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The Microworld of Differentness of Adults with Intellectual Disability: A Research Report

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The present paper is an attempt to describe the phenomenon of differentness experienced by persons with intellectual disability. The author presents the results of research which forms a part of a larger research project concerning social worlds of adults with intellectual disability. Kathy Chamaz's methodology of constructive-interpretative grounded theory has been utilised both as a strategy of collecting research material, and as a method of its analysis. The group of respondents consists of 14 adults with intellectual disability attending to the Communal Home of Mutual Aid, and their carers (among them parents and workers of the Home). The results show differentness as a phenomenon experienced by almost all persons with intellectual disability.

KEY WORDS: differentness, adults with intellectual disability

Introduction

The aim of this paper is to depict the phenomenon of differentness in experiences of adults with intellectual disability. The paper forms part of a larger research project conducted by the author,

with a main focus on comprehension of the world of adults with intellectual disability¹. Granted that said persons, alike other adults, have certain personal traits, that they face and experience various situations and events, take on specific social roles, are involved in variety of interpersonal relationships, and have their own world of values and beliefs, the author has aimed at comprehension and examination of social worlds of adults with intellectual disability. A. Schütz claims that people experience reality and take actions within the frameworks of various microworlds² (social worlds). A microworld, conceived as 'coherent and relatively independent complex or system, a separate structure of reality'³, forms a sublime part of subjectively perceived reality. Author's research perspective is based on Ewa Skibińska's assumption⁴ that microworld is a world experienced by a single person who lives simultaneously in many various worlds (micro-worlds) comprised of their basic activities⁵. The analysis of research material allowed to select a number of mi-

¹ The subject literature provides material about research on adults with intellectual disability, which shows their way of perceiving world and themselves. One of the key positions is *Difficult Paths to Acceptance. Emancipation Motives in the Analysis of the Situation of Adults with Intellectual Disability in Contemporary Polish Society (Trudne drogi adaptacji. Wątki emancypacyjne w analizie sytuacji dorosłych osób z niepełnosprawnością intelektualną we współczesnym społeczeństwie polskim)* by Beata Cytowska (2012) or *Living with Down Syndrome. Biographical Narratives of Parents, Siblings and Adults with Down Syndrome (Żyjąc z zespołem Downa. Narracje biograficzne rodziców, rodzzeństwa i dorosłych osób z zespołem Downa)* by Agnieszka Żyta (2011).

² Manterys A., *The Multitude of Realities in Sociology Theories (Wielość rzeczywistości w teoriach socjologicznych)*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 1997, pp. 24-25.

³ James, 1901, as cited in: Manterys A., *The Multitude of Realities in Sociology Theories (Wielość rzeczywistości w teoriach socjologicznych)*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 1997, pp. 19.

⁴ Skibińska E., *The Microworlds of Women. Autobiographical narratives (Mikroświaty Kobiet. Relacje autobiograficzne)*, Wydawnictwo UW, Warszawa 2006, pp. 335-336.

⁵ According to PWN Dictionary *micro* means 'the first element of compounds, indicating very small size or scale of what is named by the second element; very small: www.sip.pwn/slownik/mikro

croworlds⁶, among them the social world of differentness: a subject of the below dissertation. Therefore, it is worth to mention that presented research report concerns one of several categories, appointed by the author. The text consists of several parts: first part regards the research methodology, the second part focuses on the experience of differentness of adults with intellectual disability, and last part is an attempt of recapitulation.

Research methodology

The author's dissertation combines different fields of studies, chiefly andragogics and special education, and puts forward the following questions: What is the world of adults with intellectual disabilities like? What are the elements of this world? What are these social worlds characterised by?

Designing the research project, the author decided to utilise the constructivist-interpretivist paradigm, based on the acknowledgement of the input in research process of respondents and their competence as capable of co-creating and interpreting social reality. By giving voice to the respondents, the author considers them to have their own way of perceiving, experiencing and dealing with reality, and to not only be the object of research, as it has usually been in this kind of research, but its most competent subjects. The author follows the thought of F. Zaniecki, who claimed that cultural reality should be regarded as a world of values, and empirical facts must be considered in a way they are being perceived by individuals who experience them⁷. A researcher - participant observer 'will never obtain a knowledge deeper than actors possess, a foreigner will

⁶ In the research project other microworlds of adults with intellectual disability have been outlined as well, among them microworld of professional activity, human relationships, institutions, leisure time, or family.

⁷ Szacki J., *The History of Sociological Thought (Historia myśli socjologicznej)*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 1986, pp. 90-92.

never be able to understand indigenous people's culture better than they do, but an observer and a foreigner can develop a different image of strangers' actions or culture than their actors and indigenous people have'⁸.

Granted that human actions are emergent – they happen in a process of constant construction and assigning meanings to things⁹ – the author assumed that the actions of individuals are something they actively construct, reinterpret and redefine. The *activity*, broadly defined, refers also to creating representation of oneself in their own mind.

Moreover, the constructivist-interpretivist paradigm allows to approach research with flexibility, and to limit preconceptualisation of research objectives. It helps maintaining so-called context of discovery¹⁰ – a space to search for and unravel previously unforeseen phenomena which emerge during research process.

Presented research fits into qualitative research methodology, and the author utilises technique of constructivist-interpretivist grounded theory of Kathy Charmaz. This choice has been dictated by both specificity of the objective of research (deep comprehension of the phenomena in its processual form), and the attempt to discover the reality perceived by its social actors. The grounded theory has been utilised both as a strategy of collecting research material, and as a method of its analysis. The theory allows to collect data by using various methods typical for all kinds of qualitative research (i.a. participant observation, document analysis, interviews), as well as other techniques (among others textual analysis, qualitative inter-

⁸ Czarniawska B., *New Techniques of Field Research: Shadowing (Nowe techniki badań terenowych: shadowing)*, [in:] D. Jemielniak (ed.), *The Qualitative Research. Methods and Tools (Badania jakościowe. Metody i narzędzia)*, Vol. 2, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2012, p. 73.

⁹ Blumer H., *Symbolic Interactionism: Perspective and Method*, Prentice-Hall, New Jersey 1969, p. 82.

¹⁰ Konecki K., *The Studies on Methodology of Qualitative Research: The Grounded Theory (Studia z metodologii badań jakościowych: teoria ugruntowana)*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2000, pp. 26-27.

views)¹¹. Research material in discussed project has been collected using non-structured focused interview method¹², i.e. a way of leading conversation which allows for loose arrangement of questions sequences, and, more importantly, for adjusting language to needs and capabilities of respondents. The procedure has been implemented using the 'skeleton', i.e. a list of main questions essential for the interviewer's research purposes. At this stage of research, interviews have been conducted both with persons with intellectual disability (altogether 14 respondents between 29 and 51 years old, 8 females and 6 males), and with their parent/legal guardians (8 respondents), as well as with the employers of the Communal Home of Mutual Aid¹³ (6 respondents), where the research has been conducted¹⁴.

It is worth emphasising that one of key instruments used in the research has been the person conducting interviews, i.e. the author herself. The research project has allowed the interviewer to get close-

¹¹ Charmaz K., *The Grounded Theory. The Guide on Qualitative Analysis (Teoria ugruntowana. Przewodnik po analizie jakościowej)*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2009.

¹² Konecki K., *The Studies on Methodology of Qualitative Research: The Grounded Theory (Studia z metodologii badań jakościowych: teoria ugruntowana)*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2000.

¹³ The research is conducted in one of the local Communal Home of Mutual Aid in Łódź Voivodeship. The respondents, especially workers of the centre, wish to keep the details of the institution confidential.

¹⁴ The main criterion of respondent selection was the stage of life, i.e. maturity (age over 18 years old), and intellectual disability. All respondents have disability degree certificates. 10 of the respondents have moderate, 3 - mild, and 1 - severe degree of disability. Nevertheless, the degree of disability has not been a significant factor neither in the process of data collection, nor in its analysis. The author's objective was to examine the world of adults with intellectual disability without using disability degree certificates as labels and looking at them through their limitations. During the research process some data collected in the interviews appeared to lack some information and broader perspective, which convinced the author to include the parents, legal guardians and the Home workers in the project. Respondent group consists of: 7 parents (2 fathers, 5 mothers, and 1 aunt - a legal guardian of one of the adults with intellectual disability) and 6 employers: 4 females (the director of the Communal Home of Mutual Aid, a psychologist, 2 rehabilitation therapists, and 2 males: a rehabilitation therapist and a administration worker).

er to personal world of adults with intellectual disability, and therefore to attempt identification and description of the world experienced by respondents.

Collected material has been subjected to coding process, open at first (arranging data and assigning labels to it), then selective (orienting the research to the search for connections with the centre category), and finally, focused (emphasising interactive background). The analysis has allowed to reveal several different microworlds within which respondents exist. Among them the author distinguished: microworld of family, education, human relationships, leisure time, institutions, and freedom. Their boundaries are not permanent and solid, and they tend to fathom each other out. It is worth mentioning that the project is still in process, and, according to the utilised method, evolves in time.

Experiencing the differentness - the analysis of own research

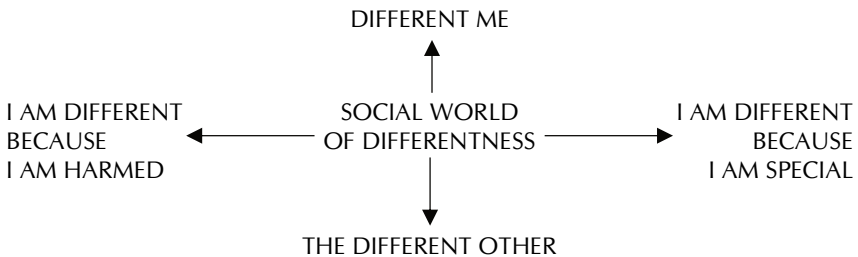
The analysed research material showed many threads focused on differentness. Almost each narrative of the respondents with intellectual disability has been referring to this phenomenon in one way or another. More importantly, the issue has been revealed in the narratives of parents/legal guardians and employers/therapists as well. In order to present synthetic facts, events, but, above all, their interpretations, and the process of assigning meanings to them and the language as a means of expression and communication of respondents, the author utilised the strategy used in grounded theory, i.a. focused coding of categories. The aim of this manoeuvre is to sort, synthesise, and organise large group of data¹⁵, and to present a way in which the information is connected.

¹⁵ Charmaz K., *The Grounded Theory. The Guide on Qualitative Analysis (Teoria ugruntowana. Przewodnik po analizie jakościowej)*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2009.

Experiences related to differentness have served as a centre of many categories which have provided answers to such questions as: if and why the respondents feel different? What are the dimensions of being different? What are the consequences of being different? In which areas of life does this sense of being different reveal itself? These are the main questions which, according to the Strauss and Corbin's thought¹⁶, let a researcher more accurately describe analysed experience and indicate connections between categories and sub-categories, as well as connect data anew.

Synthetically presented phenomenon of 'differentness' of respondents with intellectual disability can be described in terms of the above diagram:

Diagram No. 1: Microworld of differentness of adults with intellectual disability



Source: study based on own research

The following section is an attempt to outline each of the above fields.

Different me

As the research material indicates, persons with intellectual disability faced their first experiences of differentness at school. No

¹⁶ Strauss A.L., Corbin J. 1998, *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory*, Second edition, Thousand Oaks, Sage.

references to earlier life stages have been made in the interviews. The analysis has showed that many respondents recall school years as a time of dealing with practices which can be described as an experience of differentness. The language used by the adults with intellectual disability in their narratives about these experiences suggests that most of them understood them. Most of the narratives have been larded with very articulate or even crude expressions or, on the contrary, with rather laconic phrases.

Following are a few statements exemplary for the selected category. Respondents have situated their experiences in context of peer interactions:

Marek, 51 years old: *'At school, on breaks or after class, I was alone, I would rather walk by myself, they didn't like me much, those kids were so mean to me, rude they were, these cruds';*

Iza, 37 years old: *'When I was at school, I remember that other kids would laugh at me because I didn't know how to do this or that, they would push me, spit on me, and shout at me that I'm a moron, nutcase, or Down, at first I cried, but then I just got used to it';*

Mateusz, 37 years old: *'I always felt I was different than my colleagues at school. They were much more calm. They would look at me and not understand me, but sometimes I quite liked to come to school anyway. There was a lot of those harmed'.*

They often name people, facts, or events, engraved in their memory as objectifying (creating differentness):

Irena, 42 years old: *'I had this class tutor, she was so mean, she had me repeat grade. And so I had this commission exam, a psychologist, and some other therapist, and so they put me into a special school. It wasn't so great there, I was overgrown, different than others';*

Iza, 37 years old: *'one time this lady said I was the stupidest one in the whole class, and that I didn't belong there'.*

References to this issue can be found in narratives of the respondents' parents:

Mateusz's mother: *'You know, he was different than those kids back then at school. He was apart, he didn't have any friends, they were picking on him, cause he was disparate, just different, and so were saying the teachers';*

Kasia' father: *'My daughter is a bit different, apparently an adult, but still a child, you might say. Our younger daughter, that's completely different, she's got a husband, children, in general, and the older one, she is slightly different'.*

The same pattern emerges from the narratives of the employers of the Communal Home of Mutual Aid:

A female therapist No. 1: *'Most of them was already in the doghouse at school. I listen to it sometimes, as they recall those tough years, being laugh at, picked on, who knows what else there was. They were usually excluded, because they were different, you might say they didn't fit in'.*

The nature of discussed school experiences is displeasing. They are mostly related to the incidents at school, but also to informal or everyday life situations. Former ones are clearly and unambiguously identified by students with intellectual disability as a sign of disrespectful or even hostile attitude of some teachers towards them, and it concerns both so-called 'normal' students, and those from special schools.

It is worth mentioning that differentness, marked by other people, can manifest in appearance of respondents as well as in their behaviour. Analysed interviews contain narratives indicating that some respondents are aware of the fact that people around them notice particular external symptoms of their disability. This is how a 38 years old woman gives an account of her experiences:

'(...) when people look at me, or these old women, when they look at me with this: 'oh, a disabled one!', I'm quite scared. Well, when people look, I just turn away my head, and I don't look at them, I don't pay attention'.

People's reactions intimidate her and make her anxious. Similar aspects of social perception have been identified by a 27 years old woman, who have extrapolated her own experiences on the situation of every person with disability.

Kasia: *'I know that when a normal person sees someone like me, they laugh at them, and I can see it sometimes, but I know what it's like, I can feel whenever someone doesn't like something about me'.*

Granted that a person builds their identity in relation to other people, based on their words, gestures, and glances, which perform a role of a feedback for every individual, it can be assumed that described experiences had a significant influence on the way respondents have been building their world, and the image of themselves. If, according to Buber's words, *I* constitutes itself when encountering *You*¹⁷, then violent interactions experienced by respondents might have made them develop the attitude of dependence, weakness and submissiveness.

Another two contexts can be identified in the area of 'different me': the differentness of needs and of capabilities of adults with intellectual disability. There is a noticeable subjective perception of what respondents need in the analysed narratives. They demonstrate lack of trust, and distance towards what is new and not entirely familiarised. They obviously present a different perception of needs:

Daria, 36 years old: *'I don't know how to use ATM, honestly, I can't withdraw cash, but I don't need to, it's not necessary, my sister or my mom do that';*

Mateusz, 37 years old: *'Computer is not for me, what would I need it for? Well, Internet, maybe, it's easy, but other programs? What for, so I can mess something up?';*

Iza, 37 years old: *'I receive a pension, I don't have to work. I get the money once a month and it has to do. You know, for food, for clothes, but I manage'.*

The differentness and limitation of needs were shaped by earlier experiences and have caused a sense of differentness perceived as strangeness.

¹⁷ M. Buber, *I and Thou. Selected Philosophical Writings (Ty i ja. Wybór pism filozoficznych)*, Pax, Warszawa 1992, p. 45.

Another context of differentness have been revealed in terms of different capabilities, clear in following narratives:

Grzegorz, 34 years old: *'These things are for others, not me';*

Iza, 37 years old: *'I'm not fit for it'';*

Maria, 29 years old: *'When you're disabled as I am, you can't do much'.*

Respondents with intellectual disability do not feel strong and qualified enough to act by themselves:

Maria, 29 years old: *'Oh, no! I can't live by myself. There's lot of things I can't do. You know, things like sandwiches, something simple maybe, but dinner or groceries, it's my mom who takes care of this. I'm not sure I would be able to manage by myself. No, I don't think I would. No, I don't know if I would be able to manage, just on my own.*

Grzegorz, 34 years old: *'No, not to live independently, not yet, I'm not sure how it is going to be with bills and other stuff, I prefer to live with my parents for now. No, I think I would not be able to take care of myself, and why would I?'*

Iza, 36 years old: *'I couldn't raise a child, I can't have children, it is beyond my abilities. Maybe I could give birth to one, but not raise it, no. Because I would not be able to teach them about life, show them, it's hard. I have issues taking care of my nephew and niece, I'm just not good at it.'*

The different Other

Some of the respondents with intellectual disability have perceived themselves as different than other persons with disabilities. One man remembered his difficult experiences at work. He said that in a tough situation he had not been able to help himself and he had 'burst out'. He explained that he had not understood why 'normal' employers had laughed at him when he had been coming earlier to work or made mistakes while performing his duties.

Tomasz, 32 years old: *'I got mad, everything was wrong, I couldn't control myself anymore, because I got mad, and I don't even know why they would pick on me, they even minded me coming earlier, these normal employers, everything bothered them'.*

The respondent called his colleagues from work 'normal', despite the fact that they also have intellectual disability. 37 years old Iza, who participated in a camp with rehabilitation program for people with physical disability, describes her experiences in a similar way:

'I was in rehab there. Sometime earlier I had been there as well, and I had met this nice boy Adrian, he had lived next door with those on wheelchairs, because he couldn't have walked, and not with us normal ones, as I had'.

The ways the respondent has described the circumstances reveals the phenomenon of adopting the schemes of perceiving persons with (physical, in this case) disability. Social reproduction of an image of persons with physical disability among able-bodied members of society may cause internalisation of social environment's view toward individuals with other disabilities, and differentiating perception of persons with physical disability.

It seems that perceiving one's own, as well as another persons' otherness, has been one of the main emotional experiences of a human being. The dichotomic division between Us and Them is of such a kind which is hard to imagine existing in a world without. The natural need to search for similarities and differences plays a significant part in constitution of identity.

I am different because I am special

Being different because of being special is a kind of achieved differentness. The keynote here is engagement in a particular area of activities in which respondents feel qualified, successful, and appreciated. The narrative of 32 years old Dawid is exemplary here:

'I have talent, I'm not like the others. Not everyone can sing like that, I'm a really good singer and I often perform on stage. I really, really like to sing. I win prizes in competitions, because I have talent.'

Dawid's musicality is his special skill. He succeeds in this area of living. Dawid is a solo singer and a kind of a leader of a band in the Communal Home of Mutual Aid. Friends and workers of the House call him a star and a 'stage animal'. The therapist supervising the band claims that

'Dawid cannot do many things, as a result of his deficiencies, but despite this he is very special, because he can sing beautifully. He has a good ear, great voice with nice timbre, and a vocal range. What's more, he is capable of interpreting a song. He actually understands what he is singing about, he gets music. He has a feel for it, he shows emotions, and he is in it with every fibre of his being. And it is special, not everyone can do that. If he was different, fully abled, and he could perform in some talent show, he could even win.' (Worker No. 2, a female).

Another words of this therapist are though-provoking:

'When performing, Dawid is a different person. He stands up on a stage, takes a microphone, and changes completely. He sings and he actually changes. You might say, he is not disabled anymore. He deserves to be called a 'star', he's a star on stage without a doubt.' (Worker No. 3, a female).

Another example of engagement in an activity requiring a special talent is Mateusz. This 37 years old man demonstrates artistic talent. It can be said that painting is the respondent's main occupation:

'I like to paint so much, I can do it all the time. I paint at home too. I have paints, paintbrushes, and I sit and paint, because I like it. I have a lot of paintings, and all of these, hanging on the walls, and in the corridor, and next to the door, they are mine too, and they put them on exhibitions, and I have successes.'

Another area of achieved differentness is sports. An example of a person particularly talented in this field is 34 years old Piotr. The

respondent demonstrates advanced sports skills. Currently he practises four sports disciplines, all of them with good results:

'(...) I really like to attend sports competitions. These cups right there, they're mine, well, not all of them, but many. It is really cool. People arrive from other centres, from various places, and we meet, we practice, and there are competitions (...)' I am very good, everybody praises me, others aren't that good, but Tomek runs with me anyway.'

A therapist supporting Piotr says:

'Piotrek is a really talented boy. He is strong and determined, he is willing to train, he practices. He is special, because he's not easily discouraged or tired like others'. (Worker No. 4, male).

Being different is seen as being special both by persons with intellectual disabilities and by people close to them. It results in a person's status change in their closest environment, their higher position in group, and their sense of prevalence. Achieved differentness means searching for one's own identity, and using it to constitute oneself. This kind of differentness is accepted, or even desired.

I am different because I am harmed

The narratives of respondents with intellectual disability depict one more concept of differentness, i.a. perceiving oneself as a person harmed by fate, miserable, affected by a disorder, suffering. One of the respondents, telling about her experiences during her visit in a local clinic, has recalled words of an old woman waiting in line with her.

Iza, 37 years old: 'This lady said to me: 'Oh, you are such a poor thing', well, I know I am so poor, other people don't have to suffer as much as I do. And she was right, because what do disabled people exist for? Why did God do that? Nobody knows.'

Another respondent, 37-year-old Mateusz, has told about his experiences in an emotional way:

'Sometimes I think it would be better if I had never been born, because why was I? I wouldn't have to feel ashamed (...) and suffer. Who would laugh at me? If I wasn't disordered.'

Some of the narratives outline the way in which respondents identify their disability with a disorder:

Daria, 36 years old: *'This disability of mine, it's a disorder, it's not like with other people, because I am sick, diseased'.*

Iza, 37 years old: *'When you're sick, this is how it's like, you have such problems as I have. That's why I have a pension.'*

Mateusz, 37 years old: *'My life is really sad. I don't want to remember about it anymore (...), all I want is to live as a healthy, normal person. So I can just be at home, eat dinner, go shopping, have some time for myself in the morning, not just the Home all the time. I like it here, but it's just better to be normal and healthy'.*

This way of seeing disability can be recognised in narratives of the parents of adults with intellectual disability:

Maria's mother: *'I worry, because of her disability she's different, she's so poor, more vulnerable and naive, so helpless sometimes. Fate has been hard on her. Sometimes I wonder why she has been so harmed'.*

Daria's mother: *'Once in a while I cry over her fate, you know what I mean, she is so poor'.*

This kind of differentness might be a consequence of the need to prevent stigmatisation. Persons with intellectual disability carry a much heavier stigma than persons with other diseases. The sense of social isolation and marginalisation switches focus from intellectual disability to the state of disease. There is a clear pattern of 'preserving' the losses resulted from deficiencies and learned helplessness. This condition may lead to giving up on undertaking various activities, and give both adults with disability and their carers

a false sense of security. The situation of a person whose differentness is identified as being harmed may appear as socially more acceptable.

Conclusions

To sum up, analysed research material allows to outline many-sidedness of the phenomenon of differentness, which is relative and mutual, and at the same time universal due to its range and various interpretative perspectives. As noticed by E. Goffman, social roles of Others and 'normal' ones are not a once-and-for-all kind of roles. In particular situations, the Other – a different one – can be normal, and it can work the other way around as well¹⁸.

It is also worth highlighting the phenomenon of undertaking and staying in a role of the Other. Respondents with intellectual disability not only feel different, but they are treated as they were. It is manifested in many ways, among others in giving up on undertaking some social roles, evading some responsibilities, or expecting assistance. Persons with intellectual disability are expected to behave in a proper, nonabrasive ways, and to submit, but not to evolve and actively participate in social life. It is partially society which stigmatises persons with intellectual disability with differentness, and marginalises them, and partially it is themselves who withdraw from social scene. As Beata Cytowska notices, 'persons who diverge from the preferred pattern are willing to internalise group ideologies which place them on a bottom rung of a social ladder, thereby giving up on their beliefs and values'¹⁹. The re-

¹⁸ E. Goffman, *Stigma. Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity (Stygma. Historia zranionej tożsamości)*, GWP, Gdańsk 2007.

¹⁹ B. Cytowska, *Difficult Paths to Adaptation. Emancipation Motives in the Analysis of the Situation of Adults with Intellectual Disability in Contemporary Polish Society (Trudne drogi adaptacji. Wątki emacyacyjne w analizie sytuacji dorosłych osób z niepełnosprawnością intelektualną we współczesnym społeczeństwie polskim)*, Impuls, Kraków 2012, pp. 122-123.

spondents with intellectual disability are mostly aware of the fact of their own differentness, lower social position, and negative assumptions and perception related to it. Socially pigeonholed, they internalise lower social status, limit their self-evolvement, and get used to their disability²⁰. The differentness of experiences of persons with intellectual disability increases social isolation, and it is a source of creating and deepening a sense of alienation.

The phenomenon of differentness is bound up with prejudices, stereotypes²¹, stigmatising²², and discrimination²³. Prejudice is an assumption (often biased) of a group or an individual, usually based on their imaginary characteristics²⁴. It contains beliefs, as well as emotions and readiness to act. S. de Beauvoir wrote that 'The category of the Other is as primordial as consciousness itself. In the most primitive societies, in the most ancient mythologies, one finds the expression of a duality – that of the Self and the Other'²⁵. The reality we live in 'forces' us to encounter the Other, but the nature of these encounters is constantly open and complex, and their consequences depend largely on ourselves. Today there are many motivation and integration programs, aimed at helping persons with intellectual disability to leave social margin. They are subject of concern and held in centres where, in comfortable conditions, they

²⁰ M. Skura, *Me – The Other. Social Relationships of Persons with Disability (Ja – Inny. Relacje społeczne osób z niepełnosprawnością)*, Wyd. UW, Warszawa 2016, p. 8.

²¹ Elżbieta Zakrzewska-Manterys wrote about the 'persistentness' of the stereotype of a child with intellectual disability, see: *An intellectually disabled child: the inevitability of stereotypes (Dziecko upośledzone – nieuchronność stereotypów)* (2003).

²² One of the most significant works on the process of stigmatisation is *Stigma. Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity (Piętno. Historia zranionej tożsamości)* by Erving Goffman, published in 1963.

²³ Stanisław Kowalik wrote about discrimination, see: *Psychological and Social Foundations of Rehabilitation of Persons with Disability (Psychospołeczne podstawy rehabilitacji osób niepełnosprawnych)* (1999); *Between Discrimination and Integration of Persons with Disability (Pomiędzy dyskryminacją a integracją osób niepełnosprawnych)* (2001).

²⁴ www.bezuprzedzen.org/dyskryminacja/index.php?&tekst – on 12.03.2017

²⁵ S. de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex (Druga płeć)*, Czarna Owca, Warszawa 2003, p. 27.

are supposed to live a 'careless' life. But isn't such an attitude toward adults, based on adjusting their environment to their intellectual abilities rather than to the stage of life and their physical and social maturity, discriminatory itself?

It is worth mentioning that the analysis of research material have led the author to the point where a reflection on characteristics and descriptions of persons with intellectual disability in subject literature shows itself as necessary. Traditional, based on clinical research mainly in the area of clinical psychology, these accounts mostly focus on deficits identified as irreversible and affecting whole personality of an individual²⁶. This way of thinking appears to be inadequate to the data acquired using interpretative research methods, rather limited, lacking of broad perspective including all areas of life, and therefore insufficient. It can be said that they build an image of persons with intellectual disability.

In conclusion, presented research shows that differentness is a significant element of reality of persons with intellectual disability. It is counterproductive to uniform their experiences and problems; on the other hand, the analysis of research materials shows that the phenomenon of differentness is a common issue among almost all respondents. It has, nevertheless, various aspects and consequences. It may be a source of discriminations, as well as a factor determining safety and being taken care of (e.g. it protects from undertaking challenges, responsibilities or social roles, but it also gives a sense of security by highlighting unhoped-for achievements).

It can be only concluded then that if differentness is a phenomenon experienced by almost every person with intellectual disability, it requires further research which allows to examine it from various perspectives, and to broaden the field of reflection. It is necessary to carry out theorisation of results, according to utilised methodology, which the author will attempt to do at the closure of the conducted project.

²⁶ See also: J. Kostrzewski 1981, H. Borzyszkowska 1985, R. Kościelak 1989, J. Lausch-Żuk 1987, Ż. Stelter 2009.

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