

## ON THE USE OF THE INTERPRETIVE APPROACH IN QUALITATIVE RESEARCH: AN EMPIRICAL EXAMPLE

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This paper presents a method of analysis and interpretation of the narrative data, based upon a study on experiencing warmth in the relationship between sisters, one of whom is a person with Down syndrome. The aim of the study was to describe and understand the meaning of the experiences in a sisterly relationship. Females aged 12–30 years, in four sibling groups, took part in the research. Two narrative interviews were conducted with each participant. The Family Relations Test (FRT), observational data, and a questionnaire for the parents on the sibling relationship were also used. The article describes in detail the data from one dyad. The results indicate that warmth is most often manifested through tenderness and closeness, and experiencing warmth is fostered by spending quality time together and enjoying it. The presence of the subject dimension—experiencing oneself as a person who is valued and close to the sister and the ability to decide—is also important. The high quality of the relationship is related to perceiving the sister with intellectual disabilities as an entity pursuing her aspirations rather than a person in need of protection and care. Simplicity of experiences, sincerity in communication, and simple language indicate attunement between the sisters. The results of this study supplement the outlook with the perspective of a person with a disability and the positive aspects of the relationship. This could have been difficult to obtain using quantitative methods.

**Keywords:** people with Down's syndrome; narration; relationships; warmth

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The continuous development of the narrative psychology includes many approaches derived from different theories (e.g., symbolic interactionism, social constructionism, autoethnography, grounded theory, ethnomethodology, and others). The purpose of this paper is to present an interpretative approach based on Straś-Romanowska's (1992, 2010, 2016) existential and personalistic concept in qualitative narrative research. The conceptual categories of existence and person that are central to this concept define the theoretical context, determining how the person is known and understood in psychological research. A person is defined by the uniqueness of their existence, which consists of biological distinctiveness, the social need to form bonds with others, subjective awareness of one's own distinctiveness and autonomy, and the spiritual reference to values. These dimensions are complemented by the aspect of action manifested in the individual's activities and involvement. The dimensions constitute an integral whole. The approach described does not make it possible to limit the research to one of them while ignoring the others (Frankl, 2009).

The core category in Straś-Romanowska's (1992, 2010, 2016) concept is existence, which means experiencing oneself and one's life situation in a personal, peculiar way in the context of sensations, reflections, and feelings within the previously mentioned dimensions. By existing, a person responds to their own self and to the world, discovering the meaning of what they encounter. It follows that psychology should undertake research that respects the uniqueness of the human experience. The goal of the researcher in this case is to arrive at personal meanings, not cultural significance in an anthropological sense. Narrative research in this approach is primarily descriptive and interpretive, aimed at understanding, i.e. discovering the meaning (subjective, personal) as experienced by the subject.

### **Theoretical Assumptions on the Text Analysis and Interpretation**

The qualitative interpretation of narratives requires making several assumptions that will guide the researchers working on the text. The need to make these assumptions stems from ambiguous, debatable findings on the relationship between language and experience on the ground of semantics and cognitive science, as well as problems of reliability of interpretations that reach for the meanings hidden in the semantic code (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Byrne, 2022). In the approach we have adopted, we study the importance of the phenomenon for the narrator and the discovery of the personal meaning. To discover it, references are sought to various dimensions of existence, including

the permanent elements formed by the sphere of values (understood objectively). Such assumptions bring the described method closer to a phenomenological approach based on transcendental reduction, rather than to constructionist and relativist approaches, since the object of study is concerned with individual experience expressed in language, not the way it is constructed by language. The presented approach combines inductive and deductive approaches, that is, the coding process includes the meanings presented by the narrators, but also used the accepted definitions embedded in the theoretical findings on the quality of interpersonal relationships to describe these meanings. We also assume that the superficial meanings in the narrative described using the semantic tools (semantic field: Robin, 1980) can be the starting point for an interpretation aimed at discovering hidden, individual meanings.

### **Present Study**

The study presented here is part of a larger project that aimed to look for relational resources among siblings with intellectual disabilities (i.e., Down syndrome; we will adopt the abbreviation ID), where one (older) of the siblings is neurotypical and the other (younger) is a person with a disability.

High-quality close relationships between siblings create good conditions for functioning and development (Buist et al., 2013). The results of the studies of siblings with ID demonstrate a wide variation in the quality of this relationship (Mandleco & Webb, 2015; Wałęcka-Matyja, 2018). It has been found that this quality depends on the persons' gender, the type and severity of the disability, the birth order, their age, and the way the parents treat their children (Kasten, 1997); and while the works also demonstrate the importance of the emotional bond (Kowalewski, 2008), there are no findings on how this bond is experienced. Its depiction, evaluation, and related experiences, especially from the perspective of a person with a disability, is a missing component of sibling research (Meltzer & Kramer, 2016). The previous research primarily focused on the healthy siblings of people with DS (Hodapp & Urbano, 2007; Jurkiewicz, 2017; O'Neill & Murray, 2016; Orsmond & Seltzer, 2007; Pisula, 2007; Szarecka, 2013; Tomeny et al., 2017). The data on people with DS has mainly come from their caregivers, which means it has ignored the perspective of a person with a disability.

The quality of social processes in dyads is determined by the characteristics of the partners, the quality of the relationship, and the socio-cultural context (Hinde, 1976). Complex, multi-level relationships are defined primarily by

their quality. One of the characteristics of a relationship experienced by the partners is *warmth*, a term often used in scientific works interchangeably with *closeness* or *affection*. These words refer to the positive qualities of people or the relationship between them, although warmth originally refers to a physical sensation. Unsurprisingly, it is almost automatically associated with closeness (which evokes physical warmth) or positive affection (which causes a desire for closeness). In psychology, warmth does not have a homogeneous, fixed definition. In the studies of sibling relationships, the following characteristics of warmth are most often cited: intimacy, spending time together, perceived similarity, admiration, affection, caring, acceptance, mutual knowledge of each other, and support (Furman & Buhrmester, 1985; Stocker et al., 1997).

In this research, warmth is defined as a broader dimension that includes: (1) tenderness, understood as “behaviors used by people to convey information about love and heartfelt regard for one another” (Greszta et al., 2019, p. 340); (2) acceptance, i.e. approval towards the other person, expressing agreement with their presence/behavior, favorable evaluation of the other person (Siuta, 2009); (3) closeness, i.e. the feeling of attachment to another person, the perception of being in a relationship with another person (Gino & Galinsky, 2012).

The following research questions were posed: (1) Are descriptions of relationships of siblings where one person experiences intellectual disability characterized by warmth? If so, how is it manifested? (2) What dimensions of experience are mostly present in experiencing warmth? (3) What differences characterize both parties' experience of warmth? (4) What is the importance of warmth for both parties?

## METHOD

To reconstruct the way the relationship is experienced from the subjective perspective of its participants, the personalistic-existential approach of Straś-Romanowska was used focusing on multidimensional personal meaning. In this case we analyzed the meaning of the bond between siblings.

### Participants

The study focused on sisters' relationship due to numerous research reports suggesting a better-quality relationship between siblings with a person with ID, especially when both are of the same gender (Cuskelly & Gunn, 2003;

Sommantico et al., 2020) and when the typically developing party is a female (Orsmond & Seltzer, 2007; Prino et al., 2019).

We used purposive sampling of the study subjects. The inclusion criteria for the study included gender and neurodiversity—a neurotypical older sister and a younger sister with Down Syndrome, and verbal competence to create a story. The participants self-enrolled after reading notices sent out to schools or after personally contacting the person conducting the study. All the younger sisters are diagnosed with moderate intellectual disability (ID) and attend a special school. In all the families, the parents are divorced or separated. Table 1 contains other information on the participants.

**Table 1**  
*Participants' Information (Names Changed)*

Participants	Age	Independence level	Other siblings	Sisters' relationship with the father	
Siblings pair 1	Agata	22	lives on her own, works, studies	none	frequent contact
	Magda	16	lives with the mother		
Siblings pair 2	Marta	23	lives with the mother and the sister, studies	none	no contact
	Kaja	12	lives with the mother and the sister		
Siblings pair 3	Dominika	30	lives with her own family (partner, son), works	sister, 32	no contact
	Zosia	21	lives with the mother		
Siblings pair 4	Kasia	19	lives with the mother and the sisters	sister, 18	frequent contact
	Basia	16	lives with the mother and the sisters		

### **Ethical Considerations**

The participants were provided with all the necessary information (linguistically adapted to the intellectual capabilities of people with ID) regarding the subject matter and procedure of the study. Each person consented to the study. In addition, the consent to conduct the study was obtained from the parents of minors. The subjects were informed that the study was anonymous and confidential, and that the data obtained would only be used for scientific purposes.

### **Tools**

The authors' version of a narrative interview, modelled after the Schütz (1983) method (Bartosz & Żurko, 2014; Żurko, 2020) was used, consisting of two parts. In the first subjects were asked to talk about the last weekend they spent with their sister and the last Christmas they spent together. In the second part, the researcher told the beginning of a story about the adventure of two sisters who found an injured dog and the subjects' task was to complete it. If the main narrative questions proved too difficult for female participants with ID, the story would constitute an additional source of data on the personal concept of the sisterly relationship. The authors also used an observation sheet on different ways of expressing warmth in three areas: affection, acceptance, closeness (for example, affectionate physical contact, saying nice things to each other, using diminutives, expressing admiration, adjusting the pace of activities, expressing interest) and a questionnaire for the parents of the subjects (23 questions, answered on a 5-point scale) containing questions about the parent's perceived quality of sibling relationship (10 questions, such as "Do the sisters enjoy spending time together?"), the subjects' ability to establish close relationships (9 questions, such as "Does your daughter enjoy helping other people?"), and the subjects' social environment (4 questions, such as "Has your daughter been bullied by her peers because of her disability?"). Based on the data obtained, a brief description of the sister relationship from the parent's perspective was created for each pair to compare with the sisters' narrative.

In addition, the Family Relations Test (FRT) by Lewandowska-Walter and Błażek (2018) was used in the study of younger sisters, a qualitative method linguistically adapted for working with children. The test provides information on the structure of the family and the quality of the relationships between its members. It involves a set of figures symbolizing family members,

a board used to place them (to examine proximity, blocks used to mark family hierarchy, and a set of SMS messages (14 positive ones, such as “I like being with you” and 14 negative ones, such as “Sometimes you tease me”), which the subject selects and sends to all the family members. Kendall’s  $W$  for the FRT inter-rater reliability is 0.87 (Lewandowska-Błażek & Walter, 2018).

### **Procedure**

The researcher met with the siblings three times. The purpose of the first meeting was to introduce the participants to the research problem and the way the study would be conducted. The second meeting lasted an hour and was devoted to data collection. The FRT was administered first, then a narrative question was asked, finally the story read, with a request to complete it. An observation sheet was also completed during the study. Surveys for parents were sent out electronically. The third meeting was held to obtain feedback from the participants on the correctness of data interpretation.

### **Analysis and Interpretation Method**

The analysis and interpretation method was based on the proposal of Bartosz and Żurko (2014). The recorded interview with each subject was transcribed and then read out loud to get a first evaluation of the material (Lieblich et al., 1998). A semantic field analysis of the word “sister” was then conducted for each subject. The semantic field method assumes that language is a system of words interconnected by a network of semantic relationships that form fields of meaning. “The search for the meaning of a text, a sentence, a word involves analyzing all of its uses and contexts and requires constant work on the text, the apparent unfolding of the sequence of utterances and the order of utterances in order to put them back together according to meaningful readability” (Robin, 1980, p. 252). A table was constructed for the word “sister” containing equivalents, associations, actions of the subject, actions on the subject, oppositions, and the terms describing her. Placed in so constructed semantic field, the elements were analyzed for the presence of components of warmth (sensitivity, proximity, or acceptance) and their specific manifestations. The elements containing warmth marked this way were then analyzed in terms of the personal context of experiencing warmth (actional, social, personal, emotional, and spiritual level). The next step was to determine what

was unique and what was similar in the sister's image and in the expressions of warmth in the relationship. An important component of interpretation is an attempt to answer the question about the values that are present in the relationship. To answer the research questions, the data from all the sources was used: the narrative interviews, the observational data, the parent survey, and the FRT.

## RESULTS

### **Agata, 22**

#### *Observations and Parent Questionnaire Data*

During the meeting, the subject often smiled at her sister, joked with her, helped her (combing, wiping her face), was patient, and verbally expressed her pride in how well her sister was doing. She clearly set the study boundaries and rules for the younger sister (such as following instructions on her own, not disturbing the other during the interview). The meeting atmosphere was relaxed. The data obtained from the mother indicate that the older sister did not experience unpleasantness from her environment due to her sister's disability and is a well-liked person.

#### *Narrative Analysis*

The obtained narrative material (two stories) was analyzed to create a semantic field for the word 'sister'. Then, manifestations of the experience of warmth were identified in statements belonging to individual components of the field (equivalents, associations, actions of the subject, actions on the subject, oppositions and definitions). The results of this analysis are presented in Table 2.



**Table 2**

*Agata, 22: Number of Warmth Elements Occurring in Semantic Field of 'Sister'*

	Number in semantic field	Containing warmth	Including tenderness	Including acceptance	Including closeness
Equivalents	4	1	1	0	0
Associations	2	0	0	0	0
Subject activities	43	30	7	6	17
Activities on the subject	37	30	20	1	9
Oppositions	1	1	0	1	0
Terms	22	19	3	8	8
Total	109	81	31	16	34

In the subject's narrative, warmth is mainly manifested through proximity (actions of the subject) and tenderness (actions on the subject). There are more actions of the subject than the actions on the subject, which may indicate that the younger sister is perceived as an active person, carrying out her intentions (e.g., "and she arranges everything by herself", "and do you know how many songs she already knows? I'm shocked"). Closeness can be evidenced by the ease and sincerity of communicating one's feelings, understanding the younger sister's behavior, and a great deal of knowledge about her and her life. Warmth is revealed in all the assumed ways, including through acceptance (e.g., "with my friends, she feels grown up then, somehow she just feels so normal"). The statements attesting to the importance of physical proximity are also noteworthy ("I actually sleep best with Magda, I think because we have just slept together all the time, and that's great").

In the next step of the analysis, the identified types of manifestation of warmth were assigned to individual dimensions of the personal context of experience (actional, social, subjective, emotional and existential levels). The results of this analysis are presented in Table 3.

**Table 3**

*Agata, 22: Contexts of Experiencing Warmth in Relationship with Sister and Number of Their Occurrences*

	Action-oriented	Social	Emotional	Subjective	Spiritual
Tenderness	2	0	7	20	2
Acceptance	3	1	11	0	1
Closeness	8	1	16	2	5
Total	13	2	34	22	8

Warmth is most often revealed in the emotional dimension. Ambivalence is noticeable: in addition to feelings of joy, contentment, and acceptance, the narrator expresses outright criticism and mild irritation, although this rarely occurs and is communicated gently (e.g., “at our place it was like this, because Madzia mostly, like, grabbed all the attention of everyone around her”, “she’s just stubborn”). Tenderness gets the highest frequency in the subject context (e.g., “she made two sounds, and everyone knew she meant me”, “I also had to grow up a little bit very quickly, also because of Madzia, and I like going back to it with Magda sometimes”). The narrator portrays herself as a caring and helpful person towards her sister, having a close relationship with her (e.g., “I take her out”, “I have to—I have to comb her hair”, “I like spending time with my sister, a lot”). The narrative also includes statements referring directly to the spiritual dimension (e.g., “I loved you all the time”).

The FRT score shows that the subject has a good, close relationship with all the family members and the closest one to her is her younger sister. Such expressions of tenderness as saying nice things to each other, enjoying time spent together, and affectionate touch are perceived as bilateral, while caring or taking the initiative are perceived as the actions of the subject alone.

The completion of the story about a dog presents the younger sister as a caring, empathetic person (“I think the younger sister would definitely stroke it, take care of it”). The other activities described in the story were performed by the sisters together.

## **Magda, 16**

### ***Observations and Parent Questionnaire Data***

During the study, Magda verbally expresses affection and admiration, jokes, teases, but listens to her sister and complies. She eagerly accepts help and physical proximity pleases her. She is casual and smiles often. She tries to look like her sister (changing her hairstyle).

The questionnaire data: she often needs help with daily activities, willingly helps others, establishes contact easily, apologizes to people towards whom she has behaved inappropriately, shows no aggressive behavior. She experiences kindness from those around her, is well-liked, and is unlikely to have experienced stigma due to her disability.

### ***FRT***

The figures that symbolize the sisters were placed closest to each other, facing each other. The parents are put together in a common spousal subsystem and are in equal distance to the subject. The most positive content was sent to the sister (8 out of possible 14). The content of the messages speaks of the subject's pleasure derived from the time spent with the sister, and the tenderness shown by the sister toward the subject (smiling, hugging, enjoying their moments together). No negative messages were sent to the sister. Both positive and negative messages were sent to the parents, but the positive ones dominated.

### ***Narrative Analysis***

After creating a semantic field for the word 'sister', in both narratives of the second person, manifestations of the experience of warmth were identified in the statements belonging to individual components of the field (see Table 4).

**Table 4***Magda, 16: Number of Warmth Elements Occurring in Semantic Field 'Sister'*

	Number in the semantic field	Containing warmth	Including tenderness	Including acceptance	Including closeness
Equivalents	4	2	2	0	0
Associations	7	3	1	1	1
Subject activities	34	28	21	2	6
Activities on the subject	16	15	15	0	0
Oppositions	3	0	0	0	0
Terms	18	13	11	0	2
Total	80	61	50	3	9

Warmth in the semantic field of the word “sister” is revealed primarily in connection with the action of the subject (sister) and takes the form of tenderness. It is also manifested in the actions on the subject and in the way the sister is spoken about. Tenderness is the leading form of warmth expression. The predominance of the subject’s activities may indicate that the sister is perceived as an active person, planning and organizing meetings or entertainment, and the subject is a willing participant. The actions directed toward the subject have positive overtones, reflecting the image of the sister as a kind, loving, and engaging person (“Agata helps too. She always helps me”). This positive image is reinforced by outright expressions of affection and compliments (e.g., “you shine like a beautiful rainbow in the sky, you shine in the sky like a real rainbow”). The term “my sister” is often used as well, emphasizing the relationship between the sisters and its exclusiveness.

In accordance with the next stage of the analysis, the identified types of manifestation of warmth were assigned to individual dimensions of the personal context of experience (see Table 5).

**Table 5**

*Magda, 16: Contexts of Experiencing Warmth in Relationship with the Sister and Number of their Occurrences*

	Action-oriented	Social	Emotional	Subjective	Spiritual
Tenderness	28	1	10	4	4
Acceptance	0	1	0	2	0
Closeness	1	2	6	0	0
Total	29	4	16	6	4

The prevailing dimension of individual warmth experience in the relationship is joint activities, followed by the emotional dimension. Unlike the older sister's results, the feelings experienced are positive only. The subject dimension is weakly marked, but the connection between the experience in the relationship with the sister and self-acceptance is clear (e.g., "and when I got to the top my sister praised me", "she liked me so much then"). Within the social dimension, noteworthy are the statements that testify to the perception of the relationship as equal (e.g., "my sister always parrots me when I say something"), although analysis of the semantic field indicates the dominance of the older sister. The experiences related to the spiritual dimension are directly expressed (e.g., "I'm not offended by you, because I love you very much, sister").

The FRT results indicate that the relationship with the sister is the closest one for the subject, characterized by positive feelings that are reciprocated.

The completion of the dog story created by the subject mostly recounts the joint actions of the two sisters. There is only one sentence separating their actions ("One of them noticed this dog, then the other had to... also react, fight to help this dog"). The sisters are kind, helpful, empathetic people, but above all, they work together.

### **Interpretation**

To reconstruct the way the two sisters experience warmth in the relationship, an attempt was made to answer the research questions posed.

***Are Descriptions of Relationships of Siblings Where One Person Experiences Intellectual Disability Characterized by Warmth? If So, How Is It Manifested?***

In the narratives of the two sisters, the expressions of warmth are frequent, accompanying most of the components of the semantic field of the word “sister”. These are primarily tenderness and closeness—less frequently, acceptance. In addition, both parts of FRT suggest that the relationship with the sister is perceived as the closest one, dominated by positive, mutual feelings. Such results suggest that for both sisters it is a high-quality relationship: warm and close.

***What Dimensions of Experience Are Mostly Present in Experiencing Warmth?***

In the two sisters’ accounts, warmth is expressed primarily through positive feelings accompanying joint actions or expressed explicitly. Warmth is also referred to the subject dimension (self-acceptance, development). For both sisters, physical closeness (combing, sleeping together) is important. Direct references to the realm of values appear infrequently and relate to the love between the sisters.

***What Differences Characterize the Two Sisters’ Experience of Warmth?***

In the younger sister’s narrative, the most common form of warmth is tenderness, while the older sister’s narrative is more varied: tenderness and closeness have a similar frequency, acceptance is more common. This could be attributed to differences in verbal and intellectual competence between the sisters and/or to differences in expressive style within the relationship. The younger sister expresses only positive feelings (directly), while in the older sister’s narrative criticism of her sister is marked as well. In the older sister’s narrative, the subject context (related to the Self) is more strongly marked than in the younger sister’s narrative, while the social context is least present. This may result from the context of the study or may indicate that the relationship with the sister is experienced as an exclusive one, without connections with the network of other social relationships. The relational experiences in the subject dimension are presented in the older sister’s narrative in the context of care for her sister, as well as the need to become an adult quicker. For the younger sister, the relational experiences build her sense of worth

through her sister's praise and through experiencing herself as a valuable relationship partner.

***What Is the Importance of the Warmth Experienced in the Relationship for Both Parties?***

One may conclude that the value realized through warmth in the sisters' relationship is love. Both sisters speak about it directly, it is also present indirectly. It is realized through the joy of spending quality time together, physical contact, giving and receiving support, direct expressions of attachment and appreciation. There is noticeable sincerity and freedom in expressing feelings and opinions, as well as spontaneity in acting for the sake of the other sister. The simplicity with which love is expressed in the narrative of the two sisters is noteworthy.

## **DISCUSSION**

The results align with the previous research reports indicating that relationships between siblings in which one member is a person with DS can be characterized by high levels of warmth, closeness, and frequent positive interactions (Cuskelly, 2016; Hodapp & Urbano, 2007; Orsmond & Seltzer, 2007), and that more empathy is noted in unisex dyads (Sommantico et al., 2020).

It appears from both narratives that the primary context for experiencing warmth is spending time quality together and having positive feelings towards the sister (liking each other). This is consistent with the findings from studies of adult siblings of people with an ID that indicate the emotional and playful nature of the relationship (Walęcka-Matyja & Przybylak, 2013), more positive feelings, and more frequent contact than with neurotypical siblings (Burbidge & Minnes, 2014). Liking each other and spending time together are the earliest developmental features of close peer bonds that do not always characterize sibling relationships (Dunn, 2009).

Based on the interpretation made, it is possible to identify those aspects of experiencing warmth that may be related to the high quality of the relationship between the sisters.

### **The Importance of the Subject Dimension**

This context proved important for both sisters. The time spent together is an opportunity to experience yourself as a person who is valued and respected by the sister, who grows and copes with the challenges of everyday life. Each sister experiences her subjectivity in the relationship in a way that is specific to herself, but it seems equally important to both.

For siblings with an ID, high-quality relationships are fostered by parenting practices that strengthen the subjectivity of the neurotypical child (Pisula, 2007; Ünal & Baran, 2011). The results of this study show that equally important to the quality of the relationship is the experience of the self as a subject by the person with an ID, as well as the situations where the neurotypical sister provides opportunities for such experiences.

### **Support and Dominance/Symmetry in the Relationship**

Undoubtedly, it is the older sister who provides the younger one with various forms of support, especially instrumental. Emotional support, on the other hand, seems to be the domain of the younger sister. The positive effects of having a sibling with an ID described in the literature have been linked to the developmental nature of the challenges faced by neurotypical siblings (Tomeny et al., 2017; Wałęcka-Matyja & Przybylak, 2013). These results indicate the positive role of emotional support provided by the sister with an ID as well. In both narratives, the sister appears as an active person with initiative, pursuing her goals; the relationship is symmetrical in this regard. For the sister with ID, this result fits in with the principle described in the research of Burbidge and Minnes (2014) who noted that people with an ID perceive their relationship with their siblings as reciprocal and experience themselves in it as important to their siblings. However, it is difficult to explain why the older sister portrays her younger sister this way. Perhaps this is related to the high level of sensitivity to the other person that characterizes adult siblings of people with an ID (Taunt & Hastings, 2002).

### **Similarity, Attunement**

Although there are differences in the picture of the relationship emerging from each sister's narrative, the essential ways in which warmth is experienced are very similar (the role of joint action, emotionality, the role of the



subject dimension, physical closeness, etc.). The style of expression is also similar. It is characterized by simplicity, directness, and sincerity. Both sisters use uncomplicated language and express feelings in a similar way. This similarity can be the result of attunement—that is, the mutual adaptation of the behavior of the relationship partners enabling the exchange of signs of closeness. While there are many studies on mother–child attunement in the early stages of development, there are no results on synchrony between siblings with such large differences in their levels of functioning. The results obtained in this study show an important field to explore.

### CONCLUSION

The purpose of this article was to provide an example of a narrative analysis and interpretation in the qualitative, interpretive stream. As in all studies, there are limitations to accepting conclusions. At the data collection level, the participants' interactions must be considered. In this case, both sisters were present during the study, so they were able to spin their stories in such a way as not to make each other uncomfortable. In addition, the voluntary recruitment increases the likelihood of sympathetic people who manage their relationships well coming forward. Because the participants knew the purpose of the research, their narratives contained what they chose and were told in the way they chose. Therefore, it is important to use the data from other sources, including observations, in the interpretation. Additionally, when the interpretation aims to reconstruct the hidden meanings of the text, the researcher's experience and values come into play. Such limitations are widely discussed in qualitative research literature (Kaufmann, 2021; Kvale, 2010).

The research procedure presented here employed strategies to increase the reliability of the results: attention to consistency and clarity in the theoretical assumptions on the research subject and methodology, the use of definitions to facilitate coding, the use of additional data sources, a clear and consistently applied data analysis as well as interpretation procedures tailored to the nature of the data, and discussion of interpretation results with the subjects. Despite the lack of generalizability of the data in this approach, the results allow us to see potential further areas of research and even practical applications aimed at supporting relationships between siblings with disabilities.

While the narrative research places a requirement on their subjects to be verbally competent, this does not mean that it is necessary to eliminate those

who cannot provide a seamless story. The advantage of the qualitative research strategy is that the perspectives of the researcher and the researched can be negotiated to get to the essence of the experienced problem, even if the verbal capabilities of the subjects are limited.

### **CRedit Author Statement**

AGATA KUZIA (60%): conceptualization, methodology, validation, formal analysis, writing (original draft), writing (review and editing).

MAGDALENA ŻURKO (25%): conceptualization, methodology, validation, formal analysis, writing (original draft), supervision, writing (review and editing).

BOGNA BARTOSZ (15%): methodology, validation, writing (original draft), writing (review and editing).

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