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Solving identity problems by students of Polish universities and the phenomenon of problem drinking

Abstract: In a non-homogeneous system of cultural meanings, identity formation becomes a cognitive practice based on permanent individual experimentation. The article is focused on identity formation issues, a process that depends on the social conditions in which it occurs, and the typical qualities of cognitive processes of individuals participating in it. Both factors may support and interfere with the process of reaching a mature identity (obtaining the effect of complete identity). In the identity context, this implies: the result of one's own exploration and the commitments made on its basis, and with them important life decisions. The cognitive orientations involved in the process of identity formation may indicate different identity styles, which should be understood as different ways of dealing with identity problems. Identity styles refer to beliefs, attitudes, ways of dealing with different situations and making important life decisions to resolve identity conflicts. In the article I refer to identity styles used by students of Polish state and private universities, showing the differences in processing information, negotiating identity issues and singularities related to problems resulting from drinking alcohol, which makes them, from a cognitive point of view, important and analytically up-to-date.

Key words: identity problems, academic youth, problems resulting from drinking alcohol.

Introduction

The complexity and temporal multidimensionality of the contemporary society subject to globalization (its ambiguity, ambivalence, transience, diversity) and the transformation of the socio-cultural reality subjected to constant fluctuations make it difficult to describe and standardize the heterogeneity of the society objectifying itself in its actions. Consequently, the nature of global connections and interdependencies is not without significance for the quality of an individual's functioning (Cybal-Michalska 2013, p. 10). The reality of permanent change and ambivalence provokes reflection on the condition of contemporary humans and the way they solve their identity problems.

The multifaceted and multilevel structure of social reality understood by K. Dąbrowski, as "the entirety of phenomena that take place in the external and internal environment of man and are perceived by him, grasped and experienced by means of the senses and mutually connected mental, emotional, imaginative and intuitive activities" (Tylukowska 2000, p. 233), points to the particular topicality of questions about the meaning and scope of the concept of "identity". This issue becomes particularly important in the context of academic youth.

Shaping identity as a reflective activity

The problem of identity crystallizes the problem of the trajectory of individual fates. In this sense, like "any other formalized narrative, it is something that has to be worked out and that, by its natural progression, requires creative effort" (Giddens 2001, p. 107) and a reflective approach to one's own biography. Identity is a "reflexive loop in which when one leaves oneself, one returns to oneself" (Zawadzki 2003, p. 5). In the context of the transformation of the modern world, it seems particularly important to seek and specify the answer to the question "Who am I in this rapidly changing world?" (a dynamic question). In response to a complex question of a dynamic nature, in their view of the world individuals, perceiving the pace and intensity of changes, try to determine to what extent they are active subjects of prospective changes taking place in cultural and social contexts (Misztal 2000, pp. 158–160)¹.

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¹ Identity as a cognitive practice, as B. Misztal points out, means that an individual seeks an answer not only to the questions such as "Who am I?", "Who am I becoming?" or "Who am I not?" but also attempts to define the answers to "Who am I if I am so different from others?" (a contrasting question) and "Who am I if the characteristics of people are so unevenly distributed?" (a gradation question), which allow us to see the scale of differentiation of the degree of saturation with a chosen feature among different subjects of social life.

In a situation where social life is perceived to be organized around a multitude and variety of alternatives (which is a feeling which is not only observed but also experienced), young people are challenged to determine their relationship with this world. In a way, it is an internal exploration and an element of searching for answers to complex questions requiring a lot of thought: Am I subject to prospective changes and to what extent? The significance and dynamics of changes imply changes in the identity aspects of social life in which young people search for and define themselves. For young people participating in the unstable reality, who are in a period of dual transit: from adolescence to adulthood and from education at the academic level to the labor market, finding an answer to the question: “Who am I becoming?” is becoming increasingly important, but it also turns out to be more and more difficult to define in the “multitude of worlds” (Cybal-Michalska 2013, p. 231).

The formation of identity is a reflective activity. As J. Rainwater puts it, “we are not what we are, but what we make of ourselves” (as cited in: Giddens 2001, p. 102). Identity decisions made by young people at the threshold of adulthood determine their further development, namely the development of their potential. The awareness, feeling and assessment on the matter of “who am I?”, “who am I becoming?” enables the formulation of a vision of the desired state. Unprecedented diversity of individualized lifestyles, understood as “a culturally conditioned way of meeting needs, habits and norms” (Fatyga, Rogala-Obłękowska 2002, p. 24), makes it possible and necessary to live out one’s life through change, where everyone “must become a model for the era we want to create” (Illich, as cited in: Kwieciński 2000, p. 269). In this sense, the loss and permanent change of individual reference points updates the problem of identity styles and the issue of “how identity is created and changed” (Jawłowska 2001, p. 54) depending on the social context and quality of young people’s involvement in the exploration process. Getting to know and understanding oneself helps to develop a sense of agency and responsibility for agency – to make a commitment. Exploration is one of the basic dimensions on the path to crystallization of identity, which is emphasized on the basis of psychology by J. Marcia, Erikson, A. Brzezińska, among others. The essence is “looking back at oneself, contemplating oneself, trying to understand who we were, who we are and who we can be in the future, [...] which enables us to realize who we are, our relationship with the outside world and with the surrounding environment” (Stanišauskienė; as cited in: Adomaitiene, Zubrickiene 2010, p. 90). Academic youth entering adulthood face the necessity of permanent self-definition (in a situation of dominant change and ambivalence) and individualization (forced by the lost “connection” with the community) of the course of their own biography.

This was developed further in M. Berzonsky’s concept of identity styles. It can be considered to be an important addition to Marcia’s theory of identity statuses, which refers to the structure of identity as a stable disposition of the individual,

an identity that is understood as a state (and not a process) resulting from its development (Berzonsky et al. 2011; Czyżowska et al. 2012; Berzonsky 2003). And yet, identity is formed in the context of social and cultural influences undergoing a permanent change of reality. Berzonsky's model provides an opportunity to dynamically describe the way identity crystallizes. Identity styles determined by social and cognitive processes refer to individual preferences in processing information about the subjective self, decision-making, in selection of strategies for constructing or avoiding crystallization of one's identity. The style of identity is understood by the author as "an individual's way of solving identity-related problems" (Czyżowska et al. 2012, p. 60). The Identity Style Inventory questionnaire², developed by Berzonsky, was used to determine the identity styles of the studied group of academic youth from public and non-public universities. The style of identity model proposed by the author refers to the differences in individual processing of information relevant to the identity of an individual and the differences in the content of individual's self-concept. For example, an individual may focus on obtaining information, deliberately process and evaluate it before deciding to commit and define oneself, or may automatically adapt and internalize the normative recommendations of significant individuals or the groups and communities to which said individual belongs (Berzonsky et al. 2011, p. 295). M. Berzonsky postulated that values influence how individuals engage in the process of shaping their own identity and dealing with identity conflicts. Values motivate individuals and give their life direction. A conscious, rational, typical of an information style approach to identity is combined with values which indicate independence and autonomy of the individual while at the same time being able to transcend personal pleasure and self-indulgence. The normative approach to identity is associated with the values of conformism, institutional commitment and responsibility. The "full of procrastination and avoidance" diffuse/avoidant approach is combined with an interest in achieving personal pleasure and avoiding distress (Berzonsky 2011, p. 297–299).

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² M. Berzonsky's Identity Style Inventory (1992) is composed of statements corresponding to three styles of identity at different subscales: information style scale, normative style scale, diffuse/avoidant style scale. The research used an adapted version of the questionnaire, translated into Polish by psychologist J. Byczkowska. It is worth mentioning that the author of the translation took up the topic of identity styles in her MA thesis, written at the Institute of Psychology of Adam Mickiewicz University, entitled "Identity in the Present Times compared to Identity Styles and Cognitive Processes" (original title: *Tożsamość we współczesności i style tożsamości a procesy poznawcze*, 2009) (Thesis supervisor Prof. A. Brzezińska). The respondents were asked to assess statements on a five-level scale ("does not apply to me" – please tick the number "1"; "it applies to me to a large extent" – tick the number "5") in order to diagnose identity styles. The sum of the points a given respondent scored each claim assessed is this respondent's result. The difference in results in one of the scales indicates the domination of one of the distinguished identity styles.

Identity styles of academic youth and the phenomenon of problem drinking

The cognitive orientations involved in the process of crystallization of identity may indicate, as Berzonsky puts it, different styles of identity, namely: the information style, the normative style, the diffuse/avoidant style³. The author of the model of identity styles emphasizes that “the formation of identity is a dynamic, lengthy process in which the establishment of commitments can provide new information and reactions, which may result in a change of priorities” (Berzonsky et al. 2011, p. 299). The Identity Style Inventory refers to beliefs, attitudes, ways of dealing with various situations and making decisions that are important in life and for constructing identity and resolving identity conflicts. The observed differences in the styles of identity of the studied academic youth are the result of different preferences in the choice of social-cognitive strategies used to engage (or not engage) in the tasks of constructing, maintaining and/or reconstructing a sense of identity (Berzonsky et al. 2011, p. 295). The aim of the research was to distinguish the identity styles of academic youth and to present the peculiarities of the relationships that can be captured between identity styles and the phenomenon of problem drinking.

The most typical for the academic youth under study is an informative style of identity (69.7%). The next one in the hierarchy of identity styles, characteristic for the examined group, is the normative style (18.0%) and then – diffuse/distributed (12.3%)⁴.

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³ Moreover, the author points to the commitment factor of identity, also called commitment strength.

⁴ The text has been prepared as a result of the *Studenci 2019* (Eng. *Students 2019*) survey carried out by the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań as part of the competition for the implementation of tasks in the field of public health specified in the National Health Programme for 2016–2020 in the area of Operational Objective no. 2 – Prevention and solving problems related to the use of psychoactive substances, behavioral addictions and other risky behaviors (orig. *Profilaktyka i rozwiązywanie problemów związanych z używaniem substancji psychoaktywnych, uzależnieniami behawioralnymi i innymi zachowaniami ryzykownymi*), Task 40/3.4.2/19/DEA – Supporting scientific research in the area of risk factors and factors protecting against problems resulting from alcohol consumption (orig. *Wspieranie badań naukowych w obszarze czynników ryzyka i czynników chroniących przed problemami wynikającymi z picia alkoholu*). The *Studenci 2019* study is an extensive quantitative study aimed at recognizing the determinants of alcohol consumption and alcohol dependence of students in a broader context when selecting a number of sociodemographic variables (gender, age, type of university, material situation, academic achievements, marital status, parental role, place of residence – variables used as criteria for inter-group comparisons in the student population). The survey was conducted on a representative sample of third-year students of public and non-public universities of all types. The research was carried out in 38 universities from all over Poland. The research was conducted in May and June 2019. 4,503 students were surveyed in total. The statistical procedure in the presented article was based on the analysis of relations between sociodemographic

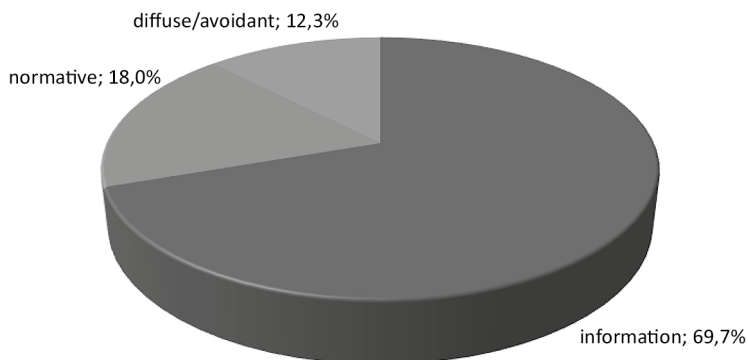


Fig. 1. Identity styles of academic youth of Polish universities
Source: own study.

The information style is characteristic for individuals who seek information in the process of building identity, or more precisely, before making binding identity-related decisions. Methods of exploration in the process of crystallization of identity are based on an independent and active search and reworking of a multitude of different informational data. The essence is to refer to the elements of Self such as: personal standards, goals, value system (Czyżowska et al. 2012, p. 61). Individuals⁵ with an informative style of identity act in a thought-out man-

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variables and styles of identity. It was not without significance to establish the relationship between youth identity styles and variables: problem drinking, alcohol dependence, frequency of occasional drinking per annum and in 30 days prior to the study (established using scales for alcohol dependence and problem drinking: RAPS 4 (Rapid Alcohol Problem Screening) and Test AUDIT-C (The Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test Consumption)). The statistical procedures used made it possible to determine both the relationship between the two variables and the strength of that relationship. The chi-square test was used for all variables.

⁵ The selection of the study group consisted in preparing a scheme and drawing a sample in such a way as to obtain a representative sample of Polish university students. For this purpose, a multi-stage draw scheme was used. In the first stage of selection universities were drawn. The selection was carried out using a proportional selection scheme in layers. The layers were defined by the voivodship, the type of universities (public universities, non-public universities) and the type of higher education (universities, technical universities, agricultural universities, economic universities, pedagogical universities, medical universities, maritime universities, physical education universities, art universities, universities of theology, universities of the Ministry of National Defense, universities of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Administration and State Higher Vocational Schools). The draw was conducted on the basis of the current list of universities in the integrated information system on science and higher education – POL-on and in the Local Data Bank of Statistics Poland. The number of students for the analyzed types of universities was calculated. The drawing of institutions was carried out using a systematic selection scheme in layers with a probability proportional to the calculated size of the population (number of students) at a given institution. In the next step, in each of the selected institutions, groups of third-year students were drawn (full-time and part-time students from both state and non-public universities).

ner, intentionally seek, evaluate and refer to information that is useful to them. The information style is characterized by individuals who reflect on their own views, subjecting them to multiple assessment, especially in situations of conflicting feedback. The information style of identity is positively correlated with the need for cognition, with cognitive complexity, self-reflection, rational thought in the process of dealing with problems, careful decision making, openness to new experiences and conscientiousness. An information style of identity is combined with subjective activity and causative competence of the subject. E. L. Deci and R.M. Ryan singled out integration among regulatory processes. Activities requiring awareness of objectives, values and standards are the result of integrated self-regulation and the individual's choice from the possibilities which, through the act of choice, determine the individual to act according to their own preferences (Berzonsky 2003, p. 132, 139; Cybal-Michalska 2013).

The research shows that the information style is characterized by more male than female students ($\chi^2 = 15.7$; $df = 2$; $p < 0.001$), students of both genders coming from large voivodship capitals (cities with a population of more than 250,000 people – $\chi^2 = 27.9$; $df = 10$; $p = 0.002$). For academic youth who rent a room or a flat or have their own apartment ($\chi^2 = 19.0$; $df = 10$; $p = 0.040$), as well as for young people who live alone during their studies ($\chi^2 = 24.8$; $df = 8$; $p = 0.002$), internal exploration takes place by means of information-seeking, reaching deep into oneself, taking personal values and internalized standards as a reference point. Active exploration of alternatives, information-seeking and flexibility in making commitments (Berman et al. 2001, p. 514) are attributes of the style represented by persons who declare that they are not currently in a relationship – are single ($\chi^2 = 30.6$; $df = 8$; $p < 0.001$), do not work full time (on the basis of an employment contract – $\chi^2 = 14.0$; $df = 2$; $p = 0.001$), declare taking part in study trips, internships abroad (e.g., as part of the Erasmus programme – $\chi^2 = 10.6$; $df = 2$; $p = 0.005$), achieve an average grade of more than 4.5 ($\chi^2 = 26.6$; $df = 8$; $p = 0.001$), were granted a scholarship for academic achievements at the university ($\chi^2 = 6.1$; $df = 2$; $p = 0.047$) and distinctions for activities at the university ($\chi^2 = 6.9$; $df = 2$; $p = 0.032$). Research indicates that the information style combines “insight, open-mindedness, coping strategies, careful decision-making, cognitive complexity, emotional autonomy, empathy, adaptive self-regulation, high levels of commitment and achieved identity status” (Berzonsky et al. 2011, p. 296). Therefore, it may be assumed that the distinguished psychological predispositions, as it results from the research, contribute to the fact that academic youth from public and non-public universities representing an information style of identity much more often than youth representing other styles of identity declare that their frequency of drinking alcoholic beverages is either never or once a month at the most ($\chi^2 = 22.2$; $df = 8$; $p = 0.005$), and if they do, it is the normal drinking non-indicative of an alcohol problem ($\chi^2 = 50.6$; $df = 8$; $p < 0.001$). It is also worth noting that on a single occasion

young people with an information style of identity do not drink five or more portions of alcohol (1 portion is about 10 g of 100% alcohol) – ($\chi^2 = 37.0$; $df = 8$; $p < 0.001$). Active exploration of alternatives, information-seeking and making commitments (Berman et al. 2001, p. 514) so characteristic of the information style are characteristic of academic youth, who declare to be interested in other people as they were before and not to lose interest in others – ($\chi^2 = 35.9$; $df = 6$; $p < 0.001$). The research of D. Czyżowska, E. Gruby and A. Białek shows that there is a connection between an information style of identity and an orientation towards equality collectivism. Those to whom equality collectivism can be attributed are also characterized by trouble with submitting to authority (Czyżowska et al. 2012, p. 60, 64).

The normative style refers to the manner in which an individual can deal with decisions that are important for the Self by accepting and internalizing the expectations of those who are important for the subject or the social norms in force. Settlement of identity conflicts takes place by referring to such components of Self as: family, nation, religion (Czyżowska et al. 2012, pp. 60–61). “Normatively” oriented individuals show little readiness for internal exploration, have a clear direction of action, have limited tolerance for informational contradictions, and are blind to information that can threaten personal beliefs and value systems. The normative process, which in the eyes of E. L. Deci and R. M. Ryan, is connected with the internalization of standards, goals, values of significant persons, hinders the individual from perceiving the involvement as fully own. The individual’s actions are accompanied by anxiety resulting from a sense of possible guilt, approval or duty (Berzonsky 2003, p. 132, 139, Cybal-Michalska 2013). Among the surveyed academic youth representing the normative style of identity, this style is more common among surveyed women than men ($\chi^2 = 15.7$; $df = 2$; $p < 0.001$), respondents who live in their own apartments or their family homes during the course of their studies ($\chi^2 = 19.0$; $df = 10$; $p = 0.040$), respondents who during their studies live with a spouse or a partner, or their parents or a member of the family ($\chi^2 = 24.8$; $df = 8$; $p = 0.002$). For this group of surveyed young people more often than in case of representatives of other styles of identity, not having any experience related to moving out to study or going on practical training abroad ($\chi^2 = 10.6$; $df = 2$; $p = 0.005$), and coming from

a village ($\chi^2 = 27.9$; $df = 10$; $p = 0.002$) is also characteristic. Acceptance and internalization of the expectations of significant people and the axionormative layer of culture are more often (compared to representatives of two different styles) characteristic of people who perform the role of a parent ($\chi^2 = 30.6$; $df = 8$; $p < 0.001$), work full time based on an employment contract ($\chi^2 = 14.0$; $df = 2$; $p = 0.001$) and declare that the material situation is good/very good as it is sufficient to cover their basic expenses and allows them to make decent savings ($\chi^2 = 19.4$; $df = 8$; $p < 0.013$). Normative engagement is more rooted in emotions than information and characterizes people who declare more frequent con-

sumption of alcohol: two to four times a month ($\chi^2 = 22.2$; $df = 8$; $p = 0.005$) and adolescents who have not felt guilt after drinking alcohol in a period of 12 months ($\chi^2 = 28.7$; $df = 2$; $p < 0.001$). Resolving identity conflicts by referring to people of significance and social norms is also characteristic of normatively oriented female and male students, who more often declare that during the previous week they did not feel: sad, depressed or down ($\chi^2 = 59.6$; $df = 6$; $p < 0.001$), lack self-confidence or feel hopeless ($\chi^2 = 75.1$; $df = 6$; $p < 0.001$), physical exhaustion and a need to rest ($\chi^2 = 19.6$; $df = 6$; $p = 0.003$), lack of good mood, lack of pleasure in situations which previously evoked positive emotions ($\chi^2 = 36.2$; $df = 6$; $p < 0.001$), anxiety, panic or stress ($\chi^2 = 22.4$; $df = 6$; $p = 0.001$). Guided by group norms, referring to the components of Self depicting important socialization agendas reveal people who are characterized by a lack of thoughts about suicide or self-harm ($\chi^2 = 30.9$; $df = 6$; $p < 0.001$). It's not surprising that during the past 7 days they felt no sadness, no depression ($\chi^2 = 59.6$; $df = 6$; $p < 0.001$), were not overly concerned about the future ($\chi^2 = 70.3$; $df = 6$; $p < 0.001$), were convinced that are not guilty of any significant negligence ($\chi^2 = 81.4$; $df = 6$; $p < 0.001$), got pleasure from what they were doing ($\chi^2 = 58.4$; $df = 6$; $p < 0.001$), did not feel guilt towards oneself or other people ($\chi^2 = 44.1$; $df = 6$; $p < 0.001$), did not feel they deserve any punishment ($\chi^2 = 27.6$; $df = 6$; $p < 0.001$), felt self-satisfaction ($\chi^2 = 80.4$; $df = 6$; $p < 0.001$), did not feel inferior to other people ($\chi^2 = 75.1$; $df = 6$; $p < 0.001$) and had no suicidal thoughts ($\chi^2 = 17.3$; $df = 6$; $p = 0.008$). The normative style typical of this group of academic students is characterized, assuming Berzonsky's ideas, by a little exploration of alternatives, obedience, tendency to respect power, attachment to norms and dogmas, conformism towards social and family expectations and rigidity of attitudes when making commitments (Berman et al. 2001, p. 514). The survey of academic youth shows that normatively oriented people experience the least depressive episodes ($\chi^2 = 77.3$; $df = 4$; $p < 0.001$). In contexts where problems, requirements and standards are rather stable, the power of engagement itself promotes the effective functioning of the individual, regardless of the degree of rationality manifested in attitudes. Thus, an engagement supported by emotions can make the assumption of a commitment a reality, which is an exemplification of subjective activity and its agency competence (Berzonsky 2003, p. 139).

The scale of the diffuse/avoidant style reflects the attitude of procrastination and postponement of the solutions important for the formation of identity, the resolution of identity conflicts. Individuals with a diffuse/avoidant style avoid confrontation with personal problems and postpone important decisions as long as possible, and their behavior is determined mainly by situational factors. Important, central components in the structure of Self are popularity, making impression, reputation (Czyżowska et al. 2012, p. 61). In individuals classified as representing a diffuse/avoidant style, the requirements associated with and determined by the situational context usually dictate or limit the behavioral responses

of the entity. The diffuse/avoidant style of identity is positively correlated with emotional coping strategies, with situational changeability, with neuroticism and depressive reactions, as well as with meticulousness and cognitive inquisitiveness (Berzonsky 2003, p. 131–132)⁶. In Berzonsky's model of identity styles, diffuse/avoidant is more than a dispersed, "lost" self. This style "combines with strategic attempts to bypass or hide potentially negative, relevant feedback [...] with little involvement, with external control location and impulsiveness" (Berzonsky et al. 2011, p. 296). The diffuse/avoidant style of identity is more characteristic for the group of the surveyed academic students, whose main residence during their studies is in a dormitory ($\chi^2 = 19.0$; $df = 10$; $p = 0.04$), for those who are not parents ($\chi^2 = 8.9$; $df = 2$; $p = 0.011$), who sometimes have difficulties in covering basic expenses ($\chi^2 = 19.4$; $df = 8$; $p < 0.013$), achieved an average grade of less than 3.7 ($\chi^2 = 26.6$; $df = 8$; $p = 0.001$) and have not received scholarships for academic achievements ($\chi^2 = 6.1$; $df = 2$; $p = 0.047$), and distinctions for activities at the university ($\chi^2 = 6.9$; $df = 2$; $p = 0.032$). They are more likely to avoid solving personal problems and are more likely to react to events in a situational manner: people who drink alcoholic beverages two or three times a week and even four times or more ($\chi^2 = 22.2$; $df = 8$; $p = 0.005$), respondents who consume seven to nine portions of alcohol during the period when they drink alcohol ($\chi^2 = 50.6$; $df = 8$; $p < 0.001$), and most often they consume it once a week, in some cases even on a daily basis ($\chi^2 = 37.0$; $df = 8$; $p < 0.001$). Recognizing that it is characteristic for this group of academic youth under study to postpone facing identity conflicts and problems for as long as possible, these young people, as research shows, reveal the existence of an alcohol problem (harmful drinking or addiction – $\chi^2 = 24.8$; 1 ; $df = 2$; $p < 0.001$), tends to feel guilt after consumption of alcohol ($\chi^2 = 28.7$; $df = 2$; $p < 0.001$), faced a situation in which a friend told them what they did or said while drinking alcohol of which they had no memory ($\chi^2 = 16.3$; $df = 2$; $p < 0,001$) and it happened in their life that they consumed alcohol right after waking up ($\chi^2 = 19.0$; $df = 2$; $p < 0.001$). For the selected group of people there is a high probability of alcohol dependence ($\chi^2 = 39.1$; $df = 2$; $p < 0.001$). It can therefore be considered that it will be characteristic of these groups of surveyed young people to postpone facing identity conflicts and problems for as long as possible, and that their actions, decisions and choices will be accompanied by behavior that primarily reflects the response to the external context and taking into account the consequences. However, the moment of compliance (behavior – context) is a short-term rather than a long-term modification that may affect auto-identification (Berzonsky et al. 2011, p. 296).

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⁶ The research by f M. Berzonsky and L. Kuk (2000) or J. M. White and R. M. Jones (1996), among others, indicates that individuals characterized by the diffuse/avoidant style experience a variety of behavioral problems, eating disorders, neuroticism and depressive reactions, and problems with alcohol and drug addiction. (Berzonsky 2003, p. 138)

Diffuse/avoidant style of identity involves a constant sense of sadness and unhappiness which becomes unbearable ($\chi^2 = 59.6$; $df = 6$; $p < 0.001$), feeling that one's past was hopeless and nothing can be done about it and fearing that nothing good awaits in the future ($\chi^2 = 70.3$; $df = 6$; $p < 0.001$), as well as feeling no satisfaction and being convinced that everything one does is done wrong ($\chi^2 = 81.4$; $df = 6$; $p < 0.001$). The tendency to react situationally to events, to avoid confrontation with problems is possessed by people who often feel aversion to each other ($\chi^2 = 80.4$; $df = 6$; $p < 0.001$), have no decision-making skills ($\chi^2 = 34.8$; $df = 6$; $p < 0.001$).

Waiting, avoiding or postponing the resolution of problem situations also involves frequent waking up at night and not being able to fall back asleep ($\chi^2 = 34.3$; $df = 6$; $p < 0.001$), with the feeling of exhaustion, lack of strength to do anything ($\chi^2 = 43.4$; $df = 6$; $p < 0.001$), with being concerned about one's health ($\chi^2 = 23.1$; $df = 6$; $p < 0.001$) and losing interest in sexual activity ($\chi^2 = 30.8$; $df = 6$; $p < 0.001$). In addition, there is a link between diffuse/avoidant style of identity and a moderate or even deep depressive episodes, namely: depressive disorders ($\chi^2 = 29.6$; $df = 2$; $p < 0.001$). Making decisions as a result of making choices that are accompanied by behaviors that primarily reflect a response to the external context – so characteristic of the diffuse/distributed style – is positively correlated with the declaration “the previous week I always felt”: sad, depressed, down ($\chi^2 = 27.5$; $df = 6$; $p < 0.001$), lack of self-confidence in myself and hopelessness ($\chi^2 = 75.1$; $df = 6$; $p < 0.001$), physical exhaustion and a need to rest ($\chi^2 = 19.6$; $df = 6$; $p = 0.003$), anxiety, panic or stress ($\chi^2 = 22.4$; $df = 6$; $p = 0.001$). Among people with a normative style of identity, thoughts about suicide or self-harm are more common than among people with an information and normative style of identity ($\chi^2 = 30.9$; $df = 6$; $p < 0.001$), a lack of good mood and lack of pleasure in situations which previously evoked positive emotions in the previous week were recorded as well ($\chi^2 = 36.2$; $df = 6$; $p < 0.001$).

Final remarks

Recognizing the need for a multifaceted approach to research on the problems resulting from alcohol consumption in the population of Polish students, the reference to its identity styles sheds new light on the peculiarities of presenting the problem of alcohol consumption as a disease and a social phenomenon. The process of identity formation is highly dependent on the quality of the cognitive processes involved. In the case of students representing the information style, the choice of the strategy of constructing identity is the result of exploring the subject and the commitments made on its basis, acquiring knowledge about oneself and structuring them into a coherent self-concept. It is therefore not surprising that

this group of young people exhibits the slightest evidence of a risk of harmful drinking or alcohol dependence. A conscious, rational, typical of an information style approach to identity combined with values which indicate independence and autonomy of the individual while at the same time being able to transcend personal pleasure and self-indulgence are typical of students who can resist drinking alcohol. Students with a normative style, which is associated with the values of conformism, commitment and reference to significant individuals and groups are more likely to consume alcohol than those representing an information style. It can be assumed that the type of group that normatively-oriented young people consider significant is not without significance. For academic youth with the diffuse/avoidant style of identity, in the process of solving identity dilemmas behavior “full of procrastination and avoidance” is typical, which is associated with a high tendency to drink alcohol in order to make experiences more interesting, achieve pleasure and avoid unpleasantness and emotional response to life situations. Research shows that it is the choice of construction strategy (as is the case with information style representatives) rather than avoiding crystallization of one’s identity (as is the case with young people representing the diffuse/avoidant style) that favors rational thought-based coping with problems, rather than the escape into “substitutes” or “anesthetics” in the form of alcohol abuse. In this way, young people should be made aware of the essence and importance of the intentional search for information, the purposeful processing of information, before they decide to make a commitment that is necessary from the perspective of the identity formation process.

Identity styles of academic youth, showed the differences in processing information, negotiating identity issues and making personal decisions (Berzonsky 2003, p. 131) by the respondents and the peculiarities of problems resulting from alcohol consumption, which makes them, from a cognitive point of view, analytically important, because they also serve to explain the relationships that can be grasped between the styles of identity process and the phenomenon of problem drinking.

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