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Identity and markers of adulthood: the relationship between two constructs.

Abstract: *The article presents both the classical and contemporary approaches to the analysis of identity formation. Special emphasis has been placed on the processual approach, in which identity is regarded as a dynamic construct that remains in constant, mutual relations with personal and contextual factors. Since research on identity has been predominantly based on studies conducted on individuals in adolescence and early adulthood, i.e. in the time of transition to adulthood, the article focuses on adulthood markers that may be found in this particular phase of human development. The authors have distinguished different markers of adulthood (transitions to adult roles, psychosocial maturity, sense of adulthood) and have described their links to identity. In the conclusion of the present paper, it has been stressed that future research on identity should to a large extent include factors originating from these different categories of conditions, and that researchers ought to consider the interactions of these factors as predictors of identity formation*

Key words: *commitment, exploration, identity formation, psychosocial maturity, role transitions, sense of adulthood*

Identity is usually associated with possessing by an individual a kind of definition of oneself, a complex and available to the individual set of personal attributes thanks to which the person is able to identify oneself and distinguish oneself from others. In this respect, it is a cognitive construct that may be described with the use of more or less hierarchized notions and schemata pertaining to the person, and which is of great personal value to the individual (Marcia, 1966; Oleś, 2008).

Neo-eriksonian approach to identity

In psychological studies on identity authors very often avail themselves of the approach initiated by Marcia (1966) in the 1960s, known as identity status theory. Marcia's main aim was to continue the thought of Erikson in such a way that would allow reliable scientific investigation of identity (for further information on the relationship between the theories of Erikson and Marcia see: Waterman, 1999; van Hoof, 1999; Schwartz, 2001). To this end, Marcia used one of the elements from Erikson's theory – personal identity – that incorporated, among others, occupation,

world-view, religious and political views, which enable self-determination and the establishing of one's self, and thus constitute the basis for identity formation. Identity status theory describes the way in which individuals integrate the aforementioned elements and, thereby, create their own, unique identity.

In his theory Marcia placed emphasis on a person's own activity, stating that the best way to achieve a stable and well-developed identity is to make one's own choices based on previous experience. He claimed that there were two consecutive processes involved in identity formation: (1) crisis (now called exploration i.e. getting to know various alternatives and different lifestyles, experimenting with roles), and (2) commitment (being a consequence of choosing a particular alternative). Crossing the two dimensions (i.e. crisis / exploration and commitment) with each other enabled Marcia to distinguish four different identity statuses, understood as an outcome of the process of coping with the identity crisis: identity achievement, moratorium, foreclosure, and identity diffusion (see Table 1).

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Table 1. Identity statuses according to James Marcia

Relation to ideology and occupation	Identity status			
	<i>Identity Achievement</i>	<i>Moratorium</i>	<i>Foreclosure</i>	<i>Identity Diffusion</i>
Crisis / exploration	+	+	-	-
Commitment	+	-	+	-

Source: based on Marcia, 1980

According to Marcia (1966, 1980), the four statuses reflected Erikson's dimension of "identity synthesis – identity diffusion", with identity achievement and moratorium placed closer to the positive end of the continuum, and with foreclosure and identity diffusion located closer to the negative end of this continuum. In the opinion of Marcia, for the right development of personal identity, i.e. for the transition to more developmentally advanced statuses, it is necessary to experience a crisis, a phase characterized by an intensified exploration.

Beginning with the longitudinal studies of Waterman (1982), researchers started to investigate the mechanism of identity status change. Initially, it was assumed (Marcia, 1980) that an individual progresses from an inceptive state of identity diffusion, via intermediate stages, to identity achievement. It turned out, however, that this mechanism is far more complex (for a review, see: Kroger, 2007a). Depending on different internal and external factors, identity development may cease on a less developmentally advanced status – a status located closer to the negative end of the continuum (identity diffusion or foreclosure). Regressive transitions, i.e. transitions from more developmentally advanced statuses to less developmentally advanced ones, are also possible. Moreover, it has been proven that identity status may change during the phase of adulthood (Fadjukoff, Pulkinnen, Kokko 2005; Fadjukoff, 2007), despite the fact that it is still believed that adolescence is the phase most conducive to identity change (Kroger, 2007b). The findings that have been made lately undermine, to a certain extent, the foundations of Marcia's theory – the thesis about epigenetic development of identity with a well-defined outcome in the form of identity achievement.

Since the mid-1980s the demand for a more dynamic approach to identity in psychological studies has been constantly increasing (e.g. Grotevant, 1987, Kunnen, Sappa, van Geert, Bonica, 2008). It has been postulated that researchers should renounce the static approach to identity that focused on its particular statuses, and adopt the perspective of treating identity as an outcome of mutual, dynamic relations between the person and their life context. This new understanding implies that identity is engaged in a process in the course of which exploration and commitment-making activities intertwine with one another in the different domains of human existence. The change of perspective in the research on identity was brought about by results of studies that challenged the validity of the assumption that the four statuses of identity constitute a continuum from the least mature to the most developmentally advanced statuses (van Hoof, 1999; Bosma, Kunnen, 2001).

Despite the decades that have passed since the

creation of identity status theory there still is little research on the role of contextual factors (e.g. Waterman, 1999; Kroger, 2000; Galambos, Leadbeater, 2000; Schwartz, 2001, 2005), that is if we exclude studies on family relationships that were, in fact, investigated quite often. Searching for a wider set of conditions that influence identity change is connected with placing emphasis on the dynamic aspects of the development process, and thus indicating not only the effects of the change, but also its mechanisms (Grotevant, 1987; Meeus, Iedema, Helsen, Vollebergh, 1999). Adopting such an approach resulted in the 1990s in the emergence of theories in which their authors stressed that identity was immersed in a deeper context, and that the formation and further development of identity had its origins in, inter alia, evaluations of the person's identity formulated by significant others in everyday interactions (Kerpelman, Pittman, Lamke, 1997); sense of compatibility between the person's identity, personal and external expectations, and external standards (Grotevant, 1989; Waterman, 1990, 1992; Adams, Marshall, 1996); style of cognitive functioning and its interactions with the changing life context (Berzonsky, 1989); tangible and intangible personal resources that enable the individual to negotiate their position in the postmodern world (Côté, 1997).

One of the newest processual models of identity development is the Dual-Cycle Model of Identity Formation (Luyckx, Goossens, Soenens et al., 2005; Luyckx, Goossens, Soenens, 2006; Luyckx, Goossens, Soenens, Beyers, 2006; also: Brzezińska, Piotrowski, 2011). The model is based on the assumption that both exploration and commitment are complex and dynamic processes that are related to each other. Deriving from earlier studies (Grotevant, 1987; Bosma, Kunnen, 2001; Meeus, Iedema, Maasen, 2002), the authors of the model distinguished three types of exploration, both adaptive and maladaptive, which was a significant new idea and two types of commitment, thanks to which they differentiated the process of commitment-making from the degree to which the person identifies with the commitments already made.

The Dual-Cycle Model of Identity Formation does not distinguish any specific stages of identity development. It implies that all dimensions of identity are mutually connected to one another and are present throughout the whole life of an individual. Differences may pertain to the intensity and domination of particular dimensions, depending on the configuration of psychosocial factors prevailing in the given phase of development. This approach, similarly to the view of Bosma and Kunnen (2001), presumes that with age and changing context of development, and in connection to other personal characteristics, changes in the sphere of person—environment transactions take place. As

a consequence of these changes, alternations in exploration and commitment dimensions occur, and thus a change of the overall sense of identity takes place.

Process-oriented perspectives on identity development have been coined in order to, *inter alia*, include in the research on personal identity theses from sociological and social psychology theories (Côté, 1996; Rattansi, Pheonix, 2005) pertaining to the influence of cultural and macrosocial factors on identity. The main aim of studies representing this approach is to describe and explain the continuous and dynamic relations between identity, and both the internal and external context. These new perspectives on identity are not a radical attempt to diverge from the classic theory of identity statuses, they rather constitute an important complementation and elaboration that leads to the augmentation of our knowledge about human identity and offers new possibilities of conducting studies and interpreting their results. Identity starts to be treated as a changeable construct that not only indicates one's developmental trajectory, but which is also created and modified by that trajectory. Bosma and Kunnen (2001) stress that identity may change due to both the internal characteristics of an individual (endogenous identity change) and alterations in the context of development, modifying transactional relationship between the person and their environment (exogenous identity change).

Two approaches to adulthood

When defining the notion of adulthood and determining the criteria on the basis of which one can be considered to be an adult, we often refer to age. Determining adulthood as the achievement of a certain age, while effective in a legal system, seems to be unsatisfactory in psychological studies. The current divergence from the practice of perceiving societies as based on stable, often "hereditary" social roles, contributes to the fact that nowadays the age criterion has ceased to be considered a good marker of the life situation of an individual, especially in adulthood. Therefore, it seems necessary to take into account other criteria.

The most frequently applied criterion of adulthood, particularly among sociologists (Hogan, Astone, 1986; Mortimer, Oesterle, Krüger, 2005), emphasizes the importance of fulfilling the social roles characteristic of adults (demographic criterion; objective marker of adulthood). The extent to which these roles are fulfilled determines whether the person can be considered an adult. Referring to the objective markers of adulthood has a long history and is deeply rooted in the majority of societies, both those traditional (e.g. transition rituals in tribal societies), and those highly developed (e.g. having a child, getting married).

Naturally, the fulfillment of particular social roles continues to have a relationship to a person's age. However, as data from different countries suggest (e.g. Guerreiro, Abrantes, 2004; Macek, Bejček, Vaníčková, 2007; Lanz, Tagliabue, 2007; Szafranec, 2011; data of the Central Statistical Office – GUS, 2011; Brzezińska,

Czub, Nowotnik, Rękosiewicz, 2012) this relationship is now significantly weaker than it used to be about a decade ago. The attenuation of this relationship can be attributed to the progressive individualization of development and divergence from the traditional stages of transition to adulthood. Recognition of adulthood in terms of undertaking particular social roles in the given culture yields, nevertheless, difficulties connected with establishing a list of roles characteristic of an adult person. Among the most frequently analyzed events connected with the roles of adulthood (Hogan, Astone, 1986; Fadjukoff, 2007) one may enlist: finishing education, leaving the family home and establishing an independent household, beginning full-time work, establishing a close relationship (also in the form of marriage), and having children.

One can also distinguish an approach that frames adulthood as a subjective category (see e.g. Côté, 1997; Arnett, 2000; Arnett, Galambos, 2003; Brzezińska, Piotrowski, 2010). Studies within this approach usually focus on the subjective sense of adulthood, i.e. on the conviction of being an adult (categorical approach), or being an adult to a certain extent (dimensional approach). The subjective sense of adulthood is also referred to as adult identity.

An analysis of the literature on the transition to adulthood enables the observation of the constantly increasing absorption of researchers in examining adulthood from the perspective that emphasizes personal qualities as the basis for both recognizing a person as an adult, and perceiving oneself as an adult. This approach is particularly highlighted in the studies of Arnett (1997, 2000), according to whom individualistic criteria, such as accepting responsibility for one's self and making independent decisions, constitute, especially in the highly developed countries, the most important criteria of adulthood. This led Arnett to the conclusion that „most young Americans regard specific events traditionally viewed as marking the transition to adulthood, such as finishing education, beginning full-time work, and marriage, as irrelevant to the attainment of adult status” (2003, p. 63).

Replications of Arnett's studies, conducted on the samples of Poles (individuals aged 15 to 56; Gurba, 2008), Austrians (individuals aged 11 to 55; Sirsch, Dreher, Mayr, Willinger, 2009), and Argentinians (individuals aged 25 to 27; Facio, Micocci, 2003), yielded similar conclusions. Regardless of certain intercultural differences, for instance, that in Poland and Argentina social roles were more frequently identified as crucial for achieving adulthood than in the United States, and that in China becoming able to financially support parents turned out to be very important, which was practically insignificant in the Western societies (Nelson, Badger, Wu, 2004), individualistic criteria proved to dominate.

Despite the fact that Arnett's studies and the conclusions deriving from them met with criticism, especially from sociologists (Hartmann, Swartz, 2006; Benson, Furstenberg, 2006) who substantiate that the social roles are equally important as the "internal side" of transition to adulthood (Andrew, Eggerling-Boeck, Sandefur, Smith, 2006), we

would maintain that paying attention to the subjective / internal aspects of transition to adulthood needs to be assessed as being unequivocally positive.

Apart from a belief in one's own autonomy and taking responsibility for one's own actions, categories crucial to Arnett's theory (2000), researchers have investigated such internal characteristics as self-perceived maturity (Johnson, Berg, Sirotzki, 2007), marriage readiness (Carroll, Badger, Willoughby, Nelson, Madsen, Barry, 2009), intimate relationship readiness (Brzezińska, Piotrowski, 2010; Piotrowski, 2012), which can also be perceived as markers of adulthood and transition to adulthood, besides social roles and sense of adulthood. Such characteristics as independence and readiness to build long-lasting relationships may be treated as markers of a wider category – psychosocial maturity – that expresses the individual's capacity to function satisfactorily, both from the point of view of the individual and their environment (Greenberger, Steinberg, 1986; Galambos, Tilton-Weaver, 2000; Montgomery, 2005).

In the studies of, Shanahan, Porfeli & Mortimer (2005) and Johnson, Berg & Sirotzki (2007), the authors claim that from the point of view of an analysis of adult identity (i.e. self-perceived adulthood) an optimal approach seems to be the confluence model which emphasizes the fact that adult identity is based on two pillars: role transitions and personal qualities. Such an approach appears to be useful not only in the case of a sense of adulthood, but also with reference to the development of other dimensions of personal identity (see: Piotrowski, 2013a).

It is worth noting that the analysis of adulthood from the points of view of social roles and psychosocial maturity applies, as a matter of fact, to similar areas. In the first of the two approaches, researchers may verify whether the individual has a partner and/or has left the parental household, whereas in the latter they may inquire whether he or she feels / is ready to establish an intimate relationship, or whether the person independently decides about the domains of their own activity.

The factors connected with identity formation that are under scrutiny in the present paper have been divided into two categories: (1) role transitions, and (2) personal qualities, which entail both close relationship readiness, autonomy, and subjective sense of adulthood.

Identity and role transitions

When taking their first steps into the adult world, young people rely heavily on their plans for the future, create a vision of themselves in the future, and seek to achieve it (Nurmi, Poole, Seginer, 1995). The ability to create realistic plans for the future, in particular, differentiates adolescents from children. Of importance is also the content of the plans, for instance, the expected age at which young people wish to implement their intentions connected with undertaking the social roles associated with adulthood. This affects their current activities, decision-making, and may influence both current and future functioning (Carroll, Willoughby, Badger, Nelson, Barry, Madsen, 2007; Trempała, Malmberg, 1998).

The fact that adolescents, when asked about their plans for the future, most frequently point to undertaking the roles of adulthood, especially those connected with work, education, and family (Nurmi, 1991; 1992; Brzezińska, Czub, Czub et al., 2012), and that in planning their developmental path they refer to certain cultural schema (prototype), provides evidence for the great personal value that young people attach to the roles typically associated with adulthood.

(1) From school to work transition and identity formation

In studies on identity the most frequently encountered data pertains to individuals attending secondary school and to college students (e.g. Kalakoski, Nurmi, 1998; Lannegrand-Willems, Bosma, 2006; Piotrowski, 2013b – this volume). Thus, particularly valuable seem to be those research projects in which authors have decided to go beyond the scope of the two aforementioned groups, and study individuals who have already completed school and academic education. It is even more important when one takes into consideration the fact that the greatest changes in the sphere of psychosocial functioning may be observed at the end of college or university education, at the time when a change of social status is very close, and when young people anticipate significant changes in their life (Pascarella, Terenzini, 2005).

The most common subject of interest to researchers involved in the studies on identity development in the period following the completion of formal education, is to analyze the impact of the quality of transition from school to work on the self-concept/. Completion of education and getting a job are often associated with a reduction in the intensity of exploration and strengthening the sphere of identity commitments (Danielsen, Lorem, Kroger, 2000; Luyckx, Schwartz, Goossens, Pollock, 2008b; Piotrowski, Brzezińska, 2011). Professional activity coincides here with a solution of the identity crisis, a clearer perspective on one's future, and a stronger belief in finding the direction in which the individual wishes to go, whereas experiencing difficulties on the labor market (also unemployment) is connected with greater uncertainty and persisting identity crisis, high levels of ruminative exploration and weak commitments (De Goede, Spruijt, Iedema, Meeus, 1999; Piotrowski, Brzezińska, 2011).

Entering the labor market usually leads to the achievement of financial independence, and is connected with a decrease of the stress associated with change (Arnett, 1997). In comparison to individuals who still study, people who work are more motivated to make other important life decisions. Apart from that a professional career, which requires more time than school or college education, does not allow for many possibilities to explore various alternatives and, as a result, contributes to a more homogeneous environment (see Yoder, 2000). Moreover, employed individuals do not receive so much social acceptance for remaining in a psychosocial moratorium (Montgomery, Côté, 2003), and their identity is characterized by a higher degree of inflexibility and a lower level of proneness to

change (Brzezińska, Piotrowski, 2010).

Professional activity, however, is not always connected with the effects described above. The studies of Frisén and Wängqvist (2011) offer an insight into at least one of the moderators of the relationship between work and identity – education. According to them, among the employed individuals who had earned a higher degree there was observed a lower incidence of people with identity diffusion and moratorium than in the group of individuals without academic education. Unfortunately, in the aforementioned study the researchers did not control for the type of work. As a consequence, it is difficult to clearly determine whether these differences should be attributed to the fact that people with higher education often practice the type of work they identify with and which meets their ambitions and, therefore, enables them to deal with identity confusion, or whether these differences should be ascribed to the longer education of better educated individuals, and thus a longer period of moratorium and greater amounts of time that could have been spent on dealing with identity issues in a safe educational environment. Similar doubts emerge from other studies (Fadjukoff, Kokko, Pulkinen, 2007), in which it has been shown that the status of achieved identity at the age of 27 and 9 years later (at the age of 36) was the more frequently found the later the individuals finished their education and started to work full-time.

In the literature, both explanations can be found, i.e., that a positive effect on identity development has (1) an extended period of moratorium, and (2) a more satisfying profession that yields a higher income for individuals who are better educated. The latter explanation can be to a certain extent supported by the relationship between dimensions of identity and financial situation that has been found in Polish studies (Brzezińska, Piotrowski, Garbarek-Sawicka et al., 2010; the relationship was not observed in the studies of: Luyckx, Duriez, Klimstra, De Witte, 2010). Lower incomes and associated with them – in the opinion of the examined subjects – a lower ability to meet one's needs resulted in a stronger identity crisis and a lower degree of identification with the identity commitments in the period of early adulthood (the average age of investigated individuals was slightly higher than 30).

Probably all of the factors mentioned above coexist with one another and exert a cumulative influence on a person's development. An extended period of education is conducive to a more successful coping with identity diffusion and to a better recognition of one's own abilities which, in turn, along with the fact of having a university degree, is favorable to getting a more satisfactory, stable and well-paid job, and thus leads to a sense of security. In such a context, it seems to be easier for young people to locate themselves in a satisfactory place on the social ladder and to build a vision of their future.

Studies on the influence of work activity carried out in recent years (Danielsen, Lorem and Kroger, 2000; Frisen, Wängqvist, 2010) have led to different conclusions than those formulated in the 1970s and 1980s (Munro, Adams, 1977; Morash, 1980). Today, one may more and

more frequently observe individuals with achieved identity among college / university students than among employed people. During college education the vision of one's future is quite clear. Young people have a plain conceptualization of their future, and expect that their dreams and plans will come true. In the following years they are confronted with the requirements of the contemporary labor market and, in Europe, these requirements result in many difficulties, especially those associated with getting and keeping a job that allows for the financial independence that young individuals need. Perhaps these difficulties make individuals who have started their professional career reduce their exploration activity in order to maintain the status quo. Therefore, taking into consideration the relationship between professional activity and identity, it seems to be crucial that the sphere of social engagement coincides with the self-concept formation.

(2) Leaving the parental household

Another important event on the road to adulthood, also connected with commencing professional activity (Guerreiro, Abrantes, 2004), is leaving the parental home and establishing one's own independent household. Young adults who have already left their family home are characterized by a higher degree of personal development, better relations with parents, and possessing a sense of personal success (Jordyn, Byrd, 2003). Running one's own household, even if it does not mean total self-sufficiency, necessitates coping with many requirements, organizing autonomous functioning, and managing one's time and resources. In such circumstances it is likely that the self-concept of a person and their identity will undergo certain changes, similar to those yielded by a professional career.

Jordyn and Byrd's studies (2003) have shown, however, that this matter is not unequivocal. Living independently and possessing simultaneously the status of moratorium identity coincided, in comparison to individuals with different identity statuses, with less frequent soliciting for support from family members when they found themselves in difficult situations. The authors explain that the status of moratorium identity and the associated with it emotional difficulties that were found in this group (lack of vision of one's professional career, dissatisfaction with one's appearance, dissatisfaction with possessed abilities, dissatisfaction with and alienation from the academic environment, social isolation, anxiety and depressive mood) led to lower social activity, while the physical distance from family members additionally impeded the receiving of social support. In the light of these studies it seems necessary to approach the matter of leaving the parental household with caution. Only in the case of individuals who had already left their family homes and had made clear identity commitments (identity achieved or foreclosure) did the configuration of results point to their high level of adaptation. Hence, becoming physically independent from one's family during the time of transition to adulthood does not seem to be beneficial for everybody.

Undertaking the roles of adulthood requires,

thus, an appropriate level of psychological development (Galambos, Tilton-Weaver, 2000; Galambos, Barker, Tilton-Weaver, 2003), which advocates the need to include both of the aforementioned spheres into the research on transition to adulthood. It is necessary to stress that Jordyn and Byrd (2003) studied young (19-20 years of age) college students. Perhaps this was the reason why independent living was considered troublesome for the people in the researched sample. These individuals might not have been mature enough to cope with the requirements connected with running a household alone, which would lead to the conclusion that undertaking the social roles of adulthood may affect a person's development both in a positive and negative way, depending on the level of psychosocial maturity of the individual, included in which is their readiness to be independent.

These results may be interpreted, however, in a different manner, especially in the context of data presented by Fadjukoff, Kokko and Pulkinen (2007) who showed that the earlier the social roles connected with family life were undertaken (also leaving the parental household) the more frequent was the status of achieved identity at the age of 27. Individuals who became independent quite early, and such were those investigated by Jordyn and Byrd, in the initial period may be forced to intensify their efforts in learning how to live independently, which may translate into a temporary deterioration of their functioning and may lead to experiencing a severe identity crisis (Bosma, Kunnen, 2001). Later, however, as a result of adaptation to the new circumstances, it may even facilitate coping with the crisis, and lead to the transition to a higher level of functioning. So far the issue of establishing an independent household has not been investigated thoroughly enough and it seems to be an area worth exploring.

(3) Close relationships and having children

While the results of studies on establishing independent households by young people are rather ambiguous the sphere of close relationships is much better explored, even though the studies in this area focused mainly on the emotional aspects of these relationships (particularly on closeness and intimacy between partners) and therefore investigated individuals who had a partner. Unfortunately, the data from these studies does not yield a lot information about any potential influence exerted on the individual by the very fact of establishing a close relationship, or what personal characteristics are conducive to engaging in a close relationship (Orlofsky, Marcia, Lesser, 1973; Årseth, Kroger, Martinussen, Marcia, 2009).

The matter of having / not having a partner has seldom been the subject of empirical investigations, and the results of these scarce studies are not unequivocal. On the one hand, it has been shown that having a partner is more frequent among individuals with achieved identity, whereas people still experiencing identity diffusion build close relationships far less frequently (Frisén, Wängqvist, 2011). These findings are consistent with Erikson's (1968) assumption that real intimacy is possible only after the

identity crisis has been solved, which does not preclude the fact that the very act of establishing a close relationship with another person is conducive to the solution of the identity crisis. Fadjukoff, Kokko and Pulkinen (2007), on the other hand, showed that the earlier the social roles connected with family life are undertaken (leaving the parental household, having a partner, having children), the more frequent is the status of achieved identity at the age of 27. In turn, Luyckx, et al. (2010) did not observe any significant differences in identity development between individuals who have a partner and those who have not. In the studies of these authors, no significant relationships between identity and many objective markers of adulthood were found (individuals with different identity statuses did not differ from one another in terms of age, education, the fact of having / not having a partner and/or children, the type of employment contract: temporary vs. permanent).

The diversity of results obtained by researchers could be attributed to the fact that the researchers and the individuals investigated by them came from different cultures. It could be assumed that in the case of Swedes investigated by Frisé and Wängqvist (2011) and young Belgians studied by Luyckx, et al. (2010) that cultural differences may be responsible for, for instance, the degree of importance that young people attach to close relationships. However, differences in the results may also stem from the fact that the realization of social roles in adolescence and at the beginning of early adulthood remains simply in a weak relationship with identity, which could be the reason why this relationship may not always be spotted if indeed it exists. This would be consistent with the opinion of Arnett (2000) who claimed that among individuals aged twenty-something (according to his terminology, among emerging adults) the social roles undertaken by them do not exert significant influence on identity being rather a possibility of gaining new experiences than commitments allowing them to better define themselves.

Identity and personal qualities

(1) Intimacy in close relationships

Although Erikson (1968) quite clearly stated that without solving the identity crisis there is no possibility of experiencing true intimacy in a relationship, and thus solving the basic psychosocial crisis of early adulthood, contemporary scholars (e.g. Årseth, Kroger, Martinussen, Marcia, 2009) argue that between identity and intimacy there rather exist feedback relationships, and that these spheres are involved in mutual interactions.

Meta-analysis of studies linking identity status to attachment style and intimacy in close relationships of the adolescence and early adulthood period showed that the status of achieved identity correlates positively, and the status of diffused identity negatively, with a secure attachment to a partner and the level of intimacy between the partners (Årseth, Kroger, Martinussen, Marcia, 2009). A solution to the identity crisis is thus connected both with more often entering into close relationships in general, and

with a more mature functioning in close relationships that influences the level of satisfaction with the relationship felt by the partners (Zimmer-Gembeck, Petherick, 2006).

The ability to build relationships that are characterized by a high level of intimacy increases with age (Montgomery, 2005; this effect has also been confirmed in Poland: Brzezińska, Piotrowski, 2010), and is concurrent with the development of other dimensions of maturity. With age and experience, and with movement on the identity dimension toward the solution of the identity crisis, the role of close relationships in a person's life also changes.

While in adolescence close relationships are rather associated with experimenting in the sphere of social relations, in subsequent years one may not only anticipate a stronger motivation to form relationships based on intimacy, but also that intimate relationships will become a part of the identity commitments, and that the level of the identity development expressed on the diffusion – achievement dimension will be also connected with the level of satisfaction with the relationship and the level of intimacy between the partners (Zimmer-Gembeck, Petherick, 2006).

The higher level of intimacy observed in relationships established by people who have already solved the identity crisis may be an indication of a general tendency manifested by such individuals towards building more mature interpersonal relationships (Berzonsky, Kuk, 2000). Identity achievement is connected with, for instance, a higher level of tolerance for other people, which undoubtedly can be considered a feature favorable to building close relationships. Thus, the process of identity development leads rather to overall changes in the sphere of interpersonal relationships, among which intimate relationships are just one of the possible forms of coexistence with other people. This explains the results obtained by Frisen and Wängqvist (2010), according to whom people with identity achieved more frequently have a partner, as well as the results of other authors (Montgomery, 2005; Zimmer-Gembeck, Petherick, 2006) that confirm a higher level of intimacy between the partners with the status of identity achieved.

For a high level of satisfaction with a relationship to be felt by the partners depends on the fact of solving the identity crisis, and on the level of closeness / intimacy between the individuals (Zimmer-Gembeck, Petherick, 2006). Both of these factors, mutually influencing each other, have an effect on the level of satisfaction of the partners with their relationship. A relationship that gives a sense of security, stability, and that satisfies the need of belonging, may be conducive to finding answers for identity questions, especially when one takes into consideration the fact that the very relationship itself may be a significant component of the individual's identity. On the other hand, only individuals who are certain about who they are and where they are heading may in a satisfactory way connect their own identity with the identity of another person (Erikson, 1950). The link between identity and intimacy between the partners in a close relationship seems to be, in the light of available studies, quite clear. In close relationships, the level of intimacy increases with the development of identity.

(2) Autonomy and self-reliance

Another crucial marker of psychological maturity, autonomy and independence (Galambos, Tilton-Weaver, 2000; Berzonsky, Kuk, 2000), is understood as the ability to make decisions concerning the direction of one's life coincide with the solution of the identity crisis. A high sense of autonomy possessed by young adults is not only associated with a better evaluation of their relationship with their parents in early adulthood, but also, or even most importantly, it has a direct impact on the satisfactory fulfillment of the social roles of adulthood, and translates into a better adaptation to life circumstances (Beyers, Goossens, 2003). Individuals who during the period of transition to adulthood have the opportunity to make independent decisions about themselves and their actions, and who are convinced of their own independence, are also more satisfied with the roles they exercise, are characterized by a higher life quality in general, and less frequently manifest a clear identity diffusion (Berzonsky, Kuk, 2000).

Many expectations of young people in the period of transition to adulthood are connected with the very process of becoming physically independent (starting to work, having a need to build a partnership relation with parents, leaving the parental household), hence the sense of autonomy may be a particularly important marker of a satisfactory transition to adulthood and its conformity to the expectations of the individual. As in the case of forming one's identity through making appropriate commitments, becoming independent, both physically and emotionally, is a pivotal task of individuals in transition to adulthood. On the one hand, it is likely that there will be a positive correlation between the sense of autonomy and changes in functioning in the social sphere, especially those connected with exercising the social roles of adulthood. Of remarkable importance here seems to be the fact of commencing a professional career, which enables the person to become more financially independent and to leave the parental household. On the other hand, a higher level of autonomy may be observed in the case of individuals who have already solved the identity crisis (Berzonsky, Kuk, 2000), which supports the claim that all of these areas (maturity, identity, social roles of adulthood) remain in mutual relations to one another (Piotrowski, 2013a).

(3) Sense of adulthood

A higher level of psychological maturity (being able to build interpersonal relations based on closeness and intimacy, making independent decisions, and taking responsibility for one's own actions) and solving the identity crisis are reflected in a person's conviction of being an adult. The relationship between the sense of adulthood and personal identity has been investigated in several studies that yield quite clear conclusions about this relationship. Becoming convinced of being an adult (which can be identified with the completion of transition to adulthood, at least in the subjective sense) is a result of the development process that takes place in many different spheres of an individual's functioning. One of the components of this

process is exercising the social roles of adulthood that gives young people the opportunity to observe visible evidence, both for them and for other people, of the completion of the childhood and adolescence phases.

Looking at the process of acquiring a sense of adulthood from the perspective of personal identity, based on the mechanisms of exploration and commitment, one can point to the special role of identity commitments in the development of this sphere (Nelson, Barry, 2005; Luyckx, Schwartz, Goossens, Pollock, 2008; Nelson, 2009). Individuals who consider themselves adults are most often people who to a large extent have managed identity diffusion, know what professional path they want to follow, what attributes their partner, with whom they want to build a long-lasting relationship, should possess, and have a vision of themselves in the future. This relationship turned out to be particularly visible in the studies of Luyckx, Schwartz, Goossens and Pollock (2008), who observed that the sense of adulthood among individuals aged 18-30 is connected negatively with an intensification of the identity crisis (ruminative exploration) and positively with undertaking identity commitments and with having a strong identification with them, being a marker of conformity of the person's commitments and their expectations / standards. The sense of adulthood increases when individuals stabilize their life in both the social and identity spheres.

Moreover, it has been observed that the relationship between identity and sense of adulthood is characterized by a quite distinct time stability (Fadjukoff, Kokko and Pulkinnen, 2007). Individuals who at the age of 27, considered themselves to be adults were characterized by a stronger sense of identity in the subsequent years of their life (at the age of 36 and 42). Even 15 years later, entering the period of middle adulthood, the subjects were characterized by a strong and stable sense of identity. The conviction of being an adult emerges when a person find their niche in the social sphere (roles of adulthood), works out an individual style of functioning, and takes responsibility for their actions (maturity), which turns out to be a good predictor of further satisfactory development and offers the possibility of maintaining or transforming identity in a manner consistent with personal expectations.

In studies conducted in Poland (Brzezińska, Piotrowski, 2009; 2010; Piotrowski, 2012) on individuals at various stages of transition to adulthood (20-40 years of age) a confirmation of the results concerning the relationship between identity and personal qualities presented above was found. We observed that a significant change of identity takes place in the period between 24 and 29 years of age. Among the younger subjects the markers of the identity crisis (strong ruminative exploration, weak identification with commitments), which is to a large extent resolved in the second half of the third decade of life when identity usually becomes more stable (Brzezińska, Piotrowski, 2009, 2010), had much higher levels in comparison to the other groups. The highest levels of exploration, the lowest levels of commitments, and the lowest sense of adulthood was found among university students aged 20-23. In subsequent years, under the influence of the social context change

(Piotrowski, 2013a), the pattern of development pointed to a transition from the moratorium identity, dominated by an active identity crisis, to an increase in the strength of commitments and to a lower level of exploration. The difference in terms of identity, which was observed between individuals aged 20-23 and older people, also coincided with differences in terms of the sense of adulthood, which among university students was significantly lower.

We also observed a distinct relationship between the sense of adulthood, readiness to build a close, intimate relationship, and the identity status. The highest levels of these markers of adulthood were found in the groups of individuals with the status of foreclosure and identity achievement, whereas the lowest level of sense of adulthood characterized people with the status of moratorium and undifferentiated identity (Luyckx, Schwartz, Goossens, Pollocks, 2008; Brzezińska, Piotrowski, 2009). A difference was thus observed between the statuses characterized by strong (identity achievement and foreclosure) and weak to moderate commitments (moratorium and undifferentiated identity) commitments. Dimensions of exploration are in the case of a sense adulthood less important, although a significant negative relationship was found here (Brzezińska, Piotrowski, 2009, 2010). It needs to be emphasized that the people aged 20-23/24 who took part in the reported studies were for the most part students, whom we compared with older individuals who had already finished their university education (see also: Luyckx, Schwartz, Goossens, Pollock, 2008). Hence, the observed differences can be attributed to the influence of both the age itself, as well as the change of the social context that follows the end of education. However, previous studies (Danielsen, Lorem and Koger, 2000;) indicate that the end of education and entering the labor market, regardless of the age at which this takes place, is associated with changes in the structure of identity (stronger commitments, a lower level of identity uncertainty and confusion), and alternations in the sense of adulthood and psychosocial maturity. Also, articles presented in this issue of Polish Psychological Bulletin (Piotrowski, 2013b) advocate the need to take into account contextual factors, connected with the educational environment, when considering the determinants of identity formation in young people.

Résumé

Probably all of the researchers of development would agree that we should cease to explain human development by referring to individual influences or factors connected with the maturation of the body, with personality, or with social environment. In order for studies to yield an insight into the mechanisms of human development we need to strive to integrate a variety of data, verifying more and more complex models. Simultaneously, it needs to be acknowledged that different traits of an individual may be connected with greater or lesser problems in forming one's identity (Berzonsky, 1989; Berzonsky, Kuk, 2000; Piotrowski, Brzezińska, 2011; Brzezińska, Czub, Hejmanowski et al., 2012; Czub et al., 2012), such as the

environment of the person, their context of development, may influence the development of identity, and lead to the convergence of individuals who are subject to this influence. On such an assumption, *inter alia*, are based intercultural studies (Boski, 2009), also on identity: individuals who come from different cultures differ from one another in some aspects and, simultaneously, are in these very aspects similar to the members of their own culture.

Identity is an effect of the combined influence of external / contextual factors and internal / individual factors. In our opinion a thesis put forward in a review article of Rattansi and Phoenix (2005), that similar environments may produce similar identities of its inhabitants, is true. Links between identity and internal and external factors may be thus understood as a form of balancing between being similar to others and being distinct, different from other people (Jarymowicz, 1992).

In their article, Baumeister and Muraven (1996) claim that the best way to conceptualize the complex relationships between a person's identity and their socio-cultural life context is to assume a perspective of adaptation, because thanks to that one may, on the one hand, emphasize the causal role of culture / context and, simultaneously, the importance of individual choices, or changes of the internal or personal traits. Identity development is, according to them, a process of adaptation of a person (with all of their capacities, plans, traits) to external conditions. A similar approach is represented by Yoder (2000), for whom the context of life creates a certain scope of possibilities within which the individual forms their identity. The influence of external context on the identity development is thus moderated by the person's traits.

Recognizing identity as a construct that is an effect of a dynamic interaction of personal and contextual factors must lead to questioning, at least to a certain degree, the validity of perceiving its development in terms of transition from the initial state of identity diffusion to the final form of identity achievement. As Trempała (2000, p. 16) claims, with reference to the studies on development understood as a life-long process, "(...) the essence of development is not so much growth as rather a change that takes place over time. Its characteristic feature is plasticity due to which different directions of the development are possible, depending on the individual and environmental resources of the person". Such an approach requires studies on identity to investigate individuals who differ in the social context and in their internal characteristics, and to analyze the relationship between these variables, and their interaction with identity (see the Identity Capital Model - Côté, 1996).

In the present article, data on the relationship between identity, social roles of adulthood, and markers of psychosocial maturity and sense of adulthood have been discussed. Several researchers (e.g. Greenberger, Steinberg, 1986; Galambos, Tilton-Weaver, 2000; Galambos, Barker, Tilton-Weaver, 2003) suggest that these characteristics of young people should be examined jointly, because one may sometimes observe pseudomature individuals among adolescents. This group is characterized by the realization of certain social roles of adulthood (e.g. working, commencing

sexual activity) and, at the same time, low psychological maturity (the authors of the term "pseudomaturity", Greenberger and Steinberg (1986), define psychological maturity in terms of a high degree of autonomy, independent functioning, and social responsibility, i.e. actions for the benefit of the quality of life of the society). The individuals who function the most successfully are those who have achieved the status of an adult in the sphere of social roles, but also those who are characterized by a high level of psychosocial maturity (Galambos, Tilton-Weaver, 2000; Piotrowski, 2012). In the case of pseudomature people, one may expect either very strong, inflexible identity commitments, when strong internalization of the role takes place, or, on the contrary, a very strong identity diffusion. If the exercised social roles do not yield a sense of greater maturity, do not cause mental independence, do not contribute to an increase of responsibility, it may turn out that they not only impede successful coping with the identity crisis, but also are conducive to its intensification.

In the studies of Piotrowski (2012), it has been shown that individuals who exercise a great number of the social roles of the adulthood period and, at the same time, have a low psychosocial maturity are characterized by a low level of identification with the identity commitments. People unready for the fulfillment of certain social roles that they have nonetheless started to implement out of necessity or as a consequence of their own decisions, may have difficulties in identifying with them and in accepting the rules of these roles, and this may hamper the development of identity. Only in the situation when both of these spheres – psychological maturity and the fulfillment of social roles – harmonize with each other, i.e. when undertaking social roles of the adulthood period is accompanied by changes at the level of psychological maturity, or when the level of psychological maturity is high and next the social roles of adulthood are undertaken, can one most likely expect a solution to the identity crisis, and a satisfactory development in different spheres afterwards.

The path that young people follow in the period of adolescence up to adulthood is connected with a number of internal changes pertaining to cognitive structures (Labouvie-Vief, 1980), personality and emotions (Roberts, Caspi, Moffitt, 2001), hence referring to the overall human experience. It can be argued that during the years that elapse from the start of the adolescence period until the moment of a complete entrance into adulthood, the essential spheres of human functioning undergo a transformation that is reflected in changes in behavior, perception of the world and the place the person occupies in this world. These changes, regardless of whether they occur suddenly and dynamically, chaotically, or slowly, evolutionally (Flum, 1994a, 1994b) and orderly, must also result in alternations in the way in which the individual perceives and thinks of himself, i.e. in the sphere of self-image.

Taking into consideration the fact that subjectively the most important components of self-image constitute an integral part of personal identity, changes in this sphere are also inevitable. In our opinion, identity is a dynamic construct that is an outcome of an interaction between

personal and contextual factors, and not a constant, homogeneous personality trait. Thus, in the times of liquid modernity (Bauman, 2000; Giddens, 1990), it is practically impossible to maintain an established identity which is why it seems to be necessary to seek for these new theoretical models that would concentrate on the mechanisms of identity change, and to assume an interactive perspective as the basis for further studies in this field.

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