

AWARENESS OF NARRATIVE IDENTITY AND SELECTED ASPECTS OF NARRATIVE ACTIVITY AND MEANING-MAKING. PRELIMINARY RESULTS

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Narrative identity allows various experiences to be integrated and incorporated into the concept of the *self*. Recent studies indicate that being aware of developing the story about the *self* that brings cohesion and meaning may be adaptive. This paper presents preliminary findings across three studies (two quantitative methods and one mixed) aimed at exploring the phenomenon of awareness of narrative identity in terms of its relations to other aspects of narrative identity and meaning-making (meaning in life, self-esteem, and post-traumatic growth). The total number of participants in all studies was 840 ($N_1 = 254$, $N_2 = 424$, $N_3 = 162$). The results indicate that stronger awareness of narrative identity is related to higher self-narrative inclination and reflection and may be adaptive in terms of meaning-making and coping with traumatic events. People who were more aware of a narrative identity produced

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more elaborated and coherent self-narratives about an important past relationship. Additionally, they had a stronger tendency to integrate these past experiences with a sense of self-identity. Surprisingly, awareness of narrative identity was not related to self-esteem. These findings are discussed in terms of narrative identity literature. Moreover, possible directions for further studies to expand our understanding of awareness of narrative identity are proposed.

Keywords: narrative identity; narrative activity; meaning-making; narrative psychology; narrative coherence; post-traumatic growth.

According to McAdams (2001, 2006), the pioneer of narrative psychology who introduced the concept of narrative identity into psychological discussions and research, narrative identity is an internalized and evolving story that we create about the self, based on personal autobiographical memories. It is thought to contribute to a sense of purpose, meaning, and unity across time and situation (Adler, 2012; McAdams & McLean, 2013). One of the most important adaptive functions of a narrative identity is to meaningfully integrate positive and negative, congruent and contradictory experiences. Even where new experiences were challenging, they can become meaningful and assimilate into self. A process of autobiographical reasoning (interpreting and evaluating remembered experiences) brings the sense of understanding of self and others (McLean & Pratt, 2006; Pasupathi & Mansour, 2006; Singer & Bluck, 2001). Studies have shown there is a relationship between narrative identity and psychological well-being and mental health, especially in an existential aspect related to sense of purpose and continuity of life (e.g., McAdams, 2001, 2006).

The global coherence of a life story may be understood as a descriptive category of narrative identity, referring to the sense of personal integration. Habermas and Bluck (2000) identified four different specific features of coherence in life stories: temporal (well-ordered sequence of events), causal (convincing explanation of causal relations between events), thematic (a story's organization around a central theme), and autobiographical (following a culture's normative expectations regarding the human life course). The role of a sense of coherence (understood in terms of comprehensibility, manageability, and meaningfulness) was also highlighted by Antonovsky (1995; see also Şek, 2001). Adler et al. (2018, p. 12) suggested from an empirical perspective that narrative coherence may be understood as the combination of a lucid chronological flow with identifiable temporal and causal milestones, a psychological context which orients the reader and makes clear what the protagonist felt about the events being recounted, and some interpretation of the story to demonstrate its broader significance". It seems that processes involved in the forming of narrative identity are related to adopting an observing, external perspective toward personal, subjectively vital experiences and trying to describe them

(description), recognize emotions (differentiation), and reflect on them (integration) (e.g., Greenberg & Angus, 2004). Sense of personal integration is often linked to the global coherence of a life story (in terms of temporality, causality, themes, and referring to autobiography; see Habermas & Bluck, 2000), which itself is related to psychological well-being and self-esteem (Chen et al., 2012; Hallford et al., 2021a; McLean & Breen, 2009; Mitchell et al., 2020).

Recent research on narrative identity (Hallford & Mellor, 2015, p. 2) has highlighted the metacognitive ability of awareness of narrative identity, which refers to “understanding that one’s experiences might be represented as a story about self that informs about one’s identity”. Hallford and Mellor (2015) suggested, and evidenced, that being aware of developing the story about self that brings cohesion and meaning may be adaptive itself and related to lower depressive symptoms and higher meaning in life, self-esteem, and self-efficacy. What is more, they showed that people who are more aware about developing a narrative identity tend to provide more coherent narratives about turning-point life events. These results have been replicated by Sevim and Otrar (2021) in terms of meaning in life, self-esteem, and self-efficacy, and studies have shown that changes in awareness of narrative identity occur as part of adaptive reminiscence interventions involving the recall of autobiographical memories of specific events and periods across the lifespan, and reflecting them upon and considering for what can be learned about them, and how they may be adaptively integrated into one’s sense of self (Hallford & Mellor, 2016; Hallford et al., 2021b).

The aforementioned findings are in line with Habermas and Köber (2015) research indicating that mere remembering past episodes is not sufficient to preserve a sense of identity continuity. Accordingly, it seems that conscious factors (e.g., an effort involving autobiographical reasoning) are engaged when forming a sense of life cohesion in situations of crucial life changes (see Blagov et al., 2013; Oleś, 2004). The phenomenon of awareness of narrative identity seems to be a promising construct, which may be adopted to studies on narrative identity. Therefore, in addition to replicating findings about its potential role for meaning in life, self-esteem, and mental health, it is necessary to examine its relation to other aspects of narrative identity. Against this background, we present three independent studies with interrelated aims:

1. To replicate Hallford and Mellor’s (2015) study on the associations between awareness of narrative identity, thinking and talking about life, and psychological resources including meaning in life, self-esteem, expecting a pattern of positive correlations (Study 1).

2. To verify the hypothesis of positive correlations between awareness of narrative identity and the level of coherence in written autobiographical narratives

(Study 1), and to also examine self-narrative inclination and the self-relevance of narratives. These latter two constructs are not yet studied in this context. Self-narrative inclination is the tendency or need of a person to take a third-party perspective on one's life and speculate about events involving oneself and express their own experiences in the form of a story in which the narrator is a protagonist (Soroko, 2013a). An essential feature of self-narrative inclination is its identity-forming aspect, expressed in looking at one's life from a distance and treating it as a story (e.g., Suchańska & Ligocka, 2011). People with a stronger self-narrative inclination more frequently have an achieved identity (Suchańska & Ligocka, 2011), suggesting that having a stronger tendency to thinking (and talking/writing) about personal experience in a narrative manner may support the process of integrating various aspects of *self* and achieving a consolidated identity. We propose that people may develop awareness of narrative identity on the basis of self-knowledge of how willing they are to tell and look at their lives in a narrative way. However, it should be highlighted that inclination is not the same as narrative competence (the ability to understand and create stories; Baldock, 2006), because it does not concern the level of performance but rather the tendency or need of a person to develop and express their own experiences narratively. Accordingly, it is possible that people with a strong self-narrative inclination are not good at narratively organizing their experiences (both in thoughts and spoken/written narratives), which may result in trouble in developing a coherent and meaningful life story. In that case, potential relations between self-narrative inclination and awareness of narrative identity may be weaker, or the event not present. Self-relevance relates to the ability to perceive experiences as being related to insights or learning about oneself and, in the case of specific written narratives, might indicate the process of integrating stories into one's global sense of self. Therefore, we expected that the global awareness of narrative identity (especially in the dimension of thematic coherence referring to organizing the story around a central theme) would be positively related to objectively coded dimensions of narrative coherence in specific written narratives, as well as higher self-narrative inclination and self-relevance.

3. To further assess the adaptive role of narrative identity awareness identified by Hallford and Mellor (2015) by assessing its association with rumination and reflection (Studies 1, 2, 3) and post-traumatic growth (Study 3). In the case of rumination (mode of responding to distress involving repetitively and passively focusing on symptoms of distress, and its possible causes and consequences; see Nolen-Hoeksema et al., 2008), a negative correlation is predicted given that the tendency to think of negative past experiences and related feelings unproductively and repetitively might reflect difficulty with resolving these experiences and forming coherent, integrated stories about the self. Conversely, a reflection involving remembering past expe-

periences to gain insight and perspective is expected to be positively correlated with awareness of narrative identity. In the case of post-traumatic growth (experience of improved functioning, higher well-being and greater life awareness as an outcome of traumatic life event; see Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2007), a positive correlation is predicted given that changes in self-concept that occur following traumatic experiences may benefit from awareness of stories integrating themes of loss, threat, growth etc.

STUDY 1: AWARENESS OF NARRATIVE IDENTITY, PSYCHOLOGICAL RESOURCES AND NARRATIVE COHERENCE, INCLINATION AND SELF-RELEVANCE

Materials and Methods

Participants and Procedure

The study included 254 (74.0% female) participants from Poland aged 17–82 ($M = 29.00$, $SD = 11.80$) who gave informed consent for this non-remunerated scientific study. Most of them (61.3%) had a bachelor's or master's degree (see Table S1 in the Supplementary Materials for demographic details). The questionnaires were completed in paper-and-pencil form (30%) and online (70%), which did not differ in terms of gender ($\chi^2 = .02$, $p = .877$), age ($t = -.98$, $p = .326$), education ($\chi^2 = 10.9$, $p = .090$) or marital status ($\chi^2 = 4.3$, $p = .363$). The group filling in the paper version was reached by means of the snowball method (participants were invited during classes at university, and interpersonal networks were used), and the Internet sample was reached by means of open announcements on forums, where students were encouraged to participate. A smaller subsample ($n = 71$; see Table S1 in the Supplementary Materials for demographic details) was asked to complete the narrative task including writing an autobiographical and personally meaningful story about a relationship with a significant person.

Measures

Awareness of narrative identity. The Awareness of Narrative Identity Questionnaire (ANIQ) (Hallford & Mellor, 2015; Polish adaptation [ANIQ-PL] by Soroko et al., 2019) is a 20-item self-report questionnaire to assess awareness of narrative identity and the perception of how globally coherent one's autobiographical memories are in terms of temporal order, causal associations, and themes. The ANIQ is

divided into four scales (each includes 5 items): awareness, temporal coherence, causal coherence, and thematic coherence. The “awareness” subscale measures the awareness of having stories about one’s life that provide information about personal identity. The rest of subscales measure the perception of how coherent one’s autobiographical memories are with respect to understanding when and the order in which events occurred in someone’s life (temporal coherence), how they are causally linked with one another (causal coherence), and how clearly themes about the self can be interpreted by assessing events over the lifetime (thematic coherence). Participants responded on each item using 10-point end-defined scale ranging from 1 (*I absolutely disagree*) to 10 (*I absolutely agree*). Higher scores indicated: a) a higher level of awareness that one has developed stories about own life, b) being more conscious about drawing on these stories to understand the kind of person, c) perceiving personal autobiographical memories as more coherent in terms of temporal order, causal associations, and themes. The ANIQ-PL scales demonstrated high internal consistency levels in this sample ($\alpha = .87-.94$).

Meaning in life. The Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MLQ; Steger et al., 2006; Polish adaptation by Kossakowska et al., 2013) measures the presence of meaning in life (MLQ-Presence) and search for meaning in life (MLQ-Search). Participants responded to 10 items using 7-point end-defined scale ranging from 1 (*absolutely untrue*) to 7 (*absolutely true*), with higher scores on this scale indicating a stronger sense of personal meaning in life or a stronger sense of searching for meaning. The internal consistency was good for the MLQ-P ($\alpha = .87$) and MLQ-S ($\alpha = .81$) subscales.

Self-esteem. The Self-Esteem Scale (SES; Rosenberg, 1965; Polish adaptation by Łaguna et al., 2007) includes 10 items rated on a 4-point end-defined scale ranging from 1 (*I absolutely disagree*) to 4 (*I absolutely agree*). The SES is used to measure self-reported level of self-esteem as a relatively stable trait (Łaguna et al., 2007). Higher scores indicated higher self-esteem. The internal consistency was good in this sample ($\alpha = .92$).

Self-narrative inclination. The Self-Narrative Inclination Questionnaire (IAN-R; Soroko, 2013a) encompasses self-narrative inclination as a three-dimensional construct: distancing from experience (inclination to take a third-party perspective on one’s life and speculate about events involving oneself, in particular about the impact of past events on the present; 13 items), self-narrative recounting (inclination to recount autobiographical events in a convention of a story in which the narrator is the protagonist; 13 items), and making use of cultural heritage (inclination to make use of cultural heritage, like books, films, cultural patterns, when referring to one’s own experiences; 4 items). Participants responded to 30 items using a 5-point lettered scale: A = *I absolutely agree* (5 points), a = *I partially agree* (4 points), ab –

hard to say (3 points), *b – I partially disagree* (2 points), *B – I absolutely disagree* (1 point). Higher scores indicated a stronger self-narrative inclination in regard to each aspect. Internal consistency for the IAN-R in this study was good (Cronbach's $\alpha =$ for subscale, respectively: .89, .90, .79).

Frequency of talking and thinking about one's life. Two self-report items directly referring to talking ("In general, how often do you talk to others about what's happened in your life?") and thinking about one's life ("In general, how often do you think back over your life?"). A scale ranging from 0 (*never*) to 10 (*very often*) was used (Hallford & Mellor, 2015). Higher scores indicated more frequent thinking or talking about one's life.

Self-narratives and their features. Participants were asked to write about an important, emotional-engaging relationship. The instructions for participants were as follows: "Please remind yourself and tell a story of any important interpersonal relationship, which has been engaging to you in an emotional way in the past. Please, write how this relationship started, how it developed and how you perceive this relationship now." These narratives were assessed by three coders (psychology students taking part in a course of narrative psychology) who were trained in methods on the following three dimensions: narrative coherence, emotional tone, and relation to self (see below). Narratives were also assessed by one expert (second Author) who was the supervisor during the aforementioned course. For each dimension the mean of ratings from the pair of coders (supervisor and a student) with the highest agreement (Krippendorff's α) was used.

Narrative coherence. An analysis of narrative coherence based on operationalization by Baerger and McAdams (1999) was used in terms of orientation, structure, affect, and integration. Orientation refers to locating characters and events in a specific context (temporal, social, personal). Structure is related to the chronological order of the story, which is oriented on a goal. Affect refers to the level of clarity and comprehensibility of emotions expressed in the story. Finally, integration is related to the tendency of the author to link the story with broader themes about their life or identity, as is considered a sign of autobiographical reasoning. These four aspects were assessed on a 5-point scale ranging from 0 (no coherence) to 4 (high coherence). The coder agreements (Krippendorff's α) were as follows: .72 for an orientation, .89 for a structure, .49 for an affect, and .89 for an integration. The low reliability of the affect dimension indicates the need for cautious interpretation.

Emotional tone was assessed using a pre-existing coding scheme (McAdams, 2001) and a 5-point scale ranging from 0 (very pessimistic emotional tone of the story) to 4 (very optimistic emotional tone of the story). The agreement between the coders was acceptable (Krippendorff's $\alpha = .78$).

Relation to self. This coding dimension refers to how the written story was linked with the self, based on the autobiographical reasoning processes (Habermas & Bluck, 2000; Habermas & Köber, 2015). A linear system (0–3 points) proposed by McLean and Pratt (2006) was used to code stories: 0 = experiences have not been linked to self, 1 = experiences are linked with self but without the sense of any change caused by this experience, 2 = experiences are linked to self and some learning or lessons were detailed without extending beyond the original experience, 3 = experiences were linked to the self and learning or change occurred which extended beyond the specific experience and demonstrated that broader insight was gained about oneself. The rating coder agreement was acceptable (Krippendorff's $\alpha = .82$).

Length. This was assessed by the counting number of words for each story. The narratives about an important relationship ranged in length from 7 to 281 words, with an average length of 119 words ($SD = 65.1$). The length of narratives did not differ by gender ($t = 1.67, p = .10$), but was negatively correlated with age ($r = -.43, p < .001$).

Result

A stronger awareness of narrative identity was weakly to moderately related to higher frequency of thinking and talking about life (for a summary of all correlational results see Table 3). All subscales of the ANIQ were positively correlated with meaning in life, with the exception of temporal coherence and presence of meaning in life. In line with our predictions, awareness of narrative identity was positively correlated to self-narrative inclination. However, all these correlations were weak ($\rho < .30$). To gain a deeper insight into mutual relations between self-narrative inclination and awareness of narrative identity, we have split the sample into subgroups referring to results in the IAN-RS and ANIQ (four groups based on quartiles) (Table 1) and investigate whether it is possible to have a strong self-narrative inclination and a low awareness of narrative identity. It turned out that almost none of the participants having a very strong self-narrative inclination had a very low awareness of narrative identity. However, some had a very strong awareness of narrative identity, despite a very low self-narrative inclination.

Table 1*Self-narrative Inclination and Awareness of Narrative Identity (Study 1)*

IAN (quartiles)		ANIQ (quartiles)			
		1	2	3	4
1	N	12	17	14	23
	%	18.2%	25.8%	21.2%	34.8%
2	N	28	18	12	5
	%	44.4%	28.6%	19.0%	7.9%
3	N	23	18	23	8
	%	31.9%	25.0%	31.9%	11.1%
4	N	2	10	16	23
	%	3.9%	19.6%	31.4%	45.1%

Note. IAN = Self-Narrative Inclination Questionnaire; ANIQ = Awareness of Narrative Identity Questionnaire.

Contrary to expectations, awareness of narrative identity was not related to self-esteem. Only thematic coherence was weakly positively correlated with higher self-esteem.

Turning to analyses of the written narratives of relational experiences, producing more elaborated and structured narratives referring to a higher level of integrating experience with self was positively correlated with being more aware of using a life story to build own identity and with perceiving thematic coherence between own experience. Perception of temporal or causal coherence of own experience was not correlated with characteristics of narratives about relational experiences. Positive correlations were observed between awareness of narrative identity and most aspects of self-narrative inclination, except cultural heritage; however, these were generally weak in strength. There was also a significant positive correlation between the length (number of words) of self-narratives and all aspects of the awareness and perceived coherence of narrative identity except for causal coherence. These results are mostly in line with our hypothesis. However, stronger correlations were predicted.

STUDY 2: REPLICATING FINDINGS ON SELF-NARRATIVE INCLINATION AND EXTENDING TO RUMINATION AND REFLECTION

Materials and Methods

Participants and Procedure

The study included 424 (76.0% female) participants (recruited in Poland via social media and advertisements in the academic sites) from the general population (see Table S1 in the Supplementary Materials for demographic details) who gave informed consent to take part in a larger online remunerated scientific study with five daily measurements. The age of participants ranged from 18 to 45 years ($M = 24.60$, $SD = 5.11$). Most of them (51.2%) had a bachelor's or master's degree. The majority of the participants (60.1%) lived in a major city (200,000 to 500,000 inhabitants). The results presented here were obtained during the baseline measurement.

Measures

Awareness of narrative identity. The Awareness of Narrative Identity Questionnaire (ANIQ), described earlier (see Study 1), was also used in Study 2.

Self-narrative inclination. The Self-Narrative Inclination Questionnaire (IAN-R), described earlier (see Study 1), was used in Study 2.

Rumination and reflection. The Rumination-Reflection Questionnaire (RRQ) (Trapnell & Campbell, 1999; Polish adaptation by Radoń, 2014) consists of 24 items divided into two scales—rumination (12 items) and reflection (12 items). The rumination subscale refers to negative aspect of repetitive thinking about the past, the present, and the future (maladaptive thoughts, evaluations, and emotions). The reflection subscale refers to positive aspects of thinking about one's life related to gaining insight and a new perspective on one's experiences. Participants respond on each item using 5-point scales ranging from 1 (*I completely disagree*) to 5 (*I completely agree*). Higher scores indicate higher intensity of rumination, and/or reflection. Both subscales demonstrate good internal reliability with Cronbach's $\alpha = .83$ for the rumination subscale, and .81 for the reflection subscale.

Results

In line with our research hypothesis, awareness of narrative identity was positively correlated to reflection. Surprisingly, it was also positively correlated to rumination. Associations with self-narrative inclination were replicated, but overall were somewhat stronger and more consistent with awareness of narrative identity relative to Study 1, particular with overall awareness of narrative identity. This indicates that a higher inclination for taking a third-person perspective on one's life, recounting autobiographical events in a story, and making use of cultural heritage in those processes are related to being more aware of developing the story about own life.

Additionally, and similarly to Study 1, we have split the sample into subgroups referring to results on the IAN-RS and ANIQ (four groups based on quartiles) (Table 2) and investigate whether it is possible to have a strong self-narrative inclination and low awareness of narrative identity.

Table 2

Self-narrative Inclination and Awareness of Narrative Identity (Study 2)

IAN (quartiles)		ANIQ (quartiles)			
		1	2	3	4
1	<i>N</i>	52	22	25	10
	%	47.7%	20.2%	22.9%	9.2%
2	<i>N</i>	29	29	24	21
	%	28.2%	28.2%	23.3%	20.4%
3	<i>N</i>	19	35	31	21
	%	17.9%	33.0%	29.2%	19.8%
4	<i>N</i>	7	21	24	54
	%	6.6%	19.8%	22.6%	50.9%

Note. IAN = Self-Narrative Inclination Questionnaire; ANIQ = Awareness of Narrative Identity Questionnaire.

In some aspects, the results of Study 2 were in line with those from Study 1 (very few people having a very low self-narrative inclination and a very strong awareness of narrative identity). However, in some aspects, they were different—not many people with a very low self-narrative inclination had a very strong awareness

of narrative identity. That may result from a stronger positive correlation between scores on the IAN-RS and ANIQ observed in Study 2.

STUDY 3: AWARENESS OF NARRATIVE IDENTITY AND POST-TRAUMATIC GROWTH

Materials and Methods

Participants and Procedure

The study included 162 (60.0% female) participants from Poland recruited online with social media from a general population who self-identified as having experienced trauma in their life. Their age ranged from 18 to 67 ($M = 28.77$, $SD = 10.00$). Most of them (60.5%) had a bachelor's or master's degree. The majority of participants (55.6%) lived in a major city (200,000 to 500,000 citizens) (see Table S1 in the Supplementary Materials for demographic details). The Posttraumatic Growth Inventory (PTGI; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996; Polish adaptation by Ogińska-Bulik & Juczyński, 2010) was used to assess the time of the trauma relative to the present day and the type of trauma from a check-list. The participants most frequently identified as their trauma the loss of a loved one ($n = 55$, 34.0%), or a loss other than that indicated in the questionnaire ($n = 36$, 22.2%). They gave informed consent to participation in the online non-remunerated scientific study. The majority of them had not received psychological help in the past (63.6%), and the remainder had used consultation (25.3%), individual psychotherapy (16.0%), group psychotherapy (3.1%), and support groups (5.6%).

Measures

Awareness of narrative identity. The Awareness of Narrative Identity Questionnaire (ANIQ), described earlier (see Study 1), was also used in Study 3.

Posttraumatic growth. Posttraumatic growth refers to change to a person based on the trauma experienced, which leads to higher functioning, better well-being, and greater life awareness (Tedschi & Calhoun, 2007). The Posttraumatic Growth Inventory (PTGI; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996; Polish adaptation by Ogińska-Bulik & Juczyński, 2010) consists of 21 items assessing four aspects of change under the influence of the traumatic experience: changes in self-perception (9 items), changes in relating with others (7 items), appreciation of life (3 items), and spiritual change

(2 items). The participants were asked to indicate the degree to which the changes occurred in their life. Responses were marked on a 6-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 0 (*I have not experienced this change due to the crisis*) to 5 (*I have experienced this change to a vast extent*). Higher scores, including of a total score, indicate more positive changes resulting from the experienced trauma. In the present sample, Cronbach's α was as follows: Changes in self-perception = .91, Changes in relations to others = .87, Appreciation of life = .80, Spiritual changes = .65 and .94 for the total score.

Results

Results are presented in Table 3. In a fairly uniform manner, awareness of narrative identity was positively correlated to all aspects of post-traumatic growth. The magnitude of those correlations varied from weak to moderate.

Table 3

Spearman Correlations Between Awareness of Narrative Identity and Variables Across All Studies

	ANIQ Total	ANIQ Awareness	ANIQ Temporal Coherence	ANIQ Causal Coherence	ANIQ Thematic Coherence
Study 1 (N = 254)					
Thinking About Life	.33***	.36***	.23***	.11	.27***
Talking About Life	.36***	.32***	.21***	.14*	.30***
IAN Total	.21***	.14*	.16*	.14*	.20**
IAN Recounting	.17**	.11	.14*	.12*	.13*
IAN Distancing	.21***	.15*	.14*	.14*	.24***
IAN Cultural Heritage	.14	.09	.15*	.09	.10
MLQ Presence	.26***	.21***	.10	.22***	.29***
MLQ Search	.33***	.24***	.24***	.21***	.33***
SES	.10	-.01	.10	.10	.13*
Study 1 (N = 71; Written Narrative Task)					
COH Orientation	.18	.24*	.23	-.17	.20
COH Structure	.17	.27*	.19	-.17	.16
COH Affect	.18	.31**	.19	-.06	.15
COH Integration	.28*	.28*	.18	.01	.26*

Emotional Tone	.03	.08	-.07	.02	-.03
Integration With Self	.28*	.25*	.15	-.01	.33**
Length (Productivity)	.24**	.31**	.25*	-.17	.28*
Study 2 (N = 424)					
RRQ Reflection	.23***	.31***	.02	.17***	.25***
RRQ Rumination	.07	.24***	-.11*	.00	.12*
IAN Total	.41***	.41***	.19***	.34***	.38***
IAN Recounting	.23***	.22***	.14***	.16***	.21***
IAN Distancing	.45***	.47***	.16***	.40***	.43***
IAN Cultural Heritage	.30***	.31***	.15**	.26***	.26***
Study 3 (N = 162)					
PTGI Total	.36***	.25**	.26**	.38***	.31***
PTGI Relating to Others	.25**	.19*	.17*	.28***	.24**
PTGI Self-perception	.36***	.24**	.24**	.39***	.32***
PTGI Appreciation of Life	.36***	.25**	.29***	.34***	.29***
PTGI Spiritual Change	.30***	.26***	.28***	.25**	.22**

Note. IAN = Self-Narrative Inclination Questionnaire; MLQ = Meaning in Life Questionnaire; SES = Self-Esteem Scale; PRQ = Rumination-Reflection Questionnaire; PTGI = Post-Traumatic Growth Inventory; COH = Narrative coherence.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

The objective of this series of studies was to examine relationships between awareness of narrative identity, various aspects of narrative identity, and meaning-making. Our results suggest that awareness of narrative identity is related to the tendency to think and talk about one's own life. Weak to moderate associations were found between ANIQ variables and meaning in life, replicating previous findings (Hallford & Mellor, 2015; Sevim & Otram, 2021) that higher awareness of narrative identity and higher global coherence of autobiographical memories is associated with a stronger sense of meaning in life and also searching for meaning in life. This is consistent with reasoning by Bauer et al. (2008) that awareness of developing narra-

tion about own life may reflect higher integration of life experiences and emergence of a sense of meaning.

There was little evidence for the association between awareness of narrative identity and self-esteem. It is difficult to explain this result. It is contrary to previous findings (Hallford & Mellor, 2015; Sevim & Otram, 2021) using the ANIQ, and research showing positive associations between the cohesion of life stories and self-esteem (Chen et al., 2012; McLean & Breen, 2009). These differences may point to important cultural factors. For example, previous work using the ANIQ (Hallford & Mellor, 2015) was conducted in predominantly white Anglo-Saxon culture, often considered as more “positive” and optimistic than other cultures (Chang, 1996). The emotional climate of self-narration in building identity might be different among these countries, leading to stronger associations between life stories and self-esteem. That is, if life stories are more positively valenced, then Anglo-Saxons may benefit more from being aware that their experiences are represented as a story about their self-identity. Future cross-cultural research could establish whether there are differences in the emotional tone of life stories and whether these cultural differences moderate how the ANIQ correlates with psychological resources such as self-esteem. It may also be that sometimes people construct a life story, which is not adaptive but maintains psychopathology (Soroko, 2013b). It refers mainly to defensive and reactive narratives, which may justify the necessity of defensive behaviors, self-protection, or other maladaptive behaviors and beliefs. It may be hypothesized that in some cases, narrative may be used to justify the belief about being not good enough, guilty, non-attractive etc. In that case, being aware of developing such life story probably will not be related to higher self-esteem.

An important finding in this study was that awareness of narrative identity was positively correlated with written narrative characteristics, including orientation, structure, and integration. Thanks to a replication of these findings from Hallford and Mellor (2015), there are now two separate studies available showing concordance between self-report of one’s perceptions of having life stories and their relevance to one’s self-identity, and the coded coherence of specific narratives about their lives. This supports the idea that an abstracted sense of a coherent life story is related to coherence in specific recounting of life experiences. Therefore, people can self-report a global awareness of the narrated self that corresponds with specific stories. Although this study cannot provide inferences about causality, it does provide some support for the idea that increased coherence on the level of specific narratives might facilitate their integration into broader life stories, i.e., “narrative identity processing” (Pals, 2006a, 2006b). Alternatively, this correlation might reflect an underlying tendency for meaning making of one’s experiences, at levels of specific events and broader life stories. The correlations between specific global coherence subscales on the ANIQ and coded coherence in narratives were in the expected directions, but non-signifi-

cant. However, these magnitudes were not strikingly different from previous findings (Hallford & Mellor, 2015), and there was low power to detect statistical significance in this sample. Consistently with previous work, the awareness subscale had stronger correlations with coded coherence relative to the global coherence subscales. This suggests that awareness of life stories may be a more reliable predictor of the ability to provide coherent narratives of specific experiences relative to a person's perception of how coherent their memories are on specific dimensions.

The tendency to express one's own experiences in a narrative manner or narrative reporting (self-narrative inclination) is only weakly to moderately associated with narrative identity awareness. These findings suggest that developing life stories (narrative identity), being aware of them (narrative identity awareness), and narratives about particular events or experiences may be largely separable constructs. Hence, it could be conceivably hypothesized that they are subject to different rules and influence of different factors (for similar results, see also Soroko & Majchrzak, 2020). Our data suggest that it is relatively rare (but possible) that someone has a strong tendency to organize one's experiences narratively but does not reflect on that very much. It seems more plausible to have a strong awareness of narrative identity but rather a low self-narrative inclination. According to these findings, it should be highlighted that awareness of narrative identity refers mainly to the metacognitive ability to understand that someone's experiences may be represented in a story providing a sense of continuity and informing about one's identity (Hallford & Mellor, 2015). A contrary, self-narrative inclination refers to some preferences (style, tendency) focused on the most frequently chosen behaviors and patterns of thinking and/or talking. It should also be mentioned that, due to the questionnaire nature of measuring both phenomena, mutual relations between them may be moderated by a general ability to gain insight and reflect on one's thoughts and behaviors. Finally, it is possible that narratives about events precede development of the life story. According to Bluck and Habermas (2000), only memories that are linked to self through their emotional or motivational significance over one's life are truly autobiographical, and the life story schema could be a framework for the process of life story development.

Another important finding of this study is that a stronger awareness of narrative identity was positively related to stronger post-traumatic growth. This association is consistent with findings suggesting that developing narrative identity leads to a sense of purpose, meaning, and unity across time and situation (Adler, 2012; McAdams & McLean, 2013). It seems that people who are more conscious about drawing on their life story to understand the kind of person they are may also be stronger motivated to narratively processing their negative past experiences through autobiographical reasoning to help how they cope with trauma. Further studies should investigate how awareness of narrative identity is directly related to autobiographical reasoning, and

how it moderates the effectiveness of narrative interventions aimed to coping with negative past events.

The one surprising result is a positive correlation between a stronger awareness of narrative identity and a tendency to ruminate. Though this correlation was weak ($\rho = .24$), we would like to discuss it shortly. First, another study finding indicates that being more aware of developing a life story is related to more frequent thinking about one's life. Accordingly, it is possible that sometimes (e.g., in the case of trying to process a challenging and emotionally vivid experience narratively), this intensive thinking about one's life may result in ruminating about this experience when it is not possible to integrate it into a life story. Second, this result is in line with others, indicating that elaborated and well-structured narrative accounts may not be sufficient to be beneficial. Specific characteristics of narrative activity, for example, a highly narrative story in concreteness (saturated with bodily sensations) and speech dynamics (expressive, vivid), may characterize the functioning of individuals with borderline pathology who remain emotionally aroused and do not reflect on the experience (Górska & Soroko, 2017).

LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER STUDIES

A few important limitations need to be considered. First, these results may not be transferable to countries other than Poland. Cross-national comparative studies considering cultural factors in the role of narrative activity for psychological well-being should be done in the future. Second, the correlational nature of these studies does not allow us to draw conclusions regarding causal relationships. Rather, this calls for longitudinal or experimental studies on the role of awareness of narrative identity for meaning-making and mental health more broadly. Third, as some narratives have been coded by one of the Authors, this may produce biased results. However, between-coders agreement was established as acceptable referring to all aspects of analysis. Fourth, more research is needed to better understand the difference between various aspects of narrative activity and their role in relation to psychological well-being, self-esteem, emotional functioning, and meaning in life. Comparing the relationship between awareness of narrative identity and properties of narratives about a single event and a whole "life story" may shed light on the mutual relations between these various aspects involved in developing the narrative identity. Finally, further studies could integrate our findings and explore the role of all aspects of narrative identity in terms of meaning-making and mental health. Regression or Structural Equation Model could be useful here.

CONCLUSIONS

The goal of the presented studies was to investigate associations between awareness of narrative identity and other aspects of narrative-activity (self-narrative inclination, frequency of thinking and talking about own life, and characteristics of self-narrations), self-esteem, meaning in life, and post-traumatic growth. Our findings suggest that general awareness of narrative identity is something different than self-narrative inclination, just thinking about one's own life, or producing "good stories". However, these various aspects of narrative activity may be somehow correlated. It may be useful to consider as a specific dimension when studying the role of narratives and narrative identity in psychological well-being. These findings also support the adaptive role of awareness of narrative identity by confirming its' relations with meaning in life, post-traumatic growth, and self-relevance. Our findings are partially in line with the previous research on that topic, and partially inconsistent with them. These relationships may be moderated by a cultural context. To conclude, being aware of developing narrative identity basing on the life story may be adaptive in terms of meaning in life and coping with trauma.

CRediT Author Statement

KAMIL JANOWICZ (45%): methodology, data collection, formal analysis, writing (original draft).

EMILIA SOROKO (45%): conceptualization, methodology, data collection, formal analysis, writing (original draft).

DAVID J. HALLFORD (10%): supervision, writing (review and editing).

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SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS

Table S1*Participants' Demographics (Studies 1a, 1b, 2, 3)*

Variable	Study 1a		Study 1b		Study 2		Study 3	
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
Gender:	254	–	71	–	424	–	162	–
Female	198	74.0	53	74.6	321	76.0	98	60.0
Male	56	26.0	18	25.3	103	24.0	63	38.9
Other	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	0.6
Age: mean (<i>SD</i>)	29 (11.8)		28.01 (13.40)		24.60 (5.11)		28.77 (10)	
min–max	17–81		19–81		18–45		18–67	
Education:								
Primary	0	0.0	0	0.0	3	0.7	5	3.1
Vocational	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	4	2.5
Secondary	97	38.3	34	48.5	204	48.1	55	34.0
Higher	157	61.3	36	51.4	217	51.2	98	60.5
NA	2	0.4	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Marital status:								
Single	87	34.4	49	69.0	148	34.9		
Partnered but not cohabitating	66	25.9	0	0.0	90	21.2		
Married	55	21.7	12	16.9	54	12.7		
Partnered and cohabitating	42	16.5	10	14.1	74	15.5	NA	NA
Divorced	2	8.0	0	0.0	4	0.9		
Separated	2	8.0	0	0.0	NA	NA		
Engaged	NA	NA	NA	NA	48	11.3		
Widowed	NA	NA	NA	NA	2	0.5		
Place of residence:								
Village					68	16.0	19	11.0
Town up to 50,000					52	12.3	18	7.0
City from 50,000 to 200,000	NA	NA	NA	NA	49	11.6	35	11.0
City from 200,000 to 500,000					255	60.1	90	55.6
City over 500,000					NA	NA	NA	NA