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The importance of personal proto-histories in constructing projects for future life

Znaczenie osobistych protohistorii w konstruowaniu projektów przyszłego życia

Abstract

Aim. This paper aims to capture the relevance of personal *proto-histories* to the design of future personal and working life.

Methods and materials. Methodologically, the study chiefly relies on a subject literature analysis and the examination of selected passages from the narratives of students who attended biographical workshops as part of coursework on narrative methods in career counselling.

Results. The study presents a selection of illustrative examples of personal *proto-histories* / *proto-stories* that emerged in biographical workshops held as part of coursework in two MA programmes: one in Career Counselling and Career Coaching and the other in Counselling and Psychoeducational Assistance. Students' narratives illuminate the relevance of personal and family narratives to their future life designs.

Conclusion. Designing one's future life is part of a larger process of individual identity formation. Identity results from mediations between individuals' past, present and anticipated future. Because human life is a story/narrative, it contains references to these three temporal perspectives. Notably, individual stories also have their *proto-stories* / *proto-histories* which are developed in parental visions and plans from before the children's birth

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and in the expectations that parents develop for and of their children. Such *proto-stories* contribute to the family narrative/story and may thus affect future designs.

Keywords: *proto-history*, life story and *proto-story*, family, narrative, Life Design, biographical counselling.

Abstrakt

Cel. Niniejszy artykuł ma celu ukazanie znaczenia osobistych *protohistorii* w konstruowaniu projektów przyszłego życia osobistego i zawodowego. *Protohistorie* obejmują czas, który nie jest udokumentowany w żadnych źródłach pisanych rodziny. Są one wypełnione niespełnionymi marzeniami i oczekiwaniami, zarówno wypowiedzianymi, jak i tymi niezwerbalizowanymi; obecnymi, choć nieuchwytnymi.

Metody i materiały. Główną metodą badawczą była analiza literatury przedmiotu, uzupełniona analizą fragmentów narracji studentek i studentów uczestniczących w warsztatach biograficznych w trakcie pracy dydaktycznej nad metodami narracyjnymi/biograficznymi w ramach przedmiotu Poradnictwo edukacyjno-zawodowe i doradztwo karier.

Wyniki. W opracowaniu zostały przedstawione wybrane ilustratywne przykłady osobistych *protohistorii*, jakie wyłoniły się w trakcie warsztatów biograficznych realizowanych na studiach magisterskich na specjalnościach Poradnictwo zawodowe i coaching kariery oraz Poradnictwo i pomoc psychopedagogiczna. Narracje studentów ujawniają znaczenie narracji osobistych i rodzinnych dla konstruowanych przez nich projektów przyszłego życia osobistego i zawodowego.

Wnioski. Konstruowanie projektu przyszłego życia jest elementem szerszego procesu budowania tożsamości jednostek. Tożsamość ta jest wynikiem jednostkowych mediacji pomiędzy przeszłością, teraźniejszością i antycypowaną przyszłością. Ponieważ ludzkie życie jest opowieścią/narracją, zawiera odniesienie do wszystkich tych trzech temporalnych perspektyw. Co więcej, jednostkowa historia ma również swoją *protohistorię*, zawartą w wyobrażeniach i planach rodziców sprzed narodzenia dzieci i w ich oczekiwaniami wobec nich, która także tworząc rodzinną narrację/opowieść, może wpływać na konstrukcje przyszłości.

Słowa kluczowe: *protohistoria*, historia i *protohistoria* życia, rodzina, narracja, *Life Design*, poradnictwo biograficzne.

The importance of the family, the family home and family histories in the formation of a person's identity is an issue often subject to scientific analysis from many different perspectives (Dubas, Wąsiński, Słowik, 2021; Ładyżyński, Piotrowska, Kasprzak, 2017). As Andrzej Ładyżyński emphasises, the family is the starting point for learning about reality and acquiring experiences, it is a map of the world, the first projection of social structures and interpersonal relations. The family influences the preferred and chosen types of activities, the successes of its members, and their career paths by encouraging the realisation of their individual potential, while at the same time enabling them to pursue their own pursuits (Ładyżyński, 2016, pp. 93, 97). Particular importance is often attributed to childhood experiences, describing this period as determining

an individual's entire future, as classical psychoanalysis, for example, does. These experiences create a sense of security, trust towards the world and others and confidence towards oneself (self-confidence). This influence is also recognised by Anthony Giddens, pointing to the crucial importance of "ontological security," based on the

[...] the confidence acquired in the child's early experiences that others can be relied upon. Basic trust – as Erik Erickson calls it after Donald W. Winnicott – forms the initial weave that gives rise to a complex affective-cognitive attitude towards other people, the world of things and one's own identity (Giddens, 2001, p. 54).

For Antoni Kepiński, the family home is a "paradise lost" to which one returns later in critical moments of life (Kepiński, 2014, pp. 219–221). However, when childhood is marked by difficulties and troubles and the family does not provide a sense of security, it is difficult to look to it for support and a place of return. According to Ewa Turska, the emotional climate in childhood determines "seeing the future in optimistic or pessimistic colours" (Turska, 2017, p. 22). She sees the family as a key point of reference for the construction of one's own identity and is of the opinion that "a child, coming into the world, has no past, no experience of his or her own person, no scale by which he or she could measure his or her own worth" (Turska, 2017, p. 21).

However, this last statement can be questioned. After all, it seems that personal stories begin even before the child is born. Of course, a person's story begins with the birth, but parents are expecting a child before that. In a literal sense, it is about the period of pregnancy, but one can go back even further and think about the plans that spouses/partners have for their family future. These plans often include having (or not having) offspring, and even more – they often include having offspring of a certain gender. All that hides in these family projects, expectations, fears and hopes, I call them personal *proto-histories*. When a child is born, he or she is obviously not aware of his or her protohistory, but over time discovers it to a greater or lesser extent.

Two sources of thinking about the importance of personal *proto-histories*

Biographies, personal and family histories, are the subject of much pedagogical, psychological, sociological and, of course, literary research. The educational contexts of biographical research are presented in the book series "Biografia i badanie biografii" ["Biography and Biography Research"] in which researchers share the results of their analyses of the phenomenon of biography (Dubas, Świtalski, 2011a, 2011b; Dubas, Stelmaszczyk, 2014, 2015; Dubas, Gutowska, 2017, 2019; Dubas, Slowik, 2020; Dubas, Wąsiński, Slowik, 2021). The authors of the texts included in this series emphasise the importance of (auto)biographical narrative, reflection and interpretation in the

construction of identity, and explore the process of biographical learning. However, I was inspired to address *proto-histories* as essential components of human life by two biographical books by extraordinary people. The first is *The Family Idiot*, written by Jean-Paul Sartre, and the second is the life story of professor Simona Kossak, written by (Kaminska, 2015). I will try to present these two key sources.

The Family Idiot is J. P. Sartre's monumental but unfinished biography of Gustave Flaubert (Sartre, 1988). It is in this book that the word *protohistory* appears. Protohistory, according to dictionary definitions, means the history of societies that did not produce writing, but about which information is preserved in other sources. It is a transitional period between prehistoric time (where there is no written data at all, hence all information comes from archaeological sources) and historical time (where written data is already available). In the protohistoric period there are cultures using writing and recording their history and sometimes the history of others who do not yet have writing (Kozłowski, 1998, pp. 9–10).

Much more common in dictionaries are terms such as *prehistory* and *prahistory*. According to the *Dictionary of the Polish Language*, the term *prehistory* is used to denote the period of human history from the appearance of man to the emergence of the first written sources or the science that deals with the study of this period (Szymczak, 1979, p. 918). According to the PWN Encyclopaedia, the terms *prahistoria*, *prehistoria*, *prehistory*, *palaeohistoria* and *protohistoria* are synonymous, so they can be used interchangeably and mean “the oldest human history from the appearance of man to the invention of writing” (Prahistoria [Prahistory], 12.11.2022). A similar explanation is given by the *Integrated Education Platform of the MEiN*, stating that the prefix *pre-* refers to the period before written accounts of human life. The prefix *pra-*, on the other hand, means “something primordial, ancient, very distant,” so *prahistory* means “prehistory, ancient history” and refers to people from ancient times, ancestors (Prehistoria [Prehistory], 12.11.2022). Researchers argue about which term is more legitimate, but I will skip this discussion as it would exceed the scope of this article¹. I will also not go into other terminological considerations. In my text, I will use the word *protohistory*, as J. P. Sartre does, although English translations of *The Family Idiot* more often present the terms *prehistory*.

For J. P. Sartre, *proto-history* encompasses a time that is not documented in any of the family's written sources; it is filled with unfulfilled dreams and expectations,

¹ Suffice it to say that the terms *prahistory* and *prehistory* are sometimes used interchangeably, at other times considered ambiguous. The prefix *pre-* means “antecedent,” while the prefix *pra-* indicates the continuity and inseparability of *prahistory* and *history*. The term *prahistory* is promoted by the Poznan scientific centre, which demonstrates its greater linguistic correctness. The term *prehistory*, on the other hand, is promoted mainly by Krakow scholars, who refer to the pre-war tradition.

both spoken and non-verbalised; present, though elusive. J. P. Sartre attempts to re-construct what shaped the identity of G. Flaubert as a writer. In the *Preface* to Volume I, he announces:

[...] we have to tread carefully when dealing with *proto-history*, because testimonies are rare and falsified. We will attempt, by means of description and then regressive analysis, to determine what is missing. And if we succeed in doing so, we will try, by means of a progressive synthesis, to find out why it is missing (Sartre, 1988, p. 18).

He therefore seeks explanations, both by researching the Flaubert family history and by subjecting the works of the writer himself to close scrutiny.

So, for me, personal *proto-history* is the term for what precedes the story of a child's appearance in the family and creates the climate of its environment once it is born. I am referring, therefore, to a time spanning the period before its birth. Not only the one in which the parents consciously expect the already conceived child, but also the one in which the spouses (and sometimes the fiancées) are only just revealing their expectations of each other and constructing a vision of their future together. It is also possible to include in the *proto-history* the time of early childhood, in which the child does not yet perceive itself as a separate entity (in particular from its mother) and a self-aware one. To put it yet another way – if one assumes that the word *history* also means some kind of story, narrative, then its combination with the prefix *proto-* would denote the earliest, initial, first, primary narrative/story about the family and the self².

The biography *The Family Idiot* reveals precisely how the unfulfilled expectations of the creator of *Madame Bovary*'s parents helped shape him as a writer. As J. P. Sartre writes in the *Preface* to Volume I: "Flaubert takes us back to his *proto-history*. What we must try to find out is the origin of this 'always hidden' wound, which in any case goes back to his earliest childhood" (Sartre, 1988, p. 8). In analysing Flaubert's life, he uses the method of existential psychoanalysis, looking in detail at his fundamental choices.

Gustave was born in the winter of 1821 in Rouen. His father Achille-Cleophas Flaubert was the head doctor of the city hospital. His mother, Anne-Justine-Caroline Fleuriot, lost her parents very quickly and therefore saw her childhood as frustrating. She was very keen to give birth to a daughter who would become an improved version of herself. The couple had six children, half of whom died before the age of three. However, as J. P. Sartre writes, Mrs Flaubert only welcomed her first son with

² In English, *proto-history* can be translated as both *proto-history* and *proto-story*. In either case it will refer to the earliest stories of the past / tales of the past.

joy; from her second pregnancy onwards, she waited for a daughter, but was met with four disappointments. This explains her coldness and indifference to the deaths of three of her subsequent children. Only the last of them, Caroline, became a source of happiness for her.

Between Achilles (b. 1813), who was considered a prodigy, and the long-awaited and desired Caroline (b. 1824), Gustav (b. 1821) was born. "Between these two miracles, Gustav looks poor" (Sartre, 1988, p. 13). He was not a child to be waited for, but rather an intruder or even an "alien beast" to his mother, who was only a mother out of duty and nurtured her other son with "a love without tenderness, marked by an absolute but cold devotion" (Ouellet, 1972, p. 520). Gustave was constantly compared to his elder brother and always fared unfavourably in this comparison. The distinguished and demanding father did not understand why his son could not read until the age of seven; in addition, his whole environment regarded him as a disabled child. Not being able to read at that age was seen as a disgrace and was undoubtedly a traumatic event for a young child. According to J. P. Sartre, little Gustave's lack of relationship with words constituted a primordial rupture in his identity and caused an inability to fit into the linguistic universe, which later ultimately affected his career (Sartre, 1988, p. 11). His parents, on the one hand, were frustrated with him; on the other hand, all these "imperfections of the future writer were more than compensated for by the excellence of the other two children" (Sartre, 1988, p. 11).

Jean-Paul Sartre is convinced that the key to understanding Gustave Flaubert's biography lies in two processes: the family planning of his parents, who, defining his *proto-history* through their expectations, constituted his passivity during his childhood, and the neurotic planning already undertaken by Gustave himself and expressed in his decisions. Under pressure from his father, he took up the study of law, but failed to find himself in it and discontinued it as soon as the first symptoms of epilepsy appeared. He kept this illness a secret for the rest of his life, although it was not the only one that plagued him. After five years, he finally left Paris and devoted himself solely to writing. This was possible because his father had left a substantial inheritance after his death. He was thus able not only to write, but also to travel in Europe and the Middle East. The rigour brought from his family home, the need to control his words, in J. P. Sartre's opinion, made him an outstanding writer. He treated his writing as a daily, ordinary job, requiring word discipline and precision. From a child who was passive and incapable of performing the act of affirming words, he became the creator of novels that were innovative for the times in which he lived.

The second book that inspired me to tackle the subject of personal *proto-histories* is *Simona. Opowieść o niezwykłym życiu Simony Kossak* [Simona: The story of the extraordinary life of Simona Kossak] (Kamińska, 2015). It is a biography of an extraordinary woman from a famous painters' family who, instead of following in the

footsteps of her father and grandfather, abandoned Krakow and settled in the middle of the Białowieża Forest. Her approach to life, like that of G. Flaubert, stemmed from *proto-history*; it was clearly linked to her upbringing and relationships within her family. Also, her childhood experiences were not among the best. As Paweł Filipiak writes: “being the daughter of Jerzy Kossak, a representative of the third generation of Polish painters, was associated with a number of unpleasant memories. In the Kossaks’ home, cold upbringing, perfect manners and beating children with a spitzer were the order of the day” (Filipiak, 2023). Analysing Simona Kossak’s life story, one can find other points of contact with Gustav Flaubert’s biography. Just as Gustav’s mother longed for a daughter, so did Jerzy Kossak wait for a son who could carry on the painting traditions of the Kossak family. According to the stories of her niece, Joanna Kossak, Simona’s unhappiness was due to the fact that “[...] she was not born a boy. When my mother Gloria was born earlier, it was still possible to hope that the next one would be a boy. Another girl was a failure and a disappointment” (Zuchora, 2020). Anna Kamińska describes this proto-history in a similar way:

This was to be Jerzy’s son, Wojciech’s grandson, Juliusz’s great-grandson, who was to inherit their talent, brushes and paint palette. This was to be the male descendant, the heir who was to take over the family studio at 4 Juliusz Kossak Square in Krakow, who was to carry the easel and the well-known name and extend the Kossak dynasty of horse and battle painters. This was to be the boy the whole family was waiting for (Kamińska, 2015, p. 9).

However, the child turned out to be another girl, who, in addition, was born with a cleft palate and rickets, so that she “did not meet the family’s expectations and was completely rejected. Left to herself, she spent most of her time with the animals, of which there were plenty in Kossakówka and the large garden around the house” (Zuchora, 2020).

The Kossak family was not in a good economic situation, due to the difficult conditions of the post-war reality. Wojciech Kossak, father of Jerzy and grandfather of Simona, lived at a time when painting was a source of good earnings. The situation after the Second World War was radically different. Jerzy Kossak refused a position at the Academy of Fine Arts, he did not want to portray the communists, and the needs arising from having to support a family and a massive house with thirteen rooms were immense. “After the war no one could afford to buy expensive canvases, so he created a factory. He hired workers to produce them wholesale” (Zuchora, 2020), but he himself only made minor changes to the paintings.

Simona’s life path was also influenced by her relationship with her older sister, which became her “unresolved trauma” (Zuchora, 2020). Gloria was beautiful, so

she became the favourite one. Simona had a speech defect, spoke unclearly and had crooked legs, but she excelled among her peers and was liked by them. The sisters hated each other, and in fact Gloria contributed to Simona's disinheritance. After graduating from high school, Simona did not manage to get into an acting school, so she started to study Polish philology, but dropped out after a year. She also unsuccessfully applied for art history. Working out of necessity at the Zoo-technics Institute in Balice, first as a telephonist and then as a senior technician, she began to think about studying biology. Her dream was to work surrounded by mountains, but while waiting for plans to create the Bieszczady National Park to be realised, she ended up in the Białowieża Forest. She moved into a house without electricity or water, called Dziedzinka, in the middle of the forest. Instead of waiting there for three years, she remained in the Białowieża National Park for 30 years, living together with the animals and being like a mother to them (Kamińska, 2015, p. 197).

Simona's relationship with her mother was not a successful one either, although Elżbieta Kossak at one time spent time "at Dziedzinka" from early spring to late autumn. She brought two carts to her daughter's house to have her own furniture and trinkets from her native Kraków with her. Unfortunately, a dispute later arose between them, as a result of which her mother disinherited Simona before her death. She, in turn, was too proud to contest the will and sent all the things her mother had brought back to Kraków.

Simona Kossak's life has steered her towards science – she is known as a biologist, professor of forest science and science populariser. Her scientific work involved behavioural ecology of mammals and she was active in preserving natural ecosystems. Perversely, one could say that in some sense she continued the family tradition. Anna Kamińska calls her a battler, describing the battle she fought in defence of animals (Kamińska, 2015, pp. 225–232). She is the author of the great documentary work *Saga Puszczy Białowieskiej* [The Saga of the Białowieża Forest] (Kossak, 2001). Her career has been a way of seeking confirmation of her worth.

From the defence of her master's degree onwards, each successive degree was hard proof to her that the family had been wrong to regard her as a genetic waste in the Kossak line. The title of full professor became her ultimate triumph giving her the right to bear the surname Kossak (Zuchora, 2020).

As she said in the interview, she did not look at her life through the lens of failure: "Failure doesn't play any part in my life because it's a journey. I am on the path, once I succeed, once I fail. The important thing is the way, moving forward" (*Kto jest kim na Podlasiu...* [Who is who in Podlasie...], 2004).

The two examples outlined above could themselves serve as material for in-depth analysis, but this was not my intention. I have only used them to show the sources of my exploration of the importance of *proto-history* in the process of identity construction and designing one's own life, which in other texts I have tried to relate to *Life Design* counselling and dialogical life architecture (Drabik-Podgórna, 2015, 2017).

Temporal perspectives on life design

Designing one's life is a long-term and complex process and, in the context of today's challenges, increasingly complicated due to the constant turbulence, chaos, volatility and unpredictability of the world. It is not limited to planning professional work or personal development paths, but is part of the process of identity formation, which in turn is the result of a mediation between past, present and anticipated future. These three temporal perspectives make it possible to present identity as a multidimensional structure formed by subjective forms of identity. They are understood as a totality of ways of being, of acting, of inter-personal relationships and dialogues carried out, of emotions and feelings in connection with a specific self-image in context (Guichard, 2018, p. 71). Jean Guichard, in order to illustrate this construction, presents the following diagram (Figure 1).

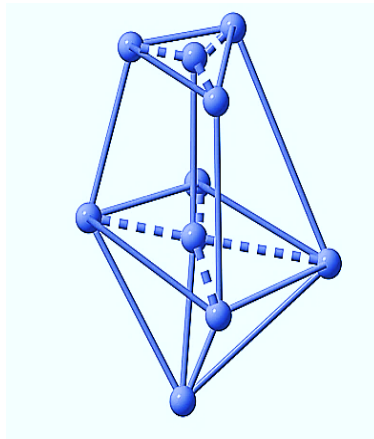


Figure 1: An example of a system of subjective forms of identity.
Source: (Guichard, 2018, p. 73).

The central axis of the diagram connects the past (bottom), the present (middle level) and the future (top). The bottom sphere refers to a childhood role. The four

spheres at the middle level correspond to current experiences, roles and values. The spheres at the very top illustrate possible selves in the future.

The possible selves represent individuals' ideas about who they can become, who they would like to become and who they fear becoming [...], they are the cognitive components of hopes, fears, goals and threats, and they give this dynamic form of specific self-development meaning, organisation and direction (Guichard, 2018, pp. 59–60).

In other words, these are the roles that the individual can and wants to perform or those that they will be forced to perform, the tasks that are to be performed, the relationships in which they will function.

The construction of the self is therefore rooted in the past, in family histories and thus also in personal *proto-histories*. This does not mean, however, that it is limited to them. History and identity can be said to share an inseparable bond. As A. Giddens notes:

[...] identity is a reflexive project [...]. We are not what we are, but what we make of ourselves. [...] The “self” creates a trajectory of development from the past to an anticipated future. The individual adapts its past by analysing it for the sake of what it expects from the (reflexively organised) future (Giddens, 2001, p. 105).

In other words, self-reflection in different temporal (and contextual) references, clearly taking place in internal narratives, is the basis for self-construction. Also, in the process of designing the future, the individual analyses and reworks his past, reinterprets it in the context of the present and transforms it into alternative scenarios for the future. By definition, biographies are not “smooth,” but marked by numerous cuts, turning events, turning points, normative or non-normative transitions, which make the individual work to rebalance his or her identity and challenge him or her to make decisions that are crucial for constructing and reconstructing life. The course of life is seen as a series of transitions (Giddens, 2001, pp. 110, 155), including those between *proto-history*, history and the expected future.

It is worth emphasising that *protohistories* do not have to be negative. Although the core of the biographies cited above was childhood trauma, the *proto-history* may reflect the joys and happiness experienced in the family, or it may be completely neutral. In such a view, it becomes simply an element of one's “cultural capital.” The latter term, introduced into scholarly reflection by Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron, encompasses both a specific type and level of cultural competence, know-

ledge, competences and professional qualifications, as well as cultural possessions (Bourdieu, Passeron, 2011). A strict definition of cultural capital is that it is a set of qualities and skills usually acquired during upbringing. These include attitudes to learning, ways of speaking and communicating, respect for others and their work. Cultural capital provides the “knowledge of how” to achieve success (Bańka, 2007). The natural way to acquire cultural capital is through upbringing in the family during childhood, and it is based on *habitus*, a specific way of structuring life experiences. This way of thinking forms the basis of contemporary biographical counselling based on dialogue and narrative, which enable bridges to be built between the found and the possible.

Personal *proto-histories* revealed in career and life design biographical workshops

Biographical workshops are an example of dialogical educational methods that are based on experiential learning and focused on (self-)reflective and interactive narratives that allow unspoken knowledge, originating in everyday actions, to surface (Pineau, 2021, p. 87). The author of one such methodological proposal is Ginette Francequin. Together with her colleagues, she encourages the extraction, analysis and externalisation of personal life stories, including *proto-histories* (Francequin, Descamp, Ferrand, Cuvillier, 2004).

For the last 10 years, I have been using selected exercises in workshops as part of my classes with students in the field of educational and vocational guidance and career counselling in the specialisations of Vocational Guidance and Career Coaching [Poradnictwo zawodowe i coaching kariery – PZiCK] and Counselling and Psychopedagogical Support [Poradnictwo i pomoc psychopedagogiczna – PiPP]. Usually about 20 students take part in the classes, and I encourage them to share their personal experiences and to use them in the process of constructing their future projects. On the one hand, these exercises are part of counselling competences training and an opportunity to learn about the counsellor’s work in practice. On the other hand, they give the students a chance to create their own projects for their future personal and professional life. Students alternate between the role of counsellor and client, using a list of questions which I prepare for them in advance. They learn to conduct a counselling dialogue while being personally and authentically immersed in it and focused on creating their own future life paths. These tasks require participants to open up and trust each other, as in real-life helping relationships. Sometimes the group performs this task spontaneously, at other times, after prior preparation and family discussions. The dialogues, carried out in pairs, are then analysed in the forum (of course, the participants only reveal as much information as they deem necessary), and sometimes they

are written down in the form of an essay. The material I have collected is in the form of recordings, class notes and written student work, and I have obtained permission from the participants to use it for research purposes.

Over the past years, I have had the opportunity to listen to many stories of joy and sadness; their deeper analysis, however, requires a separate paper. In this article, I just want to show some examples of narratives in which personal *proto-stories* and their meanings were able to surface, be verbalised and transformed into a reflective experience that builds the future.

One of the exercises that I consider crucial is the exploration of the history of the name. The questions sought to be answered are:

- What is your first name?
- Who chose it?
- Why this particular name?
- What does it mean?
- What is its significance to you (and what was it to your parents)?
- Do you like it?
- What does it make you think about?
- What associations does it evoke?

A person's first name describes them as part of their family history, referring to roots, family, religious or regional traditions (Francequin et al., 2004). Often students do not know either the meaning of their first name or the reasons why they bear it. Talking to them, however, can encourage dialogue within the family and discussing future plans with loved ones. Several narratives can illustrate the effects of this exercise:

My name is Agatha. I know it comes from the Greek word for "good." My parents simply wanted me to be good to everyone. Is that the case? I don't know... (Student, 1st year MA, PZiCK).

The name was chosen for me by my father. It was the name of his first love from his early youth. My mother nearly had a heart attack when he joyfully returned from the office carrying my birth certificate... (Student, 1st year MA, PZiCK).

I was born as twin. My parents planned to give us the names Adam and Eve. Unfortunately, my brother died shortly after birth. For my parents, I got to be daughter and son (Student, 2nd year MA, PiPP).

My father wanted to name me Żaklin, and my mother wanted to name me Hania. Neither of my parents gave up, but through compromise and international inspi-

ration I was given a name “in honour” of the then very popular model Claudia Schiffer. I do not like this name and the fact that I hear it from the mouths of the closest ones. This name and its history is closely linked to the country for which my father abandoned our family and with him, and therefore makes me think negatively of it (Student, 1st year MA PiPP).

My names are Łukasz and Kajetan. I deliberately write both names because they both define my person to some extent. Łukasz is the formal side of my personality. The man who, in a suit, leads a large conference for company bosses, makes a presentation of a new corporate product or conducts business negotiations. Kajetan is the man of legend, smiling contentedly with life, pursuing his passion and infecting others with optimism. Literally, both names originate from antiquity and mean a newcomer from Lucania or Cajetan. My name was chosen for me by my Mum. Under immense pressure from my grandfather, who did not agree with the original idea – Bożydar – Mum settled on Cajetan, as I was born on the only name day of the year for this saint. My grandfather’s influence was so great that Kajetan officially became my second name, and my mum’s third suggestion, Luke, came first. I am very fond of both of my names, as well as the history associated with them, although I use the second one on a daily basis and treat people who also use it towards me more confidentially. My name makes me think of happiness, realising my dreams, not giving up in difficulties, and following my path (Student, 2nd year MA, PiPP).

My name has two sources. The first was the figure of the saint who cleansed Christ’s face with a shawl, showing His True Face, so from the Latin – Vera Eicon. It was chosen by my mother, whom she impressed with her courage. The second meaning of the name comes from Greek or Byzantine – *phero* (to carry) and *nike* (victory). Another reason why my parents decided to name me Veronica was the 1991 film, *The Double Life of Veronica*, which made a very good impression on my mother. Above all, she was impressed by the main character, in whom she was captivated not only by her looks but also by her attitude and talents. I didn’t always like my name, but this has changed over time. Now it reminds me to always try to behave truthfully and not to be afraid to show real emotions and feelings (Student, 2nd year MA, PiPP).

As can be seen, the above narratives, which are both short statements and longer self-analyses, refer to *proto-histories*. They also reflect on their connection to the present and the future by pointing to qualities, talents, skills that can be used in the construction of the self-image.

The next exercise involves analysing a professional family tree. Participants in the class receive cards with a sketch of the tree, on which they construct a kind of genogram, a map of relationships and connections, describing the professional and private life activities of all known family members. The dialogue that follows aims to reflect on the following questions: Which occupations/occupational activities appear most frequently in the family? Which of these can be considered family traditions? What is the place of this activity in the organisation of the family space? What talents and interests are revealed in the context of the choices made by your family members? Such an analysis becomes a starting point for imagining yourself in the future and creating anticipations of potential selves, which can be constructed as a continuation of paths already blazed or, on the contrary, as an opposition to what has usually been realised in the family. Working with a map of occupations makes it possible to discover family resources, trends (but also breaks, changes and turns), relationships and patterns of activity passed on from generation to generation. The creation of the family tree is only a pretext for further in-depth dialogue. Examples of narratives emerging from this task are the following:

There are no recurring professions, but one thing is constant – everyone prefers to be self-employed. I can see that I am one who only wants to be full-time in a state-owned company (Student, 1st year MA, PZiCK).

I grew up in a family of doctors. Medicine is a family tradition. My grandparents were doctors, my parents are doctors, my brother is a dentist and I went into teaching. It was against their plans... I don't know if they will forgive me... Personally, I don't want to work as a doctor... It's not for me... (Student, 1st year MA, PZiCK).

What all professions have in common is working with animals. My grandparents are farmers, my dad is a veterinarian and I am in counselling for now, but I would like to go into dog therapy in the future (Student, 1st year MA, PZiCK).

Mining is the most common profession in my family and I think that by the region I live in, this profession can be considered a family tradition. I was never interested in working underground, but in order to continue my undergraduate studies I had to work as a lamplighter – maintenance worker in a copper mine, which was a great experience and adventure. The most common professions in my family are farmers, miners and entrepreneurs, which can be considered a total opposition to the profession I am currently pursuing (Student, 2nd year MA, PiPP).

Certainly surprising and distinctive in my family is my dad's profession. When he started his business in Poland in the 1980s and 1990s, everyone advised him against this direction of goldsmithing because the society of the time was not only financially but also mentally unprepared for this kind of product. He was seen by many as an eccentric, his parents themselves advised him against this profession due to fears of the business failing quickly. Despite this, he was not afraid to take bold steps, taking on new challenges throughout his life, trying to develop his aptitude. With his attitude, he reminds me that in life it is important to have courage, to believe in one's own abilities, to follow one's own convictions, often going against the tide (Student, 2nd year MA, PiPP).

However, my family discouraged me from studying pedagogy and the social sciences in general, at home they value a good education, but at the same time hard work; with us you have to be someone, earn money and at the same time, interestingly, work hard, because this is the only way to show that you are earning money "with your own efforts" (Student, 2nd year MA, PiPP).

The statements quoted above reveal a way of understanding careers and roles to play in the community. The next exercise, on family beliefs, explores these issues in even greater depth. The students' task is to complete sentences beginning with the words:

- There is a belief in my family that...;
- In my family, it is valued...

The analysis of the narratives emerging from this task uncovers attitudes towards work and responsibilities, beliefs about whom is worth to become in life, what is worth doing, how much to take and bear responsibility, what kind of work is valued and respected. In other words, the study of ingrained beliefs in the family provides an opportunity to explore family values, visions of life (optimistic/pessimistic), scripts for action (strategies taken in critical situations, coping with stress in the face of experienced failures and celebrating successes). Several sample narratives capture this dimension of the *proto-history*:

When I think about the texts I hear at home, it seems to me that my family values self-employment above all. I am thinking in the future about starting a kindergarten, but also something in terms of a private business (Student, 1st year MA, PZiCK).

My parents always tell me: no matter what you do, do it with passion (Student, first 1st year MA, PZiCK).

We have the principle that everyone decides for themselves. My mum tells me: it doesn't matter what path you take, do what makes you happy (Student, 1st year MA, PZiCK).

There is a belief in my family that it is worthwhile to be an educated and well-earning person. It's worth finding a job that gives you security and an income that allows you to live a worry-free life. I think, according to my relatives, it is not worth taking loans for 30 years (ha, ha). In my family, we rather pursue our career plans on our own or with a little help from our nearest and dearest (Student, 2nd year MA, PiPP).

For my relatives, honesty in one's actions counts above all. Learning, continuous development of one's own competences and high aspirations are of great importance. In the family on my dad's side, there is a belief that this can only be achieved through running one's own business. My mum's family has a completely different view of this, believing that such development is best carried out in a large company or corporation that not only provides secure and stable work, but also creates the right conditions for extending one's competences (Student, 2nd year MA, PiPP).

There is a belief in my family that it is important to be yourself in life. To not try to please others, but to focus on your own desires. To do what you love in life and take pleasure in it. However, when it comes to respected professions in my family, it's mainly the person who runs their own business. My whole family is very committed to everyone becoming an independent individual. I think that might be the result of that. I myself have been striving all my life to be an independent person. With the support of my family it is much easier. I remember when I first informed my grandmother about the studies I had chosen. When she heard that it was pedagogy, she immediately asked me if I wanted to work in a kindergarten or school. It was then that I realised how the concept of pedagogy was seen by older people and what limited thinking they had. When I told my grandmother about the possibilities of entering university, about the field of pedagogy, she was shocked. I am very happy that we can mutually learn something from each other. My grandmother often showed me how to knit or sew, because she has been doing it all her life professionally. Admittedly not a trade job, but the things sewn were for sale, so some connection to the main profession in my family is there after all. I am very happy that I had the opportunity to grow up in a tolerant family. Thanks to this, I can fulfil my dreams and solve all the difficulties I encounter together with them. I consider myself very fortunate to be able to

do what makes me happy, and my family is proud of me and supports me. I hope to be able to create a family like this in the future (Student, 2nd year MA, PiPP).

There is a belief in my family that it is important to be a good person and that family comes first. What we should do in our lives doesn't have a specific track. The important thing is to do something you enjoy, to do something in harmony with yourself. My dad is the "community" type. He likes to get involved in various local projects of a charitable nature and beyond, without expecting anything in return. In situations of self-doubt or lack of confidence, I used to hear from my mum: it's a shame to steal. Today, analysing these words, I see in them an implicit sense of family beliefs about simply being honest as a determinant in life's decisions and actions (Student, 2nd year MA, PiPP).

In my family, there was always a belief that no matter what you did, what you did professionally, the main thing was to be a decent human being. It was believed that you had to learn, that school provided opportunities and possibilities. At the same time, I never felt pressure from my parents or grandparents that "I should go in this direction and not another." It was necessary to study and fulfil my school duties, but what kind of school I wanted to choose, whether vocational, secondary or to go to university, was always a free, individual choice (Student, 2nd year MA, PiPP).

The most important thing is to do what you like, as long as what you like brings in a reasonably tangible return; if it doesn't, why not start doing something else? Of course, it's not worth resting and being lazy, as this will do no good and only harm. My family instils in its members the cult of work and constant action (Student, 2nd year MA, PiPP).

In my family, the most important motto that is always repeated is that it is good to be an independent and self-reliant person. I think this is because in order not to be dependent on anyone; a large part of my family opened their own businesses. My family reiterates that it's worth having a goal and working towards it. It's also important to educate yourself so that you have the knowledge and skills for new opportunities in the future, so you can't waste time, you have to develop yourself all the time (Student, 2nd year MA, PiPP).

The biographical work analysing the past is, of course, only a starting point. A complement to the biographical workshop is the coaching of the *Life Design Dialogues for Self's Construction* [Dialogi konstruowania życia] model by J. Guichard (Guichard, 2018, pp. 84–91). The method developed by him is an extended analysis

of subjective forms of identity. The diagram below summarises the most important phases of dialogue work (Table 1).

Table 1

Four phases of model dialogue in life construction counselling

Phase 1	Relationship building (Contract conclusion) Question 1: Which questions do you want answers to? For which problems do you want to find solutions? How will we proceed to find the answers?
Phase 2	Compilation by the counselee of a list of areas of activity, experiences, roles, spheres of life (past, present or expected future), events that he/she considers important in life, etc. Question 2: What areas of life and experiences (present, past, expected or anticipated in the future) occupy (have occupied or may occupy) an important place in your life?
Phase 3	The counselee's narratives relating to her/himself during each of her/his various main experiences, enabling her/him to identify in her/his formulations (stories), recurring elements and relationships between meaningful elements that produce certain effects: the repetitions and relationships create a direction outlining future perspectives, giving meaning to her/his existence. Question 3: Choose one area that is particularly important to you. Talk about what you think is important to talk about... Secondly... Thirdly... Which themes are related to some of the expectations of your future – note the recurring words, phrases etc. you use, and describe the emotions and feelings you experienced during these narratives?
Phase 4	Identify actions to be taken; proceedings to be implemented and end the dialogue. Question 4: What are you going to do now to engage with these expectations?

Source: Own compilation based on: (Guichard, 2018, pp. 84–91).

The aim of the first phase is to build rapport by introducing the working method itself and encouraging reflection on one's situation in different aspects, on past experiences (including *proto-histories*) and expectations for the future. In the second phase, the sketching of a map of different activities, roles, spheres of life, key events that are important, valuable and significant or could become so in the future. Then, in the third phase, on the basis of the narrative of the self, recurring elements and the relationships between them are searched for, in order to outline perspectives for the

future and to enable life to be discovered and/or made meaningful at the same time. The dialogues of life construction, by tying together the different themes of life, lead to the identification of the main expectations, aspirations and anticipations and reveal the fundamental expectations of self-realisation. Ultimately, the outcome of the dialogues is to take stock of future perspectives, which in the final phase are reformulated into concrete action plans and strategies to put them into practice (Guichard, Bangali, Cohen-Scali, Pouyaud, Robinet, 2017).

Such holistic work allows us to combine temporal perspectives and design the future. Life plans, as A. Giddens, are

[...] the content of a reflexively organised trajectory of identity. Life planning is the way in which the individual makes, in terms of the continuity of his biography, the course of future actions. It [...] presupposes a specific way of organising time, since the reflexive construction of one's identity requires as much preparation for the future as interpretation of the past, although certainly the "reworking" of past events always plays an important role in this process (Giddens, 2001, pp. 118–119).

Conclusion

To summarise the above, reconstructing personal *proto-histories* is not only the discovery and ordering of what took place in the past, but also a source for the creation of possible selves in the future. Reflecting on past and present events, storytelling is also a creative process. Narration and storytelling allow the processing and even modification of information, and thus the transcending of the self and the construction of the self-*anew*. Interpreting and understanding the past thus leads to self-creation (Lasońska, 2014, p. 39). An individual's identity and life projects are thus the result of a mediation between past, present and anticipated future. Self-talk fosters the verbalisation of one's expectations, values, goals and confronting them with the expectations, values and goals of others and, finally, enables one to give meanings to biographical events and to search for developmental paths through which it will be possible to make sense of one's own life.

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