The identity processes and the sense of identity: interrelations and significance to the capacity for closeness

The article deals with the relations between the dimensions of identity postulated in the dual-cycle model of identity formation by Luyckx and colleagues (2008) and the basic categories of the sense of identity that – according to our own approach – determines the dominant ways of experiencing and understanding oneself (Pilarska, 2014; Pilarska & Suchańska, 2013). In both of these theoretical proposals identity is viewed from a somewhat different perspective, although both are within the scope of so-called Eriksonian influences. In the article, we present theoretical premises and empirical data concerning the relations between the two approaches to identity, and thereby we answer the question of what kind of experience of the self accompanies the intensification of exploration and commitment processes. Following up the thesis, commonly advanced in the literature, that identity is a precondition of the capacity for close relationships, we also address the possibility of explaining this capacity in the light of the two considered approaches to identity.

Keywords: phenomenological approach to identity, identity-related senses, exploration, commitment, identity status, attachment style

INTRODUCTION

The aim of the article is to answer the question of the type of the sense of identity that accompanies the intensification of exploration and commitment processes, as well as the question of the significance of these aspects of identity to the capacity for closeness in relationships. This is, therefore, an empirical attempt to integrate two ways of understanding identity: phenomenological and developmental – an attempt to establish their interrelations and their associations with one of the key criteria of their adaptiveness.

Both approaches are rooted in Erikson’s theory (2000, 2004). When defining identity, Erikson, on the one hand, stresses the subjective experience (sense) of the continuity and consistency of the self. On the other hand, he devotes much space to the processes and stages of its development – from diffuse, unclear representations of oneself (diffusion), through attempts at rigid identification with external patterns (totality), to integrated and at the same time flexible self-definition (wholeness).

Since Erikson’s times, psychologists’ approach to the issues of identity has evolved consider-
rably, with both of the above directions as points of departure for the emergence of two important research traditions: cognitive-phenomenological and developmental.

**Identity: The Phenomenological and Developmental Approaches**

From the cognitive-phenomenological perspective, when starting out from the definitional question about identity: Who am I?, one is on the one hand pointing to the contents that are crucial for self-definition, and on the other – to senses that relate to his or her own self as a whole. This distinction, rooted in James’s (1892/2002) theory of the self, came to be regarded as the basis of the distinction between the subjective and objective aspects of identity (Mandrosz-Wróblewska, 1988; Oleś, 2008). The conceptualization of identity in terms of a subsystem of self-knowledge has been an object of reflection and research in the cognitive tradition of personality psychology (Jarymowicz, 1989; Mandrosz-Wróblewska, 1988). From the phenomenological point of view, identity is treated as a special kind of personal experience of oneself and described in terms of a number of so-called identity-related senses (Batory, 2012; Brygoła, 2013; Pilarska, 2012a).

The sense of identity is one of the key categories in psychodynamic theories (Kernberg, 1996) and self psychology (Vignoles, Regalia, Manzi, Golledge, & Scabini, 2006). It finds its special place and clinical illustration in the field of psychopathology (Laing, 1999; Sokolik, 1996).

Conceptualizing the sense of identity as a person-specific, holistic, intuitive-reflective relation to oneself is one of the directions that we have been pursuing in our research for the last few years. It has a multidimensional character and encompasses six basic categories: the sense of having inner contents (i.e., having and having access to one’s own thoughts, feelings, motives, attitudes, etc.), the sense of uniqueness (i.e., one’s own specificity and otherness), the sense of separateness and boundaries (i.e., the ability to distinguish that which belongs to the self from that which does not), the sense of coherence (i.e., consistency in terms of important inner content), the sense of continuity in time (i.e., the stability of one’s own self and being the same person despite the passage of time and despite the changes one undergoes), and the sense of self-worth (i.e., self-acceptance and a belief in one’s ability to accomplish personal goals). A detailed description of these senses and the basis for distinguishing them can be found in Pilarska’s publications (2012a, 2012b, 2014). Research results (Pilarska & Suchańska, 2013, 2015; Suchańska & Worach, 2013) clearly point to the adaptive character of strong identity-related senses and support the assumption that a mature (integrated) sense of identity includes the development and maintenance of all the senses listed above (cf. Sokolik, 1996).

The second of the two traditions mentioned stresses developmental and processual issues in the sociocultural context of identity formation. The significance of a person’s relations with the surrounding world in the course of life induced researchers to look into the dynamics and phases of identity formation. Their guiding idea turned out to be gradual exploration and tentative adoption of roles so as to try them out, before making a choice and identifying with the commitments concerning personal and social choices, tasks, and values. For years, a popular way of looking at identity in this tradition was Marcia’s (1966) understanding of identity as a dynamic organization of drives, abilities, beliefs, and personal history as well as his first operationalization of the phases of its development, differentiated in terms of maturity level, called identity statuses.

The contemporary pace and scope of sociocultural changes lead young people to postpone taking on adult roles and tasks and involve a dynamics of identity that is greater than it was originally thought to be. This is reflected in empirical data, pointing to identity moratorium being extended beyond adolescence (Arnett, 2000; Brzezińska, Kaczan, Piotrowski, & Rękosiewicz, 2011). These observations induced a group of Belgian scholars (Luyckx, Goossens, Soenens, Soenens, Soenens, Soenens, Soenens, Soenens).
& Beyers, 2006) to propose a modification of Marcia's theory of identity statuses in the form of the dual-cycle model of identity formation. In this model, the originally defined exploration is understood as a broad search for alternatives in domains of importance to identity. It is called exploration in breadth – as distinct from exploration in depth, which refers to the evaluation of the commitments already made in terms of their compatibility with personal standards. The extension of this stage, connected with fears regarding one's own future and with difficulties in making identity commitments, is described by the ruminative exploration dimension (Luyckx, Schwartz, Berzonsky et al., 2008). Unlike in Marcia's model, according to Luyckx and colleagues the process of identity formation does not end when choices and decisions important to identity have been made (commitment making), although it may become weaker with age and as a result of engaging in professional or family roles (Brzezińska & Piotrowski, 2009; Luyckx, Schwartz, Berzonsky et al., 2008; Luyckx, Schwartz, Goossens, & Pollock, 2008). It continues in the evaluation of current commitments and in identification with those that one considers to be right and that one remains emotionally and behaviorally involved in (identification with commitment). If it proceeds correctly, it eventually leads to the achievement of an identity that is mature and at the same time open to changes. Marcia's two-phase approach was thus replaced with a model of five interrelated stages proceeding differently in different individuals.

Identity and Close Relationships

The view that a formed identity is a precondition of being ready to build close relationships is commonly shared in the psychology of personality, regardless of the adopted model of identity. That view refers to a comprehensive, wholeness identity (Erikson, 2000, 2004), formed thanks to the optimal resolution of developmental crises; it also refers to a mature sense of personal identity, built in the process of differentiation of self/nonself representations and in the process of affective integration, experienced as a sense of separateness, consistency, continuity in time, or self-worth (Kernberg, 1996). A distinct awareness of one's own values, beliefs, and of who one is as a person enables closeness that is free from the anxiety of losing one's own individuality and boundaries – closeness that combines a sense of autonomy and interdependence. One of the goals of the presented study is to investigate whether and to what extent differences in conceptualizing the construct of identity are relevant in explaining the capacity for closeness.

The capacity for closeness with others is an issue approached from a variety of perspectives in psychology. It is sometimes described from the behavioral perspective, due to the balance of rewarding exchanges between partners, affective, in which the main criterion is emotionality, and relational – taking into account many aspects of a relationship that continues in time (Prager, 1995). In the developmental perspective, the capacity for intimacy is treated as a result of resolving successive crises in identity formation (Erikson, 2000, 2004), the phases of the separation and individuation process building the constancy of the self and object (Kernberg, 1996), or the attachment patterns formed in childhood (Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Main, Kaplan, & Cassidy, 1985).

Due to the quality of operationalization of the construct of capacity for closeness, the last of these models was used in the analysis of its associations with identity. In this model, adult attachment style is defined by the level of anxiety of being rejected and of the partner's unavailability or inattentiveness, as well as by the level of avoiding dependence on others, intimacy, and self-disclosure (Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998). The combination of anxiety and avoidance dimensions makes it possible to distinguish four attachment styles – secure, preoccupied, dismissing-avoidant, and fearful-avoidant – describing the habitual way of thinking, feeling, and behaving in relationships with close others (Fraley & Shaver, 2000).
THE PLAN OF THE PRESENT STUDY

Research Questions and Hypotheses

The adopted ways of conceptualizing identity and attachment presuppose their multidimensional character. It is therefore important to specify the relationships not only between elements (dimensions, senses) in the whole group but also between specific configurations of these elements exhibited by participants. The former represents the variable-centered approach, and the latter – the person-centered approach. The specific research questions that we sought to answer were the following:

1. What relationships exist between identity-related senses and the dimensions of identity development? Do people with different identity statuses differ in the ways in which they experience their own self in terms of the senses of having inner contents, uniqueness, separateness, coherence, continuity in time, and self-worth?

2. How are identity-related senses and identity development dimensions related to attachment dimensions? Do people with a secure and insecure attachment styles differ in terms of the intensity and configuration of identity development dimensions and identity-related senses?

The reflections presented in the introduction and the available literature on the subject (e.g., Brzezińska & Piotrowski, 2009; Brzezińska & Piotrowski, 2010b; Luyckx, Schwartz, Berzonsky et al., 2008) make it possible to formulate four hypotheses:

1a. The intensity of identity-related senses is significantly and positively related to commitment making and identification with commitment and negatively with ruminative exploration.

1b. People with identity statuses that assume commitment making (i.e., foreclosure and achievement) have stronger identity-related senses and a more integrated structure of these senses, whereas people with statuses that involve problems with commitment making (i.e., diffused diffusion and ruminative moratorium) exhibit weaker identity-related senses with a less integrated structure.

2a. The levels of anxiety and avoidance are significantly and negatively related to the intensity of identity-related senses as well as to commitment making and identification with commitment, and positively related to ruminative exploration.

2b. Individuals with secure attachment are characterized by stronger identity-related senses and a more integrated structure of these senses as well as greater engagement in commitment making and greater identification with commitment than individuals exhibiting insecure attachment.

In order to test Hypotheses 1a and 2a, we performed an analysis of correlations (Pearson's r), and in testing Hypotheses 1b and 2b we applied one-factor analysis of variance as well as the chi-square independence test. In order to extract groups differing in terms of identity status and the structure of the sense of identity, we performed a two-step cluster analysis.

Sample and Procedure

The participants in the study were 228 people (54.4% women) in their early adulthood (aged 18–35 years, mean age $M = 24.16$ years, $SD = 3.62$), with different levels of education and from various backgrounds. The study was carried out on an individual and group basis, with anonymity and the confidentiality of data ensured. All the participants completed measures of identity, and some of them (38% of the sample) completed a measure of attachment in adulthood. The participants were informed about the aim of the study, and their consent was the condition of participation.

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1 In this article we used the research of Marta Szarszewska and Karolina Niemier, conducted under our supervision as part of an M.A. seminar.
Measures

Three measures were used in the study: one instrument of our own design and two Polish adaptations.

Sense of identity. We measured the sense of identity using the Multidimensional Questionnaire of Identity (MQI; Pilarska, 2012a), whose extended version consists of 43 items concerning six identity-related senses: the senses of having inner contents, uniqueness, separateness and boundaries, coherence, continuity in time, and self-worth. All the items are rated on a 4-point scale, from definitely yes / always to definitely not / never, and the subscale score is the mean number of points. Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients for individual subscales reach the values from .62 to .86, the mean value being $\alpha = .74$ (e.g., Pilarska, 2014; Suchańska & Worach, 2013). In the presented study, the values of alpha were between .66 and .88, with a mean of $\alpha = .75$.

Identity dimensions. Individuals' position on the dimensions of identity development postulated by Luyckx and colleagues (2008) – namely, exploration in breadth, exploration in depth, ruminative exploration, commitment making, and identification with commitment – was assessed using the Dimensions of Identity Development Scale (DIDS; Brzezińska & Piotrowski, 2010a). The measure consists of 25 items, to which responses are given on a six-point scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The subscale score is the mean number of points. Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients for particular subscales reach the values of .66 do .89, with a mean of $\alpha = .79$ (Brzezińska & Piotrowski, 2009). In the presented study, the values of alpha were between .77 and .91, with a mean of $\alpha = .84$.

Attachment. To measure the dimensions of attachment (i.e., anxiety and avoidance), we used the Experience in Close Relationships Questionnaire-Revised (ECR-R) by Fraley and colleagues (2000; Wajs, 2012). Its two subscales together consist of 36 items, rated on a 7-point scale from completely disagree to completely agree. The mean number of points scored by a person on each subscale indicates his or her levels of anxiety and avoidance, and makes it possible to identify the attachment style characteristic for him or her. The reliability coefficients for both subscales exceed the value of $\alpha = .80$ (cf. Fraley, 2014).

ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

The Relationships Between Identity-Related Senses and the Dimensions of Identity Development (Hypothesis 1a)

In order to establish the associations between the dimensions of identity development and identity-related senses, we performed an analysis of correlations. The obtained matrix (cf. Table 1) reveals a pattern of positive correlations of identity-related senses with commitment making and identification with commitment as well as a pattern of negative correlations of identity-related senses with the three dimensions of exploration, particularly with ruminative exploration. These data are consistent with Hypothesis 1a. It is worth noting that the commitment dimensions are the most strongly related to the sense of self-worth, and exploration dimensions – to the sense of coherence. Relatively the weakest associations with identity development dimensions were found in the case of the sense of uniqueness.

Identity-Related Senses and Identity Statuses (Hypothesis 1b)

First we checked whether different configurations of identity development dimensions – that is, identity statuses – are accompanied by different intensity levels of identity-related senses. Cluster analysis yielded six identity statuses (cf. Figure 1), corresponding to the typology described by Brzezińska and Piotrowski (2009) as well as by the authors of the original version of the measure (Luyckx, Schwartz, Berzonsky et al., 2008).

Differences between the statuses in terms of all dimensions of identity development were significant: $F(5, 222) = 92.03; p < .001; \eta^2 = .67$ for exploration in breadth; $F(5, 222) = 81.81; \eta^2 = .67$ for exploration in depth; $F(5, 222) = 85.58; \eta^2 = .64$ for commitment making; $F(5, 222) = 91.63; \eta^2 = .67$ for identification with commitment.
We observed significant differences between identity statuses in the intensity of all identity-related senses: the sense of having inner contents, $F(5, 222) = 128.44; p < .001; \eta^2 = .65$ for exploration in depth; the sense of uniqueness, $F(5, 222) = 3.64; p = .004; \eta^2 = .08$; the sense of separateness, $F(5, 222) = 5.70; p < .001; \eta^2 = .23$; the sense of coherence, $F(5, 222) = 97.63; p < .001; \eta^2 = .69$ for identification with commitment.

Table 1. The Matrix of Correlations Between Identity-Related Senses and Dimensions of Identity Development

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<td>SU</td>
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<td>1.62 (0.47)</td>
<td>2.07 (0.50)</td>
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<td>4.19 (0.88)</td>
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***$p < .001$; **$p < .01$; *$p < .05$. We observed significant differences between identity statuses in the intensity of all identity-related senses: the sense of having inner contents, $F(5, 222) = 128.44; p < .001; \eta^2 = .65$ for exploration in depth; the sense of uniqueness, $F(5, 222) = 3.64; p = .004; \eta^2 = .08$; the sense of separateness, $F(5, 222) = 5.70; p < .001; \eta^2 = .23$; the sense of coherence, $F(5, 222) = 97.63; p < .001; \eta^2 = .69$ for identification with commitment.

Figure 1. Identity statuses (standardized data)
The Identity Processes and the Sense of Identity: Interrelations and Significance to the Capacity for Closeness

$p < .001; \eta^2 = .11$; the sense of coherence, $F(5, 222) = 17.08; p < .001; \eta^2 = .28$; the sense of continuity in time, $F(5, 222) = 7.35; p < .001; \eta^2 = .14$; and the sense of self-worth, $F(5, 222) = 20.55; p < .001; \eta^2 = .32$. The results of post hoc tests (Tukey's test or Dunnett's T3 test) indicate that the directions of the observed differences are consistent with Hypothesis 1b (cf. Table 2).

Next, it was examined whether different identity statuses were associated not only with different intensity but also with different structures of the sense of identity. As a result of cluster analysis, we obtained three types of structures of the sense of identity. As a result of cluster analysis, we obtained three types of structures of the sense of identity.

Table 2. Comparison of Identity Statuses in Terms of Identity-Related Senses

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<th>DD (I) $n = 34$</th>
<th>CD (II) $n = 10$</th>
<th>RM (III) $n = 28$</th>
<th>U (IV) $n = 58$</th>
<th>F (V) $n = 49$</th>
<th>A (VI) $n = 49$</th>
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<td>EB</td>
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<td>5.01 (0.48)$c$</td>
<td>3.68 (0.36)$d$</td>
<td>3.22 (0.62)$p$</td>
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<td>3.53 (0.44)$d$</td>
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<td>4.65 (0.55)$p$</td>
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<td>3.56 (0.72)$b$</td>
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</tr>
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<td>2.83 (0.80)$a$</td>
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<td>3.74 (0.39)$b$</td>
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<td>2.05 (0.36)$bc$</td>
<td>2.24 (0.43)$y$</td>
<td>2.10 (0.46)$bc$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SW</td>
<td>1.61 (0.48)$a$</td>
<td>1.91 (0.30)$ab$</td>
<td>1.83 (0.41)$ab$</td>
<td>2.09 (0.31)$b$</td>
<td>2.46 (0.38)$y$</td>
<td>2.12 (0.46)$p$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


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degree of disorganization in the sense of identity, with marked deficits in the senses of having inner contents, coherence, temporal continuity, and self-worth.

The relationship between identity status and structure of the sense of identity turned out to be significant: $\chi^2(10) = 77.93, p < .001, V = .41$. Individuals with identity foreclosure and achievement dominate in the cluster with the most mature sense of identity, while diffused diffusion and ruminative moratorium are accompanied by the highest disorganization in the sense of identity. An unharmonized structure, based on a strong sense of uniqueness and self-worth, is found in people with an undifferentiated and carefree diffusion statuses (cf. Table 3). These results are consistent with the expectations formulated in Hypothesis 1b.

The Relationships of Attachment Dimensions With Identity-Related Senses and Identity Development Dimensions (Hypothesis 2a)

The analysis of correlations of attachment dimensions with identity-related senses and identity development dimensions (cf. Table 4) revealed that an increase in anxiety is associated with a decrease in the sense of coherence, having inner contents, separateness, and temporal continuity, while an increase in avoidance is associated with a decrease in the sense of temporal continuity, having inner contents, and coherence. In the case of identity development dimensions, what turned out to be significant was only the negative correlations of anxiety with exploration in depth and ruminative exploration. Hypothesis 2a was thus confirmed.

### Table 3. Analysis of Association Between Identity Status and the Structure of the Sense of Identity

| Identity status | DD (I) $n = 34$ | CD (II) $n = 10$ | RM (III) $n = 28$ | U (IV) $n = 58$ | F (V) $n = 49$ | A (VI) $n = 49$
|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|---------------|---------------|---------------
| Sense of identity | $n$ (%) | $n$ (%) | $n$ (%) | $n$ (%) | $n$ (%) | $n$ (%) |
| Cluster 1 ($n = 83$) | 7 (20.6) | 2 (20.0) | 3 (10.7) | 18 (31.0) | 33 (67.3) | 20 (40.8) |
| Cluster 2 ($n = 74$) | 3 (8.8) | 5 (50.0) | 7 (25.0) | 31 (53.4) | 12 (24.5) | 16 (32.7) |
| Cluster 3 ($n = 71$) | 24 (70.6) | 3 (30.0) | 18 (64.3) | 9 (15.5) | 4 (8.2) | 13 (26.5) |

partly, and more with regard to identity-related senses than to the dimensions of identity development.

The Relationships of Attachment Styles With Identity-Related Senses and Identity Development Dimensions (Hypothesis 2b)

In the next step, we tested whether people with different attachment styles differed in terms of identity-related senses and the dimensions of identity development. The group with a secure attachment style was composed of individuals with scores lower than the median both on anxiety (\(Me = 2.47\)) and on avoidance (\(Me = 2.15\)), and the group with an insecure attachment style was individuals with scores equal to or higher than the median on one or both dimensions (cf. Fraley, 2014). The analyses (Table 5) revealed that people with different attachment styles did not differ on the dimensions of identity development. What is observed is a significantly stronger sense of having inner contents, coherence, and temporal continuity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Secure</th>
<th>Insecure</th>
<th>Differences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(M (SD))</td>
<td>(M (SD))</td>
<td>(U)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EB</td>
<td>3.95 (0.93)</td>
<td>3.91 (0.85)</td>
<td>809.50</td>
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<td>ED</td>
<td>3.80 (0.87)</td>
<td>3.77 (0.89)</td>
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<td>3.40 (1.04)</td>
<td>754.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CM</td>
<td>4.11 (0.98)</td>
<td>3.79 (1.00)</td>
<td>689.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IC</td>
<td>4.25 (0.95)</td>
<td>4.00 (0.79)</td>
<td>696.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SIC</td>
<td>2.53 (0.26)</td>
<td>2.30 (0.44)</td>
<td>585.50*</td>
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<tr>
<td>SU</td>
<td>1.79 (0.57)</td>
<td>1.88 (0.49)</td>
<td>764.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SS</td>
<td>1.67 (0.41)</td>
<td>1.61 (0.43)</td>
<td>802.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SC</td>
<td>2.28 (0.32)</td>
<td>2.08 (0.40)</td>
<td>594.00*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SIC</td>
<td>2.32 (0.36)</td>
<td>2.00 (0.36)</td>
<td>461.50***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SW</td>
<td>2.07 (0.41)</td>
<td>2.04 (0.45)</td>
<td>817.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


\(*p \leq .001; \,*p < .01; \,*p < .05.\)

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individuals with secure attachment than in those with insecure attachment.

We also compared groups with different attachment styles in terms of identity statuses and structures of the sense of identity. Analyses revealed a significant relationship between attachment style and the structure of the sense of identity, $\chi^2(2) = 6.12, p = .047, V = .27$. More than a half (51.6%) of the participants with a mature sense of identity were securely attached individuals, whereas the group with a deficient and disharmonious structure of the sense of identity was dominated by individuals with insecure attachment (respectively, 76.5% and 71.4%). The relationship between attachment style and identity status turned out not to be significant ($p > .05$). Hypothesis 2b was thus confirmed partly and only with regard to the associations of attachment styles with the intensity and configuration of identity-related senses.

**DISCUSSION**

The common origins of the developmental and phenomenological approaches to identity – operationalized as its processual-behavioral (identity development dimensions) and experiential aspects (identity-related senses) – were used in the present study as a starting point for analyzing their interrelations. This enabled an empirical description of the subjective experience of people engaged to different degrees in the processes of exploration and commitment.

The analyses of relationships between identity development dimensions and identity-related senses showed, as expected, that commitment making and identification with commitment are accompanied by a strong sense of identity in all of its aspects. As predicted, the processes of exploration, defining the stage of experimentation and uncertainty regarding one’s own role and choices, are accompanied by a weaker sense of having inner contents, coherence, and continuity. How difficult this stage can be is shown by its association with a decrease in the sense of self-worth. Such a clear relationship of this variable with exploration in breadth and in depth, and especially with ruminative exploration, may be revealing a kind of vicious circle mechanism in which low self-worth is conducive to exploratory tendencies, particularly to ruminative ones, blocking the transition to further stages of identity formation. This is consistent with the suggestions of Luyckx and colleagues (2008), who see the fixation on exploration as caused by the excessively high standards and strict evaluation of the quality of one’s own activity.

The experiential, “sense-based” description of identity statuses that has been presented supports the above observations and – as predicted – points to stronger identity-related senses in individuals who make commitments and identify with them (i.e., ones with identity foreclosure and achievement statuses) than in those who focus on exploration, particularly on its anxiety-driven form. This is also clearly shown by the analyses of the relationship between identity status and the structure of the sense of identity – people with foreclosure and achievement identity dominate in the cluster characterized by the most mature and harmonious structure of the sense of identity, while diffused diffusion and ruminative moratorium go together with the highest level of disorganization in the sense of identity. Thus, once again, the presence of permanent commitments turns out to be an indicator of the strength of the sense of identity. These results are consistent with other empirical reports, in which identity statuses based on a high level of commitment – identity foreclosure and achievement – were similarly associated with mental health characteristics (Brzezińska & Piotrowski, 2010b; Luyckx, Schwartz, Berzonsky et al., 2008). They also raise the issue, discussed in the literature (e.g., Pilarska, 2012b; Waterman, 2007), of the adaptiveness and functionality of the exploration dimension, which is decisive in differentiating identity foreclosure and achievement.
At this point, it is worth noting the unexpected advantage of people with identity foreclosure over individuals with identity achievement in terms of the senses of separateness, coherence, and self-worth. Can the slight weakening of these three identity-related senses in the form of identity regarded as the most mature be interpreted as an increase in the openness and flexibility of the sense of identity? This would be consistent with Erikson’s idea of holistic identity (wholeness), but at the same time contrary to the results of previous studies on the adaptiveness of the sense of identity, suggesting a linear positive relationship between the strength of identity-related senses and the indicators of well-being (e.g., Pilarska, 2014; Pilarska & Suchańska, 2015). The first interpretation seems to be consistent with the intention of the authors of the dual-cycle model (Luyckx, Schwartz, Berzonsky et al., 2008). The model is based on the assumption that exploration and commitment are mutually interpenetrating processes, and – according to the adopted criteria of distinguishing identity statuses – individuals with the identity achievement status continue exploration, whereas in those with the identity foreclosure status exploration occurs to a small degree. These assumptions are reflected in the construction of the method. Namely, the items of the Dimensions of Identity Development Scale, including those making up the exploration subscales – referring to ruminations about one’s own future, reflections concerning the commitments made, as well as doubts and fears connected with the shape of one’s future life (Brzezińska & Piotrowski, 2010a) – are formulated in the present tense. If we agree that identity foreclosure means absence or (temporary or permanent) abandonment of exploration and that mature identity achievement means further exploratory activity, it becomes understandable that the former is accompanied by an increase in the strength of the senses of separateness, coherence, and self-worth and that these senses become slightly weaker subsequently. This, however, would call into question the current criterion of maturity with regard to the sense of identity. Resolving this issue, crucial to both approaches to identity, requires a separate study.

The relationships of attachment dimensions and style with identity-related senses are clear and generally consistent with predictions. Relational anxiety and avoidance of closeness are associated with a weakening of identity-related senses, which manifests itself clearly when individuals high in anxiety and avoidance are contrasted with people with a more secure attachment style. Securely attached people free from anxiety and avoidance, are certain about who they are and maintain a strong sense of the unity and continuity of their self. It can be expected that they will seek and engage in mutual closeness without a sense of being in danger of confusion in the sphere of identity. There are also relations, weaker than expected but theoretically important, between attachment dimensions and identity development dimensions. The positive correlations of exploration in-depth and ruminative exploration with anxiety can explain both the instability of relationships that people enter into at this stage of their identity development as well as the extension of this stage. Assuming that – apart from work and worldview – a domain in which intensive exploration takes place is the sphere of intimate relationships (Arnett, 2000), and that the main aim of this exploration is to prepare to make a commitment to the romantic partner, it can be expected that the course of this process will be disturbed in conditions of anxiety in relations with others. The above observations may be a kind of supplement for the results obtained by Brzezińska and Piotrowski (2010b), where the level of (differently operationalized)

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2 The classification of identity statuses proposed by Meeus’s team (1999) is worth mentioning here. These authors make a distinction between achievement and achieving commitment. The latter status, combining strong commitment and strong exploratory activity, corresponds to the identity achievement status in the dual-cycle model.
readiness for intimate relationships was associated above all with the commitment dimension. The significance of identity development dimensions and identity statuses did not manifest itself in analyses taking attachment style into account, which may suggest that what plays a particularly important role in determining the capacity for closeness is the subjective experience of oneself. This is consistent with the psychodynamic approach to the problem (Kernberg, 1996).

The multiplicity of models aimed at capturing the phenomenon of identity attests the importance of the investigated issues and undoubtedly fosters constant expansion of knowledge in this area of personality. At the same time, it may cause confusion in a tangle of concepts and measures. The expression found in the literature, “the psychological problems of identity” (Grzegorek, 2000, p. 53), reflects the difficulties encountered in working out a consistent approach to the phenomenon of identity. This makes it even more important to investigate whether, despite definitional and operational differences, the proposed models in fact deal with the same problem – the experience of a person making the effort of self-definition. The analysis presented in this article is a manifestation of such investigations. The obtained results support the thesis that the two approaches to identity – phenomenological and developmental – deal with different aspects of the identity phenomenon rather than with different psychological realities. This gives hope that it will be possible to achieve an integration of the findings from both traditions.

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