INTERNAL DIFFERENTIATION OF THE DIFFUSE-AVOIDANT STYLE IN BERZONSKY’S MODEL: THE RESULTS OF ANALYSES IN VARIABLE-CENTERED AND PERSON-CENTERED APPROACHES

One of the most often used models in research on identity is Berzonsky’s (1989b, 2011) model of identity processing styles, in which three styles are distinguished as different ways of building personal identity: informational, normative, and diffuse-avoidant. For measuring these styles, Berzonsky proposed the Identity Style Inventory (ISI; Berzonsky et al., 2013). There have been suggestions in the literature (Cieciuch, 2010; Topolewska, & Cieciuch, 2012) that it is possible to distinguish two factors within the diffuse-avoidant style scale: diffuse-carefree and avoidant. The aim of the article is to check the legitimacy of distinguishing these two subscales. Research was conducted on a sample of young adults (N = 603, age: 19–25, M = 21.24, SD = 1.68, 65% women) using the Polish version of Identity Style Inventory (ISI-4; Senejko, 2010). Analyses performed in accordance with two approaches (variable-centered and person-centered) led to similar conclusions. The analyses following the variable-centered approach revealed different associations between the two diffuse-avoidant subscales and eudaimonic well-being. Following the person-centered approach, it was shown that both subscales are the basis for distinguishing separate groups of people, which also differ in terms of well-being. The obtained results support the thesis about the heterogeneous nature of the diffuse-avoidant style and about the different functioning of people who differ in their scores on the two subscales. This means that taking both the avoidant style scale and the diffuse-carefree style scale into account in empirical studies may yield more precise results.

Keywords: person-centered approach, variable-centered approach, diffuse-avoidant style, identity styles

INTRODUCTION

The formation of a mature sense of identity is considered to be one of the most important developmental tasks (Erikson, 1959). It is therefore not surprising that identity scholars devote so much attention to the factors and determinants that hinder the fulfillment of this task, speaking of diffused identity (Erikson, 1959) and identity diffusion status (Marcia, 1966) as well as introducing the concepts of ruminative exploration (Luyckx et al., 2008) or reconsideration of commitment (Crocetti, Rubini, & Meeus, 2008). This article is devoted to the model developed...
by Michael Berzonsky (1989b, 2011), whose list of identity processing styles includes one that is particularly problematic – diffuse-avoidant style. In the literature there have been studies showing various faces of diffused identity formation, such as the study by Koen Luyckx and colleagues (2008), who distinguished between diffused diffusion and carefree diffusion statuses. A similar differentiation of diffused identity formation was demonstrated in studies conducted using the model of identity processing styles (Cieciuch, 2010; Topolewska, Cieciuch, 2012), in which the diffuse-carefree style and the avoidant style were distinguished. The aim of the presented study was to check what consequences the use of the two diffuse-avoidant subscales has in different kinds of analyses and to find out whether and how these two styles differentiate between people in terms of eudaimonic well-being.

Berzonsky's Model of Identity Processing Styles

Introducing the issues of identity formation into the psychology of human development is inseparably related to Erik H. Erikson's (1959) theory of psychosocial development. The first operationalization of Erikson's theory was James Marcia's (1966, 1980) model of identity statuses, which became an inspiration for subsequent models. Marcia (1966) proposed four identity statuses, distinguished on the basis of the presence or absence of two criteria: exploration and commitment.

One of the proposals, using Marcia's work to some extent, is the model of identity processing styles proposed by Berzonsky (1989b, 2011). Berzonsky defines identity as an implicit theory of oneself (Berzonsky, 2011, p. 56), a structure made up of constructs relating to how an individual perceives himself or herself and what mechanisms he or she uses for self-regulation (Berzonsky, 2004). According to Berzonsky (1989a), people with different identity statuses use different ways of exploring and processing information concerning themselves and the surrounding world as well as differ in the ways of coping with tasks important to identity formation. Berzonsky calls these different ways of coping identity processing styles, defining them as sets of strategies used or preferred by a given individual in resolving identity conflicts and problems (Berzonsky, 1989b, 2011).

Berzonsky distinguishes three identity processing styles: informational, normative, and diffuse-avoidant. The informational style involves actively seeking and processing important information before making a decision (Berzonsky, 1989b). Individuals exhibiting this style are critical about their own cognitive judgments and at the same time open to new experience and information, concerning both themselves and the world (Berzonsky, 2011). This style is positively associated with the expectation of success and seeking social support, and negatively with engagement in alternative activities (Nurmi, Berzonsky, Tammi, & Kinney, 1997). The informational style is positively related to eudaimonic well-being (Vleioras & Harke, 2005).

The characteristic feature of the normative style is making decisions guided by the standards and rules recognized by a person's significant others – for example by parents (Berzonsky, 1989b). People scoring high on the normative style automatically adopt and internalize the views, beliefs, and values from significant others. The normative style involves a tendency to be closed to information that may threaten the established aspects of self-knowledge, such as the system of values and beliefs (Berzonsky & Sullivan, 1992).

The diffuse-avoidant identity processing style involves a tendency to avoid facing developmental tasks as long as possible (Berzonsky & Ferrari, 2009). Individuals high in the diffuse-avoidant style exhibit a lower level of well-being, self-esteem, and optimism than individuals high in the informational or normative styles (Phillips & Pittman, 2007; Vleioras & Harke, 2005). On the one hand, this is a tendency to postpone and delay the realization of tasks important to
Internal Differentiation of the Diffuse-Avoidant Style in Berzonsky’s Model

identity identification, connected with anxiously waiting until the situation determinants force the individual to act. On the other hand, this style is marked by a lack of reflection on the future, combined with a belief that life itself will write a scenario and that problems will solve themselves. The behavior of people with a diffuse-avoidant style depends on where and with whom they are (Berzonsky, 1989b), which can be considered from two perspectives. On the one hand, this style involves conscious adjustment to the views of the people one is actually with; on the other, it means not attaching much importance to one’s own actually held beliefs. These two aspects may but do not necessarily occur together. The diffuse-avoidant style may therefore have two faces: conscious, anxiety-based and diffuse postponement of issues and problems – or an anxiety-free approach to identity tasks, regarded as unimportant, combined with a belief that the future will turn out well as a matter of course.

Identity Style Measurement
To measure identity styles, Berzonsky constructed Identity Style Inventory (ISI; Berzonsky, 1989b). The most widely used versions of this measure are ISI-3 (Berzonsky, 1992) and ISI-4, and the most recent version is ISI-5 (ISI-4 and ISI-5 are discussed in Berzonsky et al., 2013). Each version of the inventory consists of four scales: the informational style scale, the normative style scale, the diffuse-avoidant style scale, and the commitment scale.

In the literature there are results of studies aimed at the verification of the factor structure of ISI. In a series of exploratory and confirmatory analyses, it was established that both in ISI-3 (Cieciuch, 2010) and in ISI-4 (Topolewska & Cieciuch, 2012) the diffuse-avoidant style breaks up into two factors, called the diffuse-carefree style and the avoidant style (Cieciuch, 2010). The diffuse-carefree style is marked by making decisions as matters arise, not attaching much importance to the problems that occur or to the past, and a belief that problems will solve themselves. The avoidant style consists in avoiding situations that involve an individual personally, in a changeability of views depending on various situational contexts and the current expectations of the environment, as well as in postponing action in the face of personal problems.

As shown by Topolewska and Cieciuch (2012), these two styles differ in terms of their relationship with emotional stability and in terms of value priorities regarding stimulation and prestige. The diffuse-carefree style is characterized by high emotional stability, high stimulation (high value placed on novelty and variability), and low preference for prestige. By contrast, the avoidant style is associated with low emotional stability, a tendency towards low stimulation, and high scores on the prestige scale (maintaining one’s public image and social status as well as avoiding humiliation).

The proposal of distinguishing two aspects within the diffuse-avoidant style scale, presented by Cieciuch (2010) as well as by Topolewska and Cieciuch (2012), is an outcome of performing psychometric analyses on the scales of ISI. Testing the factor structure and other psychometric properties of the scales used in studies is, of course, an indispensable stage of the research process. Still, one might argue that it is an effect of technical procedures that neither elaborate the adopted model nor expand knowledge about the human being. After all, it is hard to deny that distinguishing additional scales in an already existing measure is justifiable only if it provides some new knowledge about human functioning. The study presented in this article is devoted to answering the question of whether it is psychologically justified to distinguish two subscales of the diffuse-avoidant style.

Variable-Centered vs. Person-Centered Approach
Two approaches are used in psychological research concerning the relationships between various human characteristics. The first one is the variable-centered approach and the other one
is the person-centered approach. In the variable-centered approach, the main object of interest is the relations between the variables analyzed. The statistical procedures used in assessing relationships between variables include correlation analysis, regression analysis, and structural equation modeling (von Eye & Bogat, 2006).

The other approach in research is the person-centered approach. It assumes that within the population there may be groups in which there are different relationships between the studied variables (von Eye & Bogat, 2006). In this approach, as opposed to the variable-centered one, analyses begin with the identification of groups of people similar in terms of a certain criterion and differing in terms of that criterion from people representing other groups. Statistical analyses used in classifying individuals to particular groups include cluster analysis and latent class analysis (LCA).

Cluster analysis was performed on Berzon-ský’s identity styles by Crocetti, Berzonsky, and Meeus (2012), who obtained four clusters. They labeled these clusters as follows: (1) informational style cluster; (2) normative style cluster; (3) diffuse-avoidant style cluster; (4) mixed normative and informational styles cluster. Piotrowski and Brzezińska (2015) obtained similar results in Poland.

Making the assumption that the diffuse-avoidant style is additionally internally differentiated brings particularly significant consequences in studies following the person-centered approach. If the two diffuse-avoidant subscales are only a psychometric effect and do not differentiate between people, then in latent class analysis the intensity of both styles should be similar in each of the distinguished groups. If, on the contrary, the two styles do differentiate between people and are worth distinguishing, then the classes distinguished can be expected to have different configurations of their intensity. If, additionally, the groups of people distinguished are found to differ in terms of other variables (e.g., well-being), this will be an argument not only in favor of the technical justifiability of distinguishing the two styles, but also in favor of the psychologically real character of the differences between them.

THE PLAN OF THE PRESENT STUDY

**Hypotheses**

In the presented research, we formulated three hypotheses.

In accordance with the variable-centered approach, we assumed the following:

1. The diffuse-carefree style and the avoidant style differ in the way they are related to well-being.

Given the results of previous studies on the relationship between the diffuse-avoidant style and well-being (Berzonsky & Cieciuch, 2014; Crocetti, & Shokri, 2011), according to which this relationship is negative, as well as the proposed interpretation of the two diffuse-avoidant style subscales, it can be expected that the avoidant style will be more strongly negatively related to well-being than the diffuse-carefree style.

In accordance with the person-centered approach, we expected the following:

2. In latent class analysis, it is possible to distinguish separate classes representing the diffuse-carefree style and the avoidant style.

3. The classes obtained will differ in the level of psychological well-being; in particular, the avoidant style class will exhibit a lower level of well-being than the diffuse-carefree style class.

**Participants and Procedure**

We performed analyses on a group of 603 people aged 19–25 ($M = 21.24$, $SD = 1.68$; women: 65% of the participants). The participants were young adults, mostly students of Warsaw’s universities. A total of 638 people took part in the study, but data collected from 35 individuals were excluded from analyses, in accordance with the recommendations given in the literature concerning outliers (cf. Bergman, 2001).
The study was conducted using the paper-and-pencil method by trained students who had volunteered for participation in the project. Each researcher was supposed to examine a few people from his or her circle of friends. Participation in the study was voluntary and participant anonymity was ensured.

Measures

Identity processing styles. Identity styles were measured using ISI-4 (Berzonsky et al., 2013) as adapted into Polish by Alicja Senejko and Ewa Okręglicka-Forysiak (Senejko, 2010). Analyses were performed on 31 items of identity style scales, which Senejko (2010) recommends as ISI-4 assessment items. The response scale ranges from 1 (not at all like me) to 5 (very much like me). Cronbach’s alpha coefficients specifying the reliability of the scales were as follows in the present study: $\alpha = .74$ for the informational style, $\alpha = .69$ for the normative style, $\alpha = .78$ for the diffuse-avoidant style, $\alpha = .54$ for the diffuse-carefree style, and $\alpha = .78$ for the avoidant style.

Eudaimonic well-being. We measured psychological well-being using The Scales of Psychological Well-Being (PWB; Ryff, 1989) as adapted into Polish by Cieciuch (2011). Drawing on the Aristotelian tradition, Ryff (1989) proposed a conception of psychological well-being, distinguishing six aspects: autonomy, purpose in life, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, and self-acceptance. Eudaimonic well-being is the opposite of hedonic well-being; however, it comprises not only pleasure in human life but also the level of psychosocial integration (Ryff, 1989). Autonomy means not yielding to external pressure and applying internal standards when judging oneself; environmental mastery is defined as a sense of competence and as the ability to manage the environment according to your preferences. Self-acceptance means positive attitude to oneself; positive relations with others may be defined as having warm interpersonal relations marked by trust. Having a purpose in life means the ability to set oneself life goals and focus on them; personal growth is the capacity for self-improvement and orientation towards seeking the paths of further development (Ryff, 1989). The PWB questionnaire for measuring the above aspects of well-being consists of 84 items making up six scales (14 items per scale) corresponding to the aspects of well-being distinguished in the model. The participants respond on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Cronbach’s alpha reliability coefficients in the presented study were as follows: $\alpha = .79$ for autonomy; $\alpha = .84$ for purpose in life; $\alpha = .80$ for environmental mastery; $\alpha = .77$ for personal growth; $\alpha = .85$ for positive relations with others, and $\alpha = .86$ for self-acceptance.

Analysis of Results

The Relations Between Identity Styles and Eudaimonic Well-Being (Hypothesis 1)

In order to test the first hypothesis concerning the differences between the diffuse-carefree style and the avoidant style in the strength of relationship with well-being, we performed an analysis of correlations using Pearson’s $r$. The results are presented in Table 1.

Based on the obtained results, it can be concluded that the diffuse-carefree style and the avoidant style differ in the configuration of correlations with aspects of well-being. The avoidant style is negatively related to all the scales of well-being, the relationships having medium or high strength (the highest $r = -.60$ concerns purpose in life, and $r = -.54$ – environmental mastery). Of all the identity styles, it was this one that exhibited the strongest relationships. The diffuse-avoidant style is significantly and negatively related only to three aspects of well-being: environmental mastery ($r = -.10$), personal growth ($r = -.17$), and purpose in life ($r = -.26$), but these relationships are considerably weaker than in the case of the avoidant style.

Correlations between the diffuse-avoidant style computed according to the key and the
aspects of well-being are stronger than those obtained for the diffuse-carefree style and weaker than those characteristic for the avoidant style. This means that including all the diffuse-avoidant items in one scale dilutes the strength of the actual relationships between the different aspects of diffusion and psychological well-being.

It should be stressed that diffuse-avoidant style scores are much closer to avoidant style scores than to diffuse-carefree style scores. To sum up, the dominant component of the diffuse-avoidant style scale is the aspect referred to as the avoidant style in this article. However, it is possible to distinguish an entirely different diffuse factor within this scale: the diffuse-carefree style. The first hypothesis can therefore be regarded as confirmed.

Identification of Latent Classes (Hypothesis 2)

In order to test the second hypothesis, concerning the possibility of distinguishing the classes of the diffuse-carefree and avoidant styles, we performed latent class analysis. As

Table 1. Pearson’s r Coefficients of Correlation Between Identity Styles and Aspects of Eudaimonic Well-Being (n = 603)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Informational style</th>
<th>Normative style</th>
<th>Diffuse-avoidant style</th>
<th>Diffuse-carefree style</th>
<th>Avoidant style</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Autonomy</td>
<td>.16**</td>
<td>-.23**</td>
<td>-.34**</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>-.48**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental mastery</td>
<td>.23**</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>-.41**</td>
<td>-.10*</td>
<td>-.54**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal growth</td>
<td>.37**</td>
<td>-.21**</td>
<td>-.37**</td>
<td>-.17**</td>
<td>-.46**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive relations with others</td>
<td>.25**</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>-.30**</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>-.40**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose in life</td>
<td>.29**</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>-.56**</td>
<td>-.26**</td>
<td>-.60**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-acceptance</td>
<td>.19**</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>-.34**</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>-.51**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05; ** p < .01.

Table 2. Fit Indices of Models With a Different Number of Classes When the Classification Criterion is the Four Identity Processing Styles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Index type</th>
<th>Akaike (AIC)</th>
<th>Bayesian (BIC)</th>
<th>Entropy</th>
<th>Class size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 classes</td>
<td>3843.807</td>
<td>3923.041</td>
<td>.624</td>
<td>1. 334</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. 152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3. 129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 classes</td>
<td>3826.074</td>
<td>3927.318</td>
<td>.610</td>
<td>1. 180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. 73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3. 233</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4. 117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 classes</td>
<td>3811.803</td>
<td>3935.057</td>
<td>.633</td>
<td>1. 31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. 80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3. 333</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4. 99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5. 60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
opposed to cluster analysis, latent class analysis (as a subgroup of structural equations) provides fit results, which inform us what number of classes is optimal (Muthén & Muthén, 2012). The most frequently reported indices include entropy (cf. Stuewe, Lanius, & Frewen, 2012), Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC; Schwarz, 1978), and the Akaike Information Criterion (AIC; Akaike, 1987). The values of the entropy index range from 0 to 1; the higher the value, the better fitted the solution is. The interpretation is the reverse in the case of BIC and AIC: the model is better fitted when the value of the index is lower. The size of the classes generated and the possibility of their theoretical interpretation is also taken into account (Hipp & Bauer, 2006). The fit indices of models with different numbers of classes distinguished in the analysis of the four identity styles, as well as the size of the classes, are presented in Table 2.

The values of the indices included in the analysis suggest a five-class solution (the AIC index is the lowest and entropy is the highest) or a three-class solution (the lowest BIC index). However, the obtained results were fairly comparable (e.g., differences in entropy below .02), so we additionally adopted the class size criterion, choosing that solution in which there were no classes with less than 10% or more than 50% of all the participants. This was the four-class solution, which we interpret below. The standardized means of identity processing styles in each class are presented in Figure 1.

We obtained four classes of identity formation styles:
1) **The informational style class**: with high scores on the informational style and low scores on the normative, diffuse-carefree, and avoidant styles;
2) **The avoidant style class**: with high scores on the avoidant style and low scores on the diffuse-carefree style;
3) **The diffuse-carefree style class**: with high scores on the diffuse-carefree style and low scores on the avoidant style;
4) **The normative-diffuse class**, being a mirror image of Class 1: with high scores on, the avoidant and diffuse-carefree styles, a medium to high level of the normative style, and low scores on the informational style.

The four-class solution explains 10% of variance in the informational style, 11% of variance in the normative style, 64% of variance in the diffuse-carefree style, and 72% of variance in the avoidant style. Incidentally, it should be added that in latent class analysis we did not succeed in distinguishing a normative style class. The highest scores on this style are found in Class 4, which was the only class in which normative style scores were above the mean. However, in Class 4 the mean scores on the diffuse-carefree and avoidant styles were much higher.

Based on the level of identity processing styles in the obtained classes, it can be said that the second hypothesis was confirmed. The intensity of the two diffuse-avoidant subscales differs across the classes distinguished. This means that the diffuse-carefree style and the avoidant style not only give rise to separate factors as a result of performing factor analyses, but also constitute two separate criteria making it possible to describe the ways in which people build their identity.

**Differences Between Classes in Terms of Eudaimonic Well-Being (Hypothesis 3)**

In order to test Hypothesis 3, referring to the differences in the level of various aspects of eudaimonic well-being between the class-
es distinguished, we performed one-factor MANOVA.

Based on the results of Box’s test, we established that the assumption of the equality of covariance matrices in the compared groups was confirmed \((F = 1.380, p > .01)\). According to Wilks’s lambda criterion, the classes differ significantly in the mean values of the six aspects of psychological well-being \((F_{(18, 1680)} = 15.947, p < .001)\). The division of the study sample into four classes explains 14% of variance in the model thus constructed.

In order to check which classes differ from one another in terms of psychological well-being, we performed a series of one-factor analyses of variance. The values of skewness and kurtosis for all variables in each of the tested groups fall into the range of \(<-1;1>\). The results of Levene’s test show that variance in each class is homogeneous for all aspects of well-being \((p > .05)\) except the purpose in life scale \((p = .01)\). Differences between classes in terms of aspects of well-being were assessed by performing post hoc comparisons using the NIR test for all dimensions – except the purpose in life scale, for which post hoc comparisons were performed using the Games-Howell test.

The classes differ in terms of mean scores on all aspects of eudaimonic well-being, namely: autonomy \((F_{(3, 599)} = 32.902, p < .001, \eta^2 = .14)\), environmental mastery \((F_{(3, 599)} = 47.95, p < .001, \eta^2 = .19)\), personal growth \((F_{(3, 599)} = 40.92, p < .001, \eta^2 = .17)\), positive relations with others \((F_{(3, 599)} = 29.04, p < .001, \eta^2 = .13)\), purpose in life \((F_{(3, 599)} = 78.18, p < .001, \eta^2 = .28)\), and self-acceptance \((F_{(3, 599)} = 44.67, p < .001, \eta^2 = .18)\). The means and standard deviations for each scale in the classes are presented in Table 3. The profiles of mean scores for each aspect of well-being are presented in Figure 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class 1</th>
<th>Class 2</th>
<th>Class 3</th>
<th>Class 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(M)</td>
<td>(SD)</td>
<td>(M)</td>
<td>(SD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autonomy</td>
<td>4.35</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td>3.85(_a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental mastery</td>
<td>4.42</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>3.78(_a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal growth</td>
<td>4.53</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>4.08(_a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive relations with others</td>
<td>4.68</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td>4.09(_a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose in life</td>
<td>4.74</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td>3.97(_a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-acceptance</td>
<td>4.25(_b)</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>3.45(_b)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. The means marked with the same letters in subscript do not differ from one another significantly. The value of the mean with no letter next to it differs significantly from the results of the remaining classes. All the scales have a 5-point response scale.
style), and Class 4 (normative-diffuse). Autonomy, environmental mastery, positive relations with others, and purpose in life differed across classes in a similar way as the components of well-being mentioned above; however, differences between Class 2 and Class 4 turned out not to be significant. The only aspect of well-being whose mean score did not differ between Class 1 and Class 3 was self-acceptance. Self-acceptance was the only aspect of well-being that was lower in Class 2 than in Class 4, although the differences were not statistically significant. It can therefore be concluded that individuals high in the diffuse-carefree style are characterized by an equally high level of self-acceptance as individuals high in the informational style. Totally opposite results were obtained for the avoidant style class, which is the one with the lowest self-acceptance.

The avoidance style class exhibits a low level and the diffuse-carefree style class – a medium level of psychological well-being. The classes differ significantly in terms of all aspects of well-being. The scale that differentiates the diffuse-carefree style from the avoidant style is self-acceptance. This result is particularly interesting. It may mean that individuals scoring high on the avoidant style have a negative attitude towards themselves and do not accept their diffuse manner of identity processing. This distinguishes them from individuals scoring high on the diffuse-carefree style, who have a positive self-image and are satisfied with their way of identity processing.

DISCUSSION

Berzonsky (2011) proposed a conception of three identity processing styles in order to explain how people construct their personal identity and to explain the differences between people in this respect. However, it has been suggested in the literature that one of the styles – the diffuse-avoidant style – is internally differentiated to such an extent that it should be broken up into two aspects: diffuse-carefree and avoidant.

The aim of the research presented in this article was to check whether distinguishing the two aspects of the diffuse-avoidant style brings a certain added value by providing new knowledge about the identity processing styles in Berzonsky’s (2011) model. We expected that distinguishing the two factors of the diffuse-avoidant style would be psychologically justified if both styles were differently related to well-being and if they were the basis for distinguishing separate latent classes.

Our expectations were confirmed. The diffuse-carefree style and the avoidant style are related to the aspects of eudaimonic well-being (Hypothesis 1); they constitute criteria significantly differentiating the classes distinguished in latent class analysis (Hypothesis 2), and the classes differing in the level of identity styles differ significantly in the level of well-being (Hypothesis 3). The obtained results suggest that distinguishing the two aspects of the diffuse-avoidant style makes it possible to reveal a new psychological quality, both in analyses performed in accordance with the variable-centered approach and in those performed in keeping with the person-centered approach. The differences between the diffuse-carefree style and the avoidant style revealed in the analysis of correlations and in the analysis comparing classes in terms of well-being lead to the same conclusion: the avoidant style is related to a significantly lower level of well-being than the diffuse-carefree style, which makes it legitimate and even necessary from the perspective of the prediction of well-being to distinguish between these two types.

In the presented study, the informational style was marked by the highest level of all aspects of well-being. It is worth noting, however, that the difference in the level of well-being in the self-acceptance domain between the informational style class and the diffuse-carefree style class was not statistically significant. The avoidant style class was found to be the one with the lowest level of self-acceptance. Compared to the normative-diffuse class, it was characterized by
higher scores on well-being only in the personal growth domain.

Recognizing the avoidant style and the diffuse-carefree style as two different faces of diffusion has two consequences. First, this means that the course of the identity formation process is more differentiated in reality than Berzonsky’s (2011) assumptions imply, and the measure he proposed enables even more detailed description of this process. Second, the manner of identity processing referred to as diffuse is not homogeneous. Moreover, if these two faces of diffusion are related in different ways to psychological constructs, this may mean that people scoring high on these styles have completely different ways of functioning, irreducible to one category.

Such a result is consistent with the results of the study in which two types of the diffuse status are distinguished: diffuse diffusion and carefree diffusion (Luyckx et al., 2008). In that study, researchers used the model of identity dimensions proposed by Luyckx and colleagues (2008). As it turned out, the diffuse-carefree and avoidant styles that we distinguished in Berzonsky’s (2011) model are close to those two statuses: the diffuse-carefree style can be seen as corresponding to the carefree diffusion status, and the avoidant style – as corresponding to the diffused diffusion status.

The results of previous studies (Cieciuch, 2010; Stępień & Topolewska, 2014; Topolewska & Cieciuch, 2012), the content analysis of items, and the analysis of the theoretical profile of the diffuse-avoidant style show that it is possible to develop new definitions of functional diffuse-avoidant subtypes.

The characteristic feature of the diffuse-carefree style is stability in the emotional domain, living in the moment without worrying about problems, goals, or the past, as well as absence of the need to have crystallized views, accompanied by attributing great importance to novelty and stimulation. Importantly, individuals scoring high on this style exhibit a relatively high level of self-acceptance compared to people scoring high on other styles. However, this style is negatively related to well-being in the domains of purpose in life, environmental mastery, and self-assessed personal growth.

The avoidant style is characterized by a sense of being lost in the world, attaching excessive importance to other people’s opinions, and frequently changing one’s views. This style is positively related with neuroticism and a preference for prestige, which means maintaining one’s public image. It can therefore be supposed that in this style neurotic preoccupation with one’s own image may, to some extent, explain the tendency to change one’s views conformistically, but this conclusion requires confirmation in further research. The avoidant style is more strongly related to procrastination, whose decision-making aspect is a stronger predictor of this style than of the diffuse-carefree style. Apart from emotional instability, this style is characterized by low self-acceptance. As opposed to the diffuse-carefree style, in this case postponing tasks or the lack of fixed views lead to a negative self-image and a low level of psychological well-being.

To sum up, the avoidant style – as opposed to the diffuse-carefree style – involves dissatisfaction with oneself and one’s place in life (manifesting itself, for example, in low scores on well-being). In other words, in the case of the diffuse-carefree style, the diffuse way of building identity, or inactivity in this process, is not negatively related to self-acceptance.

The informational and normative styles are ways of coping with identity crisis that lead to commitment, whereas the avoidant and diffuse-carefree styles do not lead to permanent commitment but clearly differ in their relationship with well-being and form separate classes.

REFERENCES


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