being responsible at work, new tensions emerge in Jane's self system. And, after sometime, as she gains recognition from significant others present in the work environment, she is able to overcome the tensions present in her self-system and transform her previous sense of discomfort and distrust in her own ability to carry out her activities at work. A new generalized sense of responsibility (level 3) emerges as she defines herself as a *responsible worker*.

When Jane was about 21 years old, though, another rupture happened in her family life, but her new sense of responsibility, acquired at work (as a *responsible worker*), did not transfer to her home context where the new rupture occurred. Jane's mother got very sick, and she had to manage her family money and home expenses—tasks her mother used to do. Her newly acquired job position and correspondent responsibilities at work did not help her cope with the problems and difficulties emerging in her family life. As she said:

*"I started to have money problems. I had a lot of debt in my credit card. I tried to manage the money in my family, because everything I earned I gave to support my family. I had to manage everything, and this was a lot of work! And debts started to pop-up."*

Although Jane had a steady job and was the main contributor to the family budget, as she tried to manage the family expenses she realized she was not able to perform this task as satisfactorily as her mother used to, or with the same competence and responsibility she showed in her job. There was ambivalence between the two main positions she occupied in the central spheres of her life. Her position as a *responsible worker* was confronted with her position in the family as a *dependent daughter*, and Jane felt desperate and anxious as she was not able to integrate both positions. What we see here is the confrontation between the new, emergent value of *responsibility* and the old value of *dependency* in the family domain.

As this ambivalence grew and became maximized, Jane started to feel "*desperate and swamped in financial debt*." She developed psychosomatic symptoms such as hives and foreboding dreams. During this difficult time, Jane grew closer to her grandmother, a powerful leader of a religious community that seemed to be the central figure in her family. Jane started to frequently visit her grandmother at the religious temple and to take part in the religious ceremonies, although she did not participate as a formal member of the religious group. Gradually she started to position herself, and to be positioned by the religious community, as an "*initiated*" person. As Jane explained, she had to begin taking "*responsibility, not only for [her]self, but also for others*" in the same way as her grandmother did, meaning a kind of spiritual responsibility for the well-being of people belonging to that religious community<sup>1</sup>. Later on, she pointed out that:

*"Now I am learning to manage my money. I paid off all my debts. I cut up all my credit cards. [...] I think I can take charge of my own life now. I am not only responsible for myself, I am responsible for others too, for helping others, feeling that not only your own life depends on you, but the lives of others can also depend on you."*

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<sup>1</sup> The religious community to which Jane and her grandmother belonged was *Candomblé*: a religion with African-Brazilian origins, developed by the slaves who came from Africa to Bahia in Colonial time. In this religious tradition, the higher priest and religious leader is a female – called the *mother-of-saint*. Jane's grandmother was a *mother-of-saint*.

During this interview, Jane remarked that, over time, she developed a new sense of self and of the surrounding world. Her new self-configuration integrated her self-positions at work and at home, with the support of significant adults, like her grandmother. She learned how to manage family money and felt more responsible for both herself and others. Here we may see that a new hypergeneralized meaning – i.e. value – of *spiritual responsibility* (level 4) emerged in Jane’s self-system and started to guide her life experiences in different domains. It is possible to conceive that such meaning making movements, growing out of her interactions at work and family context, led to the construction of a values system that then oriented Jane’s actions towards the future.

Jane’s trajectory shows how self-regulation emerges in a process of dialogical interactions among different spheres of experience, leading not only to positionings and re-positionings within the self-system but also to transformations in motivational meanings – more specifically, in the meaning of responsibility. Her case highlights the dialogical tensions and the dynamic movements of positionings and re-positionings within the dialogical self, across time and among different spheres of life experience.

Along the lines of a dialogical-semiotic approach to the self, it is possible to understand the intricate interplay among Jane’s positions as an attempt to overcome ambivalence. In dealing with ambivalences emerging at different contexts, Jane builds new meanings to orient her experiences, and constructs a hierarchy of affect-laden meanings related to the notion of responsibility, and those may bring a relative stability to her self-system over time.

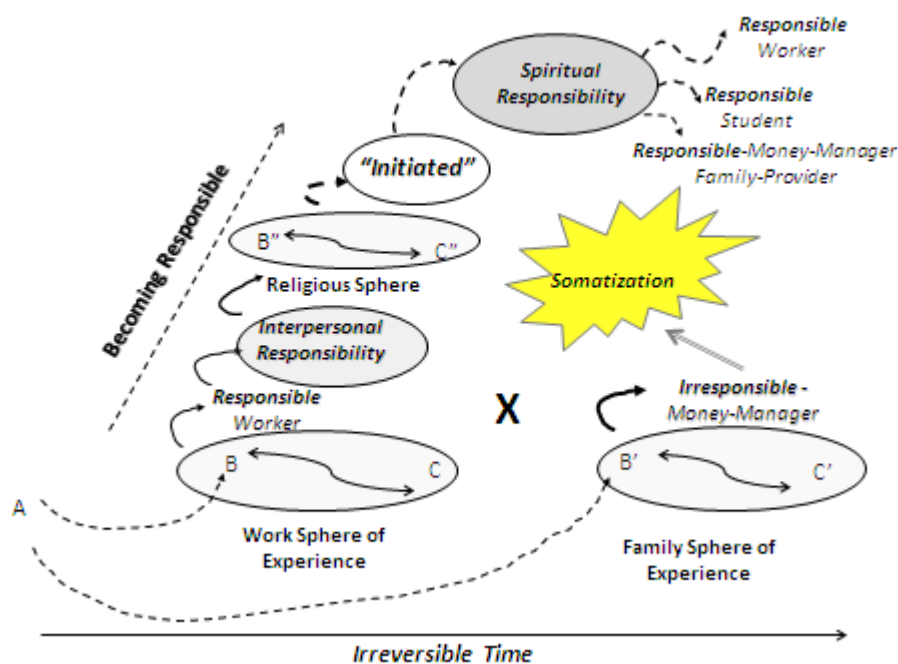


Figure 1. Self-Regulation through Hierarchical Differentiation of “Responsibility”

As illustrated by Figure 1, Jane's initial self version (A) enters the work sphere and starts a dialogical relation with Elena (B), who recognizes in advance Jane's competence in successfully performing her work tasks (even before Jane could do that herself). Jane began to internalize Elena's voice and developed a promoter position as *responsible-worker* (C). After some time, confronting the challenges in her family life experience (her mother's sickness), and through dialogical relations with her sick mother (B'), Jane positions herself as *irresponsible-money-manager* (C') – and is unable to bring the kind of responsibility she developed at work to support her new home tasks. The two positions of *responsible-worker* and *irresponsible-money-manager* are powerful signs that dominate the landscape of dialogical relations in the main spheres of Jane's life – family and work. However, there is a growing tension between these two dominant positions, because they refer to contradictory forms of dealing with *responsibility*.

Seeking to overcome ambivalence, Jane reaches for new meanings by increasing her participation in the religious sphere and getting closer to the powerful figure of her grandmother (B''), who offers an anticipated view of Jane in the future – by projecting her into something that she is not yet, but can become – a person taking a higher level of responsibilities, doing just what the grandmother herself was doing. Dialogical relations with the grandmother (B'') lead to the development of a new powerful position – *Initiated* (C''), characterized by an amplified perspective on responsibility: *spiritual responsibility*. This new higher level meaning of “responsibility” acts as a powerful value that integrates different spheres of Jane's life (work, family, religion), and provides continuity across time (past-present-future), as the valued collective culture of the family merges with Jane's personal culture through religious meanings .

Across the data, we may find the role played by the values system concerning Jane's self-development in providing the self with a relative stability, and in bringing over time an integration of the different life spheres, that results in a reconfiguration of her self-system in space and time. The intervention of the powerful self-position as *Initiated* – emerging in the religious sphere – is able to knit together partial and/or limited meanings of *responsibility* that emerge in specific life's domains, providing a self continuity across different contexts. At this point, Jane becomes able to put all kinds of limited responsibilities into perspective, and expands her responsibility into different life domains. She becomes more responsible across work, family, and religious contexts.

A new sense of religious responsibility and engagement comes together with changes in Jane's academic life as she studies and passes a very difficult exam to enter a public university. At home, she has now taken on responsibility and acts effectively to manage the money she earns. She paid off all her debts and cut up all her credit cards. In her job, she gains more stability as well, expanding and consolidating her previous responsibilities. At the work, she has internalized the voices of competence, confidence, and organization, and feels

responsible not only for herself but also for co-workers. She acts as a mentor and an advisor to her colleagues. Jane reveals that she no longer relies so much on the approval of others to make decisions. She feels free of other people's influence, and believes she is "*able to take charge of [her] own life.*"

Jane had forged a new identity negotiated among several positions in the landscape of multiple voices. The voice that finally emerges as dominant is *being responsible*, an integrated and integrative perspective of herself that irradiates its influence to different dimensions of her life, and allows her to overcome challenges across different contexts and time dimensions. With the qualities "inherited" from her grandmother (her *spirituality*), Jane repositioned herself in the present as well as the future, which now is populated by *different alternatives of being*: she has become a university student, has dreams of her own, and is "*seeking to be happy.*"

Jane's recurrent elaboration of new meanings can be seen as catalytic cycles leading to the construction of a hierarchy of semiotic regulatory tools. These catalytic processes, taking place at the intersection of personal and collective cultures, allow for the overcoming of ambivalences. Jane searched for signs at a higher level of generalization – and created a hierarchical value system – unfolding from "*personal responsibility*" to "*interpersonal responsibility*" to "*spiritual responsibility.*" Overcoming uncertainty emerges through building meaning bridges between personal culture and collective culture, as *hypergeneralized personal cultural relevant signs* (values) act as promoters of her development, integrating the multiple spheres of experience, and moving her into a new life trajectory.

## DISCUSSION

In this study, Jane's case was used to illustrate the mechanisms operating in the construction of a hierarchical system of values along transition to adulthood. Her trajectory shows how the value of '*responsibility*' – constructed at the intersection of personal and collective culture – takes a central role in Jane's self-system, facilitating her overcoming ambivalent tensions and favoring the emergence of new positions across different spheres of life. The study shows that the hierarchical organization of Jane's motivational system – organized around the value of *responsibility* – dynamically changes over time, due to particular needs and situational circumstances that emerge in her social relations within different life contexts, putting in motion negotiation processes at both inter and intra-personal levels.

To deal with ambivalences, Jane developed a strong relationship with significant adults, such as Elena and her grandmother. They presented Jane with a set of alternative and powerful self-positions, representing different ways of being '*responsible,*' enabling her to reorganize her self-system based on a new set of values. Along this process, Jane was able to build a *personal sense of responsibility*, which emerged initially in the collective culture of her work sphere. Through exchanges with Elena and other co-workers, she became able

to perform progressively complex work tasks. Along time, she redefined her sense of *interpersonal responsibility* at work, but then had to face ambivalences in her family life. When she needed to be in charge of the family budget due to her mother's problems, Jane was not able to become *responsible* for managing the budget and planning the monthly expenses in advance. This cycle brought Jane closer to her grandmother, and then she ended up developing a powerful position as an *initiated* member of a religious community, the Candomblé. This facilitated an *expansion* of the former—yet limited—meanings of *responsibility*, adding to them the value of the *spiritual responsibility*. This new sense of responsibility facilitated the integration of her self-system across space (i.e. different spheres of experience—family, work and religion) and time (her flowing through past-present-future). Jane became able to project herself in a new path for the future as a *responsible person*.

In line with Branco and Valsiner's (2012) perspective on values, Jane's transition can be characterized by the integration and empowerment of certain affective-laden meanings, her values of *responsibility*. Such values facilitated a self-reconfiguration and the emergence of a new dynamic stability in her self-system. The value of responsibility took a central role in this process, allowing her not only to deal with everyday life difficulties, but also to regulate her present and future actions. Its emergence and operation also dynamically reconfigured her self-system at the intersections of collective and personal cultures. Last but not least, Jane's case study demonstrates the significance of analyzing the mutual constitution between values and self-development, highlighting the important processes that occur at the intersection of collective and personal cultures.

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