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Education as the Space where Identity Processes Come to Play – Based on Educational Narratives of Women

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Editorial preface

The concept of script included in the transactional analysis theory assumes that we realise quite a stable life scenario. On the other hand, an important area of the theory assumes the development of the Adult ego state, integration of other ego states, and what follows, personal development and taking over the control over one's life. One way to explain that paradox is looking at Eric Berne's concept from a historical perspective. Every life scenario passed down by parents or carers is created in a given social reality. The postmodernism era brings changes that make clear descriptions of standard behaviour, social roles attributed to sexes, jobs or a place on a social ladder blurred. Script realization is linked with self-interpretation and one's image against the background of other people, and a change in social roles perception naturally influences that process. Another important aspect is the influence of the educational process, which does not always go hand in hand with values instilled at home. In this process, an individual is created for life, realizes script records but modifies their behaviour based on new information. Difficulties in self-definition might result in the process of change and personal development.

Zbigniew Wieczorek

Abstract

In this text, the Author carries out theoretical discussion and presents the outcomes of her studies of the shaping process of women's identity in the context of a human (auto)biography, referring to

the category of identity, putting particular stress to the educational biography, called a special type of a thematic biography (important for the category of identity), and a category of narration, of key importance for comprehending the phenomenon of auto(biography). A human biography is an invaluable source of information on their life and the person her/himself. Getting acquainted with the biography, looking for information about a given person, learning her/his story from her/himself (biography passed through an autobiographical account) or from the biographical materials, e.g. diaries, letters, memoirs and recollection of others. The Author says that one of the identity criteria is the sense of one's own continuity in time. This criterion can be fulfilled thanks to the autobiographical memory, or a memory of personal episodes and autobiographical facts. The problems of biography are closely connected with the autobiographical memory. In the text the Author presents three intertwined categories: identity, autobiographical memory and biography.

Keywords: thematic biography, educational narratives, stories of learning, life stories, self-termination, women's education, self-development

Role of Education in the Postmodern Context

Nowadays, education is perceived as an indisputable value, especially when we consider the situation of humans in the times of highly advanced progress, scientific development, social changes and civilisation threats. The demand for lifelong learning or self-education, as defined by Dzierżymir Jankowski, being a component of the plan or strategy for life, seems particularly valuable and legitimate (Jankowski, 1999). In my opinion, the everyday life and its specific properties in 21st century, both in the individual and global dimension, makes the motto from the report by Edgar Faure of 1975 – “Learning to be”, more understandable and closer to one's heart (Faure, 1975). This “being” should be understood a bit metaphorically: as the sense of identity, the picture of me or a concept of oneself. It is not necessary to convince anyone that the aspects of identity development are of crucial importance. It is enough to quote Erik Homburger Erikson who mentions the effects of disturbed identity development for an individual, including the sense of isolation, shyness, uncertainty, lack of faith in one's abilities, belief that life happens rather than is intentionally lived, absence of plans or creation of unrealistic ones, no trust in people and the whole world or, eventually, sense of disintegrity (Witkowski, 2000). The negative consequences suffered by an individual translate into the social dimension. In other words, they afflict not only the individual but also social relations.

Faced with the identity threats growing in the postmodern era, education should be considered also as a factor shaping the individual identity, offering multiple chances and opportunities for gathering information on oneself, and helpful in self-defining. This is why the fact that women in Poland are better educated than men, participate in the education process longer, are more eager to start it and still take an inferior position in many areas of socio-economic life suggests that education should be analysed not only as a factor determining the quality of life but also as a plane where the identity processes come to play and

as their factor (Domański, 1992). Education accompanies women for many years, their identity forming and developing in its course. This is why, in my opinion, education should be considered also referring to the identity shaping process which is rarely included by scientists discussing education.

It seems that in recent decades the interest in the problem of identity has been growing, especially when it comes to social sciences and humanities (so also educational science). This is caused by the processes taking place e.g. in social life, bringing a new quality of life and the compulsion to redefine oneself and one's place or even finding oneself anew (adopting a new identity). According to Katarzyna Rosner, the shared direction of changes in various research disciplines dealing with human identity consists in deviating from perceiving a human as a being with specific features and replacing it with a category of a being "developing in time and yet finite, that is the one whose existence starts at the time of birth and ends with death" (Rosner, 2003, p. 6). In such an approach, a human is a being spread in time and also the one undergoing continuous development. In this context, the identity is not offered but requested, demanding to be defined. This definition consists in self-defining which takes place in time. This is why the self-understanding, as mentioned by K. Rosner, becomes a basic factor constituting the individual identity (Rosner, 2003, p. 6). The identity perceived in this way is spread, just like the human existence, in time meaning it has a changing, processual nature. The author emphasizes that the notion of human identity, constructed by reflecting on one's own existence, is a problem for redefinition of a human being (in philosophy or social sciences). The problem pertains especially to the process of constructing one's own identity and also the accompanying factors (Rosner, 2003, p. 7).

Authors such as Charles Taylor or Anthony Giddens justify the need to reflect on the individual identity (its formation) by means of changes occurring in the contemporary culture. Their focus is also on the factors that influence the forming of identity. They contemplate the properties of Western culture from various perspectives (Ch. Taylor from the philosophical one, A. Giddens from the sociological one), in the context of changes that have already taken place. According to Ch. Taylor, the changes in thinking about a human started at the very threshold of the modern era. The central current of those changes was the appearance of the individual autonomy notion, individual right to freedom or the demand, formulated by John Stuart Mill, that everyone should be able to develop their personality without any restrictions (Taylor, 2001, p. 26).

Postmodern Identity Determinants

The deliberations on identity, regardless of the discipline, are always focused on its determinants. In the social context, the contemplation refers to cultural de-

terminants, among other things. Pre-industrial, traditional societies had clearly defined and unequivocal descriptions of e.g. gender roles. The immutable standard of behaviours and properties ascribed to a “typical woman” and “typical man”, present in the previous epochs, is no longer valid today, in the era termed Postmodernity or Liquid Modernity (e.g. Zygmunt Bauman – Bauman 1994, 2003, 2004, 2006) while by others Late Modernity (Anthony Giddens) or even Risk Society (Ulrich Beck – Beck, 2004). All the same, defining oneself becomes more difficult but still indispensable. It should be stressed that the Postmodern epoch is characterised by diversity, ambiguity, variability, ambivalence, pluralism of values and cultures and also, as mentioned by Anna Barska, “the wealth of changes, instability, discontinued concept of oneself, both for an individual and for the group”¹ (Barska, 2005, pp. 15–16). Z. Bauman highlights that globalisation, included in the Postmodernity (or rather in the Liquid Modernity), affects the stability and persistence of identity and makes the individual identities mobile, changing, unstable, uncertain and liquid. All the same, the continuous and consistent narration becomes impossible. Such a situation gives rise to unlimited opportunities for individual self-creation. Such opportunities, as pointed out by Z. Bauman, are connected with a threat of losing the identity we already have (Bauman, 2001, p. 11).

The changeability and inhomogeneity so common in the (Post)modernity refers not only to one individuality-forming axis that is the sexuality (and the more and more emphasized bodily aspect connected with the gender) (Melosik, 1996, p. 61; Bauman, 1995, p. 70). According to Hanna Mamzer, it seems to be a rule that all the identity axes (e.g. gender, class, racial origin, age, sexual orientation) “are related to and interact with one another which is why it keeps changing throughout the whole human life, never becoming a petrified formation” (Mamzer, 2002, p. 71). Those identity axes also interact, to a certain degree, with the outer world, causing continuous changes. This is why, according to H. Mamzer, self-defining is not a stable, complete condition but a long-lasting process. Identity keeps changing and transforming, is narrative as it is something allocated. It keeps shaping till the very end of human existence, of human biography. The processual nature of identity and the need for continuous self-definition stem from the fact that the individual is undergoing constant changes but also that the changes are found in the conditions and times when the individual lives, as I have already mentioned before. The context of the individual’s life changes but the same is true for the social context. This dynamism of life, constantly changing reality require unceasing reflection on one’s own identity. Self-definition is modified, thus requiring redefining, “identity is open as the contemporary human is as if not completed” (Boksański, 1989, p. 210; Rosner, 2003, pp. 6–7). A human enters adult life convinced that s/he is going to change and, according to Zbigniew

¹ All transl. – author.

Bokszański, displays readiness for those changes (Bokszański, 1989; Rosner, 2003). Here a question arises: why self-definition, searching for or adoption of a given identity is so important in the (post)modern world? There are two possible answers. Firstly, self-definition, definition of one's identity is always important, not only in the (post)modern era. Secondly, it seems especially important in the (post)modern era due to the continuous changes of the world which encompass us whether we wish it or not. In the past, those changes were not so intense and surely they did not concern the humans as much as they do today which is why it was easier to determine and maintain the identity. Approaching the essence of the response to the above question, it is necessary to refer to the function played by identity. According to Jolanta Miluska, defining and maintaining identity is the basic biological rule: "life lasts as long as living creatures are able to retain their identity. Losing it, the being disintegrates" (Miluska, 1996, p. 10). According to the author, this rule is imperative also for the psychological functioning of humans. Identity loss is the most disorganising factor for human personality. Accordingly, identity is crucial for the normal functioning in the world. In the opinion of A. Giddens, identity is a prerequisite for the sense of security and subjectivity, self-acceptance and self-confidence (Rosner, 2003, p. 42). Constructing and maintaining identity is, apparently, of special importance due to the roles of identity, so crucial for the individual's participation in social life and the world.

Education as the Space where Identity Processes Come to Play

Self-interpretation largely takes place in the broadly taken educational process. During the process *a human comes to life*, which is described by Małgorzata Malicka as a keystone or even the essence of the educational process (Malicka, 1996, p. 213). I am certain that the differences between the situation of women and men (in various areas of life) can be explained by referring to the paths their identities were formed but also to the education as the social area where learning is accompanied by personality formation based on the applicable standards, models, customs and stereotypes. In such a context, it is possible to discuss also identity imposed by education on both genders and for this reason I will consider education as the source of identity differences between women and men, and one of the reasons for their differing social situations.

Education and, more specifically, school contribute to copying gender-related stereotypes offering the popular cultural message. The division into female and male activities, jobs, features, behaviours is deeply rooted in the Polish culture and this is where education draws from. Stereotypical opinions largely define the direction of girls' upbringing in Polish families and schools and they do not level the differences in the social status and opportunities of girls/women and boys/men.

The differing situation of both genders in the social space is apparent in the course of socialisation, school education (starting from the school customs to the relations with peers, teachers, but also the contents, models and evaluation of female and male roles found in the handbooks, Siemieńska, 1997), the division of study disciplines and specialties into male and female, to the different situation of men and women in assuming and performing social and professional roles. The differences are clear in all those aspects. Although women and men are similar in many ways, in certain respects their situations differ only because of gender or rather its social significance. It should be noted that this difference takes the form of an explicit tendency to place women in inferior positions in various areas which was broadly described in Poland by e.g. I. Boruta (Boruta, 1996), H. Domański (Domański, 1992), A. Titkow (Titkow, Domański, 1995), D. Pankowska (Pankowska, 2003), E. Gontarczyk (Gontarczyk, 1995) A. Żarnowska, A. Szwarc (Żarnowska, Szwarc, ed., 1995), M. Fuszara (Fuszara, 2001), P. Budrowska (Budrowska, 2000), E. Pakszys or I. Reszke (Pakszys, Heller, 1999; Reszke, 1984). The male roles and jobs are more prestigious. This is how the society assesses them which means, we, the women, do the same.

During the school education, an individual participates not only in the didactic process. Besides learning (that is teaching and learning), various other phenomena take place at school. One of them is a process of socialisation that is learning social life. According to A. Giddens, socialisation is the basic channel of cultural transfer through times and generations (Giddens, 2004, p. 50). This is a process where a human learns to move about in the culture s/he lives in. The process can be divided into two stages. Stage one, primary socialisation, takes place in infancy and early childhood and is highly intense (learning to speak, acquiring basic patterns of behaviour). Stage two, secondary socialisation, covers older children and adults. The first socialisation stage takes place in the family while at the second the responsibility shifts to such institutions as schools, peer groups, organisations, media or work environment (Giddens, 2004, p. 51). Learning social gender roles outside the family takes place also at school, and when we consider the time spent there (even perceived in years), its huge impact in this respect becomes visible. The very essence of the socialisation process suggests that school (institutional education creating a community) should be perceived as the place where values, standards and opinions of humans are shaped (Tillman, 1996, pp. 111–171). The socialisation process taking place at school enables an individual to create their social identity and contributes to shaping the individual identity.

The socialisation for gender roles by schools takes place at various levels. In this respect, school life can be analysed based on the criteria proposed by M. Chomczyńska-Miliszkievicz (Chomczyńska-Miliszkievicz, 2001). One of the criteria, as presented by the author, of analysing school life in the socialisation context covers school structure, teacher-student interaction and curriculum as the

most important socialisation factors. Other suggestions include formal school organisation, leadership and disciplinary strategies, material contents and teaching strategies, social skills development, students' attitudes and behaviours. Another interesting proposal is the analysis of the socialisation process at school, distinguishing the mental area affected by it, that is intellect, emotions and social attitudes (Mandal, 1995, pp. 40–44). According to Eugenia Mandal, there are obvious differences in the intellectual training of particular genders. They start from different toys for girls and boys (at home, nursery school), through different games, books, curricula, and ending with different girls' and boys' patterns (consisting in e.g. appearance, behaviour, social roles, like profession or family role) promoted by mass media and literature (including handbooks) (Mandal, 1995). Socialisation accompanying the education process at the above-mentioned levels (intellect, emotions and social attitudes) contributes also to getting to know oneself. It helps the individual to build one's own self-awareness and the sense of identity. It works by enabling the individual to act (in various aspects) and by consequent experiencing oneself, but also by providing her/him with information on the self, one's place in the social structure (e.g. in the class), own abilities (tasks and grades) and how s/he is perceived by others etc. By creating the opportunities to act (even forcing to act) and thanks to the information on the self-offered to the individual (grades for school accomplishments, for conduct), the school contributes to getting to know oneself. However, the cultural message promoted by school is very important, as I have already mentioned. Its significance lies in its context-forming properties, offering the background for self-discovery. The context (culture) delineates, to a certain degree, our path to self-discovery by the promoted patterns, values, standards, ideals or rules of social life. The culture assesses a given component of social life in a specific way while it would be assessed differently in another culture.

Experiencing the value of oneself is inscribed in self-discovery. In this area, education (school) offers a vital source. Considering school as the source of opportunities to experience one's own value, it is possible to distinguish several areas of school life, contributing thereto, that is: teacher-student relations, peer relations (with the same and opposite gender), evaluating (in terms of grades but also opinions of others), verifying oneself in action (initiating activities). Those areas enable us to experience oneself, learn one's own value. This is interrelated with shaping self-esteem, a crucial component of human sense of identity. According to Kinga Lachowicz-Tabaczek, a statistical woman feels, interprets the world and behaves in a way resembling the one of people with low self-esteem. A statistical man, on the other hand, resembles people with high self-esteem (Lachowicz-Tabaczek, 2000, pp. 63–64). It can be inferred that low self-esteem is typical of women. High self-esteem promotes better adaptation, more efficient actions, helps to defend against adverse effect of failures and, eventually, "is a buffer protecting the individual from experiencing the anxiety, especially the

existential one” (Lachowicz-Tabaczek, 2000, p. 64). Paradoxically, women reduce their chances to succeed by disbelieving in their abilities to do so. According to K. Lachowicz-Tabaczek, this derives from the women’s acceptance of stereotypes, describing them as less competent and ambitious than men. Most women believe, once they have succeeded, that the success can be attributed to their luck or immense effort and not to their capacities (Lachowicz-Tabaczek, 2000, p. 66). Unfortunately, school contributes to such self-esteem shaping by offering the above-mentioned socialisation process.

Mirosława Nowak-Dziemianowicz has many doubts concerning education and its reference to contemporary reality. She asks if the contemporary education perceives the changes that have been taking place? Does it respect the approach to individuality, characteristic of the (post)modern culture? Does it allow to shape an individual identity of a human, identity detached from “the imposed, unvarying rules and models of life that used to define human life in the premodern era” (Nowak-Dziemianowicz, 2003, p. 282)? In her response, the author postulates to open humanist education to reflection or even change the firm certainty into the reflective approach.

Educational Biography and Discovery of Identity

If we wish to consider the role of education in the identity processes, we need to study education but from the perspective of the experience, emotions of its participant, or more precisely, its female participant in this case. Education should be perceived through the eyes of the participant, the subject of education. It is necessary to reach down to her educational biography. The educational biography covers the subject’s history of participating in education. This participation covers a number of events, situations, interactions which took place in a specific period of time or, more exactly, during the educational process. The educational biography shows primarily participation of a specific subject in education. We learn about the history of the biography subject along the educational path, including schools attended, what type of student s/he was, what her/his relations with others were, what s/he learned and how s/he did it, what grades s/he had etc. An undoubted feature of the thematic biography is that it is always related to the holistic one, and even that “those two biography types are intertwined” (Helling, 1990, p. 17). Thematic biography is an integral part of the history of life of a given person and all the same it is not detached from the broad context of human life. For this reason, the educational biography may include also information from other areas of the person’s life. This stems from the specific nature of human life, its multidimensionality. Education is intertwined with family life; references to education but also certain aspect of family life appears in professional life. Specific aspects of human activity are to a certain degree interrelated, they appear

together, creating a general context of human life, her/his history. The context complements the thematic biography, detailing specific histories, presenting them in a broader plane. It adds what is not presented explicitly but also shows certain relationships. For this reason, it is so valuable as it offers in-depth knowledge of certain biographies and presents certain links.

Educational biographies are a potential source of knowledge on various aspects of the individual's participation in education. One of those aspects is identity. Identity formation is coupled with the formation of educational biography, accompanies the latter and becomes its constituent. According to Hanna Malewska-Peyre, by studying a given biography we stand a chance of "apprehending what is the least changeable in one's identity, best preserved in one's memory, most important for one's individuality" (Malewska-Peyre, 2000, p. 130). Identity is formed primarily during the school years, but the process goes beyond those frameworks, accompanying later education. Education, upbringing and socialisation are of crucial importance for identity formation, providing grounds for the identity processes. Within the education the individual is exposed to processes that not only form the personality of an individual and facilitate her/his socialisation, but also develop her/his identity. They provide information and situations helping to formulate oneself, to self-define, to create one's own picture, self-concept. The education, with its constituents of upbringing and socialisation, is processual and continuous, similar to identity formation. Studying someone's biography is, to a certain degree, getting to know the person and, consequently, her/his identity. Human identity itself, in its complexity and developmental nature, can be considered thematic biography: history when the individual identity is formed which is close to the narrative identity proposed by P. Ricouer. Biographies, that is life histories, are at the same time the histories of learning (Backe, Schulze, ed., 1979; Urbaniak-Zajac, Piekarski, 2001, p. 80). Learning is an immanent component of human life regardless of the educational path of that person. In the course of learning (participating in education), the processual identity forming and sense of life constructing takes place. This means that in the educational biography you can find also the scope of life history pertaining to human identity.

Studying educational biographies of women, besides the educational path we can learn also the process of their identity formation, see the determinants of women's identity (the problematic identity of women, as I have already mentioned) ingrained in education. Thanks to such an approach, education can be perceived and analysed as the area of human life which significantly determines the identity of humans and primarily of women. According to Th. Schulze, pedagogical attempts always have "biographical references" (Schulze, 1979, p. 13), as upbringing is "a biography companion and in this way it structures individual biographies" (Jacob, 2001, p. 111).

Proprietary studies

Getting to know a given educational path, that is a certain school reality, educational reality, you create chances to pinpoint the constituents of the institutional education that participate in identity forming and influencing the individual, or more specifically a girl/woman here, in various (what type?) ways. What is more, there is a chance to learn if there are any differences in educational impact on identity, found at various stages, levels and forms of education. My particular interest was the women's perception of those aspects. I wanted to learn how the women perceive their education, if they believe their education was based on a stereotypical gender picture and to what degree, and also what their subjective assessment of such a situation is. These questions became grounds for turning my research interest to the institutional education area. As the identity processes are of special interest to me (how women perceive themselves, what their sense of identity is), my studies focus particularly on the interdependencies between the formation of the sense of identity and the institutionalised education. I therefore assumed as if by default that such interdependencies exist (it is acceptable in the qualitative studies) which is supported by the reference works from the field of psychology, sociology and philosophy.

Based on the focus of my studies, I formulated the following research subjects. These include *sense of identity and educational biography*. These notions need to be made more precise. This is especially important when you refer to the *sense of identity* which has an interdisciplinary nature, with significant differences in its definition. Having analysed the definition of identity, I assumed that the identity will be perceived from the subjective individual perspective which is why the term of the *sense of identity* will be more appropriate. Human identity is formed in the course of the psychosocial development of an individual and refers primarily to the conscious sphere. According to many authors, human identity must be discussed based on an individual's account of her/his subjective condition. It would be difficult to study the identity objectively also because the identity is not a stable state of mind that can undergo verifiable quantitative examination, but rather a dynamic process, experienced through narration constructed by a human existing in the world (Morciniec, 1995). As we are in the (post)modern era, based on the opinions of A. Giddens, Ch. Taylor or P. Ricoeur I assumed that we have a new identity form, a narrative identity, nowadays (Giddens, 2001; Taylor, 2001; Ricoeur, 1998). I assume that the narrative identity has a dual nature, that it is formed but still forming which is related to the continuous creation of one's own life history, biography. This means that creating individual biography is connected with developing identity narration. Even more so, as today the identity is a task to complete which a human should face and manage to do.

I understand the educational biography, the other subject of study, as a part of the comprehensive biography, covering the fraction of life in which educational activity of the individual takes place. Here, it is the participation in the institutional education. I intentionally focused solely on institutional (school and extracurricular) forms of education as I am convinced that this will enable to study this apparently broad area in detail. I am also aware that the forms of education omitted here are an important and vast research area requiring a dedicated study. Thematic biography, besides the information on a given individual and her/his activity in the area, offers also information on events taking place in the broadly taken social milieu that is the one going beyond the delineated area. The information offers a certain context of the educational biography, completing its picture and explaining certain threads at the same time. The context is of utmost importance for qualitative studies as it complements the information collected. In the educational biography (seen from the perspective of the individual educational activity), we find also information on her/his sense of identity at a given time of education. As I have already mentioned, identity formation overlaps with education in terms of time frames, with the latter being one of the factors influencing identity processes.

In the studies carried out, I distinguished two types of objectives: diagnostic ones, i.e. *diagnosing women's biographies and their sense of identity* and exploratory ones: *looking for bonds between the educational biography and sense of identity*. The studies were to offer answers to my questions related to the existence of the interdependencies (if any and what type) between the participation in education and forming (but also modifying) of the sense of identity. In other words, I wanted to know if the educational path selected by a given individual and its course (creating the educational biography as a result) affected (and in what way) the sense of identity of the said individual and, vice versa, if the individual's sense of identity was a determinant of the selection and course of the educational path of that individual. To arrange the information and to ensure transparency of information collected, I formulated two major research problems. The first was: what is the educational biography and sense of identity of particular respondents and what were its determinants? The second was: is there any interdependence between the educational biography and the respondents' sense of identity and what is it?

The studies were carried out by the biographical method or, more specifically, by a special type of interview included in the method, that is a narrative interview supported by the analysis of biographical documents. I carried the studies out from November 2003 to February 2005. The sample included 21 women from various locations in the voivodeship of Silesia, in Poland. The sample was selected purposively, with the only condition of selection being the gender: female. According to K. Konarzewski, the purposive sampling is the most appropriate for the individualising studies. It consists in including only the items that meet the set requirement in the sample (Konarzewski, 2000, pp. 107–108). In this case the

requirement compliant with the research interest was gender (Maszke, 2004, pp. 84–85). Selection of the study sample is justified primarily by theoretical cognitive reasons stemming from the purpose of the studies and research questions formulated (Lamnek, 1993, pp. 187–194). In such studies the sample size depends on the theoretical saturation of the collected material. Saturation takes place when the analysis of consecutive cases does not bring any new threads, new information to the knowledge already obtained (Urbaniak-Zajac, Piekarski, 2001, p. 24; Krüger, 2005, p. 161). Having collected the study material based on 20 interviews, I considered the material saturated and finished the studies (Pilch, Bauman, 2001, p. 283). I decided to analyse 18 interviews in greater detail.

During the study, the respondents were aged 28 to 47. 15 out of the 18 women whose interviews were qualified for further analysis were married (3 of them did not have children), 3 were single (none of them had children). More specifically: there were 4 respondents aged 28–30, 5 aged 31–35, 3 aged 36–40 and 6 aged 41–47. During the study, 5 women had university education, the other were well advanced in their university studies. Two respondents had their PhD degrees at that time.

The method was selected based on the specific subject of studies (educational biography and sense of identity). Narrative interview is introspective, enabling to reconstruct the educational path and offering opportunities to learn the sense of identity creation process. I also analysed biographical documents (school reports, keepsakes etc., Nowak, 1998, p. 103), as an auxiliary technique to support the introspection process. This was applied only to a limited degree: it was helpful during the interview as the respondents could aid their memory by means of the documents to facilitate narration.

Narrative interview, termed also a specific form of unstructured interview or in-depth interview (Prawda, 1989), was developed by Fritz Schütze in early 1980s (Schütze, 1997). According to Heinz Krüger, narrative interview is a standard in the pedagogical and sociological biography studies (Krüger, 2005, p. 163).

I decided that the best way to analyse 18 interviews selected (totalling to 600 pages of text altogether) is to analyse the contents. This was determined primarily by the specific nature of the research area (Cierpka, 2000, p. 129). Using the contents analysis, it is possible to uncover the structure of the entire biography by dividing the biographies based on specific criteria and notions (Nowak, 1998, p. 105). This division was possible thanks to coding which “is equivalent to replacing parts of the text with labels representing text categories” (Konarzewski, 2000, p. 166).

Conclusions drawn from proprietary studies

The analysis of the study material (autobiographical statements) enables to consider education important for human identity. Although the presentation of the influence of education on the sense of identity had differing intensity, this

influence was perceivable. Only one biography failed to present a direct impact of education on the sense of identity formation. However, the cross-section analysis of that biography revealed that education reinforced the sense of identity, the source of which laid in the family life which reflects the inter-penetration of various areas of human life and the indirect impact of education on the sense of identity formation.

Based on the presentation of women's biographies related to their sense of identity, the following aspects of education that strongly determine the sense of identity formation can be specified:

- **acquired educational experiences.** The longer the educational path was, the higher was the impact of education on the sense of identity formation; also the learning contents acquired were important.
- **level of education.** The higher the education was, the more it supported conscious creation of one's identity.
- **successes and failures at school, school performance.** They are the most important for the sense of self-confidence and self-esteem.
- **school environment and atmosphere.** Peer relations but also contacts with teachers are important.
- **teachers.** Not only their professional competence but also personality is important.
- **initiative and additional activity at school.** It is very important as it enables to test oneself, which means discovering oneself, but also develop.
- **changing schools and teachers.** This refers both to going through consecutive educational stages but also changes of teachers and schools at a given stage.
- **selection of field of study, profession.** A very important aspect is the way of selection (e.g. freedom to choose, compulsion) and motivation (e.g. interests, contingency).
- **adult education.** Adulthood, because of its developmental achievements promotes conscious participation in education, self-reflection and ability to improve more than previous developmental stages.

The above-mentioned factors of the sense of identity can be termed socio-cultural, ingrained in education. They prove that education to a significant degree participates in the identity processes, being a crucial context for and the area of the sense of identity formation. Analysis of the collected biographies enabled to distinguish certain constituents of education as particularly important for the identity processes. This makes it possible to examine the identity forming processes in the field of education in greater detail.

In the studied biographies, the education-related determinants were accompanied by other identity factors: genetic determinants, family determinants, family structure and bonds, social context, stereotypes and cultural gender dimension, social roles played, especially maternity, socio-economic reality, job, body and

its appearance, diseases, specific local environment, marital status and married life, emancipation, leaving family house.

The above-mentioned factors, both those belonging to the sphere of education and those outside it, do not refer to single biographies but at least to a couple of them. Most of them recur frequently and some are found in all the biographies. In a sense, this makes them universal for a given group.

The analysis of the statements of the female respondents related to their sense of identity reveals one more, equally important aspect. The respondents describing themselves used the terms referring to their whole biographies, whole life but also the ones significant also to a certain stage of life, that is education. This shows a certain specific property of the identity phenomenon which is the fact that human identity is both stable and changeable. What is more, the sense of stability despite the ongoing changes is a crucial identity criterion, enabling to retain the sense of permanency which means a sense of connection between who you were in the past and who you are at present.

The research material includes also aspects related to identity criteria, especially individuality and integrity. This stems from the statements presenting oneself in the group. Sometimes this statement suggests that the respondent feels a group member and identifies with it, saying *we* (social aspect of identity). Somewhere else, the same respondent says *I* and when she talks about the group, she uses *I* and *they* (individual aspect of identity). This shows that the dual nature of a human being corresponds to the two-aspectual sense of identity.

The analysis of the accumulated research material leads to the conclusion related to the significance of the respondents' age for the quality of their participation in education. There is a clear tendency that the attitude towards education and commitment to fulfilling obligations related to the participation in education change positively in time. It turned out that in the studied group of respondents middle age proved to be a factor significantly facilitating participating in education (see: Havighurst, 1981). According to the respondents, middle-age learning entailed a much greater awareness of the education role and significance and also more constructive commitment to fulfilling the obligations stemming from the educational activity undertaken. When compared to the earlier stages of life, the middle-age education was perceived by respondents as the source of opportunities and satisfaction. It is even more important as in many cases the middle-age education was started after a long break and it was accompanied by certain problems stemming both from the break and from age and the multitude of obligations. Case analysis showed that the maturity and experience enabled to overcome the difficulties so well that the respondents achieved at least equally good results learning as they did during the previous educational stages. In half of the studied biographies, the results were much higher than the grades at the secondary or primary school when they had, interestingly, a smaller burden of obligations.

The above-mentioned tendency is, to a certain degree, inscribed in the human development concept by Carl G. Jung for whom middle age is a special period in life due to the individualisation process taking place at that time. Individualisation promotes expression of one's individuality. It consists in "expanding the field of consciousness with the unconscious contents and acquiring the ability to include the archetype impact on the experience of oneself and the world" (Galdowa, 1995, p. 141). Consequently, individualisation leads to changing the developmental orientation from the external to the internal one, reaching inside oneself and, as Jung says, accepting oneself. This means that the individualisation process is of immense importance for shaping the sense of identity in middle age as it enriches it significantly.

The accumulated research material shows also that not only the education determines the sense of identity, but also the sense of identity can determine education. This is particularly explicit for the adulthood participation in education. According to the biographies of respondents, the impact of the sense of identity on their participation in education is not that clear in primary and secondary school (although to a certain degree it can be seen in three biographies) as it is during the university education. In the group of respondents studied by me most women started their university education when they were adults, or more specifically, they were middle-aged. The awareness of oneself, of one's own capacities, as can be inferred from Jung's concept and proved by the research material, is much higher in the middle age than in the earlier stages of life. The accumulated biographies show also that in the middle age the abilities to create one's own sense of identity and using education theretofore are much higher. Education becomes a conscious tool for self-creation. The longer the education lasted and the higher stage of education a given women was at, the better she was able to use education to create her sense of identity but also biography. According to the research material, this was connected both with age (and consequent maturity) and with the educational level, translating into certain awareness and horizons.

This means that institutionalised education is a crucial space where the identity processes come to play. It requires further exploration especially in the specific postmodern context.

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Edukacja jako przestrzeń rozgrywania się procesów tożsamościowych – na podstawie narracji edukacyjnych kobiet

Streszczenie

W tekście Autorka podjęła rozważania teoretyczne, jak też zaprezentowała wyniki badań własnych nad zagadnieniem kształtowania się tożsamości kobiet w kontekście auto/biografii człowieka, odnosząc się do kategorii tożsamości, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem biografii edukacyjnej nazywanej przypadkiem szczególnym biografii tematycznej (istotnym dla kategorii tożsamości) oraz kategorii narracji, kluczowej dla pojmowania zjawiska auto/biografii. Biografia człowieka jest nieocenionym źródłem informacji o jego życiu, o danym człowieku. Poznając biografię danej osoby zbierając o niej informacje, poznając jej historię, czy to od niej samej (biografia przekazana poprzez relację autobiograficzną), czy to z materiałów biograficznych, jak np. pamiętniki, dzienniczki, listy, wspomnienia innych. Jak pisze Autorka, jednym z kryteriów tożsamości jest poczucie ciągłości siebie w czasie. Kryterium to może być spełnione dzięki pamięci autobiograficznej, czyli pamięci zdarzeń osobistych i faktów autobiograficznych. Z pamięcią autobiograficzną silnie wiąże się problematyka biografii. W tekście tym Autorka ukazuje specyficzne splątanie trzech kategorii: tożsamości, pamięci autobiograficznej i biografii.

Słowa kluczowe: biografia tematyczna, narracje edukacyjne, historie uczenia się, historie życia, samostanowienie, edukacja kobiet, samorozwój.