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MULTIPLE ROLES AND SENSE OF IDENTITY AMONG WOMEN IN EARLY AND LATER ADULTHOOD

The article presents the results of a study conducted on a sample of 80 women aged 19-25 and 72 women aged 40-74. The relationships of the two components of self-complexity (the quantity of self-aspects and the amount of overlap between their contents) with the multidimensionally defined sense of identity were examined. Additionally, phase of life differences in the magnitude of these relationships were also investigated. I used the Self-Complexity Questionnaire (SCQ; Barczak, Besta, & Bazińska, 2007) and the Multidimensional Questionnaire of Identity (MQI; Pilarska, 2012). The obtained results showed that the predictive importance of the number of roles for the sense of identity was marginal, whereas the similarity in the content of roles seemed to favor maintaining the sense of identity. In addition, although significant differences were observed in the self--concept structure and the strength of the sense of identity between the two groups of women, the relationships between these areas of personality were not affected by the phase of the life cycle.

Keywords: role overlap; sense of identity; multiple roles; self-complexity.

The formation and maintenance of the sense of identity are issues that become particularly important in the context of the current reality, marked by relativism, multidimensionality, and discontinuity. This is because the model of "a changing man in the changing world" (Harwas-Napierała, 2007, p. 21) means a return to thinking about the self in terms of numerous situationally activated self-images. With the self recognized as the basis (material, substance) for identity building, it seems appropriate to look for an answer to the question of what significance the differentiation and variability of the self have to the sense of identity.

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INTRODUCTION

The complex self

The replacement of perceiving the self as a monolithic whole with defining it as diffuse and contextual seems to be the most dramatic change in psychologists' views on the concept of the self. This change manifests itself in the shift of interest from the contents of the self to its structural characteristics (i.e., the organization of the contents). Of the different models of self-structure (e.g., Donahue, Robins, Roberts, & John, 1993; Showers, 1992; Woolfolk, Novalany, Gara, Allen, & Polino, 1995), it is Linville's (1985, 1987) social-cognitive model of self-complexity that seems to be the most frequently studied and cited one (Rafaeli & Hiller, 2010). Self-complexity reflects the number and content interrelatedness (overlap) of meaningful self-aspects, and therefore it is theorized as comprising two dimensions – self-differentiation[1] and self-integration (Constantino, Wilson, Horowitz, & Pinel, 2006). To measure self-complexity, Linville developed a procedure in which individuals ascribe a particular set of characteristics to freely generated aspects of their self and their life. As the index of self--complexity, she adopted the H statistic, a measure of qualitative data dispersion. A high value of H is a result of sorting with numerous self-aspects and low redundancy of the characteristics used in their description.

According to Linville's basic hypothesis, self-complexity moderates the negative effects of stressful events by buffering fluctuations in self-esteem. More precisely, people with a more complex self cope with stress-inducing situations better, since negative affect is limited to the threatened self-aspect. The issue of the adaptivity of self-complexity has been a subject of intensive research, but has not been resolved yet. Some of the results point to a positive relationship between self-complexity and adjustment (Cohen, Pane, & Smith, 1997; Dixon & Baumeister, 1991; Niedenthal, Setterlund, & Wherry, 1992), some suggest a negative relationship (Brown & Rafaeli, 2007; Jordan & Cole, 1996), and others imply a lack of relationship (Campbell, Assanand, & Di Paula, 2003; Gramzow, Sedikides, Panter, & Insko, 2000). Such a large divergence between research results encouraged scholars (Locke, 2003; Pilarska & Suchańska, 2013, 2015; Rafaeli-Mor, Gotlib, & Revelle, 1999; Woolfolk et al., 1995) to question Linvil-

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[1] The term *self-differentiation* as used here refers to the level of pluralism (multiplicity) in self-structure and draws on Zajonc's (1960) and Kelly's (1955) ideas. It should be distinguished from *self-concept differentiation* (Donahue et al., 1993), referring to the level of variability in the intensity of traits in the self-aspects (roles).

le's measure, and initiated research on the regulatory functions of the components of self-complexity, namely, the number of self-aspects and the degree of overlap between the characteristics attributed to them.

Sense of identity

In the psychological literature, the terms *self* and *identity* are sometimes used interchangeably (Baumeister & Muraven, 1996; Swann & Bosson, 2010), although the necessity of making a clear distinction between them is also pointed out (Berzonsky, 2005; Oleś, 2008; Pilarska, 2014). At the level of content, "identity is an extract from the self-concept" (Oleś, 2008, p. 50), comprising those contents concerning the self that the person regards as particularly important and whose loss would result in a sense of no longer being oneself (central, relevant, schematic, and distinctive characteristics). At the level of structure, whereas there is relative agreement regarding the complex and multifaceted nature of the self, identity by definition implies unity on a certain dimension, independently of time and space (Berzonsky, 2005).

Reflection and research on identity has been undertaken from many perspectives – cognitive, behavioral, processual, or narrative (e.g., Berzonsky, 2008; Marcia, 1966; McAdams & McLean, 2013; Whitbourne, Sneed, & Skultety, 2002). The concept of the sense of identity makes it possible to explore the subjective dimension of identity issues, directing attention to the way of experiencing oneself. This aspect of identity seems to be the closest to Erikson's (2004) theory and remains crucial from the clinical point of view (Sokolik, 1996).

The sense of identity, defined as comprehensive, intuitive-reflective relation to oneself, is an effect of recurrent ways of experiencing and understanding oneself (Pilarska, 2014; Pilarska & Suchańska, 2013). It has a multidimensional character and comprises the following senses, most often distinguished in the literature on the subject (Oleś, 2008; Pilarska, 2012; Sokolik, 1996; Vignoles, Regalia, Manzi, Golledge, & Scabini, 2006): of having inner contents (i.e., of possessing and having access to one's own thoughts, feelings, motives, attitudes, etc.), of uniqueness (i.e., of one's own specificity and otherness), of separateness and boundaries (i.e., the ability to distinguish what belongs to the self from what does not), of coherence (i.e., consistency of important inner contents), of continuity in time (i.e., of the permanence of one's own self and of being the same person despite the passage of time and despite the changes one is subject to), and of self-worth (i.e., self-acceptance and belief in the possibility of achieving per-

sonal goals). A subjectively undisturbed sense of identity presupposes the development and maintenance of all the identity-related senses mentioned above.

Study objective and hypotheses

The objective of this study is to analyze the significance of self-complexity to the sense of identity. The theoretical premises of the study of these relations are clearly present in the literature and are based, on the one hand, on recognizing the self as the basis of identity (Batory, 2012; Oleś, 2008), and on the other – on treating the sense of identity as an important manifestation of mental health (Erikson, 2004; Oleś, 2008; Straś-Romanowska, 2008). However, discussions and research on this issue do not lead to consistent conclusions. In line with the suggestions present in the literature that the variability of the self across roles is characteristic of "an interpersonal chameleon, with no inner core of identity" (Block, 1961, p. 392), it can be expected that the increasing self-complexity (self-differentiation) poses a threat to the sense of identity (Donahue et al., 1993; Styła, Jankowski, & Suszek, 2010). Contrary suggestions are found in sociological and psychological studies on the relations between the multiplicity of roles and well-being (Ahrens & Ryff, 2006; Thoits, 2003). Yet, a series of studies conducted over a few years under Pilarska's and Suchańska's guidance (Pilarska & Suchańska, 2013, 2014, 2015; Suchańska & Ligocka, 2011, Suchańska & Worach, 2013) shows that the associations between self-complexity and identity characteristics are at best limited and/or nonsystematic, and seem to argue a relative independence of these two areas of personality. The discrepancies signaled above continue to fuel the debate on the relations between self-complexity and the experience of identity, as well as on the functionality of the structural characteristics of the self in general.

In view of the developmental changes in the self-system – the progressing differentiation of self-representations until adolescence and early adulthood, marked by active experimentation with various roles (Arnett, 2004; Damon & Hart, 1988; Harter, 1998; Schwartz, Côté, & Arnett, 2005), and the gradual withdrawal from or loss of certain social roles in later adulthood (Fry & Debats, 2010; Oleś, 2000) – the aim of the study was also to attempt to determine the moderating influence of phase of life on the relations between self-complexity and the sense of identity. This issue has not been the subject of empirical analyses yet, which leaves the question of the functionality of self-complexity across the lifespan open. Certain clues are provided by Diehl and colleagues and their research on the developmental trajectories of self-concept differentiation. That

research reveals a relationship between age and self-concept differentiation, but its nature remains unclear – earlier reports by these authors suggest a curvilinear relationship, with self-concept differentiation decreasing with age and reaching the lowest level in middle adulthood only to begin to increase afterwards (Diehl, Hastings, & Stanton, 2001), whereas more recent studies suggest a negative linear relationship (Diehl & Hay, 2010). The study by Diehl et al. (2001) also suggests that the relationship between self-concept differentiation and well-being is influenced by age – negative effects of self-concept differentiation turn out to be more distinct in elderly people compared to young adults.

To sum up, a review of the literature suggests the following hypotheses:

1. The period of early adulthood is characterized by greater self-differentiation (a larger number of self-aspects) and a weaker sense of identity than later phases of adulthood.

2. A highly complex self, and particularly a low content overlap of self--aspects, is associated with a weakened sense of identity.

3. The phase of life (adulthood) is a moderator of the relationship between self-complexity and the sense of identity.

METHOD

Participants

The participants were 80 women in early adulthood ($M = 21.06$ years, $SD = 1.37$) and 72 women in middle and late adulthood ($M = 63.16$ years, $SD = 4.92$). They were university students and third age university students. The choice of women as the study sample was prompted by the view, present in the literature, that simultaneous involvement in various social roles is a potential source of tension and psychological stress especially in women (Erdwins, Buffardi, Casper, & O'Brien, 2001; O'Laughlin & Bischoff, 2005).

Measures

Self-complexity. Self-complexity was measured using the *Self-Complexity Questionnaire* (SCQ; Barczak, Besta, & Bazińska, 2007). The participants' task was to name the roles they performed in their life and to link each role with adjectives from the list provided (30 positive and 30 negative terms). Given the controversies surrounding the *H* statistic, the two component measures – namely the number of roles (self-aspects) and the level of (content) overlap between

them – were adopted as indices of self-complexity, in accordance with the approach and formulas proposed by Rafaeli-Mor et al. (1999). The name of the role, the number of adjectives used, and the proportion of positive adjectives were also coded.

Sense of identity. To measure the sense of identity, I used the *Multidimensional Questionnaire of Identity* (MQI; Pilarska, 2012). Its extended version consists of 43 items, rated on a scale from 0 (*definitely not/never*) to 3 (*definitely yes/always*) and concerning six identity-related senses: having inner contents, uniqueness, one's own boundaries, coherence, continuity in time, and self-worth. The indicator of the intensity of a given sense is the mean score on the items of the corresponding subscale.[2] The mean of the scores on the six subscales was used as the index of global sense of identity. Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients for individual subscales range from .62 to .86, the mean value being α = .74 (e.g., Pilarska & Suchańska, 2014, 2015; Suchańska & Worach, 2013).

Procedure

The study was carried out on a group basis, with anonymity and the confidentiality of data ensured. The participants were informed about the purpose of the study, and their participation was voluntary.

RESULTS

Self-complexity and the sense of identity in the study groups

Table 1 contains the means and standard deviations of scores on self--complexity and the sense of identity obtained in the whole sample and in the studied subgroups. Intergroup comparisons (the Mann–Whitney U test) revealed significant differences in both components of self-complexity: the number of self-aspects ($U = 1707.50$, $p = .002$, $r = .26$) and role overlap ($U = 1272.50$, $p < .001$, $r = .34$). As predicted, women in their early adulthood indicated a larger number of significant self-aspects (roles) than women in the second half of their life. At the same time, however, the self-aspects of the younger women were less diverse in terms of content. Moreover, their self-description turned out to be

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[2] Missing data were substituted with the mean of the person's responses to the remaining items of the same subscale (*person mean substitution*). After exceeding the acceptable number of omissions (20%), the person was excluded from the analyses in which a given variable was taken into account.

richer ($U = 1149.50$, $p < .001$, $r = .43$), with a smaller prevalence of positive characteristics ($U = 938.50$, $p < .001$, $r = .52$) compared to the older women's self-description. The women in their early adulthood usually mentioned the roles of a student (94% of the participants), a daughter (87%), a friend (57%), a sister (57%), and a partner (44%). The women in a later phase of adulthood most often reported the roles of a mother (69% of the participants), a student (54%), a colleague (47%), a wife (36%), and a grandmother (31%). As can be seen, women in both groups described themselves mainly in terms of family roles, personal relationships, or main activities.

As regards the sense of identity, significant differences between the groups are observed on the global dimension ($U = 1429.00$, $p = .004$, $r = .25$) and in four senses: of having inner contents ($U = 1161.50$, $p < .001$, $r = .37$), of one's own boundaries ($U = 1515.00$, $p = .010$, $r = .23$), of coherence ($U = 1460.50$, $p = .005$, $r = .24$), and the sense of continuity in time ($U = 1479.50$, $p = .008$, $r = .23$). In each case, as expected, women in a later phase of adulthood had a stronger sense of identity than women in early adulthood.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics and Intergroup Differences in Self-Complexity and the Sense of Identity

Variable	Total		Early adulthood		Later adulthood		Differences		
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	U	Z	r
NSA	4.92	2.09	5.28	1.59	4.47	2.53	1707.50**	-3.12	.26
OL	0.16	0.15	0.20	0.16	0.11	0.13	1272.50***	-3.96	.34
NA	13.93	5.84	16.00	5.27	11.12	5.42	1149.50***	-4.98	.43
PPA	0.89	0.13	0.84	0.13	0.96	0.08	938.50***	-6.13	.52
SIC	2.24	0.49	2.10	0.50	2.46	0.39	1161.50***	-4.24	.37
SU	1.53	0.42	1.55	0.45	1.49	0.37	1953.00	-0.36	.03
SOB	1.50	0.42	1.42	0.43	1.62	0.39	1515.00**	-2.59	.23
SC	1.99	0.43	1.91	0.45	2.11	0.38	1460.50**	-2.80	.24
SCT	1.96	0.39	1.88	0.38	2.08	0.39	1479.50**	-2.67	.23
SSW	1.92	0.46	1.95	0.48	1.86	0.42	1758.00	-0.87	.08
GSI	1.85	0.31	1.80	0.32	1.94	0.26	1429.00**	-2.85	.25

Note. NSA – number of self-aspects, OL – role overlap, NA – number of adjectives, PPA – proportion of positive adjectives, SIC – sense of having inner contents, SU – sense of uniqueness, SOB – sense of one's own boundaries, SC – sense of coherence, SCT – sense of continuity in time, SSW – sense of self-worth, GSI – global sense of identity; *** $p \leq .001$; ** $p \leq .01$; * $p < .05$.

Relations between self-complexity and the sense of identity

Table 2 presents correlations (Pearson's *r*) between the measures of self--complexity and the sense of identity in the whole sample and in the two groups

of women separately. The number of self-aspects turns out to be basically unrelated to the sense of identity, although it does exhibit a weak association with the sense of continuity in time (the whole sample, $r = .19$, $p = .037$). This effect remains significant among women in early adulthood ($r = .27$, $p = .018$, and $r = .18$, ns, for women in the early and later phases of adulthood, respectively). The relations of role overlap with the sense of identity are consistent with the predictions. Role overlap is positively associated with global sense of identity (the whole sample, $r = .21$, $p = .023$) and with three of its aspects – the senses of coherence (the whole sample, $r = .18$, $p = .044$), continuity in time (the whole sample $r = .28$, $p = .002$), and self-worth (the whole sample, $r = .26$, $p = .005$), and, at the trend level, also with the sense of having inner contents (the whole sample, $r = .17$, $p = .055$). The directions of these relations are consistent in both study groups, though they more often reach significance in women in early adulthood. In both groups, role overlap is the most strongly related to the sense of continuity in time ($r = .45$, $p < .001$, and $r = .25$, $p = .102$, for women in the early and later phases of adulthood, respectively).[3]

Table 2
Matrix of Correlations Between Measures of Self-Complexity and the Sense of Identity

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. NSA	–	.06	.04	.07	-0.07	.08	.19*	.15	.10
2. OL	.13 (-.14)	–	.17×	.10	-0.13	.18*	.28**	.26**	.21*
3. SIC	.06 (.18)	.35** (.15)	–	.15×	.33***	.76***	.60***	.56***	.83***
4. SU	.01 (.15)	.07 (.12)	.27* (-.01)	–	.18*	.20*	.16×	.49***	.51***
5. SOB	-0.13 (.05)	-0.06 (-.13)	.30** (.21)	.15 (.31*)	–	.36***	-.01	.24**	.51***
6. SC	.12 (.14)	.28* (.23)	.81*** (.61***)	.23* (.20)	.39*** (.18)	–	.58***	.60***	.84***
7. SCT	.27* (.18)	.45*** (.25×)	.58*** (.53***)	.19× (.17)	-.06 (-.09)	.60*** (.50***)	–	.47***	.67***
8. SSW	.11 (.22)	0.29* (.13)	.65*** (.62***)	.50*** (.45***)	.29** (.20)	.61*** (.71***)	.55*** (.47***)	–	.80***
9. GSI	.09 (.25×)	.32** (.18)	.86*** (.74***)	.56*** (.52***)	.49*** (.45***)	.85*** (.80***)	.66*** (.64***)	.84*** (.85***)	–

Note. NSA – number of self-aspects, OL – role overlap, SIC – sense of having inner contents, SU – sense of uniqueness, SOB – sense of one's own boundaries, SC – sense of coherence, SCT – sense of continuity in time, SSW – sense of self-worth, GSI – global sense of identity. The results above the diagonal describe the whole sample, and the results below the diagonal concern the two groups of women separately (the results for women in later phases of adulthood are given in parentheses); *** $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$; × $p \leq .10$

[3] Analysis using Fisher's z test for independent correlation coefficients showed that the relations of the components of self-complexity with global sense of identity and its aspects do not differ significantly between the two groups of women.

Relations between self-complexity and the sense of identity:
the moderating role of phase of life

With the above results as the point of departure, it was further examined if phase of life acts as a moderator in the relationships of the number of roles and their content overlap to the sense of identity. I used a hierarchical regression model, with the equation including phase of life, the number of self-aspects, and role overlap (Step 1) as well as their interactions (Step 2).[4]

As shown by data in Table 3, regression models reach significance in the case of the senses of having inner contents ($F(6, 114) = 5.74$, $p < .001$), coherence ($F(6, 114) = 3.23$, $p = .006$), continuity in time ($F(6, 114) = 6.23$, $p < .001$), and global sense of identity ($F(6, 114) = 3.54$, $p = .003$), and – at the trend level – also in the case of the sense of self-worth ($F(6, 111) = 1.81$, $p = .104$). The percentage of variance explained by the aggregate influence of the analyzed predictors ranges from 25% for the sense of continuity to 9% for the sense of self-worth. In none of the cases does the inclusion of interactive components lead to a significant increase in explained variance. This means the hypothesis about the moderating role of phase of life was not confirmed.

Table 3
Hierarchical Regression: Main and Interactive Effects

Predictor	SIC	SU	SOB	SC	SCT	SSW	GSI
PL β (*SE*)	.44***	-.03	.16ˣ	.34***	.38***	.03	.32***
	(.41)	(-.03)	(.15)	(.32)	(.35)	(.02)	(.30)
NSA β (*SE*)	.04	.07	-0.21	.08	.27*	.13	.08
	(.03)	(.04)	(-.14)	(.05)	(.17)	(.08)	(.05)
OL β (*SE*)	.36**	.18	-0.13	.24ˣ	.43***	.34*	.35**
	(.25)	(.12)	(-.09)	(.17)	(.30)	(.23)	(.24)
PL*NSA (*SE*)	.04	-0.06	.18	.05	-0.11	-0.02	.03
	(.02)	(-.03)	(.10)	(.03)	(-.06)	(-.01)	(.02)
PL*OL β (*SE*)	-0.11	-0.05	.02	.02	-0.05	-0.10	-0.08
	(-.08)	(-.04)	(.01)	(.01)	(-0.04)	(-.07)	(-.05)
OL*NSA β (*SE*)	-0.04	-0.18	.16	.05	-0.11	-0.08	-0.05
	(-.03)	(-.12)	(.11)	(.04)	(-.07)	(-0.05)	(-.03)
R^2	.23***	.03	.07	.15**	.25***	.09ˣ	.16**
ΔR^2	.01	.02	.02	.00	.01	.01	.01

Note. PL – phase of life, NSA – number of self-aspects, OL – role overlap, SIC – sense of having inner contents, SU – sense of uniqueness, SOB – sense of one's own boundaries, SC – sense of coherence, SCT – sense of continuity in time, SSW – sense of self-worth, GSI – global sense of identity; *** $p \leq .001$; ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$; ˣ $p \leq .10$; β – regression ocefficient, *SE* – standard error.

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[4] Quantitative predictors were centered around the mean.

The remaining results replicate those obtained in previous analyses. Phase of life and role overlap remain significant independent predictors of most aspects of the sense of identity. The exceptions in the case of phase of life are the senses of uniqueness ($\beta = -.03$, *ns*) and self-worth ($\beta = .03$, *ns*), and in the case of role overlap – the senses of uniqueness ($\beta = .18$, *ns*) and one's own boundaries ($\beta = -.13$, *ns*). The identity-related sense that phase of life predicts to the greatest degree, explaining 16% of its variance, is the sense of having inner contents ($\beta = .44$, $p < .001$), while role overlap is the strongest predictor of the sense of continuity in time ($\beta = .43$, $p < .001$) and explains 9% of its variance. The number of self-aspects is significantly associated with the sense of continuity ($\beta = .27$, $p = .040$), but explains only 3% of its variability.

DISCUSSION

The aim of the study was to test the relationship between self-complexity and the sense of identity in women in different phases of adulthood. Comparative analyses revealed significant differences between the study groups in the components of self-complexity as well as in the sense of identity. More precisely, the structure of the self-concept of women in early adulthood turned out to be marked by greater pluralism (the number of roles and the number of characteristics used in their descriptions[5]) and at the same time by a greater content inter-relatedness (overlap) of roles compared to women in later phases of adulthood. Moreover, women in the second half of life had higher scores both on the global dimension and on most of the specific identity-related senses, which suggests greater consolidation of the sense of identity. The exceptions were the senses of uniqueness and self-worth, with regard to which no significant differences were observed, though it is worth noting that older women's self-description was marked by a greater prevalence of positive characteristics (cf. similar result: Gove, Ortega, & Style, 1989; Mueller, Wonderlich, & Dugan, 1986).

The obtained results are consistent with theoretical and empirical reports about developmental changes in the self-system (Diehl & Hay, 2010, 2011; Luyckx, Schwartz, Goossens, & Pollock, 2008). They also support the theory of emerging adulthood as a phase of extended identity moratorium (Arnett, 2004). The considerable self-differentiation, characteristic of women in early adulthood, and the weaker subjective senses of having inner contents, one's own boundaries,

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[5] The number of characteristics in self-description corresponds to the idea of self-differentiation in Zajonc's (1960) classical taxonomy.

coherence, and continuity in time seem to reflect what is typical for this phase: the intensive process of identity formation and transformation as well as the exploration of a broad spectrum of alternatives as potential components of identity. In later adulthood, the number of significant roles is somewhat limited, and, at the same time, the images of oneself in these roles become more distinct in terms of content, which is accompanied by a more mature sense of identity. It is worth noting that the smaller overlap of the contents of self-aspects in older women may suggest that in later stages of life social expectations and role-related regulations are more clearly defined, or that role-specific versions of the self are clarified as a result of having coped with the identity crisis and role confusion at the threshold of adulthood (Erikson, 2004).

The results of correlational and regression analyses confirm the significance of the phase of life to the sense of identity, indicating its increasing strength in later phases of adulthood. Abandoning the controversial H statistic in favor of the measures of self-complexity components made it possible for the specific effects of the latter to manifest themselves. The self-complexity component that turned out to be a positive predictor of most identity-related senses and the global sense of identity is that which refers to the variability of the self in roles – namely, role overlap. The observed effects show that the greater is the content similarity between the contextual versions of the self, the stronger is the sense of identity. They therefore seem to be consistent with the notion of self-fragmentation, in which high variability of the self in roles is regarded as maladaptive and leading to identity diffusion (Block, 1961; Campbell et al., 2003; Donahue et al., 1993; Styła et al., 2010). However, when interpreting the above data, one should take into account the entanglement of role overlap with self-evaluation. Given that people more often use positive attributes than negative ones in self-description[6] – an effect that is present also in women in the study sample – it can be assumed that the role overlap index expresses primarily the degree of recurrence of positive self-descriptions. The sensitivity of self-structure measures to the level of self-esteem and, consequently, the trap of spurious correlations in analyses of the relations between structural characteristics of the self and identity have already been pointed out in previous reports (Pilarska & Suchańska, 2013, 2015; Suchańska & Worach, 2013).

The obtained results also point to the essential distinctiveness between the sense of identity and the component of self-complexity that reflects the number of significant self-aspects. This result suggests that what is of greater regulatory

[6] This effect is a manifestation of self-enhancement, one of the fundamental motives organizing the self-concept (Sedikides, 1993).

significance from the perspective of the sense of identity is not the number of roles performed by the person but their quality, defined here by the degree of overlap between the contents of the self in the changing roles. A similar conclusion is suggested by the results of studies in which – apart from the number of roles – also the experiences and satisfaction in particular roles were examined in terms of their significance to well-being (Reid & Hardy, 1999; Spreitzer, Snyder, & Larson, 1979; Stephens, Franks, & Towsend, 1994). The only effect of the number of roles turned out to be its association with the sense of continuity in time, with correlational analyses showing that this trend is more marked among women in early adulthood. This suggests that the multifaceted structure of the self may accompany the experience of the relationship between who one used to be and who one is at present as well as what one is heading for in the future, perhaps thanks to the consolidation of temporally defined self-images in various self-subconcepts.

It should be stressed that the positive main effects discussed above, describing the influence of role overlap on the sense of identity, compared with the characteristics of women in the second half of life – a relatively lower level of role overlap combined with higher sense of identity, suggest that the sense of identity is not a simple function of the structural parameter of the self that refers to the homogeneity in the contents of different self-images. Suchańska and Worach (2013) have already highlighted this, concluding that "a many-sided and differentiated self-concept may be integrated into such self-experience that ensures a sense of consistency, stability, separateness, and accessibility of identity content" (p. 229) and, further, that a self-concept with such a structure, "constituting a kind of cognitive challenge, . . . may stimulate constructive reflection on building one's own identity" (p. 229).

In the context of the above, it seems probable that, compared to women entering adulthood, those in later adulthood have greater cognitive and emotional abilities to develop an integrated sense of identity, which is conducive to the psychological independence of self-concept structure and the sense of identity. This intuition is supported by the relatively weaker correlations of role overlap with identity variables observed in this group of women, as well as by the results of research on age differences in dispositions such as autobiographical reasoning (McLean, 2008; Pasupathi & Mansou, 2006), narrative thinking (Bauer, McAdams, & Sakaeda, 2005), or dialectic thinking (Kramer & Woodruff, 1986). The analyses conducted as part of the present study revealed no effects of interactions between the components of self-complexity and the phase of life on the sense of identity. The above interpretation therefore requires further empirical verifica-

tion. The next step could be the replication of the study using the measures of processing information about oneself as potential moderators.

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