Complexity and Continuity-identity constructions of persons with intellectual disabilities

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Abstract

The aim of the presentation is to contribute to a new theoretical understanding of the construction of self-identities of persons with intellectual disability. The analysis draws both on a review of the literature in the field and on close readings of four life stories of young adults with personal experience of intellectual disability. In the review three strands of knowledge were identified: 1) sociological studies of stable, other-defined, social identities; 2) psychological studies of stable, self-defined identities, and 3) discursive studies of dynamic self- and other-defined identities. The analysis of the literature showed that the third strand has contributed significantly to the theory of identity construction by introducing the idea of complexity and flow into our understanding of self-identities of persons with intellectual disabilities. A second conclusion is that next to nothing is said about how the studied persons could maintain a sense of self-continuity in spite of the complexity of multiple self-identities. An in-depth, interpretative analysis of expressions of self-identities in the four life histories illuminated basic aspects of both complexity and continuity. The identified narrative patterns of complexity are understood against the background of Harré's and Langenhove's theory of positioning. The concept of inner dialogue is introduced in order to make sense of the analyzed expressions of self-continuity.

Keywords: Self, identity, Intellectual disability, Positioning, Inner Dialogue

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