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Liquid Identity or Multiple Identities of Young People?

Płynna tożsamość czy tożsamości
wielorakie młodzieży?

ABSTRACT

Identity is commonly understood as the process of creating an image of oneself. It is, similarly to personality, a psychical disposition which is acquired in the course of experiencing reality. Unlike personality, identity is not passively shaped by the environment, but each individual has a significant impact on the development of his or her own identity, so that the person can consciously distinguish oneself from other people in the group. On the one hand, constructing identity is the way a pupil looks for the most optimal environment for one's development, and on the other hand, acquired identity determines the logic of this person's behaviour. The period of adolescence is especially crucial for the development of identity as it is then that a young person faces new ways to participate in the world. Experience of the world through new media has a huge impact on identity, which is formed on the basis of some points of reference. These points of reference are mainly role models popularized by media. The high speed of the changes in social life results in similarly rapid alteration of identity. In liquid reality we can observe also liquid identity, which is accommodated to current social needs. It is characteristic that participation in Internet communities is the impulse for the creation of many network identities, which are selectively used in various situa-

KEY WORDS

identity, personality,
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SŁOWA KLUCZOWE

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tion. A phenomenon that may be described as the existence of multiple identities results in the fact that young people have difficulties in being aware of their own identity as well as in understanding themselves and their personality. As a result, it causes frustration, uncertainty and a feeling of being lost. Consequently, it can lead to chaos in thinking and acting. Therefore, media education aims at preventing these alarming phenomena. Studies were conducted that aimed at placing identity in social and cultural context and they permitted the question of whether a contemporary pupil was able to define himself on his own and describe his own identity to be addressed. In other words, the question was: Can a pupil cope with the process of creating the picture of oneself through experiencing reality? The research goal of this article is to analyze the personality structure of identity and, based on its background, to answer the question what is its impact on possible identity changes in current social conditions. However, the answer, which is important for educators, is not explicit and it rather implies that changes of identity may occur in two ways: as slow and smooth or abrupt and multiple. Bearing in mind that current pedagogy goes beyond its own framework and it more and more often also uses psychological tools, the article follows such a perspective and presents all dissertations, which concern the problem of searching and creating liquid identity and multiple identities, in the broader context—as the digital intermediation of social structures.

ABSTRAKT

Powszechnie tożsamość jest rozumiana jako proces tworzenia obrazu samego siebie. Jest to, podobnie jak osobowość, swego rodzaju psychiczna dyspozycja nabywana poprzez doświadczanie rzeczywistości. W odróżnieniu od osobowości tożsamość nie jest biernie kształtowana przez środowisko, ale w znacznej mierze to jednostka sama buduje swoją indywidualną tożsamość w ten sposób, aby świadomie odróżnić się do innych osób w grupie. Z jednej strony poprzez konstruowanie tożsamości uczeń poszukuje najbardziej optymalnego środowiska własnego rozwoju, z drugiej – przyjęta tożsamość określa logikę jego zachowania się. Szczególnie krytyczny w kształtowaniu tożsamości jest okres adolescencji. Przed młodym człowiekiem otwierają się nowe możliwości uczestnictwa w świecie. Doświadczanie świata zapośredniczone przez nowe media ma duży wpływ na tożsamość, która formowana jest w oparciu o punkty odniesienia. Tymi punktami odniesienia są najczęściej wzorce osobowe lansowane przez media. Szybkość zmian w życiu

społecznym powoduje, że równie szybko podlega zmianom tożsamość. W płynnej rzeczywistości możemy mówić o płynnej tożsamości i dostosowywaniu jej do aktualnych potrzeb społecznych. Znamienne jest to, że uczestnictwo w internetowych społecznościach jest z kolei impulsem do tworzenia wielu tożsamości sieciowych, które użytkowane są w różnych sytuacjach. Zjawisko, które można nazwać istnieniem tożsamości wielorakich, powoduje, że młody człowiek ma trudności z uświadomieniem sobie własnej tożsamości oraz zrozumieniem siebie i swojej osobowości, co jest przyczyną frustracji, niepewności i zagubienia. To z kolei może prowadzić do chaosu w myśleniu i działaniu. Tym niepokojącym zjawiskom stara się zapobiec edukacja medialna. Podjęte zostały badania nad osadzeniem tożsamości w kontekście społecznym i kulturowym. Pozwoliły one odpowiedzieć na pytanie, czy współczesny uczeń jest zdolny do samo zdefiniowania się i określenia własnej tożsamości, czyli, czy jest w stanie podjąć procesowi tworzenia obrazu samego siebie poprzez doświadczanie rzeczywistości? Celem badawczym podjętym w artykule jest analiza struktury osobowościowej tożsamości oraz na jej tle odpowiedź na pytanie, jak ona wpływa na możliwości wprowadzania zmian tożsamości w obecnych warunkach społecznych. Odpowiedź, istotna dla edukatorów, nie jest jednoznaczna i skłania raczej do wysunięcia wniosku, że zmiany tożsamości mają charakter dwupłaszczyznowy: powolny i płynny oraz skokowy i wieloraki. Ponieważ współczesna pedagogika wykracza poza własne ramy i coraz częściej posługuje się narzędziami psychologicznymi, więc z tej perspektywy przedstawiono również rozważania na temat problemu poszukiwania i kreowania tożsamości płynnej i wielorakich tożsamości w szerszym kontekście – cyfrowego zapośredniczenia struktur społecznych.

Introduction

The notion of “identity” was introduced for the first time by the Croatian psychoanalyst Victor Tausk in the year 1919. However, it was popularized thanks to the studies of Erik Erikson, which were conducted in the sixties in the United States of America.¹ Even today they are still the subject of discussion and inspire scientists all over the world. The term “identity” is derived from mathematics where it denotes “relations between undistinguishable objects, which means

¹ Cf. B. Szacka, *Wprowadzenie do socjologii*, Warszawa 2008, p. 149.



objects that have all distinct features the same (equal)”². In math notations this relation is marked by the following sign: “=”. Even at the end of the 20th century the notion of identity was not included in Polish pedagogical and psychological dictionaries and encyclopaedias.³ They contained only definitions of such terms as: personality, temperament, character, which referred to similar scope of activity of human being. At that time, linguists attempted to define the notion of identity. A dictionary of the Polish language from 1981 described identity as “being the same, identical”⁴, but it did not specify whether this feature could also refer to human beings. At the same time, however, intensive theoretical and methodological research was conducted that concerned the issue of identity. The research involved such disciplines as anthropology, psychology, sociology and philosophy. This common interest in identity was reflected in dictionary definitions formulated no earlier than in the 21st century. In the Dictionary of Philosophy from 2006, identity is defined as: “sameness, being and remaining oneself.”⁵ On the other hand, psychological approach is presented by the *Great PWN Encyclopaedia*. It states that identity means: “cognitive perception of oneself by human being in all possible relations with oneself and external world.”⁶ In this context, it is possible to conclude that the term “identity” has started to exist in our times.

Even though the term “identity” arose relatively recently, the issue of discovering oneself had been central to the concerns of philosophy since ancient times. Only at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries did identity become the subject of study for such disciplines as: psychology, social anthropology, sociology and pedagogy. However, each of these disciplines focuses on different aspects of identity:

- For a psychologist, the basic thing is development of identity in connection with personality formation in the context of proper adaptation to social requirements and psychical health;

² *Encyklopedia powszechna PWN*, vol. 4, Warszawa 1987, p. 518, 48.

³ Cf. W. Okoń, *Słownik pedagogiczny*, Warszawa 1975; *Słownik psychologiczny*, ed. W. Szewczuk, Warszawa 1979; *Encyklopedia pedagogiczna*, ed. W. Pomykało, Warszawa 1993.

⁴ *Słownik języka polskiego*, ed. M. Szymczak, vol. 3, Warszawa 1981, p. 519.

⁵ *Słownik filozofii*, ed. J. Hartman, Kraków 2006, p. 233.

⁶ *Wielka encyklopedia PWN*, ed. J. Wojnarowski, Warszawa 2005, p. 455.

- For a social anthropologist, identity is, among other things, a mechanism of cultural communication;
- For an identity sociologist, it is an instrument that regulates behaviors of members of social communities and ensures social order;
- For a teacher, identity is the basis for developing the sense of subjectivity, thanks to which it is possible to shape effectively the transfer of knowledge and skills.

These various levels of interest in identity cause some terminological diversity as there are many definitions of identity in many fields. Theoretical and methodological dissertations concerning this issue have been presented, for example, by Katarzyna Waszczyńska.⁷ Also some theoretical models of identity have been created that group various aspects of this notion as well as scopes of researchers' interest. These are following models⁸: the identity health model, the identity interaction model, and the identity worldview model (distinguished by Richard Robbins) as well as *egologic* one proposed by Zbigniew Bokszański, which tends to be called psycho-sociological by Małgorzata Melchior. The last model comprises all concepts of identity that are derived from psychological and sociological reflection. And it is exactly the field that includes structures of identity as well as relations that shape identity and occur between its personality elements that is presented in this article.

Reflection of personality in identity

Personality means a system of psychological mechanisms that determine the way of perceiving the world and oneself, which is specific for each individual, as well as the way the individual reacts to challenges of reality. On the one hand, personality manifested externally allows us to recognize and distinguish an individual among other people. On the other hand, personality that is manifested internally allows the designation of the border which separates one's Self from the others. Amélie Oksenberg Rorty and David Wong state that personality "is determined by the set of basic features"⁹, which refer to somatic, psychical,

⁷ Cf. K. Waszczyńska, "Wokół problematyki tożsamości", *Rocznik Towarzystwa Naukowego Płockiego* 2014, no. 6.

⁸ Ibidem, p. 61–65.

⁹ A.O. Rorty, D. Wong, "Aspekty tożsamości i działania", in: *Filozofia podmiotu* (collective work), transl. B. Chwedeńczuk et al., Warszawa 2001, p. 380.

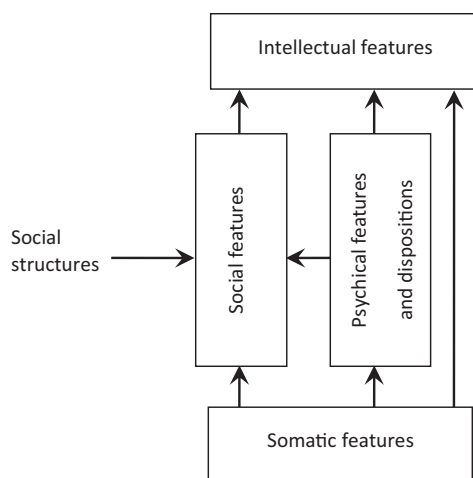


social and intellectual aspects. Based on them, some personal attributes are developed and an individual (person) is perceived through these attributes at various levels both by oneself as well as by the others.

The structure of personality as constituted by the abovementioned four aspects is presented in figure 1. The primary level is constituted by somatic features which are related to embodiment and frequently have an unconscious nature. These features constitute the foundations for other personality traits. It refers among others to psychological features, which are closely related to somatic features and they often are difficult to be differentiated. Maurice Merleau-Ponty wrote in relations to this issue:

psychological motives and some body occasions may be linked with one another because in real behaviour there is no single move that is completely accidental in relations to psychological intentions, and there is no psychological act, which hasn't its beginnings or general outline in physiological dispositions.¹⁰

Figure 1.
Structure of
personality features



Source: own studies based on: A.O. Roty, D. Wong, "Aspekty tożsamości i działania", in: *Filozofia podmiotu* (collective work), transl. B. Chwedeńczuk et al., Warszawa 2001, p. 380.

¹⁰ M. Merleau-Ponty, *Fenomenologia percepcji*, transl. M. Kowalska, J. Migasiński, Warszawa 2001, p. 106.

Whereas social features are constituted on the basis of corporeal and psychical nature and through establishing relationships within social structures. Personality development is built also by the current social order. As written by Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann: “self-creation of a human being is always of social nature.”¹¹ These features are to a great extent developed by each person on his or her own and are accepted by the person more or less voluntary. In this way, through developing specific social features, the individual simultaneously creates social order because “although any of existing social orders cannot be derived from biological data, the need for the social order as itself originates from biological nature of human being.”¹² On the one hand, there are intellectual features of personality which are related to social context and social features (views and convictions, which constitute the picture of oneself created by particular person). On the other hand, they result also directly from somatic and psychical features. These are views that have been individually developed by each person, so they are understandable for the individual and treated as personal and strictly individual. At the same time, they are more likely to be changed than views developed in particular social order. In the second situation, attitude of the individual is more steadfast, even if the person lacks reasonable arguments.

The main personality features are inborn and therefore they are stable throughout the whole human life. Other personality traits are a consequence of biological changes (internal factors) and the impact of the environment (external experiences). In the period of childhood these features become more and more stable, so that finally they can be relatively stable at the age of 7 years. In the period of adolescence they become more prominent and their stability increases gradually until approaching at least 30 year of age. The quality of the personality which is formed through this period has a significant impact on the quality of the performance of the role of the adult person. During further adult life the content of personality become stronger and stronger.¹³

¹¹ P.L. Berger, T. Luckmann, *Spółeczne tworzenie rzeczywistości*, transl. J. Niżnik, Warszawa 1983, p. 92.

¹² Ibidem, p. 94.

¹³ Cf. A. Matczak, *Zarys psychologii rozwoju*, Warszawa 2003.



Depending on roles attributed to internal and external determinants, we may consider two various theories of personality. On the one hand, two most extreme of them are those related to works of Sigmund Freud (domination of internal factors) and, on the other, those related to works of Burrhus Frederick Skinner (emphasising the external impact of the environment).¹⁴ In relation to the above, we can distinguish two approaches:

(1) Unique personalities, which are mainly an effect of internal changes (hereditary nature and activity of an individual);

(2) Social personalities, which have been developed by external social determinants (experience in contacts with the others, fulfilled social roles, events).

Nowadays, human personality is perceived in a holistic and integrative way as far as humanist and personal approach is concerned. The basic principle of this approach is the unity of invisible external determinants. Development of personality is viewed as acquiring new personal attributes as well as modifying and eliminating some of them under the influence of external social factors and internal dispositions.¹⁵ As stated by Kazimierz Obuchowski: “being a person is a continuous process of going beyond one’s own limits.”¹⁶ In this process, personal attributes are some kind of generator of individual behaviour and source of creating one’s own Self. Then, through the dynamic structure of the Self, with personality in the background, personal identity can be formed. The abovementioned relations are presented in figure 2.

Relationship between personality and the structure of Self is based on the conflict relation. Space for this social interaction is personality itself and the roles defined by social features and attributed to an individual existing in particular community remain in conflict with individual nature of the Self, which is oriented to sustain uniqueness of one’s own subjectivity. To avoid the tension between them, social roles must be involved within the scope of Self

¹⁴ L.A. Pervin, *Psychologia osobowości*, transl. M. Orski, Gdańsk 2002, p. 15–16.

¹⁵ Cf. H. Gasiul, *Psychologia osobowości. Nurty, teorie, koncepcje*, Warszawa 2006, p. 384–388.

¹⁶ K. Obuchowski, *Człowiek intencjonalny*, Warszawa 1993, p. 187.

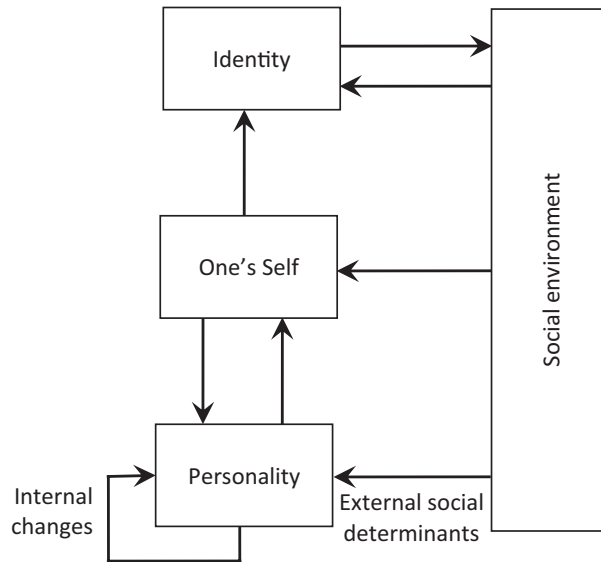


Figure 2.
Relations: Personality – Self – Identity
in the system of
acquiring psychical
dispositions

Source: own studies

individuality or the social roles need to be accepted as independent from the Self. On the other hand, “on the basis of heterogenic Self there are dynamic concepts of personal identity, which is characterized by diversity and variability.”¹⁷ The Self is there a superior category, which means individual relationships that are the effect of interpersonal contacts and social interactions constitute identity developed by particular person. Similarly Anna Batory notices that “the system of Self includes contents and basic processes that are necessary for an individual to create and sustain his or her own identity.”¹⁸ Hence, the structure of the Self is a mediator located between personality and identity.

¹⁷ A. Batory, “Wielowymiarowe i dynamiczne Ja podstawą tożsamości”, *Roczniki Psychologiczne* 2012, vol. 15, no. 4, p. 27.

¹⁸ Ibidem, p. 30.



Looking for or creating identity?

Human personality defines an individual, which means it determines what this person likes and how he or she behaves in a particular situation. On the other hand, identity defines who the person is and how the person presents oneself. Formation of identity is an important process, particularly in adolescence, since thanks to identity a young person becomes a subject in the existing social structure with rich and differentiated experience and readiness for making decisions and suffering their negative consequences. Józef Lipiec writes about it as follows:

To start existing and continue the existence an individual must radically distinguish oneself from all other individuals and needs to do it so definitely, to eliminate any doubts regarding vagueness of own identity. Moreover, the whole process of individual development as a strive for subjectivity is also regulated by similar rules.¹⁹

The individual has a sense of their own subjectivity if they are equipped with identity, are aware of this fact and, above all, accepts their own identity, which means living in harmony with themselves.

A precursor of the studies on identity, James Marcia, describes the process of identity formation as two, totally different processes: exploration and commitment.²⁰ Exploration results from experiencing a crisis in our current identity. It involves recognising new possibilities of action in changing social spheres, which enables location of cognitive resources and relations that connect the individual with other members of the community. The effect of this activity is learning roles that can be played in various fields whereas commitment consists in making decisions regarding further actions in life and personal involvement in a particular practical or mental field. The level of involvement in exploration along with the strength of undertaken commitments determines one's identity status, which defines quality of psychosocial functioning²¹ (figure 3). Studies conducted within this scope reveal that the poorest quality is typical

¹⁹ J. Lipiec, *Wolność i podmiotowość człowieka*, Kraków 1997, p. 65.

²⁰ Cf. J. Marcia, "Identity in adolescence", in: *Handbook of Adolescent Psychology*, ed. J. Adelson, New York 1980, p. 159–187.

²¹ Ibidem.

of people with the status described as identity diffusion, and the best one as far as this scope is concerned is the status called identity achievement.²² Identity formation results in the consolidation of the feeling of continuity in time and space. Koen Luyckx with co-workers state that both exploration as well as commitment are very dynamic processes which interpenetrate one other and are present within the whole adolescence period of young people. They came up with Dual-Cycle Model of Identity Formation.²³ As a result of successful conduct of the whole process, which consists of two cycles of formation and evaluation of commitment, adult identity is formed.

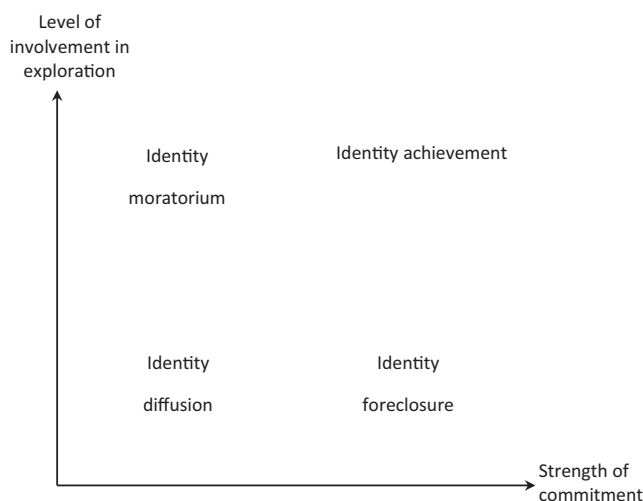


Figure 3. Identity status according to James Marcia

Source: own studies based on: J. Marcia, "Identity in adolescence", in: *Handbook of Adolescent Psychology*, ed. J. Adelson, New York 1980, p. 159–187.

²² A.I. Brzezińska, T. Czub, K. Piotrowski, "Statusy tożsamości a style tożsamości i funkcjonowanie emocjonalne uczniów szkół zawodowych", *Psychologia Rozwojowa* 2014, vol. 19, no. 4, p. 52.

²³ K. Luyckx, B. Soenens, M. Vansteenkiste, L. Berzonsky, "Parental psychological control and dimensions of identity formation in emerging adulthood", *Journal of Family Psychology* 2007, no. 3(21), p. 546–550.

Kristine Anthis and Joseph LaVoie point to the fact that individual readiness for change, which may be different for each person, has a significant role in achieving particular identity status in the period of adolescence.²⁴ It is connected with an intensive search for role models which impress young people by their appearance and original lifestyle. Nowadays, young people find the space for such searches in the Internet where various tools of social communications are available. Of course, the irrational use of these instruments may also be a threat for the development of identity. Experiencing the world by means of the Internet supplants direct experience. It is worth noticing that the media creates reality in this way and become its source. As a result, social reality merges with media reality, which can frequently make it difficult to differentiate between them also as far as functioning of identity is concerned. Similarly, processes of social interactions understood as “(...) mechanism, thanks to which interpersonal contacts are possible and can be developed, which are all mental symbols along with manners of transferring them in space and preserving in time”²⁵ are mediated by the Internet in time and space. Currently, cyberspace becomes a place where young people transfer their identities and where they usually construct a completely new reality, totally different from the one they have in the real world. As a consequence, it leads to media participation in the development of personal identity. Both exploration as well as commitment activated in Internet space are burdened with the habit of quitting actions before they are finished, which is characteristic of young users of the Internet. In such conditions, it is difficult to move beyond the status of identity diffusion and, consequently, develop appropriate level of psychosocial functioning. On the other hand, feelings of anonymity (non-traceability) in the network encourage young people to create identity in accordance with their own preferences. The Internet is a perfect place to create an ideal identity by means of exposing selected features and manipulating facts. This tendency is enhanced by the awareness of the possibility to disappear at any time (to log out)

²⁴ Cf. K.S. Anthis, J. LaVoie, “Readiness to change: a longitudinal study of changes in adult identity”, *Journal of Research in Personality* 2006, no. 40, p. 209–219.

²⁵ T. Goban-Klas, *Media i komunikowanie masowe. Teorie i analizy prasy, radia, telewizji i Internetu*, Warszawa 2004, p. 45.

and come back again after some time. It is difficult for the partners in such interactions (e.g. in social service) to verify whether the presented picture of particular person is coherent with real identity. Thus, it may influence the form of commitment, which in such conditions is taken lightly and uncritically, without a sense of responsibility and being convinced that it is necessary to respect the commitment. It leads to “ruminative exploration”, which can be characterized by its non-adaptive nature and is related to experiencing difficulties²⁶ in making decisions in later adult life.

Liquid identity in postmodernism

Zygmunt Bauman defines today's world as liquid postmodernism. “I call it «liquid», because as all liquids it cannot stay still too long and retain its shape. All or almost all in our world changes.”²⁷ Bauman tries to make us aware of the fact that we are dealing with a particular situation, where nothing is certain; all borders in time, space or even in culture and ethic become more and more blurred. In the world of constant changes not everyone can keep pace with the changes, but all attempt to do it. “If there is something, which in our culture function as a homeostat, it is not a conservation of status quo, but the drive for permanent change (however in contrary to phase of enlightenment change, this change is non-directional, which means it does not have any predefined direction)”.²⁸ As far as this approach in presenting the world is concerned, the identity of a contemporary human being who remains in interaction with the surrounding world can also be characterized by an inability to remain unchanged, because of its transitory nature, instability, constant changes, in other words its fluidity. As written by Anna Batory

multiplicity and complexity of Self is inseparably connected with assumption of its dynamism. System of Self is shaped through the relations

²⁶ A.I. Brzezińska, T. Czub, K. Piotrowski, “Statusy tożsamości a style tożsamości i funkcjonowanie emocjonalne uczniów szkół zawodowych”, op. cit., p. 52–53.

²⁷ Z. Bauman, *44 listy ze świata płynnej nowoczesności*, transl. T. Kunz, Kraków 2011, p. 5.

²⁸ Z. Bauman, *Kultura w płynnej nowoczesności*, transl. J. Bauman, Warszawa 2011, p. 27–28.



with the surrounding world. It emerges from interpersonal relations and personal references to the world, society and culture. The relationships an individual has determine the identity he or she develops.²⁹

Furthermore, Bogdan Wojciszke describes the contemporary world in terms of being a kaleidoscopic picture, where identities are subject to constant changes.³⁰ The necessity of constant conceptualization of identity makes this process the subject of permanent dynamic changes and therefore it remains in a state of suspension of relevance and incompleteness—“full of loops, inadequacies and contradictions.”³¹ Thus, the identity of a young person is fragmented, impermanent and transitory as before it has been fully shaped, existing variables and changing social conditions require its smooth revision at further stage. These changes are necessary and constitute the only way to accommodate the changing reality or even they are inevitable for proper functioning. Therefore, it can be concluded that the liquid nature of identity is invaluable, even though it can cause turbulence in the personality of a young person.

In the contemporary digital world, in the face of the division of reality into a real and a virtual one, we can also speak about real and virtual identity. The real identity (inner identity), which is linked with the real part of reality, is considered equivalent to the process of its formation that allows its fluidly changing nature. In this scope it is perceived in an objective and contextual meaning as an answer to the question “who is the individual?”. Giving a response to this question is an act of self-knowledge, which is defined as “an effect of perceiving information regarding the individual provided by social environment, analysis of consequences of one’s behaviour and comparisons with other people made constantly by the individual.”³² The roots in culture and dependence on social context are conditions

²⁹ A. Batory, “Wielowymiarowe i dynamiczne Ja podstawą tożsamości”, op. cit., p. 36.

³⁰ B. Wojciszke, *Człowiek wśród ludzi. Zarys psychologii społecznej*, Warszawa 2009, p. 136–140.

³¹ Z. Melosik, „Kultura popularna. Walka o znaczenie i pedagogikę”, in: *Kultura popularna i (re)konstrukcje tożsamości*, ed. A. Gromkowska-Melosik, Poznań – Leszno 2007, p. 74.

³² A. Sadowski, M. Czerniawska, *Tożsamość Polaków na pograniczach*, Białystok 1999, p. 57.

necessary for identity formation. Importance of contextual nature of identity results from the contemporary concept that presents inner identity as multidimensional whole, co-created by various Self³³ (see figure 2). As far as identity formation is concerned, Wojciszke states: “It seems to be reasonable to assume that Self is a loose structure of various social roles and social identities, self-concepts and self-esteem as well as values and goals considered as own.”³⁴ This way of Self recognition is connected with the process of self-evaluation. It provides an effective tool for an individual to realize self-knowledge (the source of inner identity) in various perspectives, which depend on the context. Consequently, assuming as Seth Schwartz does that inner identity is rather discovered than created, it may turn out that even though it exists on some level, there is no access to it in cognitive sense.³⁵ Thus, an individual’s attempts to change inner identity encounter the resistance of reality. Most often they have the form of ephemeral physical states, therefore they only temporarily upset the balance of identity (mainly in relations to its peripheral areas³⁶) and in this unclear (fluid) way they can change its nature.

Multiple identities

Manuel Castells states in his studies on the development of identity in a network that playing roles and building new identities is a part of interpersonal contacts, which is mainly characteristic of young people.³⁷ For this social group an important attribute of freedom is the freedom to create their own virtual identity on the basis of some determinants that can be freely selected. It consists in experimenting with alternative identities, which is impossible in normal life. It allows a young person to check how he or she feels with a particular identity and how this identity is perceived by other

³³ Cf. V.L. Vignoles, C. Regalia, C. Manzi, J. Gollidge, E. Scabini, “Beyond self-esteem: Influence of multiple motives on identity construction”, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 2006, vol. 90, no. 2, p. 308–333.

³⁴ B. Wojciszke, *Człowiek wśród ludzi*, op. cit., p. 137.

³⁵ A. Batory, “Wielowymiarowe i dynamiczne Ja podstawą tożsamości”, op. cit., p. 43.

³⁶ Ibidem, p. 44.

³⁷ Cf. M. Castells, *Sila tożsamości*, transl. S. Szymański, Warszawa 2009.



people. In this way one can have many virtual identities which are used in various internet activities, depending on which one seems to be attractive at particular moment. However, it requires being put on standby to make next attempts at creating a new identity.

Tomasz Szkudlarek and Zbyszko Melosik prove that current identity has lost its universal nature for the benefit of multiple identities, which can be observed nowadays.³⁸ Similar to the multiple intelligences of Howard Gardner, the identity of a young person may be oriented to one chosen profile out of these mentioned above. It may happen (and it often takes place) that identity is being manipulated. As Anna Ostaszewska notes:

today identity is something like creation, which can be replaced—like clothing—at any time with another, fresh and more attractive. It is a narcissistic image created for the needs of particular time, particular scene and publicity; it is a mask, which can be always replaced by another one, a mask, whose most important features are its drama and aesthetic attributes. Identity of contemporary human being is something “for show” and something “for now”. Because tomorrow, thanks to media and pop culture, new possibilities and new means of expression will appear along with new requirements for identity.³⁹

Hence, young people’s identity changes in real time and synchronically with changes in the environment.

Unlike inner identity (a process connected with real identity), virtual identity (external) is considered to be relatively stable, subjective and characterized by ownership (it is something that can be owned by an individual). In this case we rather deal with the sense of identity (external identity) than the identity itself (internal one). The individual has a subjective feeling of identity, which is created to define one’s difference as well as his similarity (for example with other members of a social forum). Also in this case identity, even though an illusory one, is changeable, however the dynamism of these changes is different. Identity is changed selectively (in some stages) like a mask chosen from among many options offered by media and popular culture, so it is not an only

³⁸ T. Szkudlarek, Z. Melosik, *Kultura, tożsamość i edukacja. Migotanie znaczeń*, Kraków 1998, p. 59–67.

³⁹ A. Ostaszewska, *Popkulturowe ramy tożsamości. Media, kultura popularna. Internet jako nowe środowiska kształtowania tożsamości*, Ośrodek Rozwoju Edukacji 2012, p. 6. Available at: <<https://www.ore.edu.pl/materialy-do-pobrania>> (access: 30.05.2016).

permanent one attributed to a particular human being and changing in a liquid and blurry way. The dependence of identity on context is particularly crucial in this situation, as it is an effect of some choices, following patterns and interpreting oneself through own self-image; in other words through looking for an answer “who does the individual want to be?”. Answers to these questions may be considered as cases of self-creation in building multiple external identities. In virtual space, an individual is fortunate in this sense that only the individual can create self-image and decide which categories of identity he or she wants to be assigned. However, freedom to choose identity profiles is often only possible within certain limits because the individual usually choose identities which seem to be most convincing and attractive in particular moment rather than those the individual desires. When he enters various interactions in virtual communities, a young man very often creates specific masks of fake identities that enable him to hide his or her real inner identity, which may also be a reason for low self-esteem.

Summary

Nowadays, family and school as traditional institutions and environment of socialization are no longer fulfilling a creative role. It is the common presence of the media in the life of children and young people that influences their sensitivity and imagination “causing inevitably destruction of traditional ways of acquiring identity.”⁴⁰ Therefore many analyses concerning social functioning are focused on various aspects of the identity of young people. The pace of changes in social life causes identity to be subject to very quick changes. Young people are very creative as far as identity formation is concerned. They generate many various and variable identities which are adjusted to heterogenic Internet activities. However, there is a danger that this habit may be transferred to real social life, where the presence of multiple identities causes that young people have difficulties in being aware of their own identity and understanding themselves and their own personality. This danger cannot be ignored by contemporary pedagogy.

⁴⁰ B. Fatyga, A. Tyszkiewicz, *Normalność i normalka. Próba zastosowania pojęcia normalności do badań młodzieży*, Warszawa 2001, p. 105–106.

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