

AUTHORSHIP OF OWN LIVES IN PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES MODEL IN THEORETICAL AND EMPIRICAL CONTEXT

Abstract: The concept of the *authorship of their own lives in people with disabilities* belongs to the trend which creates a positive, capable image of a person with disability in the society. The aim of this article is to relate contemporary theories which conceptualise disability in the categories of a universal human condition, natural human variation and positive aspects of human functioning to AOL–PwD. In particular, the analyses in this work aim to locate AOL–PwD in the perspective of the theories of coherence, well-being, self-determination, quality of life and social belonging. The analysis has allowed to formulate the following theses: (1) the classical theory of needs by Abraham Maslow provides a significant foundation and the leading context for the general explication of the *authorship of their own lives in people with disabilities* idea; (2) the connections between identity and various dimensions of human functioning make it possible to predict the relations of these dimensions with AOL–PwD; (3) specific aspects of the *authorship of their own lives in people with disabilities* can be presented in the light of relevant theories; (4) the AOL–PwD construct is a complex composition of diverse relations and dependencies; (5) the *authorship of their own lives in people with disabilities* concept refers to the holistic model of a person with disability and illustrates comprehensively the specific composition of his or her mental and social condition.

Keywords: authorship of own lives, people with disabilities, self-actualisation, coherence, well-being, self-determination, quality of life, social belonging, conceptualisation of disability

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INTRODUCTION

The ideas of normalisation from the 1960s established the perception of disability from the perspective of such personal traits as: self-determination, quality of life, sense of identity or autonomy. The concept of *authorship of own life* penetrates these areas, which, by creating mental resources of person with disability, constitute a significant condition for normalisation, because normalisation can be seen as a process which aims at allowing a person with disability to become the author of his or her own life (Głodkowska, 2014a).

The concept of *authorship of their own lives in people with disabilities* (AOL–PwD) fits in normalisation-oriented, humanist and affirmative perception of disability, which investigates areas of human subjectivity, well-being, optimum functioning, satisfactory fulfilment of developmental tasks and ability to efficient use of social support (Głodkowska 2014a, 2014d, 2015). The presented construct of the *authorship of their own lives in people with disabilities* results from the combination of various concepts of humans, formulated by researchers in the fields of psychology, pedagogy, sociology, family studies, as well as philosophy. AOL–PwD is characterised by five aspects – personalistic, eudaimonistic, functional, temporal, and help-related. So far, each of them has been interpreted in relation to a relevant theory: theory of personalism, theory of well-being, theory of optimum functioning, theory of developmental tasks, theory of social support (Głodkowska, 2015).

The term *authorship of their own lives in people with disabilities* was defined in the categories of a multidimensional construct, which identified (1) subjective experiences, (2) well-being, (3) independence, (4) satisfactory completion of developmental tasks, and (5) successful use of social support (Głodkowska, Gosk, 2018).

The previous analyses undertook the conceptualisation of the *authorship of their own lives in people with disabilities*, establishing a theoretical concept, determining contexts of meanings, defining it, designing research procedures and developing assumptions for the

diagnostic strategy (Głodkowska, 2015; Głodkowska, Gosk, 2018; Głodkowska, Gosk, Pałowska, 2018). The AOL–PwD concept was presented in specific semantic connections, which all share the common foundation of the sense of the person's identity (Głodkowska, Pałowska, 2018).

This article continues to develop the concept of the *authorship of their own lives in people with disabilities*. The authors followed important directions for analyses found in the basic strategic assumptions for AOL–PwD research defined previously (Głodkowska, Gosk, Pałowska, 2018). Referring in particular to strategic assumptions about interdisciplinarity, systematicity and the role of context, in this article the authors aim to offer an in-depth overview. In the strategy of interdisciplinarity of AOL–PwD research, the authors have assumed the need for cooperation between representatives of numerous scientific disciplines, including psychology, sociology, pedagogy, philosophy, family studies, health sciences. They have assumed that limiting research to just one perspective would lead to reductionism and yield fragmentary knowledge about AOL–PwD. In respect of the assumption about the role of context, the authors have stressed that in the conceptualisation of the *authorship of their own lives in people with disabilities*, diagnostic and classificatory procedures should consider interrelated contextual factors which integrate personal traits of an individual and his or her living environment.

The role of the context in the strategic research assumptions is important both for scientific knowledge and for design of individual diagnostic-rehabilitation actions, or it can help formulate recommendations for the social policy. In respect of the strategic assumption about the systematicity, the authors have stressed that aspects and specific categories in AOL–PwD constitute a specific system with its own, individual and unique organisation and a collection of mutual relationships and specific connections.

The aim of this article is to relate the *authorship of their own lives in people with disabilities* to those theories which conceptualise disability in the categories of an universal human condition, natural variation of humans, and positive dimensions of their functioning. In particular, the analyses offer an investigation of theoretical-empirical areas from the perspective of the contexts of meanings formulated for AOL–PwD: (1) “to have a sense of subjectivity”, (2) “to have a sense of own personal resources”, (3) “to be independent, to make decisions regarding one’s own life”, (4) “to perform developmental tasks satisfactorily”, (5) “to be able to use social support” (Głodkowska, Gosk, 2018). On the basis of the adopted contexts of meanings, the authors have indicated theories which correspond to them, highlighting significant values and indicators of *own life authorship*.

IDENTIFICATION OF SELECTED THEORIES EXPLAINING THE AUTHORSHIP OF THEIR OWN LIVES IN PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Taking into consideration the sources of the presented concept and analyses conducted so far (Głodkowska, 2015, Głodkowska, Gosk, 2018), in this part of the article, the authors will focus on the specific ‘coalition’ of meanings related to the *authorship of their own lives in people with disabilities*.

The authors would like to begin this investigation by embedding the AOL–PwD concept theoretically in the classical theory of needs by Maslow (1971). We believe that this theory offers a comprehensive ‘canvas’, a specific structure which brings elements of the *own life authorship* concept together. Here it is very important to quote Maslow’s claim (1971, p. 15) that “needs cover a very diverse area of life conditions and becoming oneself”. Becoming oneself means, among others, the acquisition of authorship features of one’s life by an individual.

In his pyramid, Maslow mentioned physiological, safety, belonging, esteem and self-actualization needs. The proposed hypothesis about the hierarchic character of the needs lays the foundation for predicting the dynamics of human

development, including the assumption that satisfying basic needs allows higher order needs — to become oneself — to activate. Importantly, as far as higher order needs are concerned, reinforcement law applies. It assumes that satisfying these needs does not cause them to disappear, but evokes pleasant experience in an individual, which leads to the urge to reinforce them, i.e. to activity, repeating actions. The top-most stage of the pyramid, according to Maslow’s concept, is the self-actualization need, which manifests itself, among others, in the pursuit of the development of one’s talents, in having goals and a sense of meaning of life, self-acceptance, acceptance of the surrounding world and other people, personal autonomy, maturity of interpersonal relationships. Even this preliminary characteristic of self-actualization need justifies seeing the *authorship of their own lives in people with disabilities* in the light of this theory, as far as the general conceptual dimension is concerned. It is also important to relate the AOL–PwD model theoretically in more detail; this will be addressed later in the article in relation to previously conducted analyses and identifications.

The AOL–PwD model constructed so far took into consideration three elements: (1) authorship aspects, (2) identity components and (3) process links (Głodkowska, Pałowska, 2018). Its interpretation has made it possible to decide that an individual’s identity (identity components and identity process links) is the central, basic category for the interpretation of individual aspects of the *authorship of their own lives in people with disabilities* in respect of the formulation of their characteristics and explanation of changes occurring over time and under the influence of various circumstances. Here we refer to Fritz Schütze (1997), who stated that suffering “penetrates the zone of individual identity” (Riemann, Schütze, 1992, p. 93).

Undoubtedly, suffering is an inherent experience in disability. Suffering one goes through causes changes to the identity which affect various dimensions of the functioning of an individual, including the authorship dimensions of the individual’s life (Głodkowska, Pałowska, 2018). Michael Wehmeyer (2013) reflects on the identity

of person with disability in the light of the general statement — “our life shapes our identity” (Wehmeyer, 2013, p. 125) — as well as in the categories of the sense of identity, constructed in social situations of acceptance, understanding, support, but also under circumstances of stigmatisation, rejection or isolation. The researcher, however, insists that the shaping of identity of person disability is not a straightforward reflection of social attitudes, but results from diverse experiences of such persons, and also from their own involvement and taking up challenges to create their own life.

Referring to the aforementioned statements, it is good to cite results of studies which show that indeed there are connections between identity and various aspects of human functioning. It turns out that such connections apply also to the essence of the aspects included in the AOL–PwD model. Among others, researchers have identified relationships between sense of identity and attainment of eudaimonic well-being (Karaś, Kłym, Ciecuch, 2013; Waters, Fivush, 2015; Ferrari, Rosnati, Manzi, Benet-Martínez, 2015; Sumner, Burrow, Hill, 2015), self-determination (Zhou, Zhou, 2018), sense of coherence (Calandri, Graziano, Borghi, Bonino, 2018), social belonging (Jenkins, 2014) or sense of one’s value (Stets, Burke, 2014).

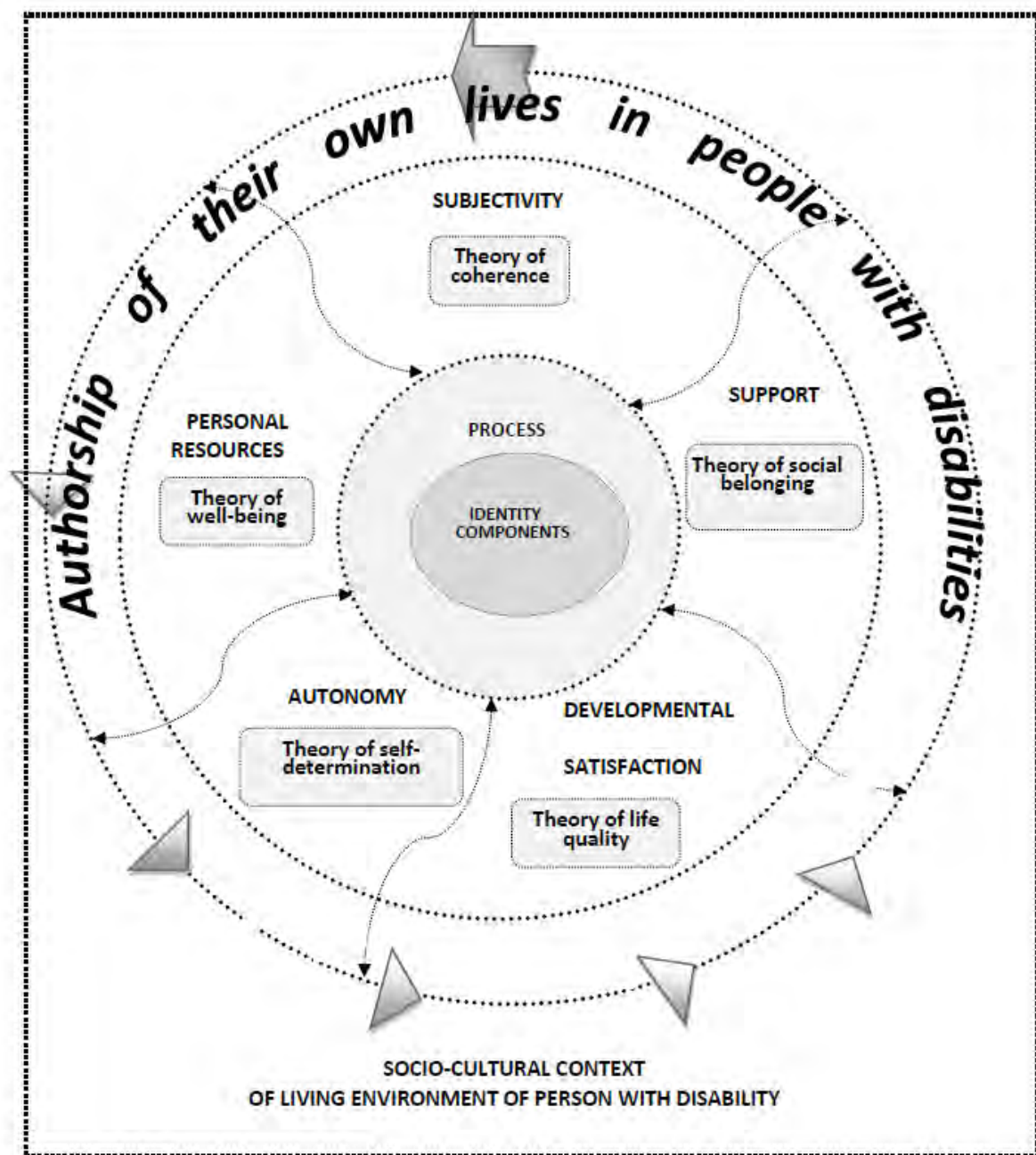
Noting the relationships signalled above, one can also expect the existence of relationships between well-being, self-determination, sense of coherence or social belonging and the *authorship of their own lives in people with disabilities*. In this article, we shall investigate the aspects of AOL–PwD: subjectivity, personal resources, autonomy, developmental satisfaction and support. Taking into consideration the theoretical-empirical evidence for identity study, we assume that each of these aspects can be explained in the light of leading ideas brought in by specific concepts. Our analyses focus on showing the

aspect of subjectivity in AOL–PwD in the context of the theory of coherence, the aspect of personal resource in relation to the theory of well-being, the aspect of autonomy in relation to self-determination, the aspect of developmental satisfaction in relation to the concept of the quality of life and the support aspect is seen in the light of the theory of social belonging (Figure 1).

The choice of these theories is not accidental, because the authors believe that they form the canvas of the contemporary approach to disability. These concepts were cited, among others, by Joanna Głodkowska (2018), when she defined the axiological pillars for special needs education, including: self-determination, well-being, normalisation, subjectivity. In this systematic characterisation and in these circles of topics, she found the values which shape the contemporary image of a person with disability and his or her place in the society. These generalisations stress various theoretical and empirical categories, including: subjectivity, identity, celebrating differences, autonomy, self-regulation, social reinforcement, self-esteem, social competencies, efficiency, decision taking and making choices, life satisfaction, as well as well-being, personal flourishing, sense of meaning of life, self-actualization, optimum functioning, happy life, optimism, vitality, welfare, life success.

In line with Thomas Kuhn’s postulate (2001), science does not accumulate knowledge; it does not approach the truth in philosophical sense. Scientists do not get to know the absolute truth, but rather perfect their means of solving unknowns and create a structure which guides the explanation of some defined facts of reality. Inspired by Kuhn’s view, the authors have decided that they want to create such a structure to explain the authorship dimensions of a person with disability in his/her life.

Figure 1. The authorship of own lives in people with disabilities model and its theoretical links



The theoretical-empirical foundation included in the AOL–PwD model will be subject to further analyses in this article. We inscribe the aspects of the model structure of the *authorship of their own lives in people with disabilities* with the following theories: the theory of coherence, the theory of well-being, the theory of self-determination, the theory of quality of life, the theory social belonging.

THE AUTHORSHIP OF OWN LIVES IN PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES IN THE LIGHT OF COHERENCE, WELL-BEING, SELF-DETERMINATION, QUALITY OF LIFE AND SOCIAL BELONGING

In the following part of the article, the authors will signal the main assumptions of the adopted theories so that, in effect, their significance for explicating aspects of the the *authorship of their own lives in people with disabilities* and creating

a comprehensive AOL–PwD construct is exposed.

Sense of coherence theory (global orientation to life) is included in the the *authorship of their own lives in people with disabilities* model in relation to the subjectivity aspect. In the light of this theory, an individual can answer the basic question: *Who am I?* The humanistic-subjective model of disability offers many options for interpretation. Therefore, it is useful to refer to Aaron Antonovsky's (1995) sense of coherence theory in the explanation of the subjective aspect of AOL–PwD.

This author assumed that sense of coherence (SOC) is a significant subjective factor which determines individual differences in the functioning of people. This concept defines global orientation to life as a generalised emotional-cognitive way of looking at the world and as a significant factor regulating an individual's behaviour. Thanks to it, the individual can be certain that: (1) stimuli which come throughout life from the internal and external environments are structured, predictable and comprehensible (comprehensibility); (2) there are resources available which will allow him or her to meet the requirements imposed by these stimuli (manageability); (3) the requirements are seen by him or her as a challenge which is worthy of the effort and involvement (meaningfulness) (Antonovsky, 1995, p. 19).

The coherence describes the functioning of a person as coherent (repeatable, predictable, ordered), corresponding to his or her abilities and offering him or her opportunities to co-decide. In the light of the afore cited description, an individual appears as a subject who is capable of understanding events, has a sense of his or her own manageability and a sense of meaningfulness of events and situations he or she encounters. The level of general orientation to life is responsible for the regulation of the individual's behaviour. This is manifested, in particular, in difficult situations, where some people recognize the meaning of the situation and take the challenge up, while others see only meaningless, overloading chaos that better be avoided.

According to Antonovsky (1995), the reason why people faced with difficulties and stress take different decisions is the different level of their sense of coherence. A strong coherence is connected with the skill of ordering, predicting and explaining incoming information and realising the ways to meet the expectations. People characterised by a high sense of coherence are, therefore, more successful in overcoming troubles they encounter. Persons with a weak sense of coherence faced with a difficult, stressful situation are — according to Antonovsky (1995, pp. 132–133) — confused, lack motivation to fight and often give up straight away.

In the light of the afore cited description, it appears justified to interpret the subjective factor of coherence in relation to the *authorship of their own lives in people with disabilities*. Disability creates numerous situations in which an individual has to face everyday problems, difficult situations which can cause stress. It can, therefore, be assumed that the level of general orientation to life is a significant component which determines the functioning of the individual in the situation where he or she experiences disability. Thus, the *authorship of their own lives in people with disabilities* can be successfully interpreted in the light of sense of coherence as the subjective factor which determines individual differences between people in respect of comprehensibility, manageability and sense of meaningfulness of situations they experience. A high level of coherence offers opportunities to reinforce sense of safety of a person with disability, who, thanks to the activation of his or her own resources and support from the environment, can take up life challenges and meet their requirements, believing that engagement and creation of one's own life are worthy of the effort.

Theories of human well-being and thriving are considered in the *authorship of their own lives in people with disabilities* concept in relation to the personal resources aspect (Figure 1). Eudaimonic well-being refers to human values/merits which are derived from the main ideas of positive psychology, both formulated theoretically and verified in empirical research (Ryff, 2013). It

refers to important asset of man which is his or her personal thriving, evoking positive emotions, a sense of self-esteem, meaningfulness, life goal, self-determination, and promoting intense hobbies and passions (Seligmann, 2011, pp. 47–48).

Following a thorough analysis of the literature, researchers usually distinguish three types of human well-being: mental, social and emotional (Keyes, Waterman, 2003). In respect of mental well-being, Carol D. Ryff and Corey Lee M. Keyes (1995) presented a multidimensional model which covers six different components of human positive functioning. In combination, these dimensions determine the well-being of an individual; among others, they testify to positive evaluation of oneself and one's previous life (self-acceptance), a sense of continuous growth and development (personal development), the ability to successfully manage one's life and the surrounding world (control over the surroundings), a sense of self-determination (autonomy) and the belief that life has a purpose (life purpose) and good relationships with others are important (positive relationships with others). For social well-being, Keyes (1998) proposed 5 dimensions which describe positive functioning of man when faced with social tasks and challenges. These include: social integration, social cooperation, social coherence, social acceptance and real contribution to social life. Emotional well-being, according to Keyes and Waterman (2003), refers to the sense of satisfaction and happiness in relation to one's life and balance in experiencing positive and negative feelings.

Selected types and dimensions of well-being are presented by authors in more detail. For example, self-acceptance, according to Carol D. Ryff and Burton H. Singer (2008), is defined as the central feature of mental health and also as a feature of self-actualisation, optimum functioning and human maturity. Self-acceptance goes beyond standard views concerning self-esteem; it is rather a kind of long-term self-assessment which is long-term and covers awareness and acceptance of one's strengths and weaknesses (Ryff, Singer, 2008, pp. 21–22). Individuals who accept

themselves, show positive attitudes towards themselves, recognise and accept their good and bad traits, have positive convictions about their future life. On the other hand, individuals who do not accept themselves and are not satisfied with themselves are disappointed with what has happened in their previous life, do not accept some of their traits, would like to be someone else (Ryff, Keyes, 1995). One important component of well-being are also positive relationships with others, which are characterised by warmth, satisfaction and trust. Individual who positively evaluate their relationships with others care about the good of others, enter empathetic, emotional and intimate relationships and understand the need to “give and take” in human relationships. On the contrary, individuals with negative relationships with others have few close, trusted relationships and believe that it is difficult to be a kind, open person and to care about others. Such people are often isolated and frustrated when it comes to human relationships and are unable to find compromise (Ryff, Keyes, 1995). Another dimension of well-being — autonomy — according to Ryff and Keyes (1995) is characteristic of persons who show self-determination, who are able to reject social pressure to think and act in a specific way. Individuals characterised by high level of well-being believe that they control the environment and, therefore, have a sense of possessing the competencies to manage the environment, control events, use opportunities effectively, are able to choose and create conditions adjusted to their own needs and values. Individuals who score low on this scale have problems dealing with everyday matters, feel that they cannot influence their environment. A person with a high level of well-being has life goals and a sense that there is a purpose to his or her present and future life. The well-being dimension — personal development — points to the positive functioning, engagement in a continuous process of developing one's own potential (Ryff, Singer, 2008). A person who pursues self-actualisation is focused on activating and developing his or her own potential, is open to new experiences, takes up confrontation with new challenges in various periods of his or her life. A person who scores low on this scale has a sense of stagnation, feels bored and not interested

in life, cannot activate new attitudes and behaviours (Ryff, Keyes, 1995).

In the light of the afore cited general and specific characteristics of well-being, we can state that they clearly foreground the personal resources which are an aspect of the *authorship of their own lives in people with disabilities*; we should note that the context of meaning of the AOL–PwD construct ‘to have a sense of possessing one’s own personal resources’ is directly connected with, among others, having a sense of individual autonomy, the ability to control the environment, self-acceptance, positive relationships with others, having life goals and a sense of personal development.

Self-determination theory is included in the AOL–PwD model in relation to the autonomy aspect of the *authorship of their own lives in people with disabilities* (Figure 1). According to Michael L. Wehmeyer, Kathy Kelchner and Sandy Richards (1996), self-determination refers to activities which are identified through four major features, depending on the function / purpose of the behaviour: (a) an individual has behavioural autonomy, (b) the behaviour is self-regulated, (c) an individual has initiated / reacted to an event/situation employing psychological empowerment, and (d) an individual acts pursuing self-realization.

Autonomous behaviour results from the process of individuation and, basically, encompasses actions in which people act in accordance with their preferences, interests and/or skills and independently, without unnecessary external influence or interference (Wehmeyer, 1999, p. 57). Inclusion of self-regulation and psychological empowerment in the definition of self-determination points to the cognitive and behavioural dimensions of this category. In this respect, Wehmeyer (1999, p. 58) notes that “just as there are people who do not pursue self-determination because they lack certain skills, there are people who have such skills and opportunity to use them, but still do not pursue self-determination, usually because they do not believe that it is possible to behave appropriately or because they believe that it would be fruitless.”

Self-regulatory behaviour encompasses self-management strategies (including self-control, self-education, self-assessment and self-development), establishment of the goals and effects of a behaviour, resolution of problems, decision-related behaviours and learning through observation. Now, psychological empowerment refers to aspects of perception of control, including the sense of one’s own efficiency, the placement of control, an individual’s motivation. Individuals who determine themselves also pursue self-realization. They use comprehensive and sufficiently accurate knowledge about themselves and their strengths and the limited ways to act in such a way as to use their potential to the fullest. This awareness and understanding of oneself result from experience and interpretation of the environment and are subject to the influence of evaluation of other, often prominent people. The age, capabilities and talents of an individual as well as the life circumstances can have an impact on the level to which the aforementioned self-determination traits are manifested.

Apart from the functional model of self-determination presented by Wehmeyer (1999), Bryan Abery (1994) presented an ecological self-determination model. In this context, self-determination is seen as a product of interaction between an individual and the environment in which he or she lives and develops (family, school, peer group, society). The environmental context of self-determination is defined as an individual’s ecosystem and can be seen taking into consideration many levels, from micro- to macrosystem. Abery (1994) shows that on the individual level, the factors which impact self-regulation are: (1) skills (establishing goals, making choices, self-regulation, interpersonal competencies concerning resolution of problems and self-advocacy), (2) knowledge (about the system of resources and services available in the environment, rights/privileges/duties, awareness of the world/society), (3) motivation (sense of one’s own efficiency, attribution of success and failure, sense of the placement of control, sense of self-esteem, self-assessment). Individual variation in respect of the afore listed motivational components of self-determination

can help explain why some individuals in spite of having sufficient knowledge and skills do not determine themselves. Among the environmental elements which are important for the shaping of self-determination, Abery (1994) lists also: participation/inclusion, respect/acceptance, individualised programme, individualised scope of support, satisfaction of basic needs, positive reinforcement, social role models, opportunities to make choice and take control of one's own life.

In the presented AOL–PwD concept, the autonomy aspect highlights the fact that such people, to the best of their abilities, are self-reliant and act independently, regulate their own behaviour, have motivations to undertake and pursue life goals and tasks they find important, have the skills and opportunities to use them, have a sense of their own efficiency and motivation to act. This description makes it possible to see the theory of self-determination as a significant element of the AOL–PwD model, which contributes particularly to explain the autonomy aspect of the *authorship of their own lives in people with disabilities*.

The concept of quality of life is included in the *authorship of their own lives in people with disabilities* in relation to the aspect of developmental satisfaction of AOL–PwD (Figure 1). The authors indicate various sources of the quality of human life. One of them is recognition of the fact that personal, family and social well-being results from complex conditions of scientific, medical and technological progress, values preferred by the person, and the environmental conditions of his or her life. A significant role is also played by social human rights movements, which stress the ideas of subjectivity and the need to focus on the person and his or her self-reliance, life independence (Schalock et al. 2002, among others).

Basic rules for the conceptualisation of quality of life have been developed: (1) it contains the same factors and relationships for both person with and without disability, (2) it is experienced when the basic needs of an individual have been met, (3) it is reinforced by integration and allowing individuals to participate in decisions which

impact their lives; (4) it has both subjective and objective elements, but first and foremost it is the individual's perception which reflects his or her quality of life; (5) it is based on individual needs, choices and control; (6) it is a multi-dimensional construct affected by personal and environmental factors, such as: intimate relationships, family life, friendships, job, neighbourhood, place of residence, accommodation, education, health, life standard and the state of one's nation (Schalock et al., 2002).

Robert A. Cummins (2005, p. 700) has defined quality of life as a construct and analyses its basic features. He notes that quality of life contains both an objective component and a subjective component, which exists only in each individual's consciousness. One consequence of this dichotomy is the fact that all comprehensive quality of life assessments must cover both the subjective and the objective traits. At the same time, quality of life should not be defined primarily for its consideration of the objective or the subjective component, because both are significant indices of quality of life. Furthermore, there is an identifiable set of basic elements which make up quality of life and which are shared by all people, therefore it is possible to create universal tools to measure quality of life; such tools can be successfully used by any group of people, regardless of cultural and socio-economic conditions as well as their condition of (dis-)ability. Moreover, quality of life should not be defined in the categories of needs, because it is not necessarily the case that a low level of their fulfilment will be related to the sense of quality of life. The author also claims that quality of life should not be defined in terms of abilities, because it is also possible that their objective improvement (e.g. improvement of work conditions) will not be seen positively by the given individual. In addition, experiencing a chance to improve one's quality of life is more likely to appear as the causal variable and not as the ultimate state or result.

On the basis of the analysis of 897 articles, Schalock, Verdugo and Braddock (2002) have identified the key indices which refer to the eight main dimensions of quality of life:

Emotional well-being:

- contentment (satisfaction, moods, pleasure), knowledge of oneself (identity, sense of self-esteem, self-assessment), lack of stress (predictability, control);

Interpersonal relations:

- interactions (social networks, social contacts), relationships (family, friends, peers), support (emotional, physical, financial, feedback);

Material well-being:

- financial standing (income, benefits), employment (professional position, work environment), accommodation (type of accommodation, ownership);

Personal development:

- education (achievements, status), personal competencies (cognitive, social, practical), accomplishments (success, achievements, productivity);

Physical well-being:

- health (functioning, symptoms, fitness, eating habits), everyday activities (self-reliant care skills, mobility), leisure time (recreation, hobby);

Self-determination:

- autonomy / personal control (independence), personal goals and values (desires, expectations), choices (opportunities, options, preferences);

Social inclusion:

- inclusion and participation in social life, social roles (author, volunteer), social support (support network, services);

Rights:

human (respect, dignity, equality), legal (citizenship, access, due process).

The dimensions of quality of life listed by the authors can offer a crucial source for undertaking further theoretical and empirical analyses, also concerning the investigation of the quality of life of persons with disabilities. Actions aimed at improvement of the quality of life of persons with disabilities, according to Schalock et al. (2002), should help establish their well-being and reinforce personal control as well as individual abilities to take up actions taking into consideration the interference of their life environment. Such programmes should indicate changes which occur in individual's personal life

as well as those which are connected to his or her social, economic and cultural life. The authors argue that the concept of quality of life is an effective tool to plan successful actions taken up in the social system to improve the quality of life of persons with disabilities. It should play the leading role in the collection of data to identify significant predictors of quality of life of such persons.

On the basis of the afore cited discussion about quality of life, we can accept that this is a relevant conceptual category, directly related to the *authorship of their own lives in people with disabilities*. By stressing developmental satisfaction, competencies, reinforcement, independence, social participation, it offers many opportunities for adoption in relation to the AOL-PwD concept. Referring to the basic principles of measurement of quality of life formulated by Schalock et al. (2002, pp. 461–463) can also be rewarding. These statements can also provide useful indications for the design of the measurement of the *authorship of their own lives in people with disabilities*, because we can similarly assume that the measurement of the AOL-PwD: (1) refers to the extent to which people have experiences which they consider valuable; (2) determines the extent to which specific aspects/dimensions of an individual's quality of life contribute to his or her ability to fully experience valuable and significant situations; (4) it takes into consideration the environmental aspect of life, which is important to persons with disabilities; (5) it is based both on common human experiences and on unique, individual life experiences.

The concept of social belonging is included in the the *authorship of their own lives in people with disabilities* model in relations to the support aspect of AOL-PwD, which stresses an individual's relationships with the social environment and the ability to use support (Figure 1).

The sociological term 'social belonging' is defined as an individual's internal affective (or evaluative) perception of his or her place in the social environment and constitutes his or her personal sense of adjustment to the external

environment as well as the experience of acknowledgement and importance (Hagerty, Patusky, 1995). In the conception of Edward L. Deci and Richard M. Ryan (2000), the need for belongingness means the desire to have social bonds and relationships with others. The authors stress that this need serves a key function in the explanation of eudaimonic sense of an individual's well-being. The need for belongingness or the need for relatedness mean the drive to compare oneself with others in respect of adjustment as well as satisfactory and coherent involvement in the environment in addition to caring for others and being subject of their care. The authors define sense of belonging as a unique concept, which enters a specific dichotomy in relation to such phenomena as loneliness, alienation or social exclusion (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Hagerty & Patusky, 1995; Napoli, Marsiglia & Kulis, 2003; Hagerty, Lynch-Sauer, Patusky, Bouwsema & Collier, 1992; Hagerty, Williams, Coyne & Ealy, 1996).

In controlled laboratory conditions, researchers carry out observations of how the threat of social exclusion (threat to the need for social belongingness) affects psychophysiological (Herman & Panskepp, 1978; Eisenberg, Lieberman & Williams, 2003), behavioural-cognitive (Twenge, Baumeister, Tice & Stucke, 2001; Twenge, Baumeister, DeWall, Ciarocco & Bartels, 2007) and emotional changes in human functioning (DeWall & Baumeister, 2006; Twenge, Catanese & Baumaister, 2003). The studies also document the fact that the less effort and engagement an individual puts into seeking ways to be included, appreciated and adjusted, the smaller sense of belongingness he or she can show (Hagerty & Williams, 1999). By experiencing personal involvement in the given system or environment, an individual gets a sense of being its integral part (Hagerty & Patusky, 1995, p. 173). In the studies reported above, the sense of belonging is treated as the psychological equivalent of the sense of being 'socially included'.

At the beginning of the 20th c., Georg Simmel (1964, 2008) developed the concept of 'web of group affiliations' (*Die Kreuzung sozialer*

Kreise). The author has decided that social structure is composed of relationships and connections between individuals and every individual belongs to specific groups which constitute his or her specific reference system. The more such systems, the smaller the likelihood that another individual will exhibit the same pattern of social affiliations (Simmel, 1964, p. 140). This process confirms the uniqueness of every individual, i.e. his or her personal identity and is related to the individuation process (Simmel, 2007, pp. 163–176). An individual's personality is shaped at the point where countless social influences cross — as a product of diverse group affiliations of this individual. The life of any human being is founded on the plurality of group affiliations, which are largely responsible for its complications, bringing in ambiguity, uncertainty and various tensions. Nevertheless, according to Simmel, the process tempers the individual and reinforces the integration of his or her personality (Simmel, 1964, p. 142). In this way, an individual gains a sense of internal cohesion, a bigger awareness in the face of the need to reconcile diverse, sometimes discordant interests of the affiliated groups. Conflicts force the individual to undertake certain internal and external adjustment activities.

It should also be noted that the concept of social belonging fits clearly in the very lively academic trend of *Disability Studies*. The representatives of this academic discipline believe that all barriers (physical and mental alike) are part of human life in its diversity. At the same time, they stress that disability is not an immanent trait of the individual, but rather a product of his or her interactions with the environment and experience of social belonging in various dimensions of life. *Disability Studies* define disability as a social, cultural and political phenomenon (Taylor, Shoultz, Walker, 2003). One important goal of activities in this discipline is to reinforce the social position, to improve the quality of life of persons with disabilities and their families as well as to offer them opportunities to participate in all manifestations of social life (Barnes, Oliver, Barton, 2002).

Defining disability in social and cultural contexts, also in the concept of social belonging, is beneficial to the development of the research perspective. It inspires research to identify the significance of persons with disabilities in the society and to explore their potential and personal experience of happiness, hope, good life.

The conducted analyses suggest that it is justified to define the *authorship of their own lives in people with disabilities* in relation to the theory of social belonging. It both outlines one of the aspects of AOL–PwD and allows to analyse the model more broadly in socio-cultural contexts of the living environment of persons with disabilities.

THE AUTHORSHIP OF OWN LIVES IN PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES EMBEDDED IN THEORY

An overview of the analyses performed so far makes it possible to formulate theses which follow from the construction of the AOL–PwD model and play an important role for further work devoted to the issue of the *authorship of own lives in people with disabilities*.

1. The classical theory of needs by Abraham Maslow provides significant foundation and the leading context for the general explication of the idea of the *authorship of own lives in people with disabilities*.

Maslow's statement quoted in this article validates the assumption that fulfilment of needs of an individual is determined both by diverse determinants of the individual's life room and the course and effects of 'becoming oneself', or acquisition of authorial life features by the person. Therefore, in general, the AOL–PwD concept refers to the development of human needs, stressing the need for self-actualization, which is located, according to Maslow's hierarchical concept, at the top of the needs pyramid.

2. Connections between identity and various dimensions of human functioning make it possible to predict the relationships between these dimensions and the *authorship of their own lives in people with disabilities*.

The results of empirical analyses point to the existence of relationships between identity and sense of coherence, eudaimonic well-being, self-determination, social belonging as well as self-esteem. The constructed model has made it possible to accept that an individual's identity (identity components and identity process links) is the central, general category for the interpretation of individual aspects of the *authorship of their own lives in people with disabilities* in respect of the formulation of its characteristics and explication of the course of identity changes which take place over time and under the influence of various circumstances. Referring to this statement, we can assume that the AOL–PwD model can be interpreted in a broader theoretical context, including also the theories of coherence, well-being, self-determination, quality of life and social belonging.

3. Specific aspects of The *authorship of town lives in people with disabilities* can be explained in the light of relevant theories, at the same time noting the flexibility of their interpretation and susceptibility of these aspects to new definitions.

Thus, the aspect of subjectivity of the AOL–PwD model can be interpreted in the context of the sense of coherence theory, the aspect of personal resources — in relation to the theory of well-being, the aspect of autonomy — in relation to the concept of self-determination, the aspect of developmental satisfaction — in relation to the concept of quality of life and the aspect of support — in the light of the theory of social belonging. At the same time, it should be noted that ascribing specific aspects of AOL–PwD arbitrarily to the selected theories does not restrict the possibility of introducing other concepts or showing other connections. The analyses of this article only play a model and systemic role. One can, however, expect that, for example, the theory of well-being (including autonomy, controlling the environment, self-acceptance, positive relationships with others, life goal, personal development), which explains the aspect of personal resources of AOL–PwD, penetrates also other aspects of the *authorship of own lives in people with disabilities*. Thus, it can also explicate the aspect of autonomy, which is interpreted from

the perspective of the theory of self-determination (autonomous behaviour, psychological reinforcement, self-regulation, self-actualization), or the aspect of subjectivity, which is characterised from the perspective of coherence (sense of comprehensibility, resourcefulness, meaningfulness). One should note that just as there are connections between the specific aspects of the *authorship of own lives in people with disabilities*, there are mutual connections between the main ideas, premises and sometimes also components of the main theories which explain the aspects of the AOL–PwD.

4. The *authorship of own lives in people with disabilities* is a comprehensive composition of diverse relationships and dependencies.

There is empirical evidence which points out to the relations between various categories which explain the specific aspects of AOL–PwD. For example, research shows that there are positive relationships between self-determination and self-reliance in life (Martorell, Gutierrez-Rechacha, Pereda, Ayuso-Mateos, 2008; Shogren, Wehmeyer, Palmer, Rifenburg, Little, 2015; Wehmeyer, Palmer, 2003; Wehmeyer, Schwartz, 1997), quality of life and satisfaction (Wehmeyer, Schwartz, 1998; Lachapelle et al., 2005; Nota, Ferrari, Soresi, Wehmeyer, 2007; Shogren, Lopez, Wehmeyer, Little, Pressgrove, 2006; Wehmeyer, Garner, 2003). Furthermore, study results reveal that quality of life level correlates with numerous aspects of functioning of persons with disabilities, including the ability to make choices (Stancliffe, 2001), life status (Wehmeyer, Garner, 2003), sense of well-being (Ruddick, Oliver, 2005), social integration and life satisfaction (Miller, Chan, 2008).

5. The OLA concept refers to the holistic model of defining a person with disability and illustrates comprehensively the specific composition of his or her mental and social condition.

The selected aspects and formulated meaning contexts of the OLA construct outline specific horizons of comprehensive, holistic and systemic definition of the functioning of a person with disability. At the same time, they stress those

dimensions which highlight the affirmative, positive manifestations of his or her life (Głodkowska, 2015; Głodkowska, Pałowska, 2018). In this article, the authors have undertaken a search for connections between OLA and contemporary conceptualisations of disability in terms of a universal human condition, natural variation of humans, personal development and complex contexts which determine individual experience of one's own life authorship. We believe that concept of the *authorship of own lives in people with disabilities* fits well in the space delimited by the theories of coherence, well-being, self-determination, quality of life and social belonging. It should be stressed that in this complex psychological-social space, there are some significant systems of factors which can reinforce but also decrease this sense of authorship of one's own life. In this respect, one can postulate a significant role of the sense of comprehensibility, meaningfulness, sense of well-being and personal thriving, as well as the sense of quality of life, independence, autonomy and beneficial social relationships, including the sense of belonging and participation in complex socio-cultural contexts.

The outlined circular model of AOL–PwD visualises the holistic character of the concept and illustrates a certain comprehensive construction of both the mental and social condition of an individual. It makes it possible to venture analyses on at least three levels: (1) general (personal categories, categories of socio-cultural contexts), (2) category (authorial aspects, identity components, process links), (3) specific (any category included in the detailed description). Such a model structure can inspire researchers to design studies in which AOL–PwD will appear as a humanist concept for diagnosis and rehabilitation within the trend which creates a positive, capable image of a person with disability in the society.

CLOSING REMARKS

The *authorship of own lives in people with disabilities* (AOL–PwD) is a concept related to the humanist, affirmative trend of recognising the disability phenomenon. The concept has been presented for its conceptualisation and strategic

research assumptions. The authors are continuously inspired by the hope that the idea to see disability from the perspective of the *authorship of own lives in people with disabilities* will allow persons with disabilities to see themselves and their life in a different light; not only through the prism of barriers, disorders and shortages, but also — of subjectivity, capability, personal resources, independence, satisfaction after completion of tasks — all of which are important aspects of authorial creation of oneself and one's life. In this article, the authors have undertaken an analysis which is extremely important for the conceptualisation of AOL-PwD — showing the issue in a specific exposition of relationships with the theories of coherence, well-being, self-determination, quality of life, social belonging. The analyses and interpretations performed in this article shall define the future complex research into the identification of AOL-PwD and its determinants.

The concept of *authorship of own lives in people with disabilities* fits in the trend of normalisation of lives of people with disabilities, which began a new perception of such people and their place in the social world. We believe that the concept of *authorship of own lives in people with disabilities* (AOL-PwD), consistently implemented and developed, will create an inspiring theoretical-empirical space for multi-dimensional exploration of the disability phenomenon in the normalisation-oriented, humanist and affirmative perspectives.

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