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Dating Barriers of Women with Motor Disabilities

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The article addresses the issue of dating barriers experienced by women with physical disabilities. This phenomenon was presented in reference to the available research results and analysis. Dating barriers were described in a division into external and internal barriers. External barriers included social issues, which encompassed negative stereotypes, patterns, attitudes and architectural barriers. Internal barriers related directly to women with physical disabilities, including their attitudes towards themselves, self-esteem and social skills. The analysis showed that women with physical disabilities may have more difficulties with finding partners and forming personal relationships leading to intimacy than women without disabilities.

KEY WORDS: women with disabilities, dating barriers, dating, physical disability.

Introduction

Love is one of the most complex phenomena in psychology. According to E. Berscheid¹, it is one of the few psychological con-

¹ E. Berscheid, *Some comments on love's anatomy: Or, whatever happened to old-fashioned lust?*, [in:] *The psychology of love*, ed. R. J. Sternberg, M. L. Barnes, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1988, pp. 359–374.

structs that are so difficult to capture. In spite of it, attempts were made at examining the essence of love by building various theories of this phenomenon. The first proposal for understanding love was presented in 1922 by Z. Freud², who showed it in the categories of striving for the ideal ego. In the area of clinical psychology, this term was also explained in the context of anticipating salvation³. Further explorations in the area of personality psychology allowed for determining it as a subject that requires understanding through individual "styles" of human love. According to J. A. Lee⁴, there are six types of love: ludus - game-playing love; eros - type of love characterised by searching for the loved one, whose physical presentation is the image of the lover kept in the person's mind; storge - slow development of feelings; mania - obsession, jealousy, emotional intensity; agape - altruistic love; pragma - paying attention primarily to the demographic features of the other person. On the other hand, in the context of social psychology, R. Stenberg presented the understanding of love via a three-component concept⁵. The author created a theory where love between a woman and a man consists of three components: intimacy, passion and commitment. These elements describe the ideal feeling, which should characterise a close relation of two people. According to M. Parol⁶, the basis for such a relation is primarily the accomplishment of the need of security, attention, close contact, emotional support, sense, emotional and sexual bond, understanding and friendship. Accord-

² S. Freud, *Certain neurotic mechanisms in jealousy, paranoia, and homosexuality*, "Collected Papers" 1922, vol. 2, pp. 235-240, 323.

³ T. Reik 1944 quoted from: R. J. Stenberg, *Construct validation of a triangular love scale*, "European Journal of Social Psychology" 1997, vol. 27, pp. 313-335.

⁴ J. A. Lee, *A topology of styles of loving*, "Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin" 1977, vol. 3, pp. 173-182.

⁵ R. J. Stenberg, *Construct validation of a triangular love scale*, "European Journal of Social Psychology" 1997, vol. 27, pp. 313-335.

⁶ M. Parol, *Potrzeby a relacje między mężczyznami i kobietami*, „Kwartalnik Naukowy” 2013, No. 2(13), pp. 5-15.

ing to B. Wojciszke⁷, it is however the need of emotional contact that is the most important in the formation of inter-human relations. Satisfaction with such a relation determines the quality of human life and becomes an element of the feeling of happiness⁸. People who want to be happy in life try to find a proper person with whom they could have a close and loving relationship. The cultural construct of the manifestation of love of two people is a date. It is a fixed element of modern life, culture, art and the media. In Poland, it appeared just 80 years ago and its' popularisation in America and Europe was influenced by custom-related changes at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century⁹. The most important of them include the first, second and third wave feminism¹⁰, consumerism and globalisation, emancipation of sexual minorities, democratisation and laicisation. Thanks to them, young people gained the opportunity of meeting outside of home without having the meetings supervised by other persons¹¹. Nowadays, dating has

⁷ K. Schier, *Johna Bowlby'ego teoria przywiązania i psychoanaliza*, [in:] *Koncepcja przywiązania. Od teorii do praktyki klinicznej*, ed. B. Józefik, G. Iniewicz, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, Kraków 2008, pp. 35–45.

⁸ K. Doroszewicz, *Bliskie związki a jakość życia*, „Psychologia Jakości Życia” 2008, vol. 7, No. 1/2, pp. 5–18.

⁹ E. Warumzer, *Wzór idealnej randki a współczesne dążenie do idealnego związku*, “Annales Universitatis Paedagogicae Cracoviensis Studia Sociologica V” 2013, vol. 2, pp. 100–116.

¹⁰ Women's movements had various forms; they aimed for independence or united with other movements. According to this, the so-called waves of feminism are distinguished. The first wave of feminism denotes the period until the middle of the 19th century, when demands were made for granting women equal rights. On the other hand, the second wave of feminism was called modern feminism, in reference to its' idea for the sake of anti-war movements, civil rights and libertarian theory. The third wave of feminism is also known as post-feminism and it had its' beginnings in the 1980s. It primarily resulted in withdrawal of multiple political accomplishments that were attributed to the earlier waves of this movement. At the same time, a concept emerged that women no longer need feminism (J. Helios, W. Jedlecka, 2016, p. 10).

¹¹ P. Szarota, *Anatomia randki*, Wydawnictwo Muza, Warsaw 2011, pp. 5–6.

undergone thorough changes; first of all, it was transferred to the public sphere and no longer entails marriage-related intentions and is no longer so closely bound with romantic love¹². A date may be analysed in a variety of ways, e. g. in the context of social rituals, a historically and culturally ideal model or in relation to the preferred and dispositional types of love. It may also be defined as an arranged meeting of two persons, aimed at deepening or establishing an intimate relationship. It may take place in the real or virtual space¹³. According to E. Warumzer¹⁴, many people strive to accomplish the model of an ideal date. In line with the author's studies, young people believe it to be an important element of their life; thus, dates are planned in advance and later remembered for a long time.

When discussing dating, it is necessary to emphasise at the very beginning that this issue is not frequently encountered in psychological and pedagogical studies. A review of English and Polish literature allows for ascertaining a significant absence of studies devoted to dating, both with respect to fully able people and people with disabilities. According to J. Barlińska and P. Szarota¹⁵, unwillingness to discuss this subject matter may result from the fact that the term "date" belongs to the colloquial language and therefore it does not seem to fit the academic discourse. However, it should be emphasised that the common nature of dating behaviour and intimate relations that result from it make this subject very important. In-depth analyses of the phenomenon could enrich the knowledge in the area of love psychology.

A. Hulek believes that "there are many more common aspects, both among people with disabilities, as well as between people with

¹² J. Wróblewska-Skrzek, *Architektura randki a kryzys matrymonialny*, „Dyskursy Młodych Andragogów” 2017, No. 18, pp. 389–402.

¹³ J. Barlińska, P. Szarota, *Światopogląd a style randkowania*, „Psychologia społeczna” 2014, vol. 9, No. 4(31), pp. 437–444.

¹⁴ E. Warumzer, *Wzór idealnej randki...*, op. cit., p. 113.

¹⁵ J. Barlińska, P. Szarota, *Światopogląd a style*, op. cit., p. 438.

disabilities and fully able people, than aspects that separate them"¹⁶. Thus, the needs experienced by fully able persons are identical with the needs experienced by people with disabilities. Nevertheless, they are often forgotten, in particular in reference to women with disabilities, whose image is created in the society via stereotypes that are predominant in it. As shown by studies of M. R. Nario-Redmond¹⁷, women with disabilities are perceived as asexual, dependant on fully able persons and incompetent, in particular with respect to family roles. Women with disabilities are exposed to stereotypes related not only to disability, but also sex. They influence the formation of the feelings of causality, social stances, professional aspirations and motivation, feeling of sexuality, as well as formation of identity in these women¹⁸. Moreover, general stereotypes are imposed on women with disabilities, which describe them as defenceless victims, as well as stereotypes pertaining to sex, which distance them from the sexual standards that are valid in the context of their sex¹⁹.

In spite of the identical needs of women with disabilities and fully able women, it is most often women with disabilities who encounter a number of barriers limiting their participation in the social life, including dating²⁰. According to the studies of A. Wołowicz-Ruszkowska²¹, finding a partner is much more difficult if a woman is disabled. On the other hand, in case of already existing relation-

¹⁶ A. Hulek, *Człowiek niepełnosprawny w społeczeństwie*, Wydawnictwo PZWL, Warsaw, 1986, p. 10.

¹⁷ M. R. Nario-Redmond, *Cultural stereotypes of disabled and non-disabled men and women: consensus for global category representations and diagnostic domains*, "British Journal of Social Psychology" 2010, vol. 49, p. 471.

¹⁸ A. Nowak, *Zagrożenie wykluczeniem społecznym kobiet niepełnosprawnych*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, Katowice 2012, p. 10.

¹⁹ A. Wołowicz-Ruszkowska, *Zanikanie? Trajektorie tożsamości kobiet z niepełnosprawnością*, Wydawnictwo Akademii Pedagogiki Specjalnej, Warsaw 2013, p. 230.

²⁰ D. H. Rintala, C. A. Howland, M. A. Nosek, J. L. Bennett, M. E. Young, C. C. Foley, C. D. Rossi, G. Chanpong, *Dating Issues for Women with Physical Disabilities*, "Sexuality and Disability" 1997, vol. 15(4), pp. 219–242.

²¹ A. Wołowicz-Ruszkowska, *Zanikanie? Trajektorie...*, op. cit., p. 227.

ships, the fact of being disabled results in their reorganisation. A number of aesthetic and functional changes appear in the body that directly influence the formation of female-male relations.

In relation to this, according to the studies of C. A. Howland and D. H. Rintala²², disabled women experience delayed development of dating behaviour. At the moment of the first date and the first serious relationships, they are usually older than non-disabled women. Reference books dealing with these issues include publications referring to the barriers in dating in reference to women with disabilities. They can be divided into external barriers that encompass the social environment and internal barriers that are experienced by women with disabilities²³.

External Dating Barriers

Social barriers that hinder the dating of women with disabilities include, in the first place, stereotypes. The term "stereotype" is defined in the social sciences as a "set of relatively fixed, simplified and unauthorised generalisations pertaining to a certain group or a class of people. In this respect, their negative and unfavourable characteristics are significant, yet some authors believe that the ingredients of stereotypes may also include positive convictions, yet biased and inaccurate"²⁴.

Stereotypical perception of women with disabilities by the society as, e. g., asexual, is related to the lack of "permission" for them to

²² C. A. Howland, D. H. Rintala, *Dating behaviors of women with physical disabilities*, "Sexuality and Disability" 2001, vol. 1, p. 47.

²³ C. A. Howland, D. H. Rintala, *Dating behaviors...*, op. cit., p. 44; D. H. Rintala, C. A. Howland, M. A. Nosek, J. L. Bennett, M. E. Young, C. C. Foley, C. D. Rossi, G. Chanpong, *Dating Issues for...*, op. cit., p. 220; M. A. Nosek, C. Howland, D. H. Rintala, M. E. Young, G. F. Chanpong, *National study of women with physical disabilities: final report*, "Sexuality and Disability" 2001, vol. 19(1), pp. 5-39.

²⁴ A. S. Reber, E. S. Reber, *Słownik psychologii*, Wydawnictwo SCHOLAR, Warsaw 2005, p. 743.

engage in romantic relations or for them to go on dates. In line with such prejudices, women with disabilities should not be taken into account as persons who desire to and who may form a romantic relationship with another person²⁵. Furthermore, there are also social fears that dating on the part of women with disabilities may lead to an unwanted pregnancy and, in consequence, birth of a child with a disability²⁶. According to the majority of the society, this is unacceptable, as, in the society's opinion, women with disabilities are incapable of bringing up children, taking care of their partner or running a household. Thus, they are useless members of a broader community²⁷.

Possibilities of dating by women with disabilities in comparison to fully able women are much more limited. These impediments primarily refer to the issue of suffering from a noticeable disability. Women with disabilities examined in the studies of C. A. Howland and D. R. Rintala adopt a standpoint that dating "before was much easier"²⁸. According to the participants of this survey, if a woman is fully able, men look with interest at her. On the other hand, when she becomes disabled, they feel sorry for her and only want to be friends with her. A woman's disability influences her relations with men. In the studies of A. Wołowicz-Ruszkowska²⁹, one of the examined women (with an inborn disability and with higher education) believed that "in the relations with the opposite sex, such disability is an impediment. After all, men are guided by appearance. In order to become involved, a man has to fancy the girl physically"³⁰. According to M. J. Philips³¹ women with disabilities are very often

²⁵ M. R. Nario-Redmond, *Cultural stereotypes of ...*, op. cit., p. 483.

²⁶ C. A. Howland, D. H. Rintala, *Dating behaviors of...*, op. cit., p. 41.

²⁷ C. J. Gill, *Dating and relationship issues*, "Sexuality and Disability" 1996, vol. 14(3), pp. 183-190.

²⁸ C. A. Howland, D. H. Rintala, *Dating behaviors of...*, op. cit., p. 49.

²⁹ A. Wołowicz-Ruszkowska, *Zanikanie? Trajektorie tożsamości...*, op. cit., p. 229.

³⁰ Ibidem.

³¹ M. J. Phillips, *Damaged goods: Oral narratives of the experience of disability in American Culture*, "Social Science and Medicine" 1990, vol. 30(8), pp. 849-857.

perceived by men as “damaged goods”, and they should be grateful for any attention or interest on the part of other people, also negative one.

C. J. Gill³² claims that limitations in dating of women with disabilities result primarily from the canons of beauty and physical attractiveness adopted in a given society. The appearance of a woman’s body is very important, as it is subject to evaluation and tends to be accepted or not in line with the male standard of femininity³³. Thus, women with a noticeable disability may very often be perceived as “defective.” In the studies of A. Wołowicz-Ruszkowska³⁴, women with disabilities, both acquired and inborn, talk about issues of rejection on account of “different” body and physical limitations which, in their opinion, are an impediment in building corporeal love.

Subsequent limitations in dating on the part of women with disabilities may be created by friends and family. They often discourage them from establishing closer relations, in particular with fully able persons. In the surveys of C. A. Howland and D. H. Rintala³⁵, one of the respondents with an inborn disability believed that persons close to her discouraged her from dating fully able men by arguing that men dating a woman with a disability must have some serious dysfunction which makes them unattractive for fully able women. It has to be emphasised that stances of parents towards women with disabilities have a great significance for their ability to establish intimate relationships in adult life. Parents who encourage their daughters to social meetings make them feel attractive and important, thereby helping them establish a strong foundation for future relations in adult life³⁶.

³² C. J. Gill, *Dating and relationship...*, op. cit., p. 184.

³³ E. Kaschak, *Nowa psychologia kobiety. Podejście feministyczne*, translated by: J. Węgrodzka, Gdańskie Wydawnictwo Psychologiczne, Gdańsk 2001, pp. 90–96.

³⁴ A. Wołowicz-Ruszkowska, *Zanikanie? Trajektorie tożsamości...*, op. cit., p. 228.

³⁵ C. A. Howland, D. H. Rintala, *Dating behaviors of...*, op. cit., p. 52.

³⁶ D. H. Rintala, C. A. Howland, M. A. Nosek, J. L. Bennett, M. E. Young, C. C. Foley, C. D. Rossi, G. Chanpong, *Dating Issues for...*, op. cit., p. 221.

Another important aspect is the mobility of persons with disabilities. It happens quite frequently that women with disabilities encounter physical barriers which make it difficult to go on a date³⁷. In line with P. Todys' findings³⁸, public transport is not adjusted to the needs of people with disabilities, both on the level of infrastructure and the rolling stock. What is more, the number of dating locations is also limited on account of non-adjustment of a majority of buildings for the needs of people with disabilities. The hindrances in the form of, e. g., lack of lifts, prevent their access to a number of attractive locations.

The presented external barriers in the dating of women with disabilities encompassed primarily the stereotypes, stances and models in the society, as well as architectural barriers. Apart from physical disability, some of the causes of life failures of people with disabilities include the social limitations that they encounter on their way³⁹. In some cases, this may result in almost complete blocking of the possibility of dating, as well as establishing intimate relations on the part of women with disabilities.

Internal Dating Barriers

Another equally important group of limitations in dating are barriers that are within the women suffering from disabilities. These limitations are primarily related to the reluctance of women with disabilities to date and establish relations with other people. They may result from women's fear of rejection by other persons, caused

³⁷ C. A. Howland, D. H. Rintala, *Dating behaviors of ...*, op. cit., p. 53.

³⁸ P. Todys, *Przejawy dyskryminacji osób z niepełnosprawnością ruchową* – Towarzystwo Edukacji Antydyskryminacyjnej – II specjalist seminar entitled "*Motor and Intellectual Disability as Premises for Discrimination*", [in:] http://www.tea.org.pl/userfiles/file/Seminaria/Niepelnosprawnosc_%20ruchowa_PTodys_TEA.pdf [access: 01.11.2017].

³⁹ Cf. L. Marszałek, *Spółeczny kontekst niepełnosprawności*, "Seminare" 2007, No. 24, pp. 339–353.

by the fact of their disability. Many women with disabilities assume that already at the very beginning of a meeting, when the partner finds out about her disability, he would treat her "differently" and that is why they do not try to establish any relations whatsoever⁴⁰.

In line with the studies of D. Hassouneh-Phillips and E. McNeff⁴¹, women with motor disabilities have a greater problem with establishing and maintaining intimate relations than fully able women. A. Długołęcka claims⁴² that the lack of the feeling of physical attractiveness caused by the disability greatly hinders establishing an emotional relation based on acceptance and security. Women with disabilities are much more exposed to dissatisfaction with their own body, as they have a tendency to compare themselves with the cultural construct of the ideal female beauty⁴³. The model of physical attractiveness which is conditioned culturally leads to the exclusion of women with disabilities, their suffering and the feeling of lack of physical attributes due to changes in their body image⁴⁴. In consequence, this leads to the weakening of emotional ties with the present partner, as well as problems with finding a new life partner, ready to create an intimate relation. According to the studies of A. Długołęcka, women with disabilities establish contacts with men less frequently than the other way round.

The appearance of a disability causes significant changes in the hitherto habits of women and men, changing the entire outline of their conduct. In consequence, this threatens the feeling of self-value and attractiveness at the moment when the need of intimacy and belonging is the greatest. This primarily refers to personal, social

⁴⁰ C. A. Howland, D. H. Rintala, *Dating behaviors of...*, op. cit., pp. 47–48.

⁴¹ D. Hassouneh-Phillips, E. McNeff, *"I thought I was less worthy": low sexual and body esteem and increased vulnerability to intimate partner abuse in women with physical disabilities*, "Sexuality and Disability" 2005, vol. 23(4), pp. 227–240.

⁴² A. Długołęcka, *Znaczenie kategorii płci w procesie rehabilitacji osób z niepełnosprawnością ruchową*, „Niepełnosprawność i Rehabilitacja” 2011, No. 4, pp. 52–67.

⁴³ D. Hassouneh-Phillips, E. McNeff, *I thought I...*, op. cit., p. 230.

⁴⁴ A. Wołowicz-Ruszkowska, *Zanikanie? Trajektorie tożsamości kobiet...*, op. cit., p. 229.

and sexual interactions with other persons. In result, people with disabilities feel lonely and isolated from others⁴⁵.

According to the studies of A. R. Craig *et al.*⁴⁶, women with disabilities are aware of their limitations with respect to the cognitive and physical functions, social potential and sexual knowledge. In spite of it, they often fail to realise the lack of social skills thanks to which they could be successful in striving for intimate relations. As shown by the studies of C. A. Howland and D. H. Rintala⁴⁷, some women who have been experiencing disability from an early age, lacked the level of social skills adequate to their age with respect to dating. This primarily refers to the ability to establish and maintain contacts and lack of maturity in relations with men, which were characterised by childishness. It should be stressed that even when women with disabilities are equipped with social skills and have many friends, it is less probable that the friendships established by them could evolve into romantic relations, as it happens in the case of fully able women⁴⁸.

A very important factor which has great impact on whether a woman with a motor disability decides to establish relations is the level of self-esteem that she possesses, which, to a greater degree, depends on social and environmental factors rather than the fact of being disabled. This is testified by the studies of A. M. Nosek *et al.*⁴⁹, which showed that the respondents (fully able women and women with disabilities) who were in a romantic relationship, worked and did not experience violence, had a high level of self-esteem. On the other hand, when fully able women and women with disabilities

⁴⁵ D. D. Glass, F. J. Padrone, *Sexual adjustment in the handicapped*, "Journal of Rehabilitation" 1978, vol. 44(1), pp. 43-47.

⁴⁶ A. R. Craig, K. M. Hancock, H. Dickson, J. Martin, F. Chang, *Psychological consequences of spinal injury: A review of the literature*, "Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry" 1990, vol. 24, pp. 418-425.

⁴⁷ C. A. Howland, D. H. Rintala, *Dating behaviors of ...*, op. cit., p. 48.

⁴⁸ C. A. Howland, D. H. Rintala, *Dating behaviors of ...*, op. cit., p. 48.

⁴⁹ M. A. Nosek, C. Howland, D. H. Rintala, M. E. Young, G. F. Chanpong, *National study of ...*, op. cit., p. 8.

did not work, were not in a relationship with anybody and experienced violence, fully able women had lower self-esteem in comparison to women with disabilities.

A person's self-esteem impacts the accomplishment of goals, guarantees optimum vigilance, protects from fear, misfortunes and stress, preventing exclusion from the society⁵⁰. High self-esteem supports a person in the control of own behaviour, as well as realisation of own desires and plans in life⁵¹. Thus, in the majority of cases, low self-esteem is a factor hindering establishment of relations and participation in dating in the case of women with disabilities⁵².

Another aspect that significantly affects dating is the stance of women with disabilities with respect to themselves and their disability. In the opinion of respondent women, care stances that they manifest in relation to themselves may materially hinder their dating⁵³. Dating behaviour of women with disabilities was extremely varied. In some cases, women with disabilities rejected everybody who asked them on a date. On the other hand, some women accepted every date offer fearing rejection, loneliness and living in a conviction that they were not worthy of anybody's love⁵⁴.

Fear of abuse from other persons discourage women with disabilities from dating. In many cases, such abuse included emotional, physical and sexual violence⁵⁵. In line with the report of the United Nations (2006), over a half of women with disabilities were victims of physical violence at a certain point in their lives⁵⁶. As noted by

⁵⁰ B. Wojciszke, *Funkcje samooceny*, [in:] *Motywacje umysłu*, ed. A. Kolańczyk, B. Wojciszke, Wydawnictwo Smak Słowa, Sopot, 2010, pp. 111–126.

⁵¹ J. Kirenko, *Wsparcie społeczne osób z niepełnosprawnością*, Wydawnictwo Wyższa Szkoła Umiejętności Pedagogicznych i Zarządzania, Ryki, 2002, p. 129.

⁵² M. A. Nosek, C. Howland, D. H. Rintala, M. E. Young, G. F. Chanpong, *National study of ...*, op. cit., p. 11.

⁵³ C. A. Howland, D. H. Rintala, *Dating behaviors of ...*, op. cit., p. 44.

⁵⁴ C. A. Howland, D. H. Rintala, *Dating behaviors of ...*, op. cit., p. 53.

⁵⁵ C. A. Howland, D. H. Rintala, *Dating behaviors of ...*, op. cit., p. 57.

⁵⁶ E. Del Rio Ferres, J. L. Megias, F. Exposito, *Gender – based violence against women with visual and physical disabilities*, "Psicothema" 2013, vol. 25(1), pp. 67–72.

C. A. Howland and D. H. Rintala⁵⁷, such abuse often takes place with a “tacit consent” of women with disabilities who, wishing to keep the relationship at any price, become overly submissive and lenient towards the decisions and demands of their partners.

When analysing the dating issues, it is also necessary to mention the issue of the mode of choosing a partner. It is quite important due to the fact that the approaches of fully able women and women with disabilities are diverse. In the case of fully able women, such selection is subject to strict rules. Yet it is interesting to note that the requirements of women with respect to a potential partner tend to be much higher than the requirements of men⁵⁸. Searching for a partner may take place in line with the principle of homogamy, i.e. choice of a person who has a similar socio-economic status, including the level of education, denomination or origin⁵⁹. In reference to women, it is also possible to mention hypergamy, understood as searching for a partner who belongs to a higher category and social group than one’s own. This need is so strong that women who try to find such a person are capable of adjusting their own romantic feelings to their rules and requirements⁶⁰.

Choosing a dating partner in the case of women with disabilities greatly differs from the choices of fully able women. First of all, it is because they feel the necessity of going on a date with anybody who asks them out, in fear of loneliness. Many women with disabilities look for the same positive features in their partner. In particular, they are looking for a person who is not only interested in the sexual aspect of the relationship, but who also thinks about marriage in the future, who is friendly, attractive and has similar interests. Yet first of all, they are looking for somebody who is able to accept their

⁵⁷ C. A. Howland, D. H. Rintala, *Dating behaviors of...*, op. cit., pp. 57–58.

⁵⁸ J. Wróblewska-Skrzek, *Architektura randki a...*, op. cit., p. 393.

⁵⁹ E. Paprzycka, E. Mianowska, Z. Izdebski, *Jak dobieramy się w pary? Płeć biologiczna i płeć społeczno-kulturowa a preferowane cechy partnera*, „Dyskursy Młodych Andragogów” 2014, No. 15, pp. 329–345.

⁶⁰ T. Szlendak, *Antropologia miłości. Socjobiologiczny model wyjaśniania ludzkich strategii seksualnych i próba jego krytyki*, „Studia Socjologiczne” 1999, No. 1, pp. 5–39.

disability. A significant limitation with respect to the choice of the partner may be the lack of experience of women with disabilities in dating. In relation to this, their ideas are full of idealised relations based on television and films, which may replace the actual experiences, resulting in unrealistic expectations. Thus, if they do not find anybody who complies with such standards, they continue living alone without a romantic relationship⁶¹.

It is worth adding that in the case of women with disabilities, ending a relationship or reluctance to date often has the same causes as in the case of fully able women. Most often, they include the partner's move to another country, disappearance of relation, the partner's unattractiveness or excessive dominance, the fact that the partner is married or engaged to another woman. However, it also has to be emphasised that if the man ends the relationship, the woman with a disability automatically assumes that the disability was the cause of the split-up⁶².

Recapitulation

Summing up the discussion, it has to be emphasised that not all women with motor disabilities are ready to establish closer relations with other people. There are many women who find it hard to accept their disability and, in consequence, consider themselves disabled persons. In the explorations of A. M. Nosek *at al.*, it is possible to find a statement of a woman with an inborn motor disability who does not identify with her disability. She believes that: "she has always felt as if her body did not belong to her"⁶³. Women who decide to date are probably the ones that are presented in the statement of another woman with inborn motor disability. She emphasises that getting to know herself allowed her to find her identity as

⁶¹ C. A. Howland, D. H. Rintala, *Dating behaviors of...*, op. cit., p. 49.

⁶² *Ibidem*, s. 65.

⁶³ M. A. Nosek, C. Howland, D. H. Rintala, M. E. Young, G. F. Chanpong, *National study of...*, op. cit., p. 10.

a woman who is valuable and has a lot of beauty. That is why she should not hide and should definitely engage in social behaviour. Authors of the study emphasise that the first and the second woman are united by a very long path that the former has to complete. Women with motor disabilities need a lot of time to acknowledge their own value (including their femininity) and become ready for romantic relations and dating.

Women with motor disabilities, as compared to fully able women, encounter many more obstacles (external and internal) that prevent them from establishing romantic relationships and dating. Social barriers in dating on the part of women with motor disabilities encompass primarily the negative stereotypes that are rooted in the society, as well as models and stances of behaviour towards women with disabilities. Another important aspect of restrictions is the ideal of the female corporeal beauty rooted in culture, which is the basis for building interest in women on the part of men. Friends and family may sometimes be the source of discouragement and demobilisation with respect to the issue of dating on the part of women with disabilities. The stances adopted by parents who brought up women with disabilities result in specific behaviour in adult life that they manifest, intent on establishing or not establishing new relations. The most obvious social limitations in dating on the part of women with disabilities include the issues of mobility and architectural barriers which are a serious obstacle in this respect. Apart from external barriers in dating, there are also inner issues of women with disabilities. They primarily encompass self-attitude and the level of self-esteem. If a woman manifests a positive self-attitude and her level of self-esteem is high, it is easier for her to establish new contacts. Social skills of women with disabilities, which facilitate their desires for romantic relations and maintenance of existing ones, are also important.

The performed analysis of a slight portion of the available literature on dating behaviour of women with motor disabilities provides valuable information in reference to the issue that is new and practically unexplored in the Polish reality. Commonness of dating

behaviour, as well as its' significance in the weakening of social stereotypes and auto-stereotype of women with disabilities is an important contribution to studies in this respect. In-depth and thorough analyses could enrich the hitherto knowledge in the area of love psychology in reference to women and men with disabilities.

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