

FACTORS REDUCING THE RISK OF SOCIAL MALADJUSTMENT: A NARRATIVE APPROACH TO ADOLESCENT IDENTITY FORMATION

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The research aimed to check if the construction of narrative identity by adolescents at risk of maladjustment contributes to their adaptive social functioning. It also aimed to identify factors related to identity on which the adjustment of adolescents at risk of social maladjustment depends. A natural experiment was conducted in Poland among youths from sociotherapy centres ($n = 60$, aged 18–20 years, 33 women and 27 men). A group of graduates at these centres ($n = 31$, aged 21–24 years, 17 women and 14 men) was included in the exploratory study and compared with the group of students in terms of maladjustment, ego-resiliency, and identity. The experiment shows that the construction of a narrative identity through a life story interview contributes to better social adaptation, which means a lower risk of maladjustment. The diffuse-avoidant identity style predisposes to maladjustment, whereas ego-resiliency is associated with a higher level of adjustment. Thus the narrative interview method can find application in the therapy of adolescents at risk of maladjustment.

Keywords: maladjustment; narrative approach; adolescence; identity processing styles; life story interview; self-confrontation method.

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During adolescence, human identity evolves intensively. A young person tries to answer who she is, but the answers are sometimes contradictory, which leads to an identity crisis typical of this period (Erikson, 1950). Normative identity crisis in adolescence, in the case of traumatic experiences, lack of care and support from relatives, and behavioural or emotional disorders as a result, can all lead to maladjustment (McDougall & Vaillancourt, 2015; Oleszkowicz, 2006; Senejko, 2010). It is therefore important to explore the importance of identity construction of those young people who are particularly exposed to factors related to maladjustment.

This research focuses on identity construction in adolescence: the level of maladjustment, narrative identity and identity styles, and ego-resiliency as key phenomena affecting adolescents' functioning. The aim was to investigate whether the process of narrative identity construction can significantly impact the adjustment of adolescents who are at risk of social maladjustment.

Maladjustment and Adolescence

Let us start with adjustment and healthy development in adolescence. The necessary conditions for that are a sense of security and belongingness, social support as well as ego-resiliency, and identity formation (Eisenberg et al., 2010; McDougall & Vaillancourt, 2015). On the other hand, the phenomenon of social maladjustment is described in the pedagogical and psychological literature as the malfunctioning of an individual in various social situations, such as among family, peers, or at school, as a result of mental disorders or unfavourable environmental conditions (Israelashvili, 2012; Pytko, 2000; Resurrección et al., 2014). The negative consequences of these difficulties may include mental illness, suicide attempts, addictions, crime, and problems with proper functioning in social relationships, for example in the family, school, or peer relations (King & Merchant, 2008; Miłkowska, 2005; Ostaszewski et al., 2008). Such a situation is also associated with a decrease in motivation to develop or achieve life goals, increased resistance to undertake constructive actions, and reduced passion or interest (Gerard & Buehler, 2004; Jaworowska & Matczak, 2008; Miłkowska, 2005).

Recent years have seen an increase in the risk of social maladjustment among adolescents and an increased percentage of mental disorders reaching at least 16% of the population of adolescents (WHO, 2021), including depression and suicide attempts, which are the third most common cause of death in 15–19-year-olds (Cha et al., 2018; Janas-Kozik, 2017).

A lot of research has focused on the genesis of the phenomenon of social maladjustment (Gerard & Buehler, 2004; McDougall & Vaillancourt, 2015; Pytko, 2000);

some studies tended to explore identity, mainly in adults, rather than test its potential impact on adjustment (McAdams & Olson, 2010). The literature review shows a lack of research on the potential impact of the construction of narrative identity on the adjustment of adolescents. Searching for new methods of working with young people at risk and getting to know this phenomenon seems essential for the effective prevention of maladjustment.

Narrative Identity and Adjustment

According to McAdams (1985), narrative identity is a personal, internalized human history that continually evolves and gives meaning to one's life. It considers the past (i.e., important events that influenced the person), explains the present and the causes of the present situation, and contains an idea of the future, and the possible further course of life. It also integrates previous records of autobiographical memory: sensual experiences, childhood images, emotions, and feelings, remembered stories, fairy tales, and myths, as well as games, dreams, and expectations. Thinking about life in this way—typical for late adolescence and early adulthood—means constructing the story of a life that is a narrative identity.

This theory refers to Erikson's (1950) concept of identity, according to which, during adolescence, identity is shaped both retrospectively and prospectively. It includes the certainty of being oneself, being perceived by others in a particular way, and awareness of the family, environmental and individual conditions that had an impact on the self. In internalizing old identifications, a set of consistent and unique commitments in various areas is formed. They originate from chosen life values and provide a feeling of coherence, purpose, and life continuity. They can give it direction and meaning, thereby strengthening one's adjustment. However, a proper adjustment to life tasks and challenges implies a positive resolution of previous developmental crises that contributed to the basic trust, autonomy, and ego-strength—in short, ego-resiliency. On the other hand, if a young person has difficulty defining her involvement in anything, she may fall into a feeling of insecurity and pointlessness (Erikson, 1950).

The research results so far suggest that the construction of narrative identity strengthens the sense of self-continuity that allows one to make life decisions and establish good relationships with other people, and fulfil personal goals. Moreover, narrative identity facilitates the creation of a real positive vision of the future and stimulates the motivation to transform the current situation into the desired one. Narrative processing of life experiences ensures a greater sense of cognitive control over one's life (Trzebiński, 2002). It involves presenting past and future events from

one's life in the form of coherent stories in which one is the main character who has specific intentions and goals, however, facing obstacles during their implementation, one has to cope with them. Telling about one's past experiences and future expectations triggers the so-called narrative motivation, which comes from the hero's thoughts and emotions that emerge from the story and determine the direction and meaning of action (McAdams & Pals, 2006; Oleś & Batory, 2008; Trzebiński, 2002). Trzebiński (1998) describes two mechanisms that regulate the motivational processes in self-narrative. The first one comes from task motivation (Lewin et al., 1944) and concerns the cognitive sphere. The person takes specific actions shaped by schema activated in the self-narrative. This allows them to give meaning to their past and present experiences and reveal their true intentions to find possible solutions to the difficulties encountered. These intentions push a person towards specific decisions and aspirations that constitute the motivation to act. The second mechanism concerns emotional processes. In a self-narrative, one perceives oneself as a subject who displays various emotions, desires, fears, hopes, etc. These are sources of energy to take appropriate action. Self-narrative may increase adjustment by stimulating the motivation to achieve personal goals, while lack of that belongs to core features of maladjustment. Many studies have shown that the self-narrative construction increases awareness of the meaning of life and personal goals as well as stimulates activities promoting personal growth (Hill & Dailos, 2011; Maruna et al., 2006; McAdams & Guo, 2014; McAdams & Olson, 2010; McAdams & Pals, 2006; Oyserman & Markus, 1990; Rowe, 2011; Trzebiński, 2002).

Based on this theory, McAdams (1985, 2007) has proposed the life story interview as a method of constructing narrative identity (McAdams & McLean, 2013). By integrating the past, present, and future in a structured way, a coherent story of one's life is created that includes dreams, plans, goals, and fears. It becomes clear how one's future is derived from the past. The whole story expresses fundamental beliefs, values, and attitudes (McAdams, 1985, 1993) and strengthens the idea that one's life has a deeper meaning and that one is the key figure who has something important to achieve (McAdams & Guo, 2014). Narrative identity develops throughout life, but it is in adolescence that people discover the continuity between their past, present, and future (McAdams, 1985).

However, do young people represent only one point of view concerning themselves in their minds or only one idea of their future or rather do they confront different points of view and various ideas? According to Hermans and Dimaggio (2007), identity is composed of many different voices that resonate together while telling other stories and engaging in dialogue. Thus, they constitute a dynamic, polyphonic, constantly evolving human self. They express different values regarding one's relationship with the self and the world (Oleś & Puchalska-Wasył, 2010). They

may have a positive or negative emotional tone and refer to two basic motives distinguished by Hermans that give direction to human actions: self-enhancement and longing for contact and union with others (Hermans & Hermans-Jansen, 1995). It is worth adding that the analogous motives forming narrative identity were identified by McAdams (1993): strength/power and love/intimacy.

Both theories are complementary. People construct and re-construct their narrative identity by telling a life story (McAdams, 1993), and exploring the system of personal meanings forming valuations of their past, present, and future (Hermans & Hermans-Jansen, 1995), and even more, they can create an alternative interpretation of their experiences. In this research we will show how it is possible to combine methods proposed in frames of both approaches.

Regarding Erikson's theory of identity development, Berzonsky and Kinney (2008) proposed a socio-cognitive model whereby one is cognitively capable of perceiving oneself as an active agent who thinks, feels, and desires and can intentionally direct behaviour. Berzonsky and Kinney (2008) identified three identity processing styles which are namely informational, normative, and diffuse-avoidant that influence decision-making, thus confronting difficulties and achieving goals in a more or less adaptive way.

Research shows that people with the informational identity processing style are more effective and better integrated than people with the diffuse-avoidant style. The informational style was positively correlated with autonomy and emotional intelligence. In contrast, the diffuse-avoidant style is characteristic of less adapted people who are less effective, without a stable and coherent sense of self, have poor self-regulation skills, and usually are impulsive, hedonistic, and chaotic in their choices (Adams et al., 2009). They are often defensive, accusing, or hostile towards others, and they manifest anxious, depressive, and neurotic reactions (Berzonsky & Kinney, 2008). On the other hand, people characterized by the normative style are somewhere between the informational and the diffuse-avoidant identity processing styles. The reason for including Berzonsky's model in this research was related to the motivational processes that are described by more or less adaptive strategies in processing one's identity.

Considering adolescents' adjustment, it is important to take into account the concept of ego-resiliency. The sources of positive adaptation of children and adolescents remain in balancing or inhibiting emotional impulses according to the situation. The strength of character, defined by Block as ego-resiliency, depends on flexibility and adaptation to changing circumstances, both in everyday life and in extremely difficult crises (Block & Kremen, 1996). In this research, we decided to investigate whether ego-resiliency changes due to the construction of narrative identity and to verify whether it is a predictor of adjustment.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

Considering the phenomenon of adjustment and identity formation in adolescence, we formulated the following research questions concerning adolescents at risk of social maladjustment:

1. Does the construction of narrative identity by adolescents at risk of social maladjustment affect their adjustment?
2. What are the predictors of adjustment in adolescents at risk of social maladjustment?

We, therefore, formulated two hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1. Constructing narrative identity by adolescents at risk of social maladjustment positively contributes to their adjustment.

Hypothesis 2. Informational identity processing style, commitment, and ego-resiliency predict a higher level of adjustment.

As the indicator of adjustment–maladjustment level, we defined results in RISB. Both hypotheses concern participants from sociotherapy centre, and Hypothesis 2 concerns also participants who were older and who had been residents of such a centre a few years ago. We decided to include in this study also this older group for we needed a reference point concerning adjustment after being at risk of social maladjustment.

The rationale for the hypotheses is as follows: Capturing life history in the form of a coherent story that provides a sense of continuity of the self and holistic reflection on one's history promotes rational choices of personal strivings and goals as well as their attainment. In turn, adjustment and reduced risk of maladjustment can be derived from more mature forms of identity described as informational style and commitment to selected goals and aspirations, and ego-resiliency that underlies adaptive coping with stress.

METHOD

Participants

A total of 91 adolescents diagnosed as being at risk of social maladjustment participated in the study. In a natural experiment, 60 youths (students) aged 18–20 years from two sociotherapy centres in Warsaw were examined: 30 (16 women)

in the experimental group and 30 (17 women) in the control group. Also, 31 graduates (17 women) aged 20–24 years at these centres were examined. All subjects voluntarily participated in the study, and the division into experimental and control groups was random.

The purpose of the natural experiment was to verify Hypothesis 1: to check whether the construction of narrative identity by adolescents at risk of social maladjustment contributes to an improved adjustment. An interview procedure was specially developed for this purpose, consisting of two methods: the Life Story Interview (McAdams, 1985) and the Self-Confrontation Method (Hermans & Hermans-Jansen, 2000). This procedure was designed to activate the subjects' narrative mode, help them to be immersed in their history, identify the best and worst moments in life, better understand who they were and what influenced their current situation, and determine their goals and life plans.

Measures

Both quantitative (questionnaires and tests) and qualitative methods (interviews) were used in this research. The complementarity of the theory of narrative identity (McAdams, 1985), and the Valuation Theory by Hermans and Hermans-Jansen (1995) makes it possible to combine two methods—the life story interview of McAdams (1985) and Hermans' self-confrontation method (Hermans & Hermans-Jansen, 1995)—and use them in one study. Therefore, participants (narrators) first told their life stories including great and tragic moments, plots, themes, and figures which influenced them, and next formulated precise and concise valuations based on individual meanings. These valuations usually were sentences related to the most important experiences from the past, present, and future (e.g., parents' divorce, or first love). The formulation of valuations summarizing or recapitulating personal meaning of personal history served to make them better reflexive and memorable.

Such a combination of these two methods was based on the premise that during the process of narrative identity construction through the life story interview (McAdams, 1985) one can also formulate valuations related to significant personal experiences that express two basic motives of self-enhancement and longing for contact and union with others and marked by positive or negative affects (Hermans & Hermans-Jansen, 1995). For the narrative interview, we used the current version of McAdams' (2007). As the subject is fully immersed in his or her history, the emerging valuations accurately reflect personal meanings that have a significant impact on the individual. Thus, it is possible to obtain a more complete picture of a person's identity by combining these two methods. Thanks to telling and struc-

turing their stories the participants made important insights about themselves and their life and identified the most important personal meanings. Hence, the natural experiment, which is a part of this research, was based on combining these two methods, and the narrative data were elaborated using qualitative and quantitative methods.

Regarding quantitative methods, the following tools were used:

– the Rotter Incomplete Sentences Blank (RISB; Rotter et al., 1949) in Polish adaptation by Jaworowska and Matczak (2008), to measure the level of maladjustment (scores above 125 points indicate maladjustment). Both Polish versions, for youths and adults (used for the group of graduates), had proper reliability (Cronbach's alphas were 0.73 and 0.79, respectively);

– the Revised Identity Style Inventory (RISI-5; Berzonsky et al., 2013) in Polish adaptation by Senejko and Łoś (2015), to measure the level of identity commitment and diagnose the identity processing style: informational, normative, and diffuse-avoidant (Cronbach's alpha of the Polish version for individual scales ranged from 0.68 to 0.80);

– the Ego-Resiliency Scale (ERS; Block and Kremen, 1996), in Polish adaptation by Kaczmarek (2011), to measure the level of ego-resiliency (Cronbach's alpha of the Polish version was 0.78). Identity commitment we defined as a measure of adjustment in our study.

Procedure

A narrative interview used in the experimental group combines two methods: the Life Story Interview by McAdams (2007) in Polish translation (Budziszewska, 2013), and the Self-Confrontation Method by Hermans and Hermans-Jansen (1995) in Polish translation (Oleś, 1992). The procedure lasted 110 minutes on average. Just before the interview (Measurement 1) and two months after the interview (Measurement 2), the participants answered the RISI-5, ERS, and RISB. The control group (30 subjects), who was not interviewed, also answered the same questionnaires twice (Measurement 1 and Measurement 2) at a two-month interval.

Participants from the older group of graduates did the same measures and a short 30-minute interview, focused on their past, present, and future. It aimed especially to explore the dynamics of their adjustment and maladjustment over time. Analysis of the content of these interviews will be presented in a separate article.

RESULTS

We start with mean results and correlations between all relevant variables (see Table 1). All correlations were low or moderate and only a few were significant. A level of maladjustment positively correlated with diffuse-avoidant identity style and negatively with commitment and ego-resiliency. Ego-resiliency correlated with commitment and informational identity style; while commitment corresponded with informative identity style and negatively with diffuse-avoidant style. Moreover, diffuse-avoidant identity style correlated negatively with informational identity style. These results may indicate the way that maladjusted youths perform. They usually avoid confrontation with challenges and do not make efforts to achieve their goals.

Table 1

Means, Standard Deviations and Correlation Coefficients for All Variables

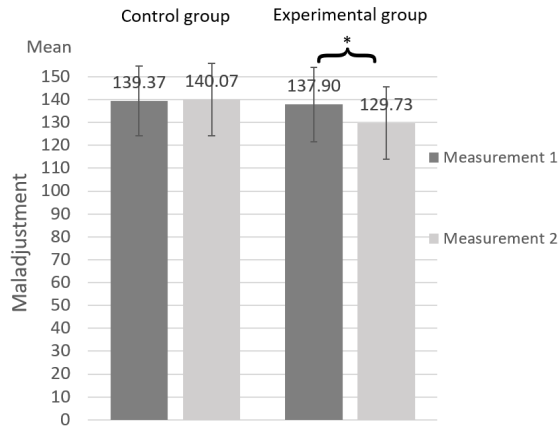
| Variables | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---------------------|----------|-----------|--------|--------|------|--------|--------|
| 1 Ego-resiliency | 37.93 | 6.03 | | | | | |
| 2 Informative style | 36.00 | 5.80 | .34** | | | | |
| 3 Normative style | 21.16 | 6.24 | .04 | -.03 | | | |
| 4 Diffuse-avoidant | 23.94 | 6.40 | -.21 | -.30** | .23* | | |
| 5 Commitment | 30.91 | 7.42 | .31** | .27** | .11 | -.45** | |
| 6 Maladjustment | 135.10 | 17.10 | -.27** | -.11 | -.20 | .38** | -.38** |

** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$.

To verify Hypothesis 1, that constructing narrative identity contributes to better adjustment, we performed a series of variance analyses (ANOVAs). It was found that the construction of narrative identity significantly differentiates the level of adjustment. Interaction (time x group) was significant: $F(1, 58) = 6.71$, $p = .012$, $\eta_p^2 = .10$ (see Figure 1). Two months after narrative identity construction, the level of maladjustment was significantly lower in the experimental group in comparison to the previous result within this group, but not in comparison to controls. Two months after narrative identity construction the mean result on RISB for the experimental group still indicates maladjustment, however to a significantly lesser degree.

Figure 1

Level of Maladjustment (RISB): Results for Control and Experimental Groups at Measurements 1 and 2

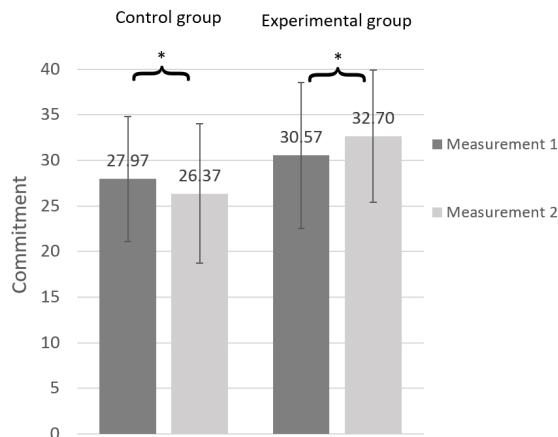


Note. * $p < .05$ (significance adjustment after Bonferroni correction). Error bars represent ± 1 standard error.

Analogous computations we performed for commitment and ego-resiliency. The results concerning the level of commitment show an interaction effect ($F[1, 58] = 11.37, p = .001, \eta_p^2 = .16$), a significant increase in the level of commitment in the experimental group, and at the same time a significant decrease in this variable in the control group (see Figure 2). Commitment differed between groups ($F[1, 58] = 5.87, p = .019, \eta_p^2 = .09$), while the time factor (the first, and the second measurement) was not significant: $F(1, 58) = 0.23, p = .632, \eta_p^2 = .00$.

Figure 2

Level of Commitment (RSIS-5): Results for Control and Experimental Groups at Measurements 1 and 2

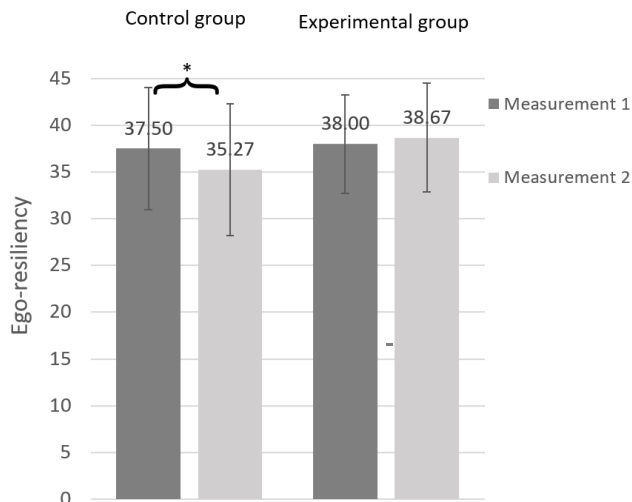


Note. * $p < .05$ (significance adjustment after Bonferroni correction). Error bars represent ± 1 standard error.

The level of ego-resiliency turned out relatively stable in the experimental group, and not so stable in the control group which generated an interaction effect (time x group): $F(1, 58) = 4.50, p = .038, \eta_p^2 = .07$. In the control group, the level of ego-resiliency was significantly lower two months after the first investigation (see Figure 3). This unexpected result can be explained by the subjects' situational and temporal stress response to the upcoming period of examinations (end of the semester). The lack of changes in ego-resiliency in the experimental group may indicate the protective effect of constructing a narrative identity. This result is worth exploring in further research.

Figure 3

Level of Ego-Resiliency (ERS): Results for Control and Experimental Groups at Measurements 1 and 2

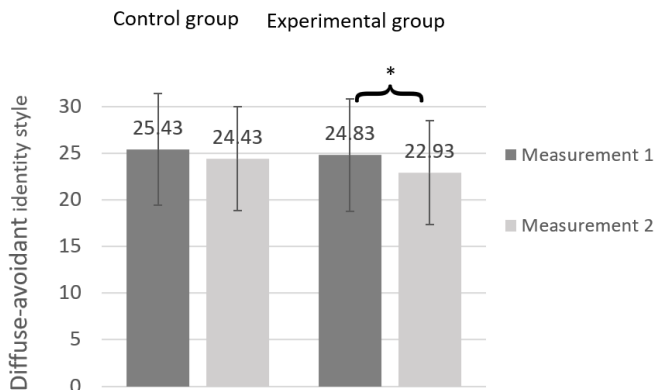


Note. * $p < .05$ (significance adjustment after Bonferroni correction). Error bars represent ± 1 standard error.

Analogous computations for identity styles revealed only one significant result, namely a decrease of diffusive-avoidant style in the experimental group between the first and second measurement, an effect of interaction: $F(1, 58) = 7.03, p = .010, \eta_p^2 = .11$ (see Figure 4).

Figure 4

Level of Diffuse-Avoidant Identity Style (RSIS-5): Results for Control and Experimental Groups at Measurements 1 and 2



Note. * $p < .05$ (significance adjustment after Bonferroni correction). Error bars represent ± 1 standard error.

To verify the second hypothesis we decided to perform a two-step analysis. First, we compared the results of three groups: two groups in maladjustment risk (experimental and control—second investigation), and the group of graduates; namely their level of adjustment (RISB), ego-resiliency (ERS), commitment, and identity processing styles (RISI-5). They scored lower on RISB which means a higher level of adjustment ($F[2, 87] = 12.28, p = .001, \eta_p^2 = .12$) and also a higher level of commitment ($F[2, 87] = 9.47, p = .003, \eta_p^2 = .10$), and a lower level of diffuse-avoidant identity style ($F[2, 87] = 6.25, p = .014, \eta_p^2 = .07$). In the other variables differences were not significant. Thus, in general, significant differences suggested a higher level of adjustment and did not indicate a real risk of maladjustment in the graduates.

Second, we performed a linear regression analysis, defining the level of adjustment–maladjustment (RISB) as a dependent variable, and identity styles, commitment, and ego-resiliency as predictors. For this computation, we used the results of all participants aged 18–25 years ($n = 91$).

The model fitted the data well— $F(5, 85) = 6.60, p < .001$ —and explained 28% of the variance of the dependent variable (Nagelkerke's $R^2 = .28$). Based on the regression coefficients, it was found that the significant predictors were the diffuse-avoidant ($\beta = 0.35, p = .003$) and normative identity style ($\beta = -0.25, p = .036$). Therefore, the increase in the level of the diffuse-avoidant identity style and the decrease in the normative style was related to a significant increase in the level of maladjustment; in other words decrease of the diffuse-avoidant identity style and increase of the normative style predicted a higher level of adjustment.

Summing up, the results mean that a high level of maladjustment is associated with a high level of diffuse-avoidant identity style and a low level of normative style.

DISCUSSION

In general, the results confirmed the first hypothesis that the construction of narrative identity positively contributed to a higher level of adjustment, which means a decrease in maladjustment and an increase in commitment. We have not studied the mechanism of how this happened, but we knew the respondents' accounts of what the life history interview and the formulation of valuations about the personal past, present, and future were for them. According to the subjects' feedback, the interview touched on deep, very personal matters and evoked strong emotions. At the same time, they perceived it as a positive, purifying experience, giving a new perspective on their life history and distance from what had already happened. Their feedback indicated that the interview helped them to combine different experiences and stages of life into a coherent whole, to clarify the current situation, and direct further action. Moreover, for many of them it seemed particularly important to distance themselves from past painful events and start to conceive their past as no longer as threatening. They could tame their story by telling it to an empathetic listener. For example, they commented after the interview:

Adam, 20: It was interesting, in my opinion, because I could see my life as a totality, and I liked the fact that I realized that everything is slowly starting to fall into place in me.

Marcin, 19: It was a purifying experience for me.

Patryk, 19: Now I know that I don't allow the past to hurt me anymore.

Kamila, 18: I was in various therapies, but they have always focused on particular events or plots, and this interview showed me for the first time my whole life from a bird's eye view. It was different and interesting.

Concerning the second hypothesis postulating that informational identity style, commitment, and ego-resiliency predict the level of adjustment–maladjustment, we obtained only partial confirmation. When we compared the groups of graduates and two groups at risk of maladjustment we found two variables as crucial for adjustment: commitment and the diffuse-avoidant identity style. When we computed linear regression we found also two variables as predictors of maladjustment: dif-

fuse-avoidant and normative identity styles. No commitment or ego-resiliency were significant in the results of regression analysis.

On the one hand, a higher level of adjustment in graduates suggests that identity is especially relevant for leaving the risk of maladjustment, precisely a lower level of diffuse-avoidant identity style and a higher level of commitment. On the other hand, a reason for such differences may lie in the developmental factors: the older age of graduates and their life situations described in terms of autonomy, engagement in work or study, and independence from their families.

The regression analysis confirmed the significant role of a diffuse-avoidant identity style with the addition of a normative identity style; however, in Hypothesis 2 we postulated an informational identity style. The question is, why is the diffuse-avoidant identity style so important for maladjustment?

Regarding Hypothesis 2, our results once again confirm the key importance of the diffuse-avoidant identity style for the issue of maladjusted youths (see Senejko, 2010). It is likely that in a group at risk of maladjustment, non-adaptive mechanisms of identity formation have a greater impact on the functioning of adolescents than the adaptive mechanisms that may predominate in adapted adolescents. Therefore, the diffusion-avoidant style rather than the informative style turned out to be important for the level of adjustment–maladjustment in this group. According to our results, a diffusion-avoidant style of identity appears to be the pivotal feature of the risk of maladjustment, and not only the side effect of behavioural disorders, family problems, addictions, or mental disorders. Thus, in the prevention of maladjustment among adolescents, it seems important to reduce the diffuse-avoidant identity style and to develop an informative style, instead.

In summary, Hypothesis 1 was confirmed. Narrative identity construction positively contributes to adjustment and diminishes the risk of maladjustment in adolescents. This is probably due to several reasons, but two of them seem especially important. The first is the fact that personal identity, understood as a life history or as a theory of self, performs important regulatory functions (Berzonsky & Kinney, 2008; Senejko, 2010). A coherent and consistent narrative—in contrast to a fragmented and incoherent history—promotes taking adaptive choices and maintaining goal-directed activity (McAdams, 1993; Trzebiński, 1998). Second, emotions that follow negative life experiences can be worked through and relieved by integrating them into life’s history (McAdams & Olson, 2010).

The participants gained extra support from an understanding and empathetic listener of their personal history, although this was not the aim of the study. Last but not least, the construction of a life story implies a sense of self-continuity that seems crucial for activity coherent with beliefs, long-term goals, and current desires (Dulaney et al., 2019; Molouki & Bartels, 2017). Note, that several participants

stated that they were able, for the first time ever, holistically reflect on their own lives, trying to connect their personal past, present and future. A kind of confrontation with the personal future, based on the sense of self-continuity, could motivate them to realize a positive scenario (see Oyserman & Markus, 1990). The open question is: how long does this effect last? Did our results capture it at the initial, optimal, or declining moment? Further research is necessary here.

As for Hypothesis 2, it was confirmed that identity processing styles and commitment are factors that favor adaptive functioning. These conclusions are substantiated by Berzonsky's theoretical considerations (Berzonsky et al., 2013) on the characteristics of individual identity styles and in research related to his concept (Adams et al., 2009). Moreover, as stated above, the results showed that the diffuse-avoidant identity style predisposes to maladjustment.

The main limitation of this research is the scope of the study which takes into account adjustment and (narrative) identity and its impact on a young person's functioning but does not go as far as the causes and specific forms of maladjustment. Meanwhile, depending on the type and genesis of maladjustment or its risk, the impact of constructing a narrative identity may be different. In the case of habits, smaller; in the case of the formulation of maladaptive aspirations or goals, larger. As DeYoung and Krueger (2018) concluded:

Maladaptive behaviors can persist for a variety of reasons, including that they are so well-learned as to be thoroughly entrenched habits; that fear or anxiety prevents the exploration that would be necessary to develop new adaptations; that one is too easily daunted or distracted to pursue a challenging goal successfully, despite knowing viable strategies; that the goals one has adopted are fundamentally incompatible with one another or with one's basic needs; or that one is unable to coordinate one's goals with other people's goals effectively. (p. 123)

Another limitation results from the relatively small number of participants and from the questionnaires, where the results may be susceptible to various distortions, such as the aggravation of problems and disorders, or to social approval. However, the credibility of the results is supported by the subjects' genuine commitment, especially during the narrative interview, which evoked authentic and strong emotions related to difficult experiences, desires, and important insights into their lives.

The innovative combination of two methods—the Life Story Interview (MCAdams, 2007) and the Self-Confrontation Method (Hermans & Hermans-Jansen, 1995)—could increase the therapeutic effect of an interview in a proposed form, namely including formulation of valuation containing significant personal meanings. Telling a story enables the person to reflect on their lives and to express emotions,

while the formulation of valuations emphasizes significant personal experiences and stimulates reflection on their impact on the self and personal activity relationships or priorities. Shortly speaking, it enhances personal narrative identity construction by additional questions and answers: What has been important in this experience? How has it influenced you and in what way? Which events and experiences were really significant and influential? Moreover, it creates new possibilities for examining the impact of constructing narrative identity on young people's functioning at risk of social maladjustment.

The proposed novel method is the narrative interview, supporting the development of youths' identity at risk of social maladjustment. Due to their development stage, adolescents may find it difficult to independently carry out an in-depth, comprehensive self-reflection on their life history. Therefore, the interview in the proposed form seems to be a tool that is properly adjusted to the needs and possibilities of adolescents and young adults at risk of social maladjustment; it can also act as a stimulus for more adaptive activities. The narrative interview is a promising method in terms of effectiveness and attractiveness for adolescents: it is intense, interactive, and safe, with a certain distance to problems. It helps to connect different motives and events in life, understand the causes of the current situation, its impact on the present, and create further development. It can also help to incorporate conflicting emotions and deal with them. This method gives the impression of a clear structure of life and promotes insight and self-investigation. The psychologist's mutual interaction, full of understanding and acceptance, stimulates the subject's insight and has a strongly supportive meaning (Hermans & Hermans-Jansen, 1995). It is also an adequately constructed method that gives positive, measurable effects on the adjustment and identity processing styles.

CRedit Author Statement

IZABELLA HAERTLÉ (70%): conceptualization, investigation, methodology, validation, formal analysis, investigation, resources, data curation, writing (original draft), writing (review and editing), formal analysis, project administration.

PIOTR OLEŚ (30%): conceptualization, methodology, validation, writing (review and editing), supervision.

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