Disability Cultures and Artifacts.
Wheelchair as *Silent Helper* and *Little Black Dress*

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Abstract:

Studies on disability culture have been conducted since the mid-90′s, by American scholars, and since 2000, by the British ones. Researches on this topic states that disability is a separate culture and that there are different voices, some of approval and some of disapproval, among persons with disabilities. The article discusses, describes and justifies the idea of disability culture, as viewed by Brown (1996; 2002), Barnes and Mercer (2001), like cultures of disability characterized by internal diversities. The article doesn't deal with the whole spectrum of subsequent structural differences in disability cultures but emphasizes the differences regarding a single element of culture - a physical artifact, which is the wheelchair. The first part of the article contains the analysis of the general anthropological concept of culture in the American and British researches, the analysis of the concept of disability culture and its internal differences which create the disability cultures. In the second part, I analyze the secondary data analysis artifact itself - a wheelchair conceptualized by 8 Polish women with a physical disability. The data from the secondary analysis indicated the role of the wheelchair, furthermore the informants' wishes for the optimal wheelchairs and the information about the unaccepted ones, as well. 8 female informants treat the wheelchair as an artifact of everyday life, enabling independence, the organization of daily activities and sex. They have their own preferences regarding the construction of wheelchairs, the color and binary functions; moreover, they give it names, such as cabriolet, legs, Gandalf or a Little black dress.

Keywords: Cultural anthropology, Culture, Disability cultures, Cultural artifact, Physical artifact, Females, Wheelchair.

Introduction

Human disability has existed since the dawn of time. Recent interesting studies, conducted by medical anthropologists, indicate that *Homo Sapiens* of Cro-Magnon, who lived in the 28.000 BCE, probability had type 1 neurofibromatosis (Charlier et al. 2018). By analyzing the lives of people with disabilities and their families in historical and anthropological aspects raises questions about the relationship between culture and its members with disabilities, about disability representations in culture, the identity of disabled groups, key values, norms, lifestyles, rituals, taboos, artifacts etc. The analysis of the phenomenon called *disability culture* has been conducted

by scholars since the mid-90's in the American research circles and since 2000, in the British one. In the next pages we aim to present the concept of disability culture as it was conceptualized by Brown (1996; 2002) and Barnes and Mercer (2001). They consider that disability cultures are characterized by internal diversities, even in the contexts of the artifacts of the given cultures. In this article, I will discuss the conceptualization of a wheelchair as it was seen by 8 Polish women with physical disabilities.

Anthropological roots in defining culture

From over 150 definitions of culture existing in anthropology and sociology in American, British or French scholarly works, the first descriptive one was constructed in the nineteenth century, by the evolutionist Edward B. Taylor. The author formulated the definition of culture by perceiving it as a synonym of civilization, indicating key areas in the structural layer. The author writes: "culture, or civilization in a broad ethnographic sense, is a complex whole that includes knowledge, beliefs, art, morality, law, customs and all other abilities and habits acquired by a human being as a member of society" (Taylor 1871, 1). Boas considers that

Culture can be defined as a whole of psychological and physical reactions and actions that characterize the behavior of people forming a group collectively and individually, in relation to their natural environment, to other groups, to the members of the group and each separately. It also includes action products and their role in the life of the group. However, the calculations of various aspects of life do not constitute culture. Culture has a certain structure and its elements do not remain independent of each other. (Boas 1911, 149)

Another researcher, Benedict, wrote that "something that really connects people together is their culture, or ideas and norms that they have in common" (Benedict 1934, 16). On the other hand, Linton believes that culture is "the total sum of knowledge, attitudes, patterns of habitual behavior, shared and transmitted by members of a given community" (Linton 1940). In turn, Herskovits emphasizes that "in culture there are certain regularities that allow it to be analyzed by scientific methods, it is an instrument for adapting people to the whole environment and for obtaining resources for expressing their creative expression" (Herskovits 1948, 625). Another definition that must be pointed out was constructed by Kroeber and Klockhohn. The authors argue that "culture consists of all the patterns of thinking, feeling and reacting, acquired and transmitted mainly by symbols, which together with their embodiments in human products are significant achievements of human groups, the core of culture is traditional (e.g. historical, accrued and selected ideas), especially values connected with them" (Kroeber and Klockhuhn 1952 in Berry 2011, 226).

Goodenough indicated that culture is "a model of community life, regularly appearing activities and material and social arrangements characteristic of individual groups." (Goodenough 1957, in Burszta 1998, 49). He believes that "the culture of a given community consists of everything you need to know, or what you have to believe in order to act in a way acceptable to its members

and in a role accepted by each of them" (Goodenough 1964, in Burszta 1998, 49). The anthropologist of culture, Geertz defined culture as follows: "it means historically transmitted patterns of meanings contained in symbols, a system of inherited concepts expressed in symbolic characters through which people communicate, consolidate and develop their knowledge about attitudes towards life" (Geertz 1966, 89).

In addition to the American perspective, along with the key concepts of culture highlighted by the British researchers, it is also important to mention, in this regard, B. Malinowski's sense of culture. He significantly emphasized the concept of organization in culture and treated it as a whole, consisting of elements on the background of significant relations between members of a culture. According to Malinowski, culture was a tool for adapting to the living conditions, and it was characterized by goals and functions. Malinowski also treated culture as a result of adapting man to the world (Malinowski 1944).

Also, on the basis of British social anthropology, it is worth pointing out the analysis of the social structure made by Radcliffe-Brown and his vision on culture, as "analysis of social structure and function redirected anthropological inquiry to the institutions of human life and to the role such institutions play in the maintenance and reproduction of society" (Radcliff-Brown 1952 in Moore, 2009, 158). Furthermore, the British anthropologist Douglas (1966; 2003) conducted an interesting analysis of cultural structures, which analyzed purity and pollution categories in cultures, being interested in comparisons, intercultural research, structure, and classification within cultures. Moore writes: "Douglas traced the convoluted lines of magic, taboo, mana, and contemplation. But in the last half of *Purity and Danger*, Douglas focused on relationships between ritual and social systems." (Moore 2009, 277)

Subsequently, Giddens (1989) indicated that "culture consists of the values the members of a given group hold, the norms they follow, and the material goods they create" Giddens (1989, 31). The author emphasized the importance of products of culture as material artifacts. Other artifacts of culture pointed to the symbolic layer highlighted Masłyk-Musial (1996). The author believes that culture is built thanks to the human community that creates symbolism, language, myths, and values. With the help of artifacts, people express culture, confirm its specificity. Symbol creation is, according to the author, a continuous process, like giving meanings. Masłyk-Musial (1996) says that symbolically included culture assumes the existence of networks of meanings - a web of symbols and the communication between them. Patterns of symbolic meanings are expressed through the myths, values, history of the organization of rituals and heroes.

Summing up the above review and the classic definitions of culture, I want to point out that they illustrate the American and British way of defining the 20th century culture and provide a canvas for further consideration on disability cultures in this article. The definitions on which I base the further analysis were constructed by Kroeber and Klockhuhn, Goodenough, and Malinowski. On the one hand, the concept of culture in this paper is seen as a set of ways of thinking and reacting symbolically. Culture is also a reservoir of values, artifacts as well as the roles of members who do everything to be members of the given groups. Furthermore, culture is considered also as an

organization enabling life and adaptation through relationships and interactions, as Malinowski (1944) noted.

Thinking about the analysis of selected cultural artifacts, I consider the concept of artifact indicated by the researchers, specifying it in regard to organizational cultures, including (Schein 2008): cultural artifacts (language, myths, and legends), behavioral artifacts (ceremonies, rituals), *physical artifacts* (art, technology, material objects). I will focus this artifacts analysis here on a selected *physical artifact* – the wheelchair and the concept of wheelchairs, and their roles in the lives of eight Polish women, in their early or middle adulthood (20-40 and over 40 years of age).

Disability cultures

Disability culture has been accompanying humanity since its inception, inscribing itself naturally into the everyday life of dominant cultures. It cannot be denied the existence of the disability, since the immemorial human existence, as the prehistorical sources point out, the presence of people with disabilities is known in all cultures around the world (Borowska-Beszta 2012). Disability cultures have been formed in different parts of the world, due to different circumstances, including relation to the *anomaly* (Douglas 2003), which sometimes it increased migration. Historically, an interesting culture of disability was formed among the deaf and the hearing people living together in the seventeenth century, on the island of Martha's Vineyard (Barnes, Mercer 2001), off the coast of North America.

Another undoubted cultural and European phenomenon constituting the original disability culture, was created as a result of migration; it happened in the seventh century in Belgium, in the city of Geel, which became the destination of disabled migrants from different European countries and a place of residence for them. Thus, Geel created a prototype of disability culture, a valuable medieval support for people with disabilities in foreign families. Such support recognized the dignity of people with disabilities and their needs (Borowska-Beszta 2012). Those two examples reflect not only the long presence in history of people with disabilities but also indicate one way of constructing disability cultures through migration in the world.

The term of *disability culture* appeared in the 1990s and it added a new dimension to the process of understanding people with disabilities and conceptualizing disability in the context of culture. The British researchers, Barnes and Mercer (2001) and earlier, the American scholar Brown (1996; 2002) wrote about this phenomenon. Disability culture should be interpreted on the background of general definitions of culture, created by sociologists and anthropologists. This means that culture manifests itself in material, spiritual or symbolic exchanges and invariably accompanies everyday life. Culture is also the image and a set of rules that influence the relationship between its members, the quality of their relationship and communication, and their lifestyles. Among the key dimensions of culture are family (kinship), language, education, art, religion, law, transport, economics, and work. It consists of specific features, highlighted by anthropologists. They are the spheres and forms of everyday practices, such as routine activities and rituals, creativity and art, learning, mobility, and work-related activities.

Other features of culture are attitudes toward time, explicit and hidden norms, beliefs, (including sacrum), customs, individual values and group values, and taboo spaces. Culture is also manifested through layers of material or symbolic artifacts, both ideographic and behavioral related to aspects of communication, gestures, and sustained patterns of behavioral data in cultures.

The problem of historical analysis of disability cultures is widely treated by Barnes and Mercer (2001). While comparing the surveys on disability culture in the American and the British studies, the authors point out that American concepts emphasize linguistic and textual aspects and the connection with bodily diversity, unequal status, power and their cultural meanings, while British scholars especially stress the representation of disability in the media, providing an ideological pretext for social exclusion (Barnes, Mercer 2001, 521).

Barnes and Mercer's analysis of the cultural, historical and media status offers the definition of *disability culture* as following: "disability culture presumes a sense of common identity that unites the disabled people and separates them from their nondisabled counterparts" (Barnes, Mercer 2001, 522). The authors emphasize that "there is a further presumption, that a disability culture rejects a notion of impairments-difference as of symbol of shame and stresses instead solidarity and the positive identification."(Mercer, Barnes 2001, 523). It should be pointed out that the very concept of disability culture met a various level of approval from disabled people's side, which is also noted by Barnes and Mercer (2001), after Finkelstein (1996 in Campbell and Oliver 1996, 111).

Finkelstein (1996) says that:

There is a great deal of uncertainty amongst the disabled people whether we want <<our own culture>>. After all, we all have had own experiences of resisting being treated as different, as inferior to the rest of society. So why now, where is much greater awareness of our desire to be fully integrated into society do we suddenly want to go off at a tangent and start trying to promote our differences, our separate identity? Secondly, at this time if we do want to promote our own identity, our own culture, there has been precious little opportunity for us to develop a cultural life. (Finkelstein 1996; Campbell and Oliver 1996, 111)

It should be added that since the publication of the last remark articulated by Finkelstein (1996), after 22 years, people with disabilities in United States and European countries significantly promote the new achievements and artifacts of the disability cultures.

Contemporary various *disability cultures*, as concepts, are coherent and may be understood as constructs of organizational cultures, existing in the frame of the dominant culture. They fit into the universal dominant culture, manifesting their own unique dimensions on its background. Disability cultures have their own everyday lives, norms, routine activities and rituals, bonds, values, sense of humor, taboo and lifestyles, as well as ways and styles of communication. In addition, the members of disability cultures create artifacts (physical, symbolic) and share similar experiences regarding relations between dominant cultures and disability cultures.

It is also worth taking into account, in this artifact analysis, the concept of a cultural artifact as defined by Reber and Reber (2005). They note "such an artifact that has the form and functions

defined by culture" (Reber and Reber 2005, 61). Furthermore, disability cultures manifest their own activity in real life plans and in virtual spaces of social networks, blogs etc. (Smieszek and Borowska-Beszta 2017).

The diversity of disability cultures

Brown (1996; 2002) uses one common definition of *disability culture*, by locating artifacts and values of disability culture related to experiencing oppression over the past centuries, creating artifacts and considering disability as pride and valorized common value. An analogous idea can be seen in Barnes and Mercer's (2001) analysis, indicating both the change of the concepts of *impairment* and *disability* to a positive meaning and highlighting the system of oppression, as the joint experience of disabled people (Barnes, Mercer 2001).

While Barnes and Mercer (2001) and Brown (2002) do not emphasize the topic of internal diversity within disability culture itself, it should be noted that disability cultures, including people with disabilities, their relatives, members of associations and communities are diverse. This means, in my opinion, that within the *disability culture* there are structures that differ in terms of, among others, artifacts (linguistic, behavioral, physical), values, routine activities, rituals, symbols, standards etc., indicating that talking about one general disability culture, as Barnes, Mercer (2001), Brown (2002) do, is an oversimplification.

Discussions on the structures and types of disability cultures are conducted in the world. The *Deaf Culture* concept is very clear, which, according to Barnes and Mercer, was constituted on the basis of the social exclusion of deaf people (Barnes, Mercer 2001), which in addition to artifacts, has shared a separate sign-language system. In addition, similar identity criteria are met by the culture of people on the spectrum of autism (*Aspi Culture*) and their families, present in online forums or other networks (Borowska-Beszta 2012).

What distinguishes disability culture internally is also related to the different concepts of disabilities itself and the attitude towards them. I should mention that another concept of disability exists in Deaf Culture, Blind Culture and a different one in Cultures of People with Intellectual Disabilities (Learning Disabilities) or Homelessness Cultures, that have members with acquired disabilities, due to the system oppressions or own lifestyle choices. Similarly, the Cultures of the Mentally Ill People and Cultures of Intellectually Disabled people have different positions in the Western dominant culture, than Deaf Culture or Blind Cultures.

In my opinion, not all disability cultures can be labeled in one common disability culture. The differences essentially include all the elements of organizational cultures indicated in e.g. by Schein (2008).

The analysis of differences in particular disability cultures concern almost all elements of culture, from artifacts through values or hidden assumptions of disability cultures, which I pointed out while analyzing taboo, hijack and fatalism patterns in generational families and cultures of people with disabilities in Poland (Borowska-Beszta 2018).

Additionally, we must bring into attention that disability cultures have a heterogeneous and multidimensional form in various parts of the world, and are subject to the regularities of the dominant culture. In disability cultures, the transmission of cultural knowledge and artistic expression, which are the axis of cultures, are transmitted through socialization and learning. In addition, the core values of disability cultures that determine their identity, i.e. *disability itself*, are also transmitted biologically, although this is not the only way to have a disability which can be acquired for exogenous factors throughout entire life.

This key value called *disability* indicates the uniqueness of *disability cultures*.

Continuing with the considerations regarding the internal diversity in disability cultures, starting from symbolic artifacts, (e.g. language) the culture of people with hidden (*invisible*) or physical disabilities, including those with movement disability, it should be added that the above-mentioned disability cultures use a completely different formal and semantic verbal language and forms of messages than, for example, those members of disability cultures having intellectual disabilities (levels from mild to profound). Once more, these qualities will not necessarily be, in my opinion, essential quality and key symbolic artifacts in Deaf culture, Blind culture or in cultures where disability has been acquired through lifestyle.

In reference to the above remarks, I believe that, in the concept of a multitude of disability cultures, all disability cultures with a multitude of artifacts and symbols share only a common brace of disability phenomenon (innate or acquired) and the oppression of the dominant culture. Other values and the quality may be different. In addition, even if cultural data is created by artifacts, they are unique and cannot be simply translated into artifacts for other disability culture, for example, a sign language system is a product of the Deaf Culture, alternative communication systems of the Aspi Culture, Braille system of the Blind Culture. Moreover, wheelchairs are a product of Cultures of people with Movement Disability. All those mentioned above are not necessarily being used by the People with Intellectual Disabilities.

Analogous, every particular culture uses specific ideographic symbols and logos in order to indicate their own identity. It turns out that only in the Culture of Chronically and Terminally Ill People is present the image of an animal (cancer), and it is the symbol of that only given culture. The blue color is nowadays a mark of the members on spectrum of autism and Aspi Culture, the purple color belongs to the members of Epilepsy Culture.

In addition, other artifacts will be present as forms of body decorations - tattoos, for example, among members of the Culture of People Intellectually Disabled. Recently, in 2018, American mothers of children with Down syndrome decorated their hands, areas around the neck, ears, and other parts of their bodies with *three arrowheads* pointing upwards and representing the trisomy in the 21th chromosome. The above remarks only indicate internal differences and the richness of disability cultures according to the plan of physical artifacts. I suppose that wider studies will reveal differences also in values, norms, routine activities, cultural rituals or taboo content in disability cultures.

Furthermore, speaking of disability cultures, there are different ways of enculturation and transmission of cultural knowledge. It also means that taboo area will be constructed differently, e.g. in the Culture of People with Intellectual Disabilities (Learning Disabilities), which in the Polish case, among others, is characterized by the long-term silence of parents, siblings regarding the future of a disabled brother or sister, after the death of parents (Borowska-Beszta 2018). The topic is not discussed openly in families for years.

In turn, by analyzing the question of time, I would like to stress that the attitude towards the concept of time is different in the Cultures of People with Intellectual Disabilities (monochronic), for example, and in the Cultures of People with Physical Disabilities or Deaf and Blind Cultures (polychronic) (Borowska-Beszta 2012; 2013).

By observing selected behavioral and symbolic artifacts in cultures of people with intellectual, physical, sensory and emotional disabilities, besides the cultures of people with chronic diseases or mental disorders, it should be noted that other artifacts will be produced, and it will be expressed with the help of different types of communication. For example, in the Culture of People with Intellectual Disability (Learning Disability), there is usually present a simple verbal communication system that minimizes abstract concepts, complex sentences and words. Such profoundly simplified communication systems are not present in the Cultures of People with Physical Disabilities, as for example those using wheelchairs and having a regular intellectual functioning level, or in cultures of people with sensory disabilities.

What's more interesting, any efforts of transferring one form of behavior in communication (*symbolic artifact*), from one disability culture to another one, could create consternation or even the protest of the members.

In conclusion, I would like to point to the layers that connect the disability culture. I agree with Barnes and Mercer (2001) and Brown (1996; 2002) on the fact that it is about the disability term, as a phenomenon of human functioning, and stories of oppression that lasted for centuries. In addition, what unites disability culture members is, in my opinion, related to the *presence* and the *open exposition* of disability itself, which in every disability culture becomes the key and the regulator to access them. This function is, therefore, a common and a universal pattern characterizing any disability culture. In order to be accepted and to get access to it, either in real or in online virtual reality, one should show his own disability, the disability of a family member, the circle of close friends etc. A common element is also the imposed control of disability cultures members from the dominant Western culture, in which there is manifested at the level of birth control, in order to attempts to control and influence entire lifestyle and death.

Wheelchair as cultural artifact

Below I would like to analyze one of the artifacts of the Culture of People with Physical Disability - the wheelchair. This artifact is designed and created for users with dysfunctions in the sphere of motion, that can be congenital or acquired. It is not generally a typical artifact for other disability cultures, as for example - Mental Illness Culture, Deaf Culture, Aspi Culture etc., unless

there is an additional value present in these cultures associated with multiple disabilities, including the need for using the wheelchair. So, the wheelchair can be designed for people with very different dysfunctions and needs that also go beyond physical disability and involve severe, multiple disabilities. It must be pointed out that modern wheelchairs, even if created in dominant cultures, are customized for the needs of the users with physical disabilities. Concluding, they are intended mainly for users with dysfunctions in the sphere of movement, physical and chronically ill. Using metaphors, Sydor believes that "in a sense, the wheelchair is both a car and shoes, a kind of interface between a disabled person and the surrounding world" (Sydor 2003, 9).

As a physical artifact (Schein 2008) and a product of particular disability culture, it is sometimes understood and treated in a binary sense. Below I will analyze secondarily the concept and role of the wheelchair in terms of 8 Polish females with dysfunction in the movement sphere, wheelchair users. I refer to the key conclusions and raw data from the Nowogrodzka (2017) ethnographic research, which I successively reinterpret.

The research questions I put forth are: *What is the meaning of wheelchair in the lives of 8 Polish females?* and *What a wheelchair should or shouldn't be?*

I conduct a secondary analysis of raw data in order to indicate individual concepts of a wheelchair as an artifact of Culture of Physical Disability. The data was collected among 8 Polish females using wheelchairs in everyday lives. The participants in research are 8 disabled females who have physical disabilities of two types (congenital: 5 females, and acquired: 3 females).

The age of females was as follows: 6 women were in early adulthood and 2 women in middle adulthood. Fieldwork and data collection and the analysis lasted from November 2015 to the end of March 2017. The personal data of females has been encoded to the initials: A, C, D, E, F, G, H, and the researcher Nowogrodzka (2007) has preserved the B marking for herself. Below is a section of raw data along with my reinterpretations regarding the role of the wheelchair and its concept in the lives of the participants, together with data analysis describing the concept of wheelchair, highlighting the perspective of the optimal and least desirable wheelchair.

In addition, the ethnographic research conducted by Nowogrodzka (2017) indicated some conclusions, the key ones which I am referring to below. The author writes that wheelchairs, as physical artifacts, do not cause direct associations with own disability for 5 out of 8 female participants, and only 3 women, while looking at the artifact of everyday use, think about their own disability, how to overcome it or how many activities they can do together with children, thanks to using a wheelchair. Sometimes the wheelchair gets a new name and it is compared to a *car*, a *cabriolet,* and *Gandalf* from the *Lord of the Rings*, which was indicated by 3 women, and also *legs*, which were indicated by 3 informants. Nowogrodzka (2017) indicated that 6 women expressed values directly related to the wheelchair. Three informants stated that the wheelchair gives them freedom, one said it gives independence, two emphasized symbolic relationships with the burden of disability and only one identified it with the symbol of disability.

In addition, new features of the artifact - the wheelchair - came out in the research results. It turns out that research participants have used their own wheelchairs for other activities than moving

around. The wheelchair has a function of a shopping basket or it is seen as a place for carrying something - indicated by 4 informants. In addition, it serves as a place to have sex (1 informant) and as a hanger for hanging clothes, or as a shelf, as one informant mentioned. (Nowogrodzka 2017, 147).

The concept of wheelchair: *Necessary Addition* and *Silent Helper*

All the participants of the research believe that the artifact, the wheelchair, is mainly an *addition* to *themselves*. The wheelchair is helpful in moving, it gives a great opportunity to carry out activities, and it gives a certain, however, limited freedom. The females point the artifact as an important object of everyday use, forming a part of their lives. The 8 informants have a positive emotional attitude towards the artifacts, accepting these subjects in their lives and their role.

A: Help in moving. Addition.

C: Huge (laughs). Because, as I mentioned before, if I did not have a wheelchair, I would not do anything. That I would not go out of the house, that I would not come to the association here, but only if I am somewhere in the mountains or the city I look at the tires that I will not break (laughs). Because if it's broken, it's just no more me (laughs).

D: It gives me freedom. Of course, this freedom is limited. Stabilization confidence while moving, the ability to overcome a greater distance in less time.

E: Necessary addition - I would call it.

F: Well, a tool that makes it easier for me to get somewhere, do something much faster, more efficiently.

G: Big. Very big. I know I cannot do a lot of things because of it, which I would like to do.

B: For example, what are these things?

G: What are these things? There are not many such things. (laughs) I would like to be an independent photographer.

H: All in all, the wheelchair and other devices are my life, they are a part of it, because they are with me 24 hours a day, even when I sleep they are next to me, they do not step away from me.

I: The most important, although not noticeable to me. Because it is something like *a thing* that is always with me, always with me, but I'm not really focused on it anyway, right? Wheelchair acts as a silent helper. It also plays the role of a prosthesis, because I have never looked at it, but now I realized it because if I did not have a wheelchair, I could not do anything (Nowogrodzka 2017, 94).

Cheerful, Soft and *not Heavy* Wheelchair

In the study, the 8 informants were asked to specify the construction and function of the wheelchair that best suited their expectations. Participants of the research indicated a category of lightness and some sort of discretion in the construction of the artifact itself, in terms of size and weight. One of the research participants personified the artifact, saying that it should be *cheerful* and also *delicate* and active cart (ACTIV). The aesthetic qualities, that is, the favorite colors of the

wheelchair and the possibilities associated with the construction (carbon fiber), backrest and the option of grips enabling the help of other people when needed, weren't in fact without significance.

A: I think a lightweight wheelchair. Can fit anywhere. As modern people, we have higher expectations and desires. A small, handy wheelchair is certainly the most comfortable.

C: Certainly *cheerful*, *he* cannot be *honest*, but he should be, because I'm honest, but the wheelchair? How to be honest? No, I do not know to be blue - it's my favorite color, and gentle despite being a wheelchair.

D: Well, I have the best wheelchair, because I have GTMs at the moment. My wheelchair is of the Active type, i.e. I can climb under curbs, I should even be able to do it under such a 15 cm, but I not able.

E: Should be as light as possible, although not too light, it would be best if it was colored.

B: And what colors could have?

E: Red, blue and green best. Maybe some yellow inserts. (laughs).

F: I think that the present is the best so far, if I'm tired then someone can help me, if I want it, I can go alone and it is light enough for a light alloy made of metal, so it's easier for me to move. You do not need that energy to put everything in motion.

G: (laughs). Exactly, one that is light, but that it still fulfills its functions there so that it has a great support, which I will not have because I cannot afford it. The backrest looks something like a chair to the desk, so bent and you can adjust the height - very cool. What else? Pull-out handles. What else? From good material - carbon fiber, it is very good, very durable and very expensive.

I: First of all, for me, it should be an active wheelchair (Nowogrodzka 2017, 113).

Horror Wheelchair like *Orthopedics* and *Hospital*

The worst wheelchairs, in the opinion of the 8 female informants, are heavy, massive, raw, and old constructed, resembling artifacts from medical cultures, hospitals but also from horror movies. These are wheelchairs that completely prevented and limited any form of independence. It is interesting that aspects, such as mentioning the hospital and the dependence of females on other people, indicated unpleasant associations of the undesirable physical artifact as a product of culture, in the time of the dominance of the medical model of disability.

A: I do not like wheelchairs and sticks like from a horror movie. Such basic, massive.

C: Certainly heavy, which is not enough that they have their weight. And I do not like wide ones.

D: Certainly not hospital, just like that.

E: I do not like heavy ones. If you know what I mean. Such *prehistoric* in shape. My first wheelchair was such that nothing could be manipulated at all, only I could sit and wait where they would take me.

F: I would not want to go back to such a wheelchair, where I will only be dependent on the person leading me.

G: (laughs) Orthopedic. Orthopedics wherein hospitals. On the other hand, I don't know if it should be completely electric, where there's only a joystick and left-right and you're going, right?

I: Well, this is a wheelchair other than active. Well, this popularly spoken: orthopedics (Nowogrodzka 2017, 114).

Wheelchair like *Little Black Dress*

Subsequently, the 8 Polish female respondents answered the question about the number of wheelchairs they can use on various occasions. The information was about the number of wheelchairs owned. One of them, informant A, additionally using a metaphor, illustrated her attitude towards wheelchair; she compared the wheelchair to the *little black dress*. She described her feminine attitude towards the physical artifact. The wheelchair was supposed to be a picture of luxury and elegance offered, as the *little black dress* does. After the analysis, it turned out that all 8 participants have only one wheelchair and do not have more such artifacts for different occasions, which is most likely related to the state of affluence and lower income of participants of the research.

A: I currently have my first wheelchair and as a woman, I decided it would be a *little black dress*. I always have the same can around and I do not pay much attention to their appearance.

C: Unfortunately, I do have only one

D: No, no, no, absolutely. One.

E: No, I only have this one.

F: I mean I have one more pair of cans and a wheelchair just in case something happens to it. But it is not related to fashion or sport.

G: No (laughs). I have this one, only wheelchair!

H: No.

I: No, I do have one, no more than this (Nowogrodzka 2017, 119).

To sum up the concept and role of the wheelchair, as a cultural, physical artifact used by 8 Polish females in their early and middle adulthood, I would like to draw attention to the fact that the analyzed physical artifact itself is in the close proximity to the space of all women participants. Females have a personal attitude towards the wheelchairs and they use its functions differently, according to own needs. Wheelchairs are for them artifacts that give freedom and the possibility of carrying out everyday activities, such as shopping or sex. The aesthetics and quality of the artifact's performance are not insignificant, as women prefer wheelchair with discreet features, lightweight with a neat construction and to be different from hospital objects or horror movies. Optimal features of wheelchairs are expressed as *addition*, *silent helper* or *little black dress*.

Conclusion

In this article, I defined the concept of culture, disability cultures and I analyzed a part of the raw data from interviews carried out by Nowogrodzka (2017). While the common concept of a single and broad *culture of disability* is recognized among the British and American academic grounds, the concept of diverse *disability cultures* must be recognized according to the complexity of which I tried to illustrate in the paper.

I am aware that speaking about the artifacts of physical disability cultures, that I have indicated in the text, is only a part of the possible analyzes. It is worth noting that wheelchairs are

essential artifacts of the cultures of people with physical dysfunction. They form part of everyday life and sometimes, artifacts that are *impersonate* and *taming*. In addition, raw data analysis showed threads of the negative attitude of the 8 female informants towards the artifacts from the past domination of the medical disability model. Furthermore, the data indicated also gender and femininity related threads. Well, the concept of the wheelchair became for one female informant a kind of clothing, related to the *little black dress*, created years ago by Coco Chanel. The probably hidden message concerns the concept and additional function of the wheelchair, which is meant to be just as elegant as the mentioned *little black dress* and to allow the woman to feel the same way.

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