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To cite this article: Małgorzata Łysiak & Małgorzata Puchalska-Wasył (2019) Functions of internal temporal dialogues, *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling*, 47:2, 210-222, DOI: 10.1080/03069885.2018.1540141

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/03069885.2018.1540141>



Published online: 26 Oct 2018.



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Functions of internal temporal dialogues

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ABSTRACT

Psychological literature in the field of internal dialogical activity assumes that internal temporal dialogues perform several important functions, namely: support, redefining the past, balancing, distancing, advising, making decisions, acquiring wisdom and managing the future. The article is an attempt to verify this proposal through qualitative analyses of temporal dialogues conducted by three persons, who participate in the wider research project on functions of internal temporal dialogues ($N=200$). Dialogical Temporal Chair Technique was used. Presented qualitative analyses of internal temporal dialogues seem to confirm most of the functions listed in the theoretical proposition. The results are also discussed with reference to well-being and happiness as well as the theory of the dialogical self (the role of metaposition) and time perspective.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 6 March 2018
Revised 12 October 2018
Accepted 22 October 2018

KEYWORDS

Internal dialogue; temporal dialogue; functions of dialogue; dialogical self theory; metaposition

Travelling in time – the eternal human desire. Easy time travel seems like a tempting prospect that could bring a lot of profits. Charles Dickens in his “A Christmas Carol” has shown a profound transformation of Ebenezer Scrooge – a man who on Christmas Eve could return to his past thanks to ghosts, and then see his future and in effect make a thorough reflection on his life. It is just fiction. But are the positive effects of travelling in time indicated by Dickens – distancing oneself from the current situation by looking at it from a past or future perspective, or acquiring wisdom expressed in the discovery of some truth about life, the importance of interpersonal relations or values – actually the effects unattainable for a human who has not invented the time machine yet?

The French phenomenalist Maurice Merleau-Ponty, referring to the concept of an intentional arc, decades ago wrote about an extraordinary quality of the human mind that allows a person to travel in time and refer to themselves from the perspective of a specific point in the future or the past (cf. Hermans & Kempen, 1993). Referring to this ability, Hermans (1996, p. 33) states:

I can imaginatively move to a future point in time and then speak to myself about the sense of what I am doing now in my present situation. This position, at some point in the future, may be very helpful to evaluate my present activities from a long-term perspective. The result may be that I disagree with my present self as blinding itself from more essential things.

Such an assessment of the current activity may be a consequence of a change of perspective and a simple comparison of the results of the adoption of two different evaluation perspectives. Sometimes, however, such a comparison takes the form of an internal dialogue, that is, a person alternates (at least) two points of view and the statements formulated from these perspectives respond to one another (Puchalska-Wasył, 2015; cf. Hermans, 2003; Hermans & Hermans-Jansen, 1995).

The concept of internal dialogue fits into a wider theoretical context defined by such concepts as: self-talk, private speech, inner speech, egocentric speech or internal monologue (cf. Depape,

Hakim-Larson, Voelker, Page, & Jackson, 2006). However, if other terms suggest that the speaker and the receiver of the statements are the same, then the “internal dialogue” assumes that there are at least two communicating parties within one person. Thus, there is the idea reflected here of a non-monolithic self, widely accepted in psychology – in polipsychism (Assagioli, 2000) and in the cognitive psychology of the self (Higgins, 1987; Markus & Nurius, 1986), but above all in the dialogical approach (Hermans, 2003; Hermans & Hermans-Jansen, 1995).

The dialogical approach (Hermans & Gieser, 2012), on the basis of which the notion of internal dialogue emerged, assumes that a person can take many different viewpoints (perspectives), here referred to as I-positions. Dialogical self in the light of the Hubert Hermans’s idea is a dynamic multiplicity of such relatively autonomous I-positions, each of which is endowed with its own voice. This means that each of them is able to give expression to specific beliefs, feelings and motivations significant for a given point of view, create a narrative around it as well as enter into a dialogue with another I-position. I-positions are shaped in different social contexts and may represent, for example, culture, community or a significant person. Therefore, a person can consider a problem from the point of view of the group to which they belong, but also from a personal perspective. I-positions may also express some aspect of themselves, felt as important and separate in relation to other aspects of themselves or they may represent a given person at different moments of their life. As a result, it happens that our “good self” argues with the “bad self” on the moral issue, or the “enthusiastic self” tries to encourage the “passive self” to act. It also happens sometimes that I in the future encourages I in the present or I in the present accuses of neglecting I in the past.

In a situation where the internal dialogue concerns the exchange of views between the voices representing two different and distant in time points of view, we are talking about temporal dialogues. Temporal dialogues usually occur between I in the past and I in the present or between I in the future and I in the present, much less often between I in the future and I in the past. It turns out that such a dialogical exchange of “voices” from the past or the future can have a particular impact. The research presented here focuses on such temporal dialogues.

Sobol-Kwapińska and Oleś (2010) talk about some basic functions of temporal dialogues, which are as follows: support, redefining the past, balancing, distancing, advising, making decisions, acquiring wisdom and managing the future.

Support results from the fact that both I in the future and I in the past may act as a comforter in difficult moments and send various types of supporting messages, for example, “You can do it, you’ll see. You’ve done it many times before, so now it will work, too!”. Redefining the past is associated with an attempt to look at past events in a new way and negotiate a new meaning for them. The result may be, for example, working through a negative experience and freeing oneself from ruminations. Balancing involves assessing the value of actions taken in the past, as well as evaluating profits and losses from a perspective in which their effects are already known. Balancing is also trying to determine what could be done differently and what not. As the authors emphasise, the balance made in a dialogue form protects against a unilateral and thus skewed assessment. Distancing is a detachment from a person’s current experience and an attempt to look at it from the perspective of the past or the future, allowing them to evaluate it in a new way. As a result, a person realises that hard times (just like significant successes) will end sometime. Advising consists in formulating advice and guidance from the perspective of past experiences or anticipated future states. I in the future, as well as I in the past, may be treated by a person as their life advisor. Especially contact with the latter aspect of the self – I in the past – seems to facilitate the use of coping resources that once proved to be effective. Help in making decisions results from confronting the reasons coming from different temporal perspectives, which is particularly useful when making critical life decisions or choosing life goals. A person in such a dialogue can put themselves in a situation of two alternative possibilities or take the perspective of the ultimate balance of life. Acquiring wisdom is a consequence of using the position of I in the future and/or the I in the past to capture a wisdom perspective, formulate some truth about life, a maxim about its meaning, the importance of interpersonal relations or values. Finally, managing the future is a function of planning

changes and preparing for future challenges by creating a possible self from the imagined future (Markus & Nurius, 1986). Creating a specific possible self, especially when having a conversational contact with it, on the one hand, prevents the temptation of dreaming unreal dreams, and on the other hand, allows to embrace the future and make it more specific by formulating goals and plans, as well as evaluate the purpose of these goals, which strengthens or weakens the motivation to achieve them.

In the outlined context, internal temporal dialogues seem to fulfill very important functions in the process of learning and conscious shaping of a person and their future, which can be crucial for people standing at the threshold of adulthood – adolescents and young adults. However, Sobol-Kwapińska and Oleś (2010) when discussing the above functions, stress that this is only a theoretical proposal, requiring empirical confirmation. The research presented below meets the need signalled by these authors. The purpose of the qualitative analyses is to seek answers to the following questions:

- (1) What are the main topics of internal temporal dialogues in adolescents and people in early adulthood?
- (2) What functions can internal temporal dialogues perform in these age groups?

Method

Participants

Participants of the study were people at two different development stages: 100 people during adolescence, including 56 women ($M_{age} = 17.92$; $SD = 1.01$) and 100 people during early adulthood, including 60 women ($M_{age} = 22.96$; $SD = 2.38$). The adolescence is a time of change and the first life balance when the development of identity is the main task. It is a time when new I positions emerge because the individual often tries to answer many difficult questions while looking for their identity. Young adulthood is a moment for searching goals, new tasks and making the sense of life, but nowadays it seems that also is a moment where the identity issues are still actual. The young adults seem to ask themselves the same questions as teenagers and they are more prone to stay in their role of teenager (e.g. staying with parents, lengthen their studying). Because the process of conscious shaping of identity and personal future appears to be especially connected with internal temporal dialogues, both these groups were analysed in our study.

The selection of the research group was not random. In the group of adolescents, there was a representation of secondary school students (51 people) and vocational school students (49 people), who were invited to the study by ads posted in their schools, during lectures, from periods and through cooperation with school educators. The young adults were people studying humanities (38 people), technical subjects (34 people), as well as legal and economic subjects (28 people). The respondents joined the research via advertisements that had been distributed at universities, dormitories or student meeting places. All the respondents participated in a wider research project on changing the meaning of life under the influence of temporal dialogues.

Procedure

The study lasted about 60 minutes. The dialogue was triggered by the Dialogical Temporal Chair Technique (DTCT) constructed by Łysiak (2017; Łysiak & Oleś, 2017). The instruction was inspired by the techniques used in therapeutic Gestalt and cognitive-behavioural approaches. There were three chairs in front of the subjects, each of them symbolising a self in a given time: in the middle – I in the present, on the left – I in the past, on the right – I in the future. A person who was describing an important moment from their past sat on a chair symbolising the past. They recalled past events and situations with all details possible, such as emotional climate or psychosocial

context. Then they directed a message to their I in the present, which responded back so that the exchange could take place. At the end of the dialogue procedure, a question was asked: What was the result of juxtaposing these two voices, can they be combined into a common message? In this way, it was checked whether there is a reflection coming from a given dialogue, a bridge by which a person is able to connect two temporal dimensions with each other. In a similar way a dialogue between I in the future and I in the present was activated. A participant was asked to imagine what their life would look like in 10 years' time and describe how they see themselves, what they are, what they do, in short, they were asked to try to empathise with themselves in the future. Then they addressed a message to their I in the present, which responded back. The dialogue was followed by a reflection linking standpoints of both temporal positions. The subjects were completely free to choose "selves" from the past and to imagine "selves" in the future. In principle, the method did not impose the topics of the dialogues. At the end of the whole procedure of activating the voices, the respondents were asked for a metareflection, that is a look at their two dialogues with a metaperspective that is characteristic of the so-called metaposition (Hermans, 1996). Metareflection was aimed at compiling, combining and interpreting the voices flowing from the temporal I-positions, taking into account the time of events and the intertwined threads (Hermans, 2001, 2003). This metareflection, a new quality, was expressed by the participants in a summary sentence, a metaphor or a message. The whole procedure including two dialogical exchanges (I in the past vs I in the present; and I in the future vs I in the present) as well as metareflection, was schematically illustrated in Figure 1. The course of the dialogues was recorded on an ongoing basis (with the consent of the respondents) and documented in writing by the researcher.

Results

The content analysis of all the collected dialogues was carried out ($N=200$) in the search for the answer to question 1. The written dialogues in random order were shown to the four competent judges. In the first stage, each judge taking into account the content of the internal temporal dialogues, distinguished several main topics. In the second stage, the judges jointly compared the categories and discussed the discrepancies in order to eliminate them. The effect of their work is presented in Table 1.

One of the most common topics of the dialogues were achievements in the area of the education and school career. In this respect, references have been made to both successes and failures. In these types of dialogues, young people often analysed their life choices in terms of success, so as to confirm their decisions. I in the future became the desirable possible self (Markus & Nurius, 1986), which served to build motivation so that a person could realise their goal in the future. The participants confronting temporal I-positions also did not avoid topics related to failure, which was accompanied by a rather negative affective climate.

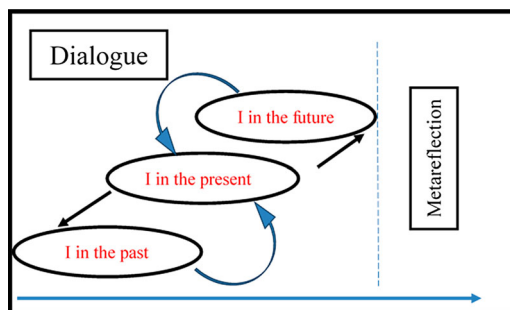


Figure 1. "Dialogical Temporal Chair Technique" – a schematic diagram of a dialogue procedure for the activation of the voices (own elaboration, source: British Journal of Guidance and Counselling, 2017).

Table 1. Topics of internal temporal dialogues.

Topics of dialogues	Participants		
	Total (N = 200)	Students (N = 100)	Teenagers (N = 100)
Career, education (studies, work, school)	34%	31%	37%
Family	27.5%	27%	28%
Love, feelings	21%	27%	15%
Sense of life	11%	8%	14%
Time	5.5%	7%	4%
Trauma (death of relatives, violence)	1%	–	2%

Another topic discussed in the dialogues was the family. In the position of I in the past, the participants returned to their experiences with their parents, and when talking about the future, they saw visions of their own families, often different from the one from the past. Emotivity varied depending on the adopted temporal perspective. I in the future seldom projected visions of an unhappy family, a wrong choice of a partner or a failed relationship. However, there were references to unpleasant experiences with both parents and siblings in the descriptions of I in the past.

Another topic that appeared in the dialogues was the subject of feelings, especially love. It evoked specific life events and emotions associated with them. The affective effect of some dialogues was rather negative than positive. The subject of love was expressed not only in the form of memories or imaginations about happiness, joy and motivation to live, but also implied suffering and referred to the existential dilemmas of a person, such as love and loneliness. For example: Can I change for love? Can I love since I am what I am? Jacobsen (2007), writing about existential dilemmas, understands them as situations in which a person finds themselves between two polarised poles and has to make a choice, but no option is optimal. Dilemmas, which are mentioned by the author, include happiness-suffering, love-loneliness, and sense-senselessness of life. According to Jacobsen, these dilemmas are interconnected, so if a person suddenly experiences a death of a loved one, a deep suffering, they simultaneously experience loneliness and the meaninglessness of life. It seems that in temporal dialogues there are contradictions similar to existential dilemmas. Confronting the experience of I in the past, focused on unpleasant situations and negative emotions with supporting I in the present, a person can simultaneously experience suffering and satisfaction, sadness and happiness. The paradox lies in the fact that satisfaction of I in the present is often a result of what a person has learned from a difficult past experience.

Several dialogues referred directly to the meaning of life, existence and its purpose, and time frames. Confronting who I am and who I will be among the youth, as well as the balance of the past achievements in early adulthood are the threads that in themselves reflect the value and sense of life.

One of the teenagers recalled an extremely painful situation in her dialogue, namely her father's death. Despite the fact that this dialogue was about family, due to its affective climate and its special expression in the context of other dialogues, judges classified it into a separate thematic category including traumatic events.

Below, in the search for the answers to question 2, a qualitative content analysis of three dialogues was carried out. The first of these will be the aforementioned dialogue on father's death by 19-year-old Katarzyna.

1. DESCRIPTION OF I IN THE PAST: *One of the key events that changed my whole life, perception of the world, values was my dad's death. I'm 13 years old. I'm finishing primary school, I have friends, everything is going well and I'm doing fine. And he suddenly does not return home from work. Initially, we think with my mom that he has overtime, so that's ok. After a few hours, a phone call, this terrible phone call. Dad had a heart attack. The first and the last. We're going to the hospital. Nothing is the same after that.*

I IN THE PRESENT: *I still can't deal with it. It's been so many years. Death changed everything.*

I IN THE PAST: *The worst thing in all of this was returning to reality, ordinary activities, breakfasts, dinners. Just the two of us. And that damned sadness.*

I IN THE PRESENT: *Paradoxically, it strengthened you. Would you change something then? Would you do something differently?*

I IN THE PAST: *Probably not. I won't turn back time, and the worst thing is that I can't find the answer: why?*

I IN THE PRESENT: *Sometimes it's better not to know the answer. I still don't know why it happened, but I do know that you did well then. You were a huge support for your mom.*

I IN THE PAST: *Yes. I know. Sometimes I dream about seeing him, make him smile again, or even shout at me. Just being present.*

REFLECTION: *Time can be terribly fickle. Sometimes it heals, sometimes it reopens old wounds.*

2. DESCRIPTION OF I IN THE FUTURE: *I am a young teacher. I feel professionally fulfilled. I have my own flat, a loving husband and a child. I try to really take care of myself and my family, especially in the context of health. Sometimes I return to the past and regret that my dad can't see my happiness.*

I IN THE PRESENT: *Looking at your past life, I'm glad that you succeeded. That I think you are happy after all.*

I IN THE FUTURE: *I am and I know that you will do everything to make me happy. I think it's my-your misfortune that has strengthened us.*

I IN THE PRESENT: *I know, although sometimes it's still not easy for me, but from what you're saying it will heal somehow and although memory does not go away, life can be beautiful.*

I IN THE FUTURE: *It can be, and will be. And if you're doing well, it would make our dad proud. He's somewhere and watches over us, I know it.*

REFLECTION: *Thanks to what I see in the future, I can better fulfil myself.*

METAREFLECTION: *Time is a connector. Time allows me to remember and at the same time plan a beautiful life.*

As part of a narrative approach in psychology, there are types of analysis of life stories of people who have experienced painful situations in their lives, such as the loss of a loved one. Such events, especially unexpected ones, are difficult to assimilate with past experiences as well as expectations regarding the future (Neimeyer, 2006). The discussed dialogue made it possible to **redefine past experience**. Sadness, despair and hopelessness typical for I in the past (*I won't turn back time, and the worst thing is that I can't find the answer: why?*) are replaced by more positive states. Despite the experience of loss there is a shadow of hope, understanding and looking into the future in the dialogue between I in the present (*(...)from what you're saying it will heal somehow and although memory does not go away, life can be beautiful*) and I in the future (*It can be, and will be*). One can get an impression that sharing this difficult experience with themselves has a function of **balancing**, because the cognitive reworking of a dramatic event makes the person sure that it was impossible to do anything more (I in the present: *Would you change something then? Would you do something differently?*; I in the past: *Probably not*). In addition, the support given to a particular I-position restores the person's sense of control and probably leads to a rise in well-being (Reflection: *Thanks to what I see in the future, I can better fulfil myself*). Consequently, it may have a positive connection to the elements of posttraumatic growth seen in the dialogue. Ultimately, the girl expresses the hope that she will be happy and tries to plan a beautiful life (Metareflection: *Time allows me to remember and at the same time plan a beautiful life*).

Internal dialogues help to organise incomprehensible, difficult, sometimes chaotic experiences. Looking at the temporal part of the self from a metalevel allows a person to distance themselves from their experiences, thanks to which the person has a chance to get to know and understand themselves better. An example of this is a dialogue by Filip, a 24-year-old student of philosophy.

1. DESCRIPTION OF I IN THE PAST: *The moment I often recall is a time in secondary school, I'm about 17 years old and I enjoy reading Nietzsche. I'm fascinated by his philosophy and his life. I am looking for his biography, I spend time in libraries reading his books. Generally, I don't notice that I am beginning to take over his views, I move away from people, I start to live as if there is nothing afterwards. This decadence of mine means for me being someone, someone beyond what is happening around me. No, I'm not going into fascism, I rather come to the conclusion that life does not make much sense.*

I IN THE PRESENT: *You are a young boy, how can you say that life does not make sense? You have your life ahead of you.*

I IN THE PAST: *I do not know that now. For me, life's about a book and being a loner. I see no point in parties, girls, arguing with teachers, as my peers do. On the one hand, I'm above it, on the other, I feel like I'm a freak.*

I IN THE PRESENT: *Because you are a freak. You shut yourself off, you don't talk to anyone, you look like a freak. Only, where is so much pessimism in you coming from?*

I IN THE PAST: *Because I don't see too much point, I prefer to surround myself with the culture of meaninglessness, worthlessness, reflection without reflection in a sense. I do not know what will happen to me in a few years, and that's how I feel at the moment.*

REFLECTION: *Finding the meaning in life requires effort, it is probably worth striving for it.*

2. DESCRIPTION OF I IN THE FUTURE: *It's going to be difficult to describe. I don't know who I'm going to be in 10 years' time. I'd really like, and I'm going this path to be someone known and valued, mainly in the world of science. Why? Because then I have the chance to leave some legacy, find a deep sense of my actions. I think that life is going to get more exciting and I'll be much more motivated in 10 years' time. I want to do things.*

I IN THE PRESENT: *I think that your philosophy of life is changing. You already perceive the sense of your actions and do everything to devote yourself to the scientific career.*

I IN THE FUTURE: *Yes, but your motivation is unstable. Sometimes you go forward, you are even successful, but one failure and you say that life doesn't make sense. Maybe it is worth going a little bit towards real expectations, not only imagined ones and give vent to what is important for you? Life is beautiful, as Benigni said.*

I IN THE PRESENT: *Maybe it is beautiful, but if you can't see this beauty for many years, then it's not so simple to do it. Sometimes it seems to me like, generally, the meaning is impossible to find.*

I IN THE FUTURE: *And I think that it's possible and that you will find it, too, despite the elusiveness of life, despite the delicacy and fragility and often senseless events that affect you. It's important to notice what you sometimes deliberately avoid and it's easier for you to say that everything is meaningless.*

REFLECTION: *I want to find the meaning, although I have doubts whether I can do it.*

METAREFLECTION: *It is worth looking for the meaning of life, even if sometimes I have to undermine many of my decisions.*

This is an example of a dialogue in which a speaker is negotiating with himself the value of his life and the meaning of his actions. It is typical that temporal positions sometimes speak using different voices, seemingly contradictory. For example, on the one hand, they support what the speaker is saying (I in the present to I in the future: *Sometimes it seems to me like, generally, the meaning is impossible to find*), and on the other hand, they are as if outraged by the speaker's attitude (I in the present to I in the past: (...) *how can you say that life does not make sense?* (...) *Because you are a freak*). It is worth noting that the author of this dialogue, describing his I in the future, also seems to be conducting a dialogue within this position (*I'd really like, and I'm going this path to be someone known and valued, mainly in the world of science. Why? Because then (...)*). This dialogue illustrates what Hermans (1996) calls the multiplicity of voices – it is important which of them comes to the foreground and what consequences it will bring. The positions of I in the past, I in the present and I in the future are saturated with a specific affective climate. I in the past has negative experiences that Filip would like to change (*For me, life's about a book and being a loner. I see no point (...)*). I

feel like I'm a freak), I in the future expresses hopes and plans, goals that the young man wants to achieve (*I'd really like, and I'm going this path to be someone known and valued, mainly in the world of science. (...) I want to do things*). **The position of I in the present** seems to be **mobile and multi-functional** depending on with which temporal position the dialogue is being led. In the conversation with I in the past, I in the present becomes an understanding friend and mentor, providing emotional support (*You have your life ahead of you*), encouraging and helping I in the past to find a distance from past events, which is expressed in the Filip's reflection: *Finding the meaning in life requires effort, it is probably worth striving for it*. However, in the confrontation with I in the future, I in the present becomes the one who needs advice, support and sometimes consolation (*Sometimes it seems to me like, generally, the meaning is impossible to find*). In this case, I in the future seems to take over functions that I in the present has just had, becoming a mentor and an understanding friend (*And I think that it's possible and that you will find it, too, despite the elusiveness of life (...). It's important to notice what you sometimes deliberately avoid and it's easier for you to say that everything is meaningless*). On the basis of Hermans' theory, the I-positions and its functions change in space and time taking on a different voice, and roles in conversations between one another.

The referenced dialogue illustrates existential dilemmas (Jacobsen, 2007). This young boy is wondering about the meaning of life and its meaninglessness, at the same time the topic of the basic dilemma appears, whether to be himself and with himself or with other people. During the dialogue, there is no direct solution, however, there is the impression that I in the future is trying to give directions to resolve the internal dispute. Confronting voices from distant temporal positions and identifying with them allows a person to evaluate current events using a different perspective. Allowing various contents of the voices to be adopted gives meaning to the present dilemmas experienced here and now. The exploration of the voices confirms the existing beliefs, however, it also hints their change. The young man has a chance to better understand who he was, who he is, and who he would like to be and if and how it is possible. In addition to the feeling of a meaningless life that is rooted in his past history, he finds a strong desire to leave his mark in the field of science sometime in the future. He confronts the future vision with the current state to determine to what extent it is possible to achieve. As I in the present he notices: *You already perceive the sense of your actions and do everything to devote yourself to the scientific career*, but in one moment from another temporal position, as I in the future, he adds that he is indecisive and that his expectations should be more realistic (*Yes, but your motivation is unstable. Sometimes you go forward, you are even successful, but one failure and you say that life doesn't make sense. Maybe it is worth going a little bit towards real expectations, not only imagined ones and give vent to what is important for you?*). Thus, the presented dialogue is an attempt to get to know oneself, and also a step towards a more conscious creation of oneself.

Referring to the functions proposed by Sobol-Kwapińska and Oleś (2010), the presented dialogue seems to be primarily a source of **support** and **advice**. I in the future fulfils the role of a mentor that shares their knowledge and tries to convey their wisdom to I in the present. In this sense, dialogue also favours **acquiring wisdom**.

The dialogue by 23-year-old Anna allows to see other functions of internal dialogue between temporal positions.

1. DESCRIPTION OF I IN THE PAST: *I can't make a decision. I've always been like this. I didn't know which school to choose, I didn't have anyone to ask advice for. It was the same with my interests, everyone had something and I could do everything and nothing. I couldn't choose a boyfriend, either, and always ended up alone at a party. I remember that going to the university was similar. I was always thinking about tomorrow, what would happen, who would I be, but I could not decide.*

I IN THE PRESENT: *You didn't use all the opportunities because you're not patient, you wanted to have everything at once, and it doesn't work like that. You will slowly learn how to choose between what you should do and what you really want to do.*

I IN THE PAST: *Do you believe that I can change? That in the end the world will be in my favour?*

I IN THE PRESENT: *I know that in a few years you will look at the world around you a little differently and you will notice your indecision or even lack of determination as an advantage, not a flaw and reasons to be sad.*

I IN THE PAST: *I want to believe that what you say is true. It's always worth trying.*

REFLECTION: *I am glad of my experiences. Thanks to this, it's easier for me now.*

2. DESCRIPTION OF I IN THE FUTURE: *I've got what I wanted. Professional success, I am fulfilling myself, I feel happy going to work and satisfied with the actions taken. It cost me a lot, but the most important thing was not to give up and have hope. I'm happy.*

I IN THE PRESENT: *Everything's not as easy as it looks from a different time perspective.*

I IN THE FUTURE: *Oh, you just want to justify yourself. The easiest way is to say that life is not easy, instead of taking matters into your own hands.*

I IN THE PRESENT: *You're smarter, but you really have what you want. So I have a chance to change something despite what has happened.*

I IN THE FUTURE: *It's normal that you have doubts whether it'll work, but it's worth looking at the future and not worrying about what has been, just act.*

REFLECTION: *Seeing yourself in retrospect makes it easier to not worry about what is happening now.*

METAREFLECTION: *In retrospect, everything seems simple. It's going to work. I'm happy that I can live in such a way that I still have this perspective ahead of me.*

The analysis of Anna's dialogue suggests that the dialogue performs several important functions. In the confrontation of I in the past with I in the present, I in the present supports, and simultaneously persuades I in the past to look differently at what is to come (*You didn't use all the opportunities because you're not patient, you wanted to have everything at once, and it doesn't work like that. You will slowly learn how to choose between what you should do and what you really want to do (...) I know that in a few years you will look at the world around you a little differently (...)*). Looking at the reflection after the dialogue between these two temporal positions (*I am glad of my experiences. Thanks to this, it's easier for me now*), we would say, agreeing with Sobol-Kwapińska and Oleś (2010), that in this case, we are dealing with the function of **redefining the past**.

In turn, in the dialogue between I in the present and I in the future, the latter seems to be fulfilling the role of the possible self, that is, the concept of self which presents a person in new social roles, in conditions that can happen, in a new environment, circumstances (Markus & Nurius, 1986). Anna's I in the future is the desired possible self (*I've got what I wanted. Professional success, I am fulfilling myself, I feel happy going to work and satisfied with the actions taken (...)*). The vision of the desired I in the future in the dialogue with a fairly uncertain I in the present (*Everything's not as easy as it looks from a different time perspective*) has primarily a **motivational function**. I in the future opens new perspectives to I in the present, mobilises it to action with a short statement (*but it's worth looking at the future and not worrying about what has been, just act*). Thanks to the supporting role of the imagined possible self in the future that spins plans and sets goals, we can talk about an attempt to **managing the future** as a function of this temporal dialogue.

However, in the context of the entire dialogue between the three temporal positions, the function of **building a distance** to what is "here and now" seems very important, which is clearly expressed by the metareflection (*In retrospect, everything seems simple. It's going to work*). Anna's dialogue finishes with a message expressing hope and optimism. It shows that detachment from the present allows for a different approach to life priorities (cf. Bandura, 2001).

Discussion

The aim of the paper was to answer questions about the main topics and functions of internal temporal dialogues in people during adolescence and early adulthood. The presented analyses have shown that in the temporal dialogues very different issues are raised, and at the same time, the topics are of great personal importance. We have also tentatively confirmed the theoretical proposal

by Sobol-Kwapińska and Oleś (2010). The authors list eight functions of internal temporal dialogues. In our analysis, which included three examples of dialogues, we found seven of these functions. Of course, each of individual dialogues performed only selected functions. The first of the dialogues presented was conducive to balancing and redefining the past. The second provided support, advice and helped in acquiring wisdom. The third served to build a distance, manage the future and – similar to the first one – redefine the past. One function, that is making a decision, has not been illustrated in the analysed dialogues, although it cannot be excluded that such function is sometimes fulfilled by internal temporal dialogues. Moreover, it is possible that another functions are also performed by these dialogues. Thus, the question of functions of temporal dialogues needs further empirical and theoretical exploration.

In this context, before we discuss our results, we should emphasise the main limitations of our study. First, we used only qualitative analysis in order to explore the functions of temporal dialogues. Second, our analysis was based on the relatively small sample of dialogues. However, as it has been mentioned earlier the analysis presented here was the small part of a bigger project concerned different variables such as emotions and meaning of life. Because the other findings were presented elsewhere (Łysiak, 2017; Łysiak & Oleś, 2017), only the results of qualitative analysis could be shown here. In the future, it should be considered to prepare further qualitative as well as quantitative research on internal temporal dialogues, their determinants and functions. Additionally, the other age groups should be taken into account to maybe find out the individual differences on internal temporal dialogicality.

When discussing our results, it is worth noting that each of the presented dialogues ended with a metareflection – a summary which was a novum for the participant, and it was the result of juxtaposing, combining and interpreting voices coming from different temporal I-positions. It is also necessary to emphasise that not every participant of the study was able to generate a metareflection. In the light of the dialogical self theory, a person, being in a particular moment in the present, can try to look at themselves and the reality from the perspective of the past and the future. They can also trigger a dialogue of these temporal positions. But most importantly, as a result of this dialogue, they have a chance to look at their experiences from a broader perspective, as if from above, thus obtaining a whole new perspective on their present situation. In the dialogical self theory, this unique point of view is called metaposition or metareflection. Hermans and Hermans-Konopka (2010), compare the adoption of metaposition to the actions of a painter who, having finished their piece of art, steps back and studies the results with all the details, taking a broader perspective. This way, the artist builds a distance while still being in the moment of creating his artwork. According to the authors, metaposition has three basic functions: (1) provides a pervasive view of the multiplicity of positions; (2) enables a person to connect particular I-positions as elements of an overall story; (3) helps to find the direction of change. Hence the integration of voices as well as the unity of I-positions can occur (Hermans, 2001).

The analysis of internal temporal dialogues seems to confirm that a person performs metareflection usually after completing an important task in their life or closing one stage of life and symbolically opening the next one (Bandura, 2001; McAdams, 2010). A comprehensive look at past, present and future experiences can play a transgressive function – by learning new ideas and assimilating new experiences, an individual goes beyond the self-centred perspective (Kozielecki, 2007; Oleś et al., 2010). When writing about the adoption of the different temporal position Hermans (1996) suggests that with this capability we are able to perceive the meaning of the current actions. Making a metareflection by looking at life from a wider perspective contributes to summaries, balancing and revaluations. A metareflection allows a person to put all their experiences into one, connect them, it also allows to give meaning to their previous actions. Detaching from one point of view allows to change the way of thinking and sometimes also a course of action. The analysis of internal dialogues also shows that they become an opportunity to confront difficult, sometimes stressful issues, which consequently can be used to acquire wisdom and a mature view of both themselves and the world (cf. Oleś, 2011). The integration of temporal positions through metareflection can

also be interpreted as an expression of the need to overcome a person's limitations, improve specific forms of activity and exceed their current capabilities. In this sense, it is an expression of the need for transcendence, generally understood as the ability to transcend a person's own conditions and expand the boundaries of the temporal self (cf. Worsch & Heckhausen, 2002). The metareflection resulting from the juxtaposition of voices of temporal positions is not just the integration of the temporal dimensions of the self. It also promotes the integration of the entire personality. A person has a need to understand past events, find a meaning in what he/she is doing and prepare for what is coming. As underlined by McAdams (1989, 1994), a human identity is a life story that integrates its reconstructed past, the perceived present and the anticipated future, giving it a sense of unity and a purpose of life. In this context, metareflection, which is a type of a link between contradictions and discrepancies in the interpretation of experiences seen from different temporal perspectives, allows the creation of identity.

Can the discussed temporal dialogues be connected with the increase of a feeling of happiness and well-being? Waytz, Hershfield, and Tamir (2015) in their research suggest that considering the past or the future allows people to transcend their day-to-day activities and to focus on the most important issues, which in turn is a potential source of the meaning of life. Also, Łysiak's study (2017; Łysiak & Oleś, 2017) shows that under the influence of temporal dialogue the meaning of life grows. In addition, the state of curiosity is intensifying, and in people who are able to finish their dialogue with a metareflection, the state of anxiety also decreases. These variables can be treated as selected measures of happiness. At the same time, they can be related to various pathways of pursuit of happiness. According to the hedonistic view (typical for e.g. Epicurean philosophy), pleasure is the main source of happiness. According to the eudaimonic approach view (propagated e.g. by Aristotelian philosophers) happiness is the result of engaging in valuable goals (Oleś & Jankowski, 2017). Currently, Seligman (2002; cf. Schueller & Seligman, 2010) in his authentic happiness theory combines hedonic and eudaimonic approaches. He posits three distinct pathways to well-being: apart from pleasure and engagement, he adds meaning. In this context, the reduction of anxiety after a temporal dialogue can be combined with pleasure, the increase of curiosity with engagement, while the increase of the sense of the meaning of life with the third pathway of pursuit of happiness, referred to as "meaning."

Considering the potential connection of temporal dialogues with well-being, it is also worth referring to studies on temporal orientation. Taking into account how people relate to time, Zimbardo and Boyd (1999) distinguished five types of temporal orientations: concentration on negative past (stress on traumas, disappointments, sad moments from the past); concentration on positive past (positive evaluation of the past); hedonistic concentration on present (stress on pleasure without considering the consequences); fatalistic concentration on present (the belief that attempts to influence the future are pointless), and concentration on future (formulating plans, setting goals). Several studies confirm that the types of time perspective are significantly linked to different important aspects of human functioning. For example, a past negative time perspective is connected with neuroticism, anxiety, depression, negative mood, low self-esteem, problems in social relations, gambling, and propensity for addiction (Klingemann, 2001; Stolarski, Matthews, Postek, Zimbardo, & Bitner, 2014; Zhang & Howell, 2011; Zimbardo & Boyd, 1999). Concentration on the fatalistic present correlates positively with risky behaviours, such as alcohol consumption and drug abuse (Daugherty & Brase, 2010; Keough, Zimbardo, & Boyd, 1999), whereas concentration on the future is connected with optimism (Zimbardo & Boyd, 1999) and health promoting behaviours (Boyd & Zimbardo, 2005).

Each of the presented internal temporal dialogues in its first part (I in the past vs. I in the present) reflects the concentration on the negative past, and also shows the elements of fatalistic treatment of the present, which may block the commitment to the future. However, the second part of the dialogue (I in the present vs. I in the future) favours the reevaluation of the negative past or distancing from it and becoming involved in the future. In this context, a temporal dialogue can be treated as an attempt to achieve a so-called balanced time perspective, defined as a relatively strong concentration

on the positive past, a moderate concentration on the future and the hedonistic present, as well as a weak concentration on the negative past and the fatalistic present (Zimbardo & Boyd, 1999). People with balanced time perspective are characterised by greater life satisfaction, less negative affect, and more frequent positive affect, a greater sense of the meaning in life, higher level of optimism, self-efficacy, happiness and mindfulness (Boniwell, Osin, Linley, & Ivanchenko, 2010; Drake, Duncan, Sutherland, Abernethy, & Henry, 2008). Thus, balanced time perspective is clearly connected with well-being.

Also, Shostrom (1974) emphasised the inadequacy of concentrating on only one of the three dimensions of time and used the term “time competence” as an essential element of a self-updating personality. In his opinion, self-updating people are able to link the past with the future in the present and they are less constrained by a sense of guilt, grief and anger from the past, while their aspirations entail realisation of the goals.

Can temporal internal dialogues that allow combining the three dimensions of time show connections with similar measures of well-being? The aforementioned studies by Łysiak (2017) and Waytz et al. (2015) suggest that indeed, but in order to give a precise answer to this question, further research is needed on internal temporal dialogues.

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Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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