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Conformism as a mechanism affecting relational and adaptive processes in a peer group Comparative analysis among socially adjusted and maladjusted adolescents – with and without intellectual disabilities

Abstract: The subject matter discussed in the article focuses on the problem of conformism. Behavioral conformism has been presented as a kind of adaptive mechanism connected with the predisposition to a thoughtless reproduction of patterns imposed by the group of social participation, conditioned by the needs of affiliation and the fear of peer rejection. Thus, the subject of the conducted analyses concerns the tendency to adopt a conformist attitude by respondents from three comparative groups, differentiated in terms of the level of intellectual development and the problem of social maladjustment. These features constitute additional risk factors for triggering conformist tendencies and are important for the success of the group integration process.

The conclusions were drawn in a comparative diagram for three groups: group A – the maladjusted in without intellectual disabilities (n=57); group B – the maladjusted with intellectual disabilities (n=57); group C – the socially adjusted (n=60). Total sample size: 174 respondents aged 16–19 years. The research utilized an author's original tool with satisfactory psychometric properties – the Scale of Conformist Attitudes (SCA).

The results obtained allow us to conclude that the groups compared clearly differentiate in terms of conformist tendencies. Additionally, conformism, in each of the compared groups, focuses around different triggering attributes.

Keywords: Conformism, peer relations, adolescence, social maladjustment, intellectual disability.

Introductory notes

Over the last dozen or so years, there has been a growing interest in conformist behavior in the field of social sciences (Coultras & van Leeuwen, 2015). Nowadays, however, this issue is more and more often treated as a known state of affairs, and consequently, empirical research on it is less frequent.

The definitions of the concept of conformism established in the subject literature show that its interpretations are made within a broad analytical perspective. However, regardless of the accepted point of view, the fact that conformism has the character of a specific adaptation mechanism remains undisputed. It is an act of behavior change in order to fit in with others (Asch, 1956; Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004), and it shows a kind of uniformity in the behavior of members of a given group or community (Mika, 1972). Moreover, it homogenizes the behavior, and thus is of key importance in explaining the aggregated patterns characterizing given communities.

The available research results also allow us to assume that conformism plays an extremely important role in shaping intragroup homogeneity, stabilizing diversity among the group members (Efferson, Lalive, Richerson, McElreath, & Lubell, 2008; Eriksson & Coultras, 2009; Haun & Tomasello, 2011; Henrich & Boyd, 1998; Whiten, Horner, & de Waal, 2005). Further, conformism is a mechanism that reduces behavioral variability within a given group/population and potentially increases heterogeneity between groups/populations (Efferson et al., 2008).

At the same time, a specific problem is the small number of empirical evidence concerning the tendency to conformism in a peer pressure situation. Moreover, few studies conducted in this area (Berndt, 1979; Bishop & Beckman, 1971; Corriveau & Harris, 2010; Haun & Tomasello, 2011; Skarżyńska, 1991; Walker & Andrade, 1996) do not consider conformism towards the peer reference group as a mechanism influencing relational and adaptive processes among adolescents.

Regardless of the above, the specificity of the transition period between childhood and adulthood makes it possible to assume that this is a phase of life in which the behavioral conformism is strongly evident. This fact is conditioned by two important mechanisms: *strong exclusion* of an identity borrowed from the adult generation in childhood and *strong incorporation* of new elements of identity, which originate from a peer group (Erikson, 2004; Giddens, 2010; Witkowski, 2000). Strong dilemmas associated with this process are part of the adjustment reaction, called *authoritarian conformism* by Erich Fromm (2014). This results in full and thoughtless blending in with the proposed cultural patterns, which the peer group, as the most important socialization agenda, becomes a carrier (Griese, 1996).

This problem becomes particularly important when we refer to the common thesis that one of the most important motives for actions taken during the

transition between childhood and adulthood is to gain and secure a position within the peer group (Zwaan, Dijkstra, & Veenstra, 2013).

Membership in a peer group is a phenomenon that enables the realization of a developmental task related to the process of separation from parents and the growth of the importance of peer relations, which is important in adolescence (Fuligni & Eccles, 1993; Meeus, Iedema, Maassen, & Engels, 2005). The related struggle for a position in the sociometric structure of the group is an important factor activating specific structures of personality linked to its motivational-emotional sphere, which determines the tendency to adopt borrowed ways of thinking and acting. From this perspective, conformism is a certain individual cost associated with group membership (Santor, Messervey, & Kusumakar, 2000).

The above assumption is matched by the approach adopted for the purposes of the planned research, which recognizes conformism as an adaptive mechanism, blocking the reflexive and individualized self-creation of the individual, which reproduces the patterns imposed by the group of social participation, guided by the needs of affiliation and the fear of peer rejection (Kosten, Scheier, & Grenard, 2013; Lönnqvist, Leikas, Paunonen, Nissinen, & Verkasalo, 2006).

In this context, the problem of conducted analyses related to the tendency towards behavioral conformism among adolescents emerges. However, due to the fact that conformism is a phenomenon related to individual characteristics of the individual and their life situation, the whole conclusion will be carried out in a comparative perspective with regard to two important differentiating variables: the problem of social maladjustment and the level of intellectual development. These features were considered an additional risk factor for triggering the tendency to conformism, as they strongly correlate with specific personality traits and negative social experiences relevant to the success of the group integration process.

Methodology of own research

Research question

The scope of the empirical analyses carried out is determined by two *research problems*, which are presented in the form of the following questions:

1. What level of tendency to adopt a conformist attitude characterizes the respondents, and is membership in a given comparative group a differentiating factor?
2. What attributes does the general tendency to adopt a conformist attitude focus on, and are there any intergroup differences in this respect?

Due to the fact that it is difficult to predict unambiguously the answers to the research problems posed, no research hypotheses were made.

Research sample

The analyses were carried out on the data from studies conducted in 2012 as part of the project financed by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education for the years 2010–2013; no. N N N106 052539.

The analyses include research material collected from 174 participants aged 16–19 years in total. The age range adopted is justified by the fact that in the period of late adolescence the developmental changes affecting the process of unification and self-creation, combined with an increase in the importance of the peer group, are clearly visible.

The entire research sample was deliberately divided into three groups:

- group A – the maladjusted without intellectual disabilities (n=57)
- group B – the maladjusted with mild intellectual disabilities (n=57)
- group C – the socially adjusted without intellectual disabilities (n=60).

Groups A and B are the pupils of 4 correctional facilities: including 2 social rehabilitation facilities and 2 rehabilitation and revalidation facilities. Group C are students of 3 secondary schools in Kraków.

The sites in which the research was conducted were drawn from properly prepared drawing frames taking into account: group A and B – all correctional facilities of a given type operating in Poland; group C – all Kraków's post-primary schools.

Variables and their measurement

Level of intellectual development

Dichotomous variable – a simple differentiation criterion based on the decision of the psychological-educational counselling centre was applied, according to which the respondents were assigned to: [1] the group of people without intellectual disabilities [2] the group of people with mild intellectual disabilities.

Social maladjustment

Dichotomous variable – by selecting the participants from the group of pupils of correctional facilities and upper secondary schools, two groups were selected:

[1] the group of people socially maladjusted and [2] the group of socially adjusted people. It was assumed *a priori* that adolescents, while in correctional facilities, display symptoms of social maladjustment. In the case of upper secondary school students, the criterion for selection to the research sample was the lack of symptoms of social maladjustment.

Level of tendency to adopt a conformist attitude

In order to measure the analyzed variable the author's original research tool – the *Scale of Conformist Attitudes* (SCA) – was applied. The version of the scale used in the study had undergone the procedure of preliminary assessment of psychometric properties according to the assumptions of the *Classical Test Theory*.

Accuracy: A factor analysis allowed to distinguish 4 independent factors examining different attributes of the general tendency to conformist behavior, reflecting different problems around which conformism is focused. Based on the description of certain needs according to H. A. Murray's concept, the description of personality traits by R. B. Cattell, H. G. Gough, and A. B. Heilbrun (the adjective check list), the individual parts of the *Scale of Conformist Attitudes* formed the following measures:

- S scale – refers to the individual's beliefs about themselves, expressing their lack of self-confidence;
- U scale – reflects the individual's predisposition to prefer passive submissiveness and dependence on other people;
- P scale – is related to difficulties in expressing one's own views;
- B scale – is an exemplification of the tendency to social passivity (stagnation) and lack of commitment to action.

Reliability: The reliability of the SCA measured using the alpha-Cronbach's coefficient is as follows: SCA (total result) – 0.87; S scale – 0.68; U scale – 0.82; P scale – 0.76; B scale – 0.73. The values obtained confirm the high internal compatibility of the entire tool and the satisfactory level of homogeneity of individual scales.

Application: The Scale of Conformist Attitudes (SCA) alpha version, due to its satisfactory psychometric properties, can be used in scientific research. This tool is used to measure the significant personality trait of adolescents that is related to the tendency to adopt a conformist attitude, i.e. the subordination of mindsets, emotional reactions and behaviors to those commonly accepted in the reference group.

The analysis of the results obtained under individual factors of the SCA allows to identify specific problems/attributes that induce this attitude. Thus, the SCA makes it possible to identify certain important resources and deficits of personality, which are important for general development and allow to forecast the behavior of an individual in different social situations.

Statistical research and analysis methods

The model of research applied in the study was *the diagnostic-verification model* based on *the strategy of quantitative research* (Nowak, 2007). The adopted research scheme is based on comparative analyses. Accordingly, the following were used to compile the data: analyses using contingency tables, the χ^2 test, the single-factor analysis of ANOVA variance, together with the interpretation of the results of *post hoc tests*. The data were analyzed using the statistical program PS IMAGO (SPSS 22.0).

Results of own research

When interpreting the collected research material, it can be concluded that the distribution of the obtained intergroup results varies. This fact is illustrated not only by the data relating to the general degree of tendency to adopt a conformist attitude in the groups compared, but also in the area of the dominant attributes of this personality predisposition.

When analyzing data relating to the general tendency of respondents to adopt a conformist attitude (general results of the SCA) in the first place, it should be assumed that the strongest tendency in this respect is in group B (the maladjusted with intellectual disabilities) and the weakest in group A (the socially maladjusted without intellectual disabilities). Moreover, in both of these groups, the distribution of the percentage results on the extreme parameters of the trait under examination is reversed. At the same time, group C (the socially adjusted without intellectual disabilities) turns out to be the least differentiated internally in terms of the general predisposition to conformism. This is indicated by a similar percentage of persons with low, average and high result in this group. The outlined tendencies have a clear confirmation in the value indicating the ratio of high to low scores calculated for each group (Table 1).

Table 1. Degree of intensity of tendency to adopt a conformist attitude (SCA – overall result)

Level of the examined trait	Comparable groups *								
	Group A			Group B			Group C		
	N = 57	%	W:N	N = 57	%	W:N	N = 60	%	W:N
low result	25	43.9		10	17.5		23	38.3	
average result	23	40.4	0,4	23	40.4	2,4	14	23.3	1,0
high result	9	15.8		24	42.1		23	38.3	
$\chi^2 (4, N = 174) = 17,118; p < 0,05; \eta = 0,263$									

* Group A – the maladjusted without intellectual disabilities; Group B – the maladjusted with intellectual disabilities; Group C – the socially adjusted without intellectual disabilities
Source: own development.

The results of the chi2 test confirm the differences in the distribution of percentage results. They are the basis for determining the relationship between belonging to a certain comparative group and the degree of general tendency to adopt a conformist attitude, although its strength is low [$\chi^2 (4, N=174) = 17.118; p < 0.05; \eta = 0.263$].

Using the results of the ANOVA test (Table 2) as a basis for conclusions, we can also say that in the compared groups there are statistically significant differences in the degree of tendency to adopt a conformist attitude [F (2, 171) = 8.660; $p < 0.001$; $\eta^2 = 0,092$].

Table 2. ANOVA single-factor analysis of variance (SCA – overall result)

Between the groups	df	F	p	η^2
	2	8.660	0.000	0.092
Within the groups	171			
Group*	M	SD	Games-Howell's test	
			Group A	Group B
Group A	59.72	11.01		
Group B	69.75	11.56	0.000	
Group C	63.50	15.76	0.290	0.041

* Group A – the maladjusted without intellectual disabilities; Group B – the maladjusted with intellectual disabilities; Group C – the socially adjusted without intellectual disabilities

Source: own development.

The procedure of *post hoc* multiple comparisons revealed statistically significant differences in two pairs. This is the comparison of group A (the maladjusted without intellectual disabilities) with group B (the maladjusted with intellectual disabilities) and group C (the socially adjusted without intellectual disabilities) with group B (the maladjusted with intellectual disabilities). At the same time, the statistically insignificant result in the comparison of group A and group C allows us to conclude that the quantifying factor is the level of intellectual development.

Taking into account the fact that the tool used in the research measures not only the general tendency to adopt a conformist attitude, a detailed analysis of the collected research material was carried out for specific attributes of conformism. Accordingly, in the next step, we will present data relating to four interrelated factors, reflecting such traits as: [1] lack of self-confidence; [2] submissiveness and dependence; [3] difficulties in expressing one's own views; [4] social passivity. All these traits have a significant impact on the relational and adaptive processes taking place in a peer group.

Table 3. Degree of intensity of the tendency to adopt a conformist attitude (the S scale – lack of self-confidence)

Level of the examined trait		Comparable groups*							
		Group A			Group B			Group C	
N = 57		%	W:N	N = 57	%	W:N	N = 60	%	W:N
low result	30	52.6		17	29.8		16	26.7	
average result	18	31.6	0.3	25	43.9	0,8	16	26.7	1.7
high result	9	15.8		15	26.3		28	46.7	
$\chi^2 (4, N = 174) = 18,767; p < 0,05; \eta = 0,288$									

* Group A – the maladjusted without intellectual disabilities; Group B – the maladjusted with intellectual disabilities; Group C – the socially adjusted without intellectual disabilities
Source: own development.

The first specific attribute of the general tendency to conformism discussed is the lack of self-confidence (the S scale). On the basis of the presented data (Table 3), it can be seen that the strongest tendency to lack self-confidence occurs in respondents from group C (the socially adjusted without intellectual disabilities). The average intensity of the examined trait can be found in group B (the socially maladjusted with intellectual disabilities) and the lowest among respondents in group A (the socially maladjusted without intellectual disabilities).

A confirmation of the regularity observed in the distribution of percentage results is provided by the obtained results of the χ^2 test. They indicate a statistically significant relationship between belonging to a specific comparative group and the intensity of the measured trait. However, the value of the measure of the strength of the relationship indicates a weak correlation [$\chi^2 (4, N=174) = 18.767; p < 0.05; \eta = 0.288$].

The statistically significant differences in the degree of intensity of the lack of self-confidence between the respondents from the distinguished contrast groups were also confirmed by the ANOVA test [$F (2, 171) = 8.613; p < 0.001; \eta^2 = 0.092$] (Table 4).

The analysis of *post hoc* multiple comparisons (table 4) shows statistically significant differences only between group A (the maladjusted without intellectual disabilities) and the other two groups, i.e. group B (the maladjusted with intellectual disabilities) and group C (the socially adjusted without intellectual disabilities). The differences in average results between group B and C are statistically insignificant.

Explaining the above regularities, it can be assumed that none of the characteristics categorizing the respondents into the compared groups has the character of a variable directly determining the level of the assessed attribute of a conformist attitude. The lack of self-confidence seems to be a feature determined by other specific features of the socially maladjusted without intellectual disabilities. Moreover, their importance is reduced in the case of the socially maladjusted with

intellectual disabilities because the level of lack of self-confidence in this group is similar to that of the socially adjusted people, despite the difference in the degree of intellectual development.

Table 4. ANOVA single-factor analysis of variance (S scale – lack of self-confidence)

	Df	F		p	η ²
Between the groups	2	8.613		0.000	0.092
Within the groups	171				
Group I	M	SD	Games-Howell's test		
			Group A		Group B
Group A	15.23	4.11			
Group B	17.53	5.43	0.033		
Group C	19.18	5.78	0.000		0.250

* Group A – the maladjusted without intellectual disabilities; Group B – the maladjusted with intellectual disabilities; Group C – the socially adjusted without intellectual disabilities
Source: own development.

When referring to the data concerning the second attribute of the tendency to adopt a conformist attitude, i.e. submissiveness and dependence on others (the U scale), the differences between group B (the maladjusted with intellectual disabilities) and the other two groups are clearly visible. This trend is confirmed twice by the highest percentage of people with high scores in this group, as well as by the calculated ratio of high to low results alone (table 5).

Table 5. Degree of intensity of the tendency to adopt a conformist attitude (the U scale – submissiveness/dependence on others)

Level of the examined trait	Comparable groups*								
	Group A			Group B			Group C		
	N = 57	%	W:N	N = 57	%	W:N	N = 60	%	W:N
low result	26	45,6		12	21,1		23	38,3	
average result	19	33,3	0,5	21	36,8	2,0	21	35,0	0,7
high result	12	21,1		24	42,1		16	26,7	
$\chi^2(4, N = 174) = 9,829; p < 0,05; \eta = 0,237$									

* Group A – the maladjusted without intellectual disabilities; Group B – the maladjusted with intellectual disabilities; Group C – the socially adjusted without intellectual disabilities
Source: own development.

The obtained value of the χ^2 test confirms the indicated regularities. On its basis, it can be concluded that there is a correlation between membership in a particular contrast group and the intensity of the predisposition to prefer passive submissiveness to others. However, the strength of this relationship is low [η^2 (4, N=174) = 9.829; $p < 0.05$; $\eta = 0.237$].

Statistically significant differences between the compared groups in the level of tendency to submissiveness and dependence on others were also confirmed in the ANOVA test [F (2, 374) = 59.86; $p < 0.01$; $\eta = 0.242$].

Table 6. Single-factor analysis of ANOVA variance (the U scale – submissiveness / dependence on others)

	df	F		p	η^2
Between the groups	2	6.910		0.001	0.075
Within the groups	171				
Group 1	M	SD	Scheffe's Test		
			Group A		Group B
Group A	20.19	5.30			
Group B	23.95	7.04	0.005		
Group C	20.42	5.75	0.980		0.008

* Group A – the maladjusted without intellectual disabilities; Group B – the maladjusted with intellectual disabilities; Group C – the socially adjusted without intellectual disabilities
Source: own development.

Analyzing the results of *post hoc* multiple comparisons (table 6), it can be seen that in this case, the role of an important differentiating variable is played by the level of intellectual development. This conclusion is confirmed by the statistically insignificant result of the comparison of group A (the socially maladjusted without intellectual disabilities) with group C (the socially adjusted without intellectual disabilities). It is also supported by statistically significant differences in the comparison of both these groups with group B (the socially maladjusted with intellectual disabilities).

By recalling the results concerning the next problem around which conformism is focused, namely the difficulty in expressing one's opinion (the P scale), similar regularities can be found as in the case of the scale discussed above. This is reflected twice by the highest percentage of people in group B (the socially maladjusted with intellectual disabilities) who received high results. This regularity is also confirmed by the value calculated for each group, showing the ratio of high to low results (Table 7).

Table 7. Degree of intensity of the tendency to adopt a conformist attitude (P scale – difficulties in expressing one’s own views)

Level of the examined trait	N = 57	Comparable groups *							
		Group A			Group B			Group C	
		%	W:N	N = 57	%	W:N	N = 60	%	W:N
low result	28	49.1		11	19.3		28	46.7	
average result	15	26.3	0.5	22	38.6	2.2	16	26.7	0,6
high result	14	24.6		24	42.1		16	26.7	
$\chi^2 (4, N = 174) = 13,401; p < 0,05; \eta = 0,255$									

* Group A – the maladjusted without intellectual disabilities; Group B – the maladjusted with intellectual disabilities; Group C – the socially adjusted without intellectual disabilities
 Source: own development.

A confirmation of the relationship between belonging to a specific comparative group and the level of difficulty in expressing one’s own views is provided by the results of the χ^2 statistics, indicating a statistically significant interdependence between the juxtaposed variables, the strength of which, however, is weak [$\chi^2 (4, N=174) = 13.401; p<0.05; \eta=0.255$]. Additional analyses using ANOVA statistics show that the studied groups differ in the degree of intensity of the tested aspect of the general tendency to adopt a conformist attitude [$F (2, 171) = 7.927; p<0.01; \eta^2=0.085$].

The procedure of *post hoc* multiple comparisons (Table 8) further highlights two specific pairs for which there are statistically significant differences in experienced difficulty in expressing one’s views. The obtained value of the level of significance in the comparison of the average results of group B (the maladjusted with intellectual disabilities) with the results of the other two groups makes it possible to conclude that here too, the quantifying variable is the level of intellectual development.

This conclusion is also supported by the absence of statistically significant differences in the comparison of the results of group A (the maladjusted without intellectual disabilities) with group C (the socially adjusted without intellectual disabilities).

Table 8. Single-factor analysis of ANOVA variance (P scale – difficulties in expressing one’s own views)

	Df	F		p	η ²
Between the groups	2	7.927		0.001	0.085
Within the groups	171				
Group I	M	SD	Games-Howell’s test		
			Group A		Group B
Group A	11.93	3.29			
Group B	14.67	3.89	0.000		
Group C	12.20	4.80	0.932		0.008

* Group A – the maladjusted without intellectual disabilities; Group B – the maladjusted with intellectual disabilities; Group C – the socially adjusted without intellectual disabilities.
Source: own development.

Presenting the distribution of results concerning social passivity (the B scale), it can be stated that the groups compared are differentiated by the level of social stagnation and involvement in action (table 9). Although in all compared groups the percentage of respondents with average results prevails, the extreme parameters of the measured traits have the greatest differentiating significance. This is confirmed in the value calculated for each group indicating the ratio of high to low scores – the highest for group B (the maladjusted with intellectual disabilities) and equal for group A (the maladjusted without intellectual disabilities) and group C (the adjusted without intellectual disabilities).

Table 9. Degree of intensity of the tendency to adopt a conformist attitude (the B scale – social passivity)

Level of the examined trait		Comparable groups *							
		Group A			Group B			Group C	
N = 57		%	W:N	N = 57	%	W:N	N = 60	%	W:N
low result	25	43.9		14	24.6		28	46.7	
average result	21	36.8	0.4	22	38.6	1.5	20	33.3	0,4
high result	11	19.3		21	36.8		12	20.0	
$\chi^2 (4, N = 174) = 9,055; p = 0,051; \eta = 0,226$									

* Group A – the maladjusted without intellectual disabilities; Group B – the maladjusted with intellectual disabilities; Group C – the socially adjusted without intellectual disabilities
Source: own development.

The apparent dependence between belonging to a specific comparative group and the degree of intensity of social passivity is reflected in the obtained values of the χ^2 statistics [χ^2 (4, N=174) = 9.055; $p=0.051$; $\eta=0.226$]. Moreover, the result of the analysis conducted using the ANOVA test (table 10) confirms that the tendency to social passivity differentiates the compared group of adolescents [F (2, 171) = 4.905; $p<0.01$; $\eta^2=0.054$].

Table 10. Single-factor analysis of ANOVA variance (the B scale – social passivity)

	Df	F		P	η^2
Between the groups	2	4.905		0.008	0.054
Within the groups	171				
Group*	M	SD	Games-Howell's test		
			Group A		Group B
Group A	12.37	2.67			
Group B	13.61	3.40	0.080		
Group C	11.70	3.83	0.517		0.014

* Group A – the maladjusted without intellectual disabilities; Group B – the maladjusted with intellectual disabilities; Group C – the socially adjusted without intellectual disabilities
 Source: own development.

The procedure of *post hoc* multiple comparisons (Table10) makes it possible to conclude that social passivity is a statistically significant differentiating feature of respondents from group B (the maladjusted with intellectual disabilities) and group C (the socially adjusted without intellectual disabilities). Also, the tendency of significance within the juxtaposition of group A (the maladjusted without intellectual disabilities) with group B, with no differences between group A and group C, is not without relevance.

The patterns found suggest that here too the main differentiating factor is the level of intellectual development. At the same time, in the case of group C and group B, there is a specific conditioning mechanism which cannot be observed when comparing group C to group A. Thus, it cannot be reduced to the problem of social maladjustment alone.

In order to complement the analyses carried out with data indicating specific attributes around which there is a tendency to conformity in each of the compared groups, reference should be made to the results presented in Table 11.

The obtained values of the r-Pearson correlation coefficient – in the system of the overall result of the SCA to the results in particular SCA scales – allow to capture the factors most strongly conditioning the adoption of conformist attitudes in particular contrast groups. The interpretation of this issue seems to be important, since the knowledge of the characteristics constituting conformism

in each of the compared groups may facilitate the recognition of specific personal characteristics that activate conformist tendencies.

Table 11. The intensity of saturation of the conformist attitude with particular attributes

Comparable groups ¹		SCA – Subscales				
		n1	S scale	U scale	P scale	B scale
SCA – overall result	Group A	57	.794**	.795**	.549**	.649**
	Group B	57	.695**	.811**	.465**	.077
	Group C	60	.808**	.786**	.737**	.790**

** the obtained correlation coefficients are significant at the level $p < 0,01$ (both sides); ¹ Group A – the maladjusted without intellectual disabilities; Group B – the maladjusted with intellectual disabilities; Group C – the socially adapted without intellectual disabilities

Source: own development.

When analyzing the compiled data, it is clear that in the case of group A (the socially maladjusted without intellectual disabilities), conformist tendencies are triggered mainly by such traits as lack of self-confidence [S scale; $r=0.79$; $p>0.01$] and submissiveness/dependence on others [U scale; $r=0.80$; $p>0.01$]. In group B (the maladjusted with intellectual disabilities) there is another interesting pattern. In their case, the tendency to adopt a conformist attitude corresponds most strongly to passive submissiveness and dependence on others [U scale; $r=0.81$; $p<0.01$]. At the same time, there is no correlation between the overall result and social passivity and lack of commitment to action [B scale; $p>0.05$]. The saturation of conformism by such a trait as difficulties in expressing one's views is also much weaker in their case [P scale; $r=0.47$]. In group C (the socially adjusted without intellectual disabilities), however, it is difficult to indicate one triggering attribute, because the level of saturation of the general tendency to behavioral conformity is similarly conditioned by all components.

Discussion of the results

The presented results of the own research indicate certain regularities concerning the tendency to behavioral conformism among the respondents from three comparative groups. Their analytical interpretation allows us to conclude that the tendency to adopt a conformist attitude is most intense in the group of socially maladjusted youth with intellectual disabilities. Next is the group of socially adjusted youth without intellectual disabilities, and finally the group of socially maladjusted youth with intellectual disabilities, where the tendency to adopt a conformist attitude is the least intense. This regularity is visible in all the

measured attributes of the general conformist tendency, although there are some specific intergroup differences.

In explaining the identified dependencies, one should first of all interpret the reasons for the significantly higher tendency to behavioral conformism in the group of people with intellectual disabilities. This attempt will be made by referring to the specific social experiences of this group of respondents and pointing to certain individual personality traits of people with intellectual disabilities.

The starting point for the conducted interpretations is the assumption that during the period of school education one of the most important factors influencing the functioning of adolescents is social stress related to low position within the peer group (Bouhaddani, van Domburgh, Schaefer, Doreleijers, & Veling, 2017). This is due to the fact that the failure in the process of group integration, which takes the form of peer rejection (Killen, Mulvey, & Hitti, 2013), makes it impossible to satisfy the natural *need for closeness* (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

Applying the above to adolescents with intellectual disabilities, it can be presumed that their high tendency to conformism, and hence to unify their behavior under the influence of group pressure, corresponds to their actual negative experiences in peer relationships, which are associated with rejection.

Rejected children are found to be highly affective and have low control over their emotions, which are expressed in instability, rebellious attitude and aggression, or in submissive, passive-submissive behavior. These characteristics may, on the one hand, condition their social maladjustment and, on the other, contribute to behavioral conformism.

This justifies the thesis that a significant factor increasing the tendency for adolescents with intellectual disabilities to adopt a conformist attitude is the fear of rejection and isolation from the peer group (Urban, 2012). In addition, an increased tendency to conformism in the case of the socially maladjusted with intellectual disabilities seems to have an additional function as a tool to defend their "self" and is associated with a strong need to meet the requirements of their environment and social acceptance. From this perspective, the high tendency to adopt a conformist attitude is for the intellectually disabled a kind of compensation mechanism, protecting them from negative effects of peer rejection, which is a frequent experience of the studied group of adolescents. This allows, in consequence, to reduce the fear of social rejection through submissiveness, social passivity and a tendency to depend on others and lack of self-confidence.

The intellectually disabled also have certain mental characteristics that can be a predisposition or risk factor not only of the process of social maladjustment, but also of the tendency to behavioral conformism. Within these personality traits, the most frequently mentioned are increased sensitivity to suggestion and submissiveness. These traits make people with disabilities more susceptible to the influence of others, especially in situations that can bring them benefits and pleasure. These people are more often characterized by a lack of initiative in

action, they have little influence on their environment and do not have properly formed habits of independent functioning.

An important context of interpretation seems to be the issue of solving identity dilemmas appearing during adolescence. The basic developmental task of this phase of life is to shape identity, which occurs in connection with the processes of unification and individual self-creation. Referring to Anthony Giddens (2010), mentally disabled adolescents are particularly characterized by an identity dilemma defined as unification vs. fragmentation. In their case, the solution to this dilemma seems to be oriented towards fragmentation. This is because the thoughtless duplication of behavioral patterns and social norms proposed by the peer reference group, mass media and virtual reality results in the adoption of the already mentioned attitude of *authoritarian conformism*. This exemplifies the formation of fuzzy identity, also known as *pseudo-identity*, which blocks the autonomous development of the individual (Wysocka, 2013).

The reasoning cited seems to indicate that a much higher level of susceptibility to social approval and influence of the reference group in adolescents with intellectual disabilities are important attributes of their significantly higher tendency to behavioral conformity.

In the case of the group of respondents with an average level of tendency to adopt a conformist attitude – the socially adjusted without intellectual disabilities – the justification of the obtained result should be sought primarily in the context of developmental tasks of the adolescence period. More specifically, it is the processes of separation and individualization that take place through the increase of the importance of the peer group. This causes a slow loss of individual identity in favor of a growing identification with the group and its habitus (Sawicki, 2018). Achieving and securing a position in the group makes adolescents willing to sacrifice their views and opinions. The struggle for a sociometric position determines the activation of individual traits related to the motivational-emotional sphere, which determine the predisposition to conformism. However, in the case of the socially adjusted, there is usually a positive reference group, so there is no duplication of negative patterns of behavior and social norms. At the same time, the cost of participation in the peer group is not negative, and the identity formed as a result of unification is positive and not deviant.

The last group discussed is the socially maladjusted adolescents without intellectual disabilities. The last group discussed is the socially maladjusted adolescents without intellectual disabilities. This group was characterized by a low tendency to behavioral conformity. At the same time, a comparison of its results with the group of the socially maladjusted with intellectual disabilities, both in terms of the general tendency to behavioral conformity and its particular attributes, showed statistically significant differences. These results are to some extent surprising. This is because the high level of behavioral conformity in this group of respondents seemed to be closer to the theoretical assumptions, as it

correlates with the social maladjustment that often results from submission to the negative reference group.

Justifications for the regularities found may be sought by reference to the impact that a corrective measure in the form of placement in a correction facility may have had. The need to function in a new, secondary peer group, connected with the application of such measure, seems to trigger a tendency to nonconformist behaviors. Moreover, the compulsion to function in this new group is connected with the fight for a position in its sociometric structure, which in the case of deviant groups is often done through rebellion. This is a rebellion against the system of social norms and values, as well as the methods of achieving them, that the institution defines. In this situation, nonconformism allows to achieve leadership in the secondary peer group, but does not exclude conformism towards the primary reference group, which is assumed to be of deviant nature. The rebellion triggered in such a situation leads to the autonomization of a *negative identity* and may be a result of retaliatory motivation, which is a reaction to experiencing oppression.

To further explain the differences in the results between the socially adjusted and the socially maladjusted (regardless of the level of intellectual development), it is necessary to refer to the two dominant motives of conformism. According to the literature on the subject, there are two main motives of conformism: normative and/or informational deficits (Cialdini & Trost, 1998).

Analyzing the data received, it seems likely that the socially adjusted are motivated by informational rather than normative deficits – which again seems to be more characteristic for the socially maladjusted. This is because in the group of the socially adjusted the behavioral conformity was assessed in relation to the peer group in the classroom system, and thus is strongly motivated by the desire to be right and to take the right, appropriate and relevant actions. As a consequence, in task situations in a school classroom, the lack of appropriate knowledge increases the tendency to conformism, which seems to be reinforced by the characteristics of the situation itself, such as the size of the group, the attitude of the participant to its members, and the difficulty of the task undertaken jointly by the class group.

Additionally, it is significant for the conformity of behaviors that the power of conformism is conditioned by the frequency and repetitiveness of a certain situation/behavior. Thus, it can be concluded that the probability of an individual accepting / reproducing a given behavior increases with the frequency of that behavior in the social reference group and the resulting reward (e.g. Asch, 1956; Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004; Cialdini & Trost, 1998; Efferson et al., 2008; Haun & Tomasello, 2011). This issue may explain the conformity of behaviors not only in the case of the socially adjusted who function in the classroom system. However, what differentiates the compared groups are the circumstances of the situation or the content of the behavior itself. For example, in the group of

socially maladjusted people without intellectual disabilities, these will be deviant behaviors, which will be a manifestation of the adopted system of norms and values of a given reference group, and in the group of socially adjusted people, behaviors that increase the level of cohesion and mutual trust of the group/class group. In the group of the socially maladjusted with intellectual disabilities, on the other hand, the behaviors which increase self-esteem and the level of group acceptance will be very important. In general, it is about all situations and experiences that can be seen as a positive reinforcement preventing social rejection. The positive significance of these situations and experiences will at the same time eliminate the possible conflict of the moral norm and benefit, explaining the criminal behaviors undertaken by this group.

Findings from the conducted analyses allow us to conclude that it is necessary to undertake further empirical research on the system of specific predictors (endogenous and exogenous) of tendency to conformist behaviors conditioned by the transformations taking place during adolescence. It also seems necessary to define the exact mechanisms of conformist behavior, indicating specific motives for these behaviors. The above issues should be addressed separately for each of the groups examined. However, in accordance with the assumptions of the *evidence-based* approach, it seems to be particularly important to verify the theses put forward in relation to the group of the socially maladjusted without intellectual disabilities, as the group that received surprisingly low results of tendency to conformism. This will allow for the design of effective social rehabilitation measures that are based on empirical evidence.

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