

Close Intimate Relations between People with Intellectual Disabilities Constructivist Research: The Polish Perspective

Remigiusz Kijak¹

¹Faculty of Education, University of Warsaw, Poland

HOW TO CITE:

Kijak, R. (2020). Close Intimate Relations between People with Intellectual Disabilities Constructivist Research: The Polish Perspective. *International Journal of Special Education*, 35(1), 37-46

CORRESPONDING AUTHOR:

Remigiusz Kijak,
r.kijak@uw.edu.pl

DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.52291/ijse.2020.35.4>

COPYRIGHT STATEMENT:

Copyright: © 2020 Authors.
Open access publication under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

ABSTRACT

The issues raised in this article are not often mentioned in the source literature. Available studies demonstrate that partnership issues for people with intellectual disabilities appear to be among the ignored problems. Empirical evidence indicates the participation of people with disabilities in the realization of these roles, but their realization is burdened with difficulties resulting from individual predispositions and social conditions. I am directing my research on partner relationships towards a constructivist–interpretative paradigm based on ontological relativism (the multiplicity of meanings given to the category of relationship can be observed at this point, arising in subjective reconstructions—statements—of the people surveyed), subjective epistemology (arising in the course of the research, which is co-created by the cognitor and the subject), and the naturalism of methodological procedures, which means the rejection of advanced statistics in favor of cognition of the true experiences of the subjects. I have assumed a qualitative nature for the research and the biographical method was used. The research aimed to answer the questions: How are the relationships of people with intellectual disabilities understood? What meaning do people with intellectual disabilities assign to love and relationships and their own intimate relations (sexuality)? A literal linguistic analysis of the statements of those tested with the Atlas.ti software is presented in the results. The article depicts the way people with intellectual disabilities describe their relationships, how they feel in the relationships they create, and thus, what linguistic means of expression they use to communicate their intentions and expectations with respect to their partner.

Keywords: intellectual disability; parenting; relationship; sexuality

BACKGROUND

The constructivist–interpretative approach adopted in this work is connected with subjective understanding and discovering as well as describing the everyday life of the subjects. The main axis of integration of the presented paradigm, as well as the subject and aim of the research, is the adoption of the research concept from the point of view of Wolf Wolfensberger's theory of valorization of the social role.

With a limited quantity of empirical evidence of partnership in the case of people with intellectual disabilities, it is inappropriate to make any kind of generalizations. However, presenting some of the available studies on this subject, which try to present, at least in general, this taboo area of life of people with disabilities, is worthwhile. Considering the international nature of the *International Journal of Special Education* readers and the fact that the research was done in Poland, it is worth elucidating the Polish research perspective in this respect. I will therefore start my theoretical analyses with Polish research.

According to a study conducted by Zawiaślak (2003a; 2003b), who researched a group of people with mild intellectual disabilities, these people usually achieve a certain degree of autonomy and independence with regard to life tasks. They often assume parental and marital roles, although obviously to a lesser extent than their peers without disabilities and with considerable delay. Among the people surveyed by Zawiaślak, 118 people aged between twenty and thirty, almost 27% had their own families. For comparison, 47% of people of the same age without disabilities functioned in their own families (Zawiaślak, 2003a). Notably, women with mild intellectual disabilities were three times more likely to form partnerships than men and were also more likely to have children (Zawiaślak, 2003a: 165–171). Most of the respondents expressed positive feelings about their life within their own families. The women surveyed were satisfied with their motherhood, despite, in most cases, the unfavorable living and family conditions. At the same time, the female respondents were convinced that they fulfill these roles correctly, which does not always correspond to objective reality (Zawiaślak, 2003a). The average age of marriage for people with intellectual disabilities and non-disabled people is similar.

The comparison of results obtained by Zawiaślak with data from the literature indicates that a higher percentage of marriages among this group of people with disabilities was recorded in the past: 50% of married women (Felhorska, Urbańska, and Wojtaszek, 1964), among graduates of vocational schools there were as many as 33% married men and 55% married women (Urbańska, 1974). In light

of these comparisons (Minczakiewicz, 1996), an increase in the age of couples starting a family can be considered a tendency. This is probably due to the general demographic changes in Poland. They involve the observable phenomenon of delayed marriages, especially among the male population, and the rising median age of newlyweds (Zawiaślak, 2003b). The differences in marital roles between women and men with mild intellectual disabilities, as obtained by researchers, indicate that it is easier for women to get married than for men. This is due to the different attitudes of girls, who demonstrate higher self-esteem, higher social and personal skills, and plan and strive to start a family, while at the same time violating social norms to a lesser extent (Zawiaślak, 2003b).

Noteworthy results were presented by Gajdzica (2004). He conducted surveys among 86 graduates of special vocational schools. According to analyses, about 33% of the respondents were married, most were under thirty years of age, had no income, and lived with their parents. Most of the couples surveyed had a similar level of education: in a group of 47 women with intellectual disabilities, the total number of children was 54, where 18 had certificates of intellectual disability while the rest were deemed disability-free.

At the same time, social consent for these types of relationships is rather low. Such marriages, in public opinion, are considered as a possible burden not only on the immediate family but also on the social environment. In this regard, it is worth recalling a study by Parchomiuk (2007). While collecting the opinions of special educators on the satisfaction of sexual needs by adults with intellectual disabilities, she also asked about the possibility of marriage. A total of 80% of respondents favored an unconditional ban. Among those who allowed for the possibility of marriages by people with intellectual disabilities, 65% believed that such marriages could only be pursued when subject to monitoring—e.g., in a social welfare center.

Kościelska (2007) presented a study of ten married couples with intellectual disabilities. The couples surveyed were people with mild disabilities, although several were certified as having a moderate disability. In one case a relationship between a person without disabilities and one with an intellectual disability was described. As the author rightly pointed out, reaching these couples presented considerable difficulties, as no records of marriages between people with disabilities exist. The search for such couples was usually carried out through the sheltered support enterprises, associations, etc. These marriages functioned in diametrically diverse ways: some functioned very poorly, others demonstrated a high level of resourcefulness in so-

cial interactions as well as everyday life. These couples also had offspring. As in the case of their general functioning, they also dealt with their roles as parents very differently. A characteristic feature of all these marriages was material poverty—the result of very low wages, low disability pensions, and low professional qualifications.

Nowak–Lipińska (2003) presented the intramarital relationships of couples consisting of people with severe intellectual disabilities and people without any intellectual disabilities. The author conducted a biographical overview of five couples in late adulthood. In each of these couples, it was the woman (aged 51–57) who had an intellectual disability while her partner (twenty years older, aged 71–76) had no intellectual disability. The marital life of the surveyed couples was rather harmonious and free of conflicts. The husbands did not treat their wives as people with disabilities. Irregularities were explained away by various random events, completely unrelated, in their opinion, to the disability (Nowak–Lipińska, 2003).

Further research was conducted in 2004–2008 by Grütz (2011). She performed an empirical analysis of six couples with intellectual disabilities using a qualitative research procedure. Those surveyed came from various Polish cities. Respondents were brought up in environments that functioned improperly for reasons of alcoholism, violence, and poverty. Of significance is the fact that all the subjects had bad experiences with their fathers, who were most often absent from the family or, if physically present, the emotional relationships were dysfunctional. As the author writes, in adult life these situations were linked to the respondents' difficulties in relations with partners—incorrect notions of roles, interactions, and bonds within the family. Grütz, in comparing the examined pairs, stated that in all cases one of the partners always operated at a higher level, which was a guarantee of stability for the other party. In the surveyed couples it was the men who exhibited a higher level of social skills. Their ages varied. They were older than their partners except for one case. The level of development of self-maintenance skills was good in all the examined persons. Additionally, in each relationship, one of the partners understood the value of money. Three of the surveyed couples had parental experience. The couples surveyed had total of five children among them; in one case severe intellectual disability was diagnosed in the child.

* * *

After surveying a group of young adult women and men with intellectual disabilities in care facilities, Norwegian re-

searchers (Holm et al., 1997) state that leisure time for most people with intellectual disabilities is often limited. This is because of the allembicing organization and planning of activities in care facilities. The result is that personal life becomes completely predictable and permanently restricted in terms of love and partner relationships. Young adults are rarely allowed to be alone. Spontaneous meetings, which are an important part of an individual's social development and strengthen mutual relations, are very rare. Further observations of the lives of people with intellectual disabilities in care facilities resulted in additional conclusions. Many of the young adult respondents with intellectual disabilities take part in dances organized in the centers with the purpose of finding a partner. Some decidedly master the “art of flirting” and encourage the “potential partner” in a polite manner that is full of style and sophistication. Others are less subtle, vulgar, and sometimes completely misread the signals sent by the opposite sex. Some direct their feelings towards the staff and are thus exposed, by definition, to failure when it comes to seduction. Researchers conclude that many disabled people live in a sheltered, highly supervised world. The staff mainly encourages friendships among people under their care.

Koller, Richardson, and Katz (1988) examined randomly selected couples consisting of adults with mild intellectual disabilities. In each case, the couple had been married for five years. Their level of social functioning was high. The spouses were graduates of special schools and in some cases even finished regular schools. All had completed primary or vocational education. Most of the people forming the married couple had employment. Research shows that people with intellectual disabilities, despite being in long-term relationships, were much less likely to be married than their peers without disabilities. The researchers found that marriages among people with more severe intellectual disabilities are practically non-existent and that people who formed such relationships had either a much higher quotient of intelligence and well-developed social skills or had a partner without disabilities. The surveyed spouses with mild intellectual disabilities reported significantly more personal problems, including marital ones, as well as social issues, mainly in relation to their neighbors, when compared with spouses without any disabilities.

Brown (1996) conducted qualitative research on the partnerships and marriages of people with Down syndrome in the context of the quality of life model. On the basis of empirical analysis, he concluded that people with Down syndrome who had a partner were much calmer, bolder, and more cheerful in contacts than those that did not have a partner. Being in a relationship changed their

sense of social status, which they described as higher, similar to other people. Additionally, attending occupational therapy workshops or working at sheltered support enterprises gave them a sense of normalcy. Most of the people surveyed met their future partners at work. It was of great importance for the respondents to collect mementos concerning their life together. Their collections included photos of both partners, wedding rings, and wedding gifts. The respondents were proud of their marriages because it was due to them that they had joined the community of adults. Some relationships benefited from external support systems, including social workers helping them with their shopping or daily activities as well as with official matters. Many couples lived together with their parents, who also supported them. The partners shared responsibilities. The more capable partner was the pillar of the relationship, assigned responsibilities, and enforced them. On the basis of comparative studies, Denholm (1992) claims that people with intellectual disabilities have the same goals as their peers without disabilities—i.e., striving for friendship, a relationship with another person, closeness, intimacy, having offspring, owning a house, and working—although their ability to achieve them is more limited.

METHODS, DATA COLLECTION, AND PROCEDURES: RESEARCH TOOLS

The aim of this work was to understand the relationships and/or married and parental life of people with severe intellectual disabilities through narration. The main research problem was formulated as follows: How do people with intellectual disabilities understand a relationship and what meaning do people with intellectual disabilities assign to love and relationships, and their own intimate relations (sexuality)?

Due to the limitations constraining this article, only a literal linguistic analysis of the statements of the surveyed people is presented to the reader. It presents how respondents with intellectual disabilities describe what a relationship is for them, how they feel in the relationships they have created, and thus, what linguistic means of expression they use to communicate their intentions and expectations to their partners.

My research is based on the biographical method, in which biography is understood as a topic. (An element of the biography is described as depicting established, practiced patterns of behavior towards partner relationships as currently experienced and created among people with severe intellectual disabilities that are projected by them through

the period of adulthood). The research was carried out in several parts of Poland—the Lesser Poland, Kuyavian–Pomeranian, Pomeranian, and Greater Poland voivodeships. Specifying the locations where the interviews were conducted could make it possible to discover the identity of the respondents. For this reason, only the names of major cities shall be disclosed, listed in the chronological order of visits during the several months of my research tour. The journey started with Cracow. Successive stops were made in Gniezno, Leszno, Ostrowiec Świętokrzyski, Pakówka, Bojanowo, Bydgoszcz, Koronowo, Chojnice, Charzykowy, Malbork, Sztum, Toruń, Grudziądz, and a return to Cracow. The research was conducted daily, with breaks for the weekend due to the unavailability of the respondents during those periods. At the same time, I also needed time to complete and organize the collected material. The material was amassed on an ongoing basis (recorded with the consent of the respondents). It required copying to a hard disk as well as grouping, annotation, and recording of observations as well as spontaneous comments, etc. The narrations presented in the work include nearly 400 hours of recordings in electronic form that were subsequently transcribed onto a computer without any alterations. Atlas.ti software was used for transcription and descriptions of the textual data and subsequently in the qualitative study. The Atlas.ti software proved to be helpful mainly in cataloging recordings and grouping them into specific categories in this research. I used its ability to search for specific information in the source material, to return to specific places in time, and to search for common topics, creating subtypes of the analyzed issues. I most probably did not use all the capabilities of the software but focused on features that proved helpful in managing qualitative data. Many years of observation of the reality of life of adult Poles with intellectual disabilities (I conducted research in Poland on the sexuality, sexual experiences, and the quality of sexual life of adult Poles with intellectual disabilities) as well as direct contacts with people with disabilities facilitated the selection of research participants so as to present the widest possible perspective on the partnership among people with intellectual disabilities. The basic and first criterion for selecting study participants was the existence of a deeper (moderate or significant) intellectual disability in at least one of the partners. I deliberately did not restrict the selection of couples to those with intellectual disabilities only but opened up the possibility of conducting research among couples where one of the partners had no disabilities or a disability that was not intellectual in nature. This introduction of “counter-horizons” (diverse perspectives) and comparing contrasting research subjects opens up

new vistas for analysis. The study group consisted of 142 persons forming 71 heterosexual couples described in this paper on the basis of several hundred hours of recorded conversations and interviews conducted in their places of residence and the environments in which they lived.

RESULTS

The linguistic analysis of the collected material made it possible to determine semantic fields contained in statements of the examined subjects with regards to the subject of being in a relationship. In a sense, being in a relationship expresses purposeful and rational intentions and expectations on the part of the partner and becomes a life goal for many people with intellectual disabilities. The final list includes seven different categories. The dominant figure in the narrative turned out to be the concept of love. Respondents most often talked about the relationship in the category of love. In their statements, the word love was used a total of 759 times, with a variety of meanings applied to it. It was the assessment of the context of the appearance of the given concept that allowed it to be categorized for analysis or rejected. For 66% of the respondents (the percentage of occurrences of the word love in the context of the relationship), love is a necessary condition for the continuation of the relationship. Love is understood as a close, intimate relationship. Interestingly, this type of narration—love as an element necessary for the continuation of the relationship—is observed more often among the women surveyed (72%) rather than men (60%). For 13%, love is understood in the context of a calculation and the relationship is seen as a kind of business or agreement. On the other hand, 4% of the surveyed men and 1% of the surveyed women directly said that they are in a relationship because the partner holds certain material possessions that are the basis of their security and ensure the stability of the relationship. They see love as a business relationship. For 66%, love is a prerequisite to having a child. The majority of women with no children put love in the category of romantic love. Of these, 54% had a romantic idea of their partner and the relationship. For 45%, love was a guarantee of not being alone. This group of respondents sought love to free themselves from loneliness. For 32%, love was also synonymous with sex and the satisfaction of erotic or intimate needs. This was followed by a category that spoke of respect (20%). However, three different terms were used in the statements: “he respects me and I respect him” (25%), “good to me” (21%), and “selfless” (9%). The “selfless” category was surprising. It should be understood as “willing

to sacrifice.” This is derived not from the coding analysis itself, but from the context of whole sentences uttered by the subjects. Statements relating to material property were formulated much less frequently (25%). Nearly 31% of respondents said that work is important in the relationship, 22% stressed the importance of the dwelling and its furnishings. In the statements of 9% of the respondents, the category of physical intimacy appears, although the respondents spoke about it in different ways: “sex” (6%), “hugging and emotion” (13%), and “we go through life together” (9%). In addition to these predominant elements relating to how the relationship is understood, a number of other “collateral” categories emerged in the narrative. Their collateral nature is linked to the small percentage of these descriptions in relation to the whole group of respondents, but dominating within a particular individual narrative. For example: “a relationship is something difficult” (6%) and “I’m constantly crying, and I don’t know what the future holds” (2%).

I have also attempted a semantic analysis of the respondents’ statements about their partner’s characteristics. Two broader aggregate categories emerged from the analysis of the collected empirical material. The respondents spoke of their partners in two ways. I termed the first category the “dream partner.” The respondents used terms such as, I dreamed of, I thought of a guy who, I always wanted to have a girl who, or my ideal. The second category is the “real partner,” which encompasses terms that apply to the partner proper.

I have defined the above two categories as aggregate ones, but within each of them, it is possible to identify more detailed categories. Four specific categories, differentiated by gender can be distinguished on the basis of the analysis of the respondents’ statements with regard to the dream partner category. I will start with a semantic analysis of the men’s statements. Categories were established on the basis of frequency of indications (the percentages of occurrence of particular subcategories do not add up, as the respondents mentioned more than one feature of their dream partner).

The first is physical attractiveness (31% of all statements). Statements such as, “pretty,” “pretty and nice girl,” “she must be pretty,” “pretty through and through,” and “a trophy, pretty” (84%), “beautiful goddess” (2%), “stunning brunette,” or “blonde beauty” (3%) are repeated within this category. Additionally, the terms descriptive of individual body parts were used: “I imagine a sexy girl with pretty legs,” “she must have pretty legs,” “chiseled legs,” “legs to die for,” “legs from here to Venus,” and “great legs” (32%). The smile is also appreciated: “nice

smile,” “laugh and smile,” and “smile” (6%). Male respondents also paid attention to other female features—breasts (54%) and buttocks (48%). For some, the smell was important as well (12%).

The second distinguishing category of the dream partner is “resourcefulness and industriousness” (21%). This was evidenced by statements by the persons surveyed such as, “a wife has to be hardworking,” “hardworking housekeeper,” “works at home every day,” “she has to take care of the house, clean and vacuum,” “industrious,” “resourceful and hardworking,” and “she has to make breakfast in the morning, get the children ready, and take care of me.” The analysis of the statements shows that the men surveyed are looking for a wife who is hardworking and resourceful, but not professionally active—someone who will take care of the house and children.

Another category is “caring” (12%). In the case of the men surveyed, this referred to childcare. It should be understood as sensitivity, subtlety, and domestic warmth. Analysis of the narrations of the examined men indicated that men treat “caring” differently than the examined women do. For them, a caring man is one who is resourceful, earns money, takes care of the woman and children, and gives a sense of security.

I termed the last distinguished category “obedience” (6%). It is evidenced by the respondent statements such as, “a woman has to be obedient” (12%), “I appreciate submissiveness” (4%), “the kind of woman who does what I tell her to do” (2%), and “for a relationship to be good someone has to step down, for there to be no quarrel a woman has to be obedient” (one statement).

The women surveyed spoke somewhat differently about their dream partner. In order to distinguish the semantic fields, as in the previous case, I noted all the categories appearing in the narratives of the women examined and then coded them, giving the synonymous statements common expressions. This long and arduous stage of analysis again resulted in the emergence of very interesting categories. Interestingly, comparing the obtained results with those obtained in my previous research in 2013 (Kijak, 2014), in which I used a ready list of features of a dream partner, I observed that thanks to the application of the qualitative research procedure a more in-depth analysis proved possible. From it, I distinguished categories other than those included in the ready list. For example, this applies to the category “obedience” in research on men and their expectations towards their dream partner (there was no such category in the ready list) and the “henpecked husband” category in the group of women (this category was not included in the ready list, either).

Moving on to the analysis of the narratives of the examined women regarding their dream partner, as before, I will start with the categories indicated most often. The first is “caring” (62%): “a husband must be caring,” “caring,” “looks after me and my children,” and “being caring is a quality of my masculine ideal” (62%).

The next category is “strong” (50%). According to the women surveyed, a man must not only be strong physically, although the physical aspect is important to female respondents, but must possess strength of character. He cannot give up. He must find a way out of every situation. He must help in difficult situations. Statements of the surveyed women indicate this— “strong husband” (70%), “one who can find a way out of any situation” (11%), “strong” (60%), “strong character and strong arms” (54%), and others that were less popular.

Another category is “likes children” (52%). In their statements, many of the women surveyed indicated that the ideal man must like children.

The last highlighted category is “giving love” (49%). The analysis of the collected material shows that only women pointed to love, but this does not mean that men do not consider love as important. It fits into the general sense of being together, a certain belonging to each other, taking care of the woman and the children. Yet, for their part, it is women that emphasized love. They gave it a more explicit character, something that is essential in the concept of a perfect relationship and a perfect man.

I would like to mention one more category, not as popular as the previous ones, but worth emphasizing nevertheless—the “henpecked husband” category (9%). The women surveyed would like their husband to be resourceful and strong on the one hand, but on the other, he should be a family man who stays home. This is what the analysis of the narrative shows. Simply put, it is easier to keep a man with you and not expose him to unnecessary temptations and yourself to cheating.

The semantic analysis of the statements of the women and men surveyed about the real partner combines elements of both the dream and real partner categories. Let us start by presenting an analysis of statements made by the women surveyed. The dominant narrative figure regarding the real partner encompasses three content-different subcategories. I termed the first one “husband next door” (42%). It turns out that the women surveyed were looking for a partner in their immediate surroundings, adapting their ideas about the ideal husband to the real characteristics of the next door partners. The search was for available and free partners as well as those interested in entering into a relationship with the girl next door.

Somewhat like in traditional society, it seems to be difficult for the surveyed women to leave their homes and live on their own. Research shows that this goal was easier to achieve for men with intellectual disabilities. Women usually stayed in their parents' homes or moved to their partner's house. The "husband next door" meant a known person you can rely on, usually a schoolmate or a man a few years older. A "husband next door" provides a sense of security and a guarantee of stabilization upon leaving the childhood home. I designated the next category "caring for children" (59%). The women stressed that their partner is hardworking, earns money, and is good with children. The last category to be identified is "plans for the future" (22%). In this category, women emphasized that their partner provides them with stability and that they plan for the future with him. These plans included having a child or next child as well as buying household appliances—a washing machine, a better refrigerator, or a new furnace and improving the heating system.

The men surveyed mostly paid attention to the thriftiness of their female partners (68%). They were satisfied with that thriftiness as well as their partners' ability to take care of the house. They appreciated the fact that their partners can and want to clean as well as do various chores around the house. The next highlighted category is "support in difficult moments" (36%). Many of the men surveyed said that they value peace of mind in their partners, on whose support and understanding they can count. The last category is "sex." A total of 42% of the men surveyed indicated that their sex life is important and good. None of them mentioned physical attractiveness, although most of them had pointed to this aspect when talking about their idea of a dream partner.

At the end of this section, a selected excerpt from the stylistic analysis of the narrative of the respondents regarding parenthood will be presented. As exemplified by Krzychała (2007: 75), I shall assume that "style determines the selection of device appropriate to a given style of communication, selected more or less consciously so as to recognize a specific result of expression and meaning of a text." Based on the syntactic analysis of grammatical forms (Polański and Nowak, 2011; Nagórko, 2010) contained in the statements of the respondents, I have identified several form types. The first is an optative form, which is characterized by a description saturated with verbs expressing a wish, hope, or possibility, an expectation or desire for something. The most often used verbs appear in the conditional mood: *chciałbym* [I would like], *zyczyłbym sobie* [I would wish], and *pragnę* [I desire]. This style characterized 25% of the statements of all respondents. The

respondents wanted their relationships to be good and wished for health: "What I would want is to be happy, for my man to love me, and for us to be healthy" (female, 32 years of age, ID). In the analysis of the empirical material, I also encountered the terms *oby* [if only], *aby* [to] that are equivalent to the subjunctive mood, which is used to express wishes, commands, emotions, possibilities, judgments, needs, and statements contrary to current facts. In Polish, the functions of the subjunctive have been divided between the conditional and imperative moods. There is, however, an equivalent of the subjunctive that is created by the use of the particle *oby* [I hope], *żeby* and *gdyby* [if], and an old past participle: *Oby on to zrobił* [Hopefully he will do this]. A number of statements such as, "I'm very busy with the baby now, and I hope it will not get worse" (female, 32 years of age, ID) and "Teresa, who gave birth last summer, what she says frightens me. She says that childbirth is unbearably painful. I hope that nothing bad will happen to me and that my Janek will not leave me. Teresa's man left her" (female, 28 years of age, ID). Another type—the imperative form—expressed in the indicative mood, points to decisive action. The narrator making the statement expresses a clear direction and hopes for a certain course of events that will take place in the future. The statement expresses a virtually neutral, objective attitude on the part of the speaker as to the facts that he or she is reporting. It also indicates that the user identifies him or herself with the facts he or she is reporting or considers them very probable. It is worth mentioning that this type of style was mostly characteristic of the men surveyed. Partners without children said: "I'll have children and a good job" (male, 32 years of age, ID). "It's only a matter of time and I'll have a house with a garden and children" (male, 24 years of age, ID). "What's there to say, there's no need to harp on it. I'm gonna have kids someday and everyone will see" (male, 29 years of age, ID). Among couples with children, this type of style prevailed in the statements made by the examined men: "This is just to provide a roof over the head of my child and her" (male, 25 years of age, ID). "It's a serious matter. We have a child and I need to provide good conditions. I'll find a job and rent an apartment. You have to rise to the occasion" (male, 32 years of age, ID). The imperative form is given in the imperative mood, which usually expresses an order, wish, or request. To strengthen the power of expression and the message conveyed, the interlocutor often raises his voice or speaks firmly, or when writing uses exclamation marks. There are several forms of passive voice that replace the grammatical mode. Most often it is a construction with the verb *musieć* [must]. Examples of such statements inc-

lude: “Well, it’s no longer a joke. I don’t want to live like this anymore. You know how hard it is to keep proving to others that I love her and want to have children with her! Everybody gangs up on me and says that this love doesn’t make sense! And I’m telling you, it does make sense and I’m going to fight for her and my baby! I love her and I’m going to do everything I can to make my Madzia and my little girl happy!” (male, 39 years of age, without disabilities, partner of a 26-year-old woman, ID).

CONCLUSION

This article presents only the linguistic aspects of the conducted research. Noteworthy results were obtained in another study presenting a phenomenological interpretation of the narrative material. There, the linguistic level of analysis was significantly broadened. It aimed to identify the specific way in which the subjects are addressed. The in-depth analysis of the narrative material did not focus on single cases forming a set of many one-dimensional categories. It analyzed numerous cases that were similar to each other. After their saturation, the final category was created by means of reconstruction and comparison. “Generated categories are verified by constant comparison and referencing to other categories. Overlaying a given category atop other categories shows whether its specificity is confirmed or needs further modification and clarification (...) the greater the number of dimensions (categories), the higher the potential for generalization of the whole category” (Krzychała, 2007: 39). In other words, the analysis consisted of identifying significant cases, identifying recurring common threads specific to individual respondents, creating specific categories, and selecting sample quotations to illustrate the topics undertaken.

In this way, five categories have been distinguished: the importance of forming bonds, the warmth of the family home, and the attitude of parents to the possibility of building a partner relationship and having children, the importance of the school and the teacher, strategies for dealing with difficult situations, support of the local community or an unimpaired partner, and social competences. To some extent, the identified categories overlapped with those distinguished using linguistic analysis (Kijak, 2017).

The material presented in this article allows capturing the facts about the partnership of people with disabilities in the language layer. To some extent, the results overlap with the research of Mill, Mayes, and McConnell (2010) who asked six young people with intellectual disabilities between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five what they

thought about becoming independent and starting their own families. The results are hardly surprising. In one case, a person with intellectual disabilities wants to be independent and more self-reliant. However, any attempt to achieve this independence—e.g., by leaving the school building and returning home on their own, having their own money, or having a partner—was treated by parents as a threat to their authority and quickly suppressed. Three persons were satisfied with their independence and did not want to change anything—the prospect of living outside their family home terrified them greatly. Two persons, with the help and support of the family, became more independent in the sense that they lived with their partner with one of the families. The studies presented are also consistent with the results obtained by Hanna Bertilsson-Rosqvist and Veronica Lövgren (2013). On the basis of their research on a group of people with moderate intellectual disabilities living in Sweden, they concluded that these people can enter marriages or even play parental roles in a way that guarantees satisfaction and full realization in those roles.

A “marriage that is good enough” is not one that compares to a marriage of people without disabilities. In principle, such a comparison does not make sense. It only points to certain shortcomings and deficits. The existence of shortcomings does not in any way mean that these marriages are worse or less satisfactory for the spouses. This is because satisfaction or fulfillment can be drawn from different aspects of being together.

The study is also consistent with the results obtained by Ćwirynkała and Żyta (2019). Their paper focused on the views and experiences of self-advocates with intellectual disabilities towards love and intimate relationships. It presents research results conducted with self-advocates with intellectual disabilities using a qualitative study based on an interpretative paradigm and focus group technique. The authors tried to answer two main research questions: (1) How do self-advocates with intellectual disabilities perceive love? (2) What contributes to their sphere of intimate relationships and sexuality? Thirty-one self-advocates with moderate and mild intellectual disabilities took part in six focus group interviews. Several themes emerged in the interviews: perceptions of love, personal experiences in the sphere of intimate relationships and sexual behaviors undertaken by the participants, and their needs and environmental constraints on fulfilling their needs. The findings align with the research results obtained by other authors—Frawley and Wilson (2016), Azzopardi-Lane and Callus (2015)—who indicate that although adults with intellectual disabilities are aware of their sexual ri-

ghts, they perceive a number of social and cultural barriers in realizing these rights.

Kijak (2014) points to important elements indicated by people with intellectual disabilities for the sustainability of relationships and other types of relations. With regard to the concept of valorization of social roles, it is important to look far back and point out that until recently, welfare centers created environments of barren and sterile nature. There, the rights of individuals with intellectual disabilities in terms of partnership or sexuality were not respected. The valorization of the social role is “to enable, establish, strengthen, preserve or protect social roles that are respected, especially for people at risk of being undervalued, by using, in so far as possible, socially acceptable measures” (Elks, 1994, p. 266). Making reference to the obtained research results, one can write that, in line with the concept of valorization of the social role, where the support of the closest social environment, support of a peer group, friends, and finally family exists, it is possible for people with disabilities to perform specific social roles—that of a partner or spouse. A positive motivating factor in fulfilling social roles includes po-

sitive experiences from the family home, family support, or support of the closest social circle. Undoubtedly, the level of social competencies and their scope is also important.

In conclusion, I would like to add that it is not always possible to change the status of people with disabilities. Restrictive parental attitudes and a malfunctioning social welfare system are just some of the factors causing devaluation. The way to counteract the devaluation process is to change the perception of the person with disabilities by others. To do this it is not necessary to change the person. Sometimes, a change of context is enough. Usually, adults with disabilities are placed in closed institutions, segregated, perceived as clients or patients. They become dependent on the state, charities, and social welfare system. Change forces a natural reorganization in thinking about people with disabilities and enabling them to perform new, socially valued roles: of a partner, spouse, neighbor, and employee. This is the main strategy in the process of valorization of the social role, a fundamental change, thanks to which we can limit the negative consequences of social devaluation.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The authors wish to express special thanks to the participating students and volunteers in the homework project.

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

FUNDING: None

REFERENCES

- Azzopardi-Lane, C., & Callus, A. -M. (2015). *Constructing sexual identities: people with intellectual disability talking about sexuality*. *British Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 43(1), 32-37.
- Bertilsdotter-Rosqvist, H., & Lövgren, V. (2013). Doing adulthood through parenthood: *Notions of parenthood among people with cognitive disabilities*. *European Journal of Disability Research*, 7(1), 56-68.
- Brown, R. I. (1996). *Partnership and marriage in Down syndrome*. *Research and Practice* 4(3), 96-99.
- Ćwirynkało, K., & Żyta, A. (2019). *Self-advocates with Intellectual Disabilities Talk About Love and Relationships: A Focus-Group Research Report*. *International Journal of Special Education*, 34(1).
- Denholm, C. (1992). *Developmental needs of adolescents: Application to adolescents with Down syndrome*. The 1992 National Conference of the Canadian Down Syndrome Society. Canadian Down Syndrome Society, University of Calgary.
- Elks, M. A. (1994). *Valuing the person or valuing the role? Critique of Social Role Valorization theory*. *Mental Retardation* 32(4), 265-271.
- Felhorska, F., Urbańska, B., & Wojtaszek, Z. (1964). *Losy absolwentów szkół specjalnych dla dzieci upośledzonych umysłowo*. Państwowe Zakłady Wydawnictw Szkolnych.
- Frawley, P., & Wilson, N. (2016). *Young people with intellectual disability talking about sexuality education and information*. *Sexuality & Disability*, 34(4), 469-484.
- Gajdzica, Z., 2004. *Status rodzinny i zawodowy osób z lekkim upośledzeniem umysłowym na tle zmiany społecznej*. In Z. Janiszewska-Nieścioruk (Ed.), *Człowiek z niepełnosprawnością intelektualną. Wybrane problemy osobowości, rodzin i edukacji osób z niepełnosprawnością intelektualną*, t. 2. Oficyna Wydawnicza Impuls.
- Grütz, M. (2011). *Osoby z niepełnosprawnością intelektualną jako partnerzy, małżonkowie i rodzice – dotychczasowe doniesienia badawcze*. In B. Cytowska (Ed.), *Dorośli z niepełnosprawnością intelektualną w labiryntach codzienności*. Analiza badań – krytyka podejść – propozycje rozwiązań. Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek.
- Holm, P., Horst J., Back Olsen, S., Pertl, B. (1997). *After normalization*. In: J. Tøssebro (Ed.), *Den vanskelige integreringen*. Universitetsforlaget.
- Kijak, R. (2011). A desire for love: *Considerations on sexuality and sexual education of people with intellectual disability in Poland*. *Sexuality and Disability*, 29, 65-74.

- Kijak, R. (2013). *The sexuality of adults with intellectual disability in Poland*. *Sexuality and Disability*, 31, 109–123.
- Kijak, R. (2014). *Seksualność człowieka z niepełnosprawnością intelektualną a rodzina*. Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN.
- Kijak, R. (2017). *Dorośli z głębszą niepełnosprawnością intelektualną jako partnerzy, małżonkowie i rodzice*. Oficyna Wydawnicza Impuls.
- Koller, H., Richardson, S. A., & Katz M. (1988). *Marriage in a young adult mentally retarded population*. *Journal of Intellectual Disability Research*, 32(2), 93-102.
- Kościelska, M. (2007). *Być kobietą, być mężczyzną – co to znaczy w odniesieniu do osób niepełnosprawnych intelektualnie*. In: A. Ostrowska (Ed.), *O seksualności osób niepełnosprawnych*. Ex Libris Pracownika Socjalnego. Wydawnictwo IRSS.
- Krzychała, S. (2007). *Projekty życia młodzieży w perspektywie badań rekonstrukcyjnych*. Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Naukowe DSW.
- Mill, A., Mayes, R., & McConnell, D. (2010). *Negotiating autonomy within the family: the experiences of young adults with intellectual disabilities*. *British Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 38(3), 194-200.
- Minczakiewicz, E. M. (1996). *Perspektywy życiowe w wyobrażeniach dorastającej pełno- i niepełnosprawnej umysłowo młodzieży*. *Roczniki Pedagogiki Specjalnej*, 7, 295-307.
- Nowak-Lipińska, K. (2003). *Psychospołeczne aspekty małżeństwa osób niepełnosprawnych intelektualnie z pełnosprawnymi*. In: K. Rzedzicka, A. Kobyłańska (Eds.), *Dorostłość, niepełnosprawność, czas współczesny: na pograniczu pedagogiki specjalnej*. Oficyna Wydawnicza Impuls.
- Parchomiuk, M. (2007). *Postawy studentów pedagogiki wobec życia erotycznego osób niepełnosprawnych*. *Człowiek, Niepełnosprawność, Społeczeństwo*, 1, 93–105.
- Polański, E., & Nowak, T. (2011). *Najnowszy podręcznik gramatyki języka polskiego*. Wydawnictwo Petrus.
- Urbańska, B. (1974). *Losy absolwentów zasadniczych szkół zawodowych specjalnych*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Szkolne i Pedagogiczne.
- Zawiślak, A. (2003a). *Sytuacja materialna i mieszkaniowa absolwentów zasadniczych szkół zawodowych specjalnych (dla młodzieży z niepełnosprawnością intelektualną w stopniu lekkim)*. In: E. M. Minczakiewicz (Ed.), *Dziecko niepełnosprawne. Rozwój i wychowanie*. Oficyna Wydawnicza Impuls.
- Zawiślak, A. (2003b). *Zawieranie związków małżeńskich przez osoby z lekkim upośledzeniem umysłowym na przykładzie absolwentów szkół zawodowych specjalnych*. In: Z. Janiszewska-Nieścioruk (Ed.), *Człowiek z niepełnosprawnością intelektualną*, t. I. *Wybrane problemy osobowości rodzin i edukacji osób z niepełnosprawnością intelektualną*. Oficyna Wydawnicza Impuls.