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Becoming a Living Book as a learning process. Researching (un)wanted stories of the Polish Living Library

ABSTRACT: This article provides insight into the Living Library, a method of anti-discrimination education, in Poland. The presented part of the research project delves into what Living Books learn through their participation in this initiative and what it means to be a Living Book. The research framework is anchored in social learning theories, particularly situated learning theory and Communities of Practice, as well as critical pedagogy perspectives. The Living Library is presented as a method for engaging with the Other and fostering understanding of otherness. Participation in the Living Library community provides an opportunity for individuals to learn about otherness. Research indicates that becoming a Living Book is not a linear process; there are different paths to becoming Living Books that can coexist. Being a Living Book involves complex self-discovery and the transformation of personal experience. It encourages self-narration and self-description, allowing individuals to challenge societal narratives, reclaim their identity, and resist oppressive norms. Becoming a Living Book within the Living Library community offers both opportunities and challenges. The opportunities include sharing unique experiences, engaging in dialogue, educating others about issues related to discrimination and stereotypes, and working for social change. However, long-term engagement in sharing their stories can be emotionally taxing. Telling their stories involves emotional and epistemic labor.

KEYWORDS: Adult education, otherness, Living Library, social learning, epistemic exploitation, learning (about) otherness

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INTRODUCTION

In this article, I present part of the research on the Living Library, which is a method of anti-discrimination education. The material presented here is about the role of Living Books. Living Books are real people who voluntarily share their personal experiences, stories, and perspectives related to social justice, discrimination, and activism. In this article, I present what and how they learn through their participation in Living Books and what it means to be a Living Book. By researching Living Books, the field of education can gain insights into innovative and effective approaches to promoting inclusivity, diversity, and empathy in formal, non-formal, and informal education. I focus on this particular part of my research project because Living Books are valuable subjects of study as they offer a unique context for exploring topics related to diversity, social change, community building, dialogue, education, and much more. By examining the dynamics and impact of Living Libraries, researchers can contribute to a better understanding of how these initiatives can foster a more inclusive and democratic society.

Research project *The Living Library: An Educational Study of the Space of Encounter with the Other* (funded by National Science Center No 2019/35/O/HS6/04146) investigates the Living Library as a development that first appeared in Poland in 2007. My explorations of the Living Library mainly focused on its practices in order to understand and depict it as a method of action in encounters with the Other/Otherness.

Otherness is a complex and multilayered construct. It is studied in a variety of academic disciplines and subdisciplines. It is a notion that has accrued pejorative meanings and tends to inspire fear. Otherness has an array of dimensions, facets, and aspects (Środa, 2020). It can be associated with people's national or ethnic background, psychosexual orientation, religious denomination or lack thereof, health status, economic standing, lifestyle, and other factors (Czykwin, 2013; Goffman, 2007). Also, otherness is an instrument that power utilizes to sustain itself by explaining to the public who and what the Other is, what threats and risks the Other poses, and how one can defend oneself against the Other.

In my research, reflection on otherness is mainly anchored in educational and adult-education perspectives. The theoretical framework was provided by social

learning theories, in particular, situated learning theory (Lave & Wenger, 1991) and Communities of Practice (Wenger, 1998), and the perspective of critical pedagogy (Freire, 1996; Habermas, 2002; Hooks, 2022; Spivak, 1988; Szkudlarek & Śliwerski, 2010). I chose to focus on the educational work of the Living Library, investigating and probing into its operations.

LIVING LIBRARY IN POLAND: CONTEXT AND PRACTICES

Present in Poland since 2007, the Living Library is a method of human-rights education, anti-discriminatory education, and education for a diverse society. It was invented in Denmark in 2000. In 2003, the Council of Europe recognized the Living Library as an official method of human rights education, thus contributing to the dissemination and promotion of the method. The Living Library started to be implemented in other European countries. It was one of the elements of the Everyone Different – Everyone Equal campaign. Currently, the method is used in 85 countries on six continents (according to Human Library Organization 2023 sources). Since 2014, there has been a nationwide network in Poland called the Living Library Poland¹, which brings together organizers, ensures the correctness of activities, and integrates the community of those involved. A Living Library can be organized by institutions, organizations, informal groups, and individuals who understand and accept the goals and standards inscribed in the method. In 2014, standards were developed in Poland that contain the goals and values that should be shared by those permanently involved in the method. Living Libraries are mainly arranged by non-governmental organizations or as grassroots initiatives launched by informal groups and private individuals. People and groups who are exposed to stereotypes, prejudice, marginalization, and exclusion have a special part in the Living Library's work (Allport, 1958; Bojarska, 2016; Branka & Cieślukowska, 2010; Lippmann, 1997; Major et al., 2003; Weigl, 2000); specifically, they play the role of Living Books. The Living Library does not focus either on one theme or on one minority; instead, it tackles the problems of discrimination in the broadest possible scope, taking into account the needs and issues of the local communities in which it is organized. For this reason, Living Books come from widely varying backgrounds and differ in their social standing, denomination, occupation, skin color, sexual orientation, economic status, education, able-bodiedness, age, views, and appearance. What they have in common is the aim of sharing their experiences in order to educate for acceptance of otherness. My interest in the experiences accumulated by Living Books and organizers of Living Libraries encompassed learning about otherness, the needs, and motivations behind such pursuits, and attempts to examine and understand the processes and relations within communities of people using this method to work for social change.

1 Poland is the only country to have developed a nationwide network assembling and supporting Living Library organizers from different regions.

Participation in the Living Library is based on voluntary and is free of charge for the audience. Also, the people who are Living Books are volunteers and do not receive remuneration. They tell their stories, share their experiences, and have the opportunity to speak about themselves in their own voice and their own rights.

The Living Books come from very different backgrounds, with diverse social statuses, religion, profession, skin color, psychosexual orientation, material status, education, fitness, health, age, views, and appearance. As they meet their audiences through conversation and by passing on their experience, they teach acceptance of otherness and the creation of critical knowledge about Otherness. Living Books refer to their own experiences to replace stereotypes with the knowledge they create. The Living Library is a space where, by asking questions, each person has the chance to get to know the other, verify a particular stereotype, and build social contact, trust, and acceptance. The diversity of the Living Library is intended to reflect the social diversity and diversity of the community in which it is organized. In practice, a Living Library operates in a similar way to a traditional Library and uses its language. The difference is that in a Living Library, the books are people. After registering, the reader receives a library card, has the opportunity to consult the catalog, which contains the titles of the Living Books and prologues – short descriptions created about themselves by the Living Books, and then borrows a Living Book for a 30-minute conversation in a prepared space that ensures safety, comfort, and intimacy of the dialogue. During one event, the reader can have multiple conversations, which are usually one-to-one. Living Books are prepared for their role before proceeding.

RESEARCH PROJECT DESIGN

The research was designed and implemented within the qualitative methodology I adopted following Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (2014, p. 23). Using qualitative methods, researchers can capture and depict the complexity and multidimensionality of human experiences, behavior, feelings, attitudes, and relations with the social world. For those who undertake to carry out research among people at risk of discrimination, marginalization, and social exclusion, the qualitative approach is an avenue that makes it possible to discover and comprehend the meanings that research participants attribute to their experiences and the social contexts in which they live. By relying on the qualitative research framework, I was able to fathom the practices that made my research participants' world(s) and experiences visible, to understand their diverse constructions and their varying meanings, and to present those to readers (Flick, 2012, p. 22). This knowledge emerges in dialogue or negotiation, in the process of sense-making and production of communal narratives (Guba & Lincoln, 2014).

This research orientation also appeared suited to the goals of my research, seeing that I am an activist with a commitment to education. As researchers are themselves situated in the world, their voices do not remain unaffected by their personal experiences, biographies, class, race, sex, culture, and ethnicity. As noted by Denzin

and Lincoln (Denzin & Lincoln, 2014, p. 49), there is no such thing as objective observation; there are only observations situated in the worlds of the observer and the observed, as well as between the two. In my research, I sought to answer three research questions: (i) What are the contexts of using the Living Library method? (ii) How does the process of learning (about) otherness unfold for people permanently working with the Living Library method? (iii) What does research on learning by the Living Library method reveal?

I used three ways of obtaining research material. These were analysis of foundational data, in-depth interviews with organizers, Living Books, and observations.

In this article, I focus on learning about otherness, describing the emergent pathways of being a Living Book and the challenges and opportunities that come along with it.

BECOMING A LIVING BOOK THE STARTING POINT

The start of engagement begins with the decision to join a community of people working with the Living Library method. As the stories of my interviewees show, they spontaneously engage or thoughtfully reach out to work with this method.

The motivations for joining the Living Library community can be categorized as either activist or solidarity-based. Activist motivations center on the desire to educate people about social issues, normalize topics with stereotypes and prejudices, engage in discussions, break taboos, and share one's perspective on societal realities. This often involves a belief that sharing personal knowledge can bring about change in society's understanding of various issues.

Solidarity-based motivations are rooted in the desire to protect someone who identifies with the same marginalized group from violence, exclusion, or discrimination. Individuals driven by solidarity want to show support and strength by sharing their experiences.

In both cases, participants aim to create awareness and change within society, emphasizing the importance of open dialogue and personal stories. They acknowledge that change may occur slowly and on a small scale, but their commitment to the Living Library method is driven by the hope for a better future and a more inclusive society.

As the interviews show, one of Living Book's most important learning aspects is learning about otherness. Entering a Living Library community means often meeting representatives of groups at risk of discrimination for the first time. As Wenger and Lave noted in their theory (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998), people function simultaneously in many different communities of practice. From the narratives of those involved in the Living Library, it is apparent that some of them have these experiences and have previously engaged in the activities of groups with which they identify or solidify. Homogeneous in terms of identification and the element of identity by which they define themselves: Alcoholics Anonymous, a faith commune, an

association for people with physical disabilities, and a support group for transgender people. They participate in regular meetings and actions of, for example, people with addiction or people with disabilities and are highly competent, knowledgeable, and skilled in the area of cooperation in this specific group. The Living Library, as a community, brings together people from different backgrounds and different groups. They share a similar experience of being different in society, but this otherness and experiences are defined by different elements of identity. Hence, it is very often the case that involvement in this initiative is linked to first contact and the establishment of relationships with people who identify with other discriminated groups.

Reactions to participating in the Living Library vary. Some people recognize their prejudices and stereotypes, others begin to acquire new knowledge and skills, and some experience tensions between different groups within the community.

“I remember my first Human Library – I was sitting and looking around, observing all these people and wondering what am I doing here. Gay person? Transvestite? It is not for me, I thought, whilst being a human book – part of the project myself I did not accept other groups present, minorities, people, but it changed over time. I discovered that they are in fact people as am I and for that I can be grateful to the Human Library, for changing my outlook, breaking stereotypes and prejudice.”

“I remember being very embarrassed during one of the first Living Libraries when to the Roma sitting next to me, who was also a Living Book, came a nephew and I checked where my wallet was. It was then that I realised I was subject to stereotypes myself.”

“And the Living Library gives us the feeling that it might be worth making the effort to make contact and that someone who is, in inverted commas, a stranger to us might turn out to be much closer than we thought. [...] It is certainly something that broadens our awareness and horizons, allowing and giving us the luxury of confronting and meeting something that bothers us, something with which we have no contact, something that drills a hole in our stomachs somewhere, and something that we would simply describe as alien. And what's foreign is what we're afraid of and that causes a lot of negativity, which I think it's nice to run away from.”

Participants in Living Libraries learn both about the otherness of others and about their own otherness. It is a process that helps them understand diversity and reflect on the experiences of others and on their own behavior in relation to them.

An important part of this process is the availability of knowledge shared by people from minority groups, something that is often marginalized outside the Living Library. Participation in meetings and dialogue with Living Books enables people to gain knowledge and perspectives, exchange information, and model their own attitudes and beliefs.

In addition, those involved in the Living Library have the opportunity to reflect on their boundaries and confront their own identity. Becoming a Living Book can lead to a deeper understanding of oneself and one's social role.

In my view, there are two major aspects of learning in this area. One of them is related to practical skills—how to communicate, how to behave, how to help a person with a motor disability, a deaf-blind individual, etc. The other aspect is related to acquiring knowledge about otherness—perception of diversity, reflection on other people's experiences and one's own behavior towards other individuals discriminated against, attention to otherness and to the needs it entails in the public sphere, narratives of otherness, injustice, and social inequality. Another area of learning about otherness encompasses learning about one's own otherness—experiencing it anew in contact with other Living Books and with readers as well. This dimension of learning primarily concerns Living Books themselves. This learning takes place in a variety of ways. It may rely on self-reflection, self-confrontation, or the acquisition of deeper knowledge about the group with which a given Living Book identifies.

PRODUCING PROLOGUES

One of the practices of the Living Library community is (to use the language of a traditional library) for Living Books to give themselves titles and to write prologues (short descriptions that serve to familiarize readers with the Living Book before the talk). Some of these are sometimes metaphorical; others are a list of questions that a Living Book can answer.

Sometimes, in a prologue, a person shares their experiences, introduces themselves and their life, or refers to existing stereotypes related to the group they identify with. There are prologues that refer to science and try to put the problem in this perspective. Sometimes, the Living Book tries to 'hide' behind a metaphor or celebrities who also identify with a particular minority group. Sometimes, the prologues remain unchanged for all editions in which the Living Book participates; others change after some time of involvement in the method and participation in several editions of the Living Library. The direction of the changes I observed concerned either changing language issues that the organizers and the Living Books considered important to change or were personal decisions by Living Books, who felt that the prologue created a few editions earlier no longer suited them. In this case, the changes usually have a direction from more metaphorical prologues to those describing a person's specific experiences, writing about themselves directly, and quoting excerpts from biographies. Participating in several editions and gaining experience makes the person feel more confident and secure and ready to tell the reader about themselves already in the prologue. The changes in the prologues correspond to learning about (one's) otherness, a change in the narrative about oneself, and the perception of one's otherness is apparent. The direction of change in the prologues reveals a greater acceptance and understanding of oneself and the self-therapeutic dimension of the Living Library and recognizing one's own story as meaningful and able to contribute to change.

Entering into a dialogue with the people involved in the Living Library, the readers and oneself in a safe space teaches self-awareness, empathy, and critical thinking and allows one to enter into a dialogue in which the person feels more comfortable, which becomes more meaningful, while deepening one's understanding of the world and allowing one to question previous assumptions and patterns (Demetrio et al., 2000; Dominicé, 2006). Some people need first to get to know how the Living Library works in order to be able to start talking about themselves directly in plologies.

LEARNING TO BE

Being part of the Living Library is a kind of negotiation of one's identity and role within the community (Wenger, 1998). From the moment one decides to join the community, one participates in practices (giving a title, writing a prologue, attending events as a Living Book, and establishing relationships with others involved). The process of becoming part of the Living Library community is multidimensional and related to all four elements of learning, as described by Wenger (1998). In the interviews and data analyzed, I noticed that how the people involved define themselves has to do with how they experience participating in this community. For each person I spoke to, being a Living Book means something different and happens differently. It is something of a biography of the person as a Living Book. I see the pathways distinguished and described from the narratives as occurring in parallel rather than following one another. Based on the research, I have identified five types of Living Books distinguished by their pathways to becoming one; these are (self)reflection Living Book, Self-therapeutic Living Book, Emancipated Living Book, Living Book accepting one's otherness, and Living Book rooted on the shelf.

(SELF-)REFLECTION LIVING BOOK

Some people recount the journey they took in reaching their identity and putting themselves together. Telling one's own story and answering questions was a process of learning oneself, understanding and accepting one's otherness, and giving meaning to one's individual experience, but also a process of integrating the different elements and premises of identity. (Self-)reflection allows one to understand one's own actions and choices better. Telling one's own story many times, writing it down in the form of a prologue, and hearing other people's perspectives is a transformative force that makes a person active in the process of gaining knowledge about themselves and their abilities.

“I greatly admire people who are able to define themselves in one word, to say who they are so unequivocally, without doubt or contradiction, for me it is impossible. Thinking now, after all these years, about the Living Library, I come to the conclusion that it had three phases for me. In the first one, which I would call amateurish, I came, answered questions and that was it,

an ordinary conversation, I didn't expect a continuation. [...] After this phase came another more mature one, which in a way made me think about who I am. I have my title people think of me in a certain way [...] The next phase of my presence in this project was a formative, shaping phase. I was an amateur, then I became more aware, and now with this awareness, with this information that I extracted from deep within myself, I have the chance to continue working on myself. I can say that in a certain way and to a certain extent I have rethought myself as a human being."

SELF-THERAPEUTIC LIVING BOOK

For some people, being a Living Book has a (self-)therapeutic dimension. In a safe place, among people who have similar experiences of being different, they, through contact with readers, can relate to their own experiences, say about themselves that they are part of a certain community, and openly express their otherness in the Living Library.

"It is in telling my story. What I have learned is that my story can be interesting and valuable to someone. Just such an ordinary story. So that, that people learn too."

"It's certainly therapeutic from a book point of view, because you can talk about yourself, you can talk, you can reel it in, you can tell it all the time and jump around different spaces, you can travel through your life in general, so asking about your life is very motivating, it's nourishing. A person comes out on such an adrenaline rush to share a piece of their story [...] But there are also sometimes different backstories to it all because you can go into your own story, and swim, and get a bit carried away [...]."

This dimension is mainly related to the possibility of speaking openly about oneself and one's otherness and experiencing something very difficult or impossible outside the Living Library. Repeatedly telling one's story has a self-therapeutic dimension; it is related to learning from one's own biography and regaining agency (Demetrio et al., 2000). One's own biography can be seen as interesting or helpful to others. Individuals also mention being able to rehearse something they want to tell people from their environment in a safe conditions to see reactions to certain confessions. This also helps them to function later, beyond the event itself.

EMANCIPATED LIVING BOOK

This path illustrates the process of becoming through understanding the journey one has taken from the moment one enters the community to the moment one decides to stop being a Living Book. It is linked to the emergence of an identity that is fully and repeatedly integrated within the Living Library and beyond it into the

wider constellation (other communities, groups, communities, society) in which the person is involved. An indispensable element is understanding and accepting one's otherness and the mechanisms created and operating socially concerning otherness. This path is also accompanied by a reflection on the method and a criticality towards it, but at the same time, an understanding that some people (mainly for self-therapeutic reasons) need to continue to act in the Living Library.

“Well what has changed? Everything, life has changed. In the sense, I got a different experience, I experienced more, I understood some situations I had no idea about because I knew them either theoretically or I didn't even imagine them at all [...] I didn't want to get upset anymore and I don't give a fuck anymore. I really don't give a shit if they think I'm a Jew, a snail, or a balloon. In the sense it's none of their business, it's just my business. So I kind of don't want to. [Well, that later they tell you that just that you're not the person you are, because you're young, you don't know yet. Or that, well it doesn't work like that, because it says in the book, [...]] Because I also don't want to convince people anymore that I'm normal. They don't have the internet? Are they blind? They can't see? People on the street they don't meet? I don't want to anymore.”

The above statement expresses the changes a person has experienced in their life and perspective on the Living Library. On the one hand, the frustration and discouragement of proving one's worth and seeking social acceptance, the fatigue with the conventions of the method, are perceptible. On the other hand, the statement expresses the autonomy and self-confidence of a person who rejects the opinions and expectations of others, focusing on their own experience and feelings. A transformation and process of self-education is evident, in which the Living Book gains the conviction that she does not need to please and convince others in order to be herself and be accepted.

In this context, the Living Library can have an emancipatory function. As Gert Biesta writes (Biesta, 2013), in this kind of emancipation, it is not a matter of relying on intervention from outside, but emancipation takes place in a moment of empowerment, in which the individual relies on an already existing (integrated K.P.) identity and begins to tell his or her story on his or her own terms. In the process of emancipation, the emphasis shifts from something external to the subject to the subject itself (Biesta, 2013). The Living Book does not wait for the readers or others to let her tell her story; they decide, autonomously, how and whether they want to tell their story at all.

LIVING BOOK ACCEPTING ONE'S OTHERNESS

Participating in a project and deciding to get involved is, for many people, the first step to understanding their otherness and accepting it. It is a kind of negotiation of one's experience with others involved in the project, but also confronting and un-

derstanding one's emotions when faced with the questions asked and experiencing being part of the Living Library community. This kind of becoming is linked to the process of personal growth, acceptance, courage, and transformation that a person experiences through participation in the Living Library.

“I became a living book, like during one of the first living libraries ever organized. I don't really remember how it happened, but I know that I was finishing rehab at the time, but it was so very, very early. And I was terribly frightened [...] because I also think a little bit that I wasn't ready to tell people about it at that time, that I was probably more afraid of it [...] many years later I came to a living library [...] I talked to some living books. [...] And I decided that this might be a good time to maybe come back to it [...] Somehow, I think I needed that to look at my problem from a bigger distance. And to have an idea at all of how I wanted to tell this story because I don't think I had been able to tell it to myself in a more positive way before. [...] In my experience, I could only be a 'Living Book' at the point where I stopped judging myself. And I stopped judging myself and my problem with addiction harshly. I just accepted it for myself [...] And that I had to do a lot of thinking to have the courage to do that and to treat it as simply part of my story. Well, because the stigma on any kind of mental health problem in general is huge on people like that.”

LIVING BOOK ROOTED ON THE SHELF²

This path of becoming is about defining oneself by belonging to a community and being for and with others. In this pathway, it is important to be present and participate in the event. The role of the Living Book and the practice is mainly seen through the prism of being among other Living Books. The feeling of being part of a group of people who accept, understand, do not judge, and are not afraid of you. This part of being part of a community is about friendships, making relationships, finding an asylum – a place where you want to be and come back. This pathway is also reflected in the length of the experience of being a Living Book. It applies to people who are rather already functioning at the center of the community: they are experienced, they know the method, they can share their experience with people who are just starting to enter the role of Living Book, and their importance is reflected in the number of loans.

“But as soon as there is an opportunity to speak at the Living Library and just share a piece of my world, I try to participate as much as possible. I try to defend this place of the living book, yes, I don't go off the shelf. It's kind of clung

² Shelf – a place/space within the Living Library, preferably secluded, where only the Living Books and the volunteer(s) operating the event stay. The Living Books can there to rest and wait for further conversations with the reader(s).

to my identity and just when I say Living Library, I think to myself, okay, well that's me too. I always have to be and it feels like it's kind of my guard down, that I can't fall asleep, that I just have to be like that, that I have to be that."

"The greatest strength of the Living Library is what happens to the Books. I've noticed in myself that at the moment joining the Living Books team, we are one big, tight-knit pack no matter what color our skin is, who we are, what we've done before, what religion we are. There are so many things that make us different and at the same time we all sit together, we fool around, we joke around, we talk."

The atmosphere during the Living Library is a frequently recurring theme of the interviews. It is most often described as family-like, friendly, and wonderful. Individuals enjoy being together, mentioning that they feel at home, are accepted, they all like each other, and enjoy spending time with each other on the shelf. Rooting on the shelf happens quite quickly precisely because of the atmosphere. People want to participate in future editions of the event, meet other Living Books, talk, and spend time together. This accepting and supportive atmosphere also creates a safe space to be together. The people on the bookshelf share a common experience of being different outside the Living Library, and it is finding a haven that offers acceptance and security, waits for their presence at each event that makes them want to return to the bookshelf. Spending time on it together is a very important part of becoming a Living Book. I think it also has links to learning to belong and the (self-)therapeutic dimension of engaging with the Living Library method. In a social context, the bookshelf, like the Living Library, represents a kind of island where otherness is not judged but accepted and celebrated. The metaphor of the bookshelf as being at home is particularly resonant, and I see in it a reference to a pedagogy of shared place (Mendel, 2017). On the shelf, individuals are together, talking, laughing, and practicing the same values. This is their commonplace, where equal and democratic coexistence applies and the bonds and relationships between them are strengthened.

The typology of becoming a Living Book presented is not a process of consecutive stages. Nor are the different types in opposition to each other. The essence is that being a Living Book is a complex process of becoming one and drawing on and creating knowledge based on one's own biography and experience. The different categories are not value-laden. It sees value in seeing the individual transformation of experience at the level of each person in the context of functioning in a community. Transforming and interpreting one's own experiences makes it possible to change the quality of life. This applies whether it is about accepting one's otherness, building relationships and a sense of community with others, or deciding to complete an activity in the Living Library. The people involved reproduce the structure of how the Living Library functions as a method and a community while they transform and change the structure of how they interpret their own experience. Telling one's story and sharing experiences is a process of self-recovery (Hooks, 1994). Self-narration and self-description are tools for nurturing critical subjectivity and resistance. In this view, becoming a Liv-

ing Book is a form of breaking with how society defines people from minority groups in favor of (re)narration. Taking the floor is an important tool for bell hooks to define who we are. Telling one's story (giving a title, writing a prologue, stepping into the role of the Living Book) becomes a way of narrating oneself, revising oneself, and re-telling oneself. The individual seeks to construct a new narrative that challenges and revises traditional narratives imposed by society or dominant power structures. Through self-narration, the individual can tell their own story, opening up new possibilities and perspectives of self-identification and understanding. By engaging in self-narration, the person who is a Living Book actively ascribes new meanings, values, and identities to themselves. This process involves questioning and transforming existing social norms and roles that may have been imposed on her. This allows for the creation of a new identity that is more in line with the individual's beliefs, values, and experiences. Both self-narration and self-description are acts of empowerment and resistance. They enable the individual to break free from the constraints of oppressive narratives and reclaim power over their own identity and sense of self. By telling their own story and ascribing new meanings to themselves, the individual can challenge existing power dynamics and affirm their own subjectivity. In this way, the self-narration and self-description of Living Books become vehicles for personal liberation, empowerment, and resistance. They allow individuals to re-imagine themselves beyond the constraints set by social norms and create a new narrative that reflects their authentic self and their aspirations for change and transformation. In this way, individuals can practice critical subjectivity and resistance, empowering themselves to challenge dominant narratives and work for social change and justice.

CONCLUSIONS

Becoming a Living Book entails certain opportunities and threats. I see opportunities in the possibility for Living Books to share their unique experience, engage in dialogue, teach others and learn about otherness, work for social change, and counter discrimination, stereotypes, and marginalization. Sharing their story can be an empowering experience. It allows Living Books to take control of their own narrative and challenge the narrative that others may impose on them. Living Books often connect with others who have had similar experiences. This can lead to a network of support and a sense of solidarity within the community. The process of sharing and reflecting on one's experiences contributes to personal growth, self-awareness, increased confidence, and seeing one's biography as meaningful and unique.

Years-long engagement of the same people from minority groups who reiterate their stories time and again may be taxing as it comes with a considerable emotional burden. Telling your story is arduous emotional and epistemic labor. This aspect is explored in more detail by Nora Berenstain (Berenstain, 2016), who coined the term 'epistemic exploitation' to label situations in which privileged people solicit and force marginalized and subordinated individuals to educate others about the causes of their own oppression. On the one hand, people who experience oppression are sup-

posed to transmit their knowledge, but on the other, their competencies to do just that are undermined, as a result of which they incur additional epistemic and emotional costs. Nonetheless, members of minority groups engaged in antidiscrimination education are expected to share their minority perspectives and present their credentials as competent and knowledgeable enough to address this issue. Questions about background, psychosexual orientation, and experiences of discrimination and violence are emotionally charged. The knowledge of causes of discrimination is common and popularly available. In the Living Library, during the meetings of readers and Living Books, both parties might be expected to have similar positions, but as implied by interview passages concerning ostensibly open-minded readers, power relations tend to remain unchanged. Answering the same questions over several hours is emotionally, physically, and mentally draining. It is not an adequate solution to arrange situations in which the ignorance of people asking questions is justified and warrants their right to seek information and obtain answers, whereby the experience of a member of a minority group is treated as the only source of knowledge. Of course, the regulations of the Living Library state that Living Books do not have to respond to all questions, but a refusal to reply may prove a pitfall. Not answering a question puts the person at risk of being denounced as impolite, incompetent, impertinent, ill-mannered, unwilling to share knowledge with others, or acting against the interest of their group; it may also be considered to indicate that the person has not 'worked through' certain issues and perhaps should not be a Living Book. This produces a further hazard of inducing value judgments to which members of minority groups are commonly exposed in everyday life. Epistemic exploitation foregrounds the needs of the majority group and is geared toward satisfying their desire for knowledge, providing them with information, and presenting them with evidence of oppression. This sustains the power and inequality structures in place. The circumstances of the educational situation are determined by the majority group. The majority group takes advantage of the resources and knowledge of a minority group and decides what questions will be asked, and whether the answers will be accepted. While the method is designed to create space for encounter and dialogue, the decision of whether readers accept the knowledge provided and incorporate it into their perception of the world rests with them. It may happen that after a long and exploiting conversation, a reader concludes that the viewpoint of the Living Book is not convincing. The effectiveness of the Living Library method will hopefully be established in my further research when I study the perspective of readers.

The research carried out showed that being a Living Book is a process that starts with a decision. A spontaneous commitment or a deliberate reaching out to work with this method. Those involved as Living Books become them and construct their own roles, change them, negotiate them, and give them meaning. Becoming is the result of interaction with others involved in working with this method: other Living Books, readers, organizers, but also the person in this role with themselves. It is a multidimensional and individual process for each person involved. Learning to belong to the Living Library community is related to the motivations and the sharing

of values, symbols, standards, and language that are inscribed in the method. It is a process of discovering, creating, and learning this role in the work of the method. I understand becoming as a process of non-linear changes taking place in the Living Books through interactions with other people involved, readers, and participation in events.

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STAWANIE SIĘ ŻYWĄ KSIĄŻKĄ JAKO PROCES UCZENIA SIĘ. BADANIE (NIE) CHCIANYCH HISTORII POLSKIEJ ŻYWEJ BIBLIOTEKI

ABSTRAKT: Niniejszy artykuł przybliży Żywą Bibliotekę – metodę edukacji antydyskryminacyjnej w Polsce. Prezentowana część projektu badawczego dotyczy tego, czego Żywe Książki uczą się poprzez udział w tej inicjatywie i co to znaczy być Żywą Książką. Ramy badawcze są osadzone w teoriach społecznego uczenia się, w szczególności w teorii usytuowanego uczenia się i Społeczności Praktyków (Communities of Practice – COPs), a także w perspektywach pedagogiki krytycznej. Żywa Biblioteka jest przedstawiona jako metoda angażowania się w kontakt z Innym i wspierania zrozumienia inności. Uczestnictwo w społeczności Żywej Biblioteki daje jednostkom możliwość uczenia się o inności. Badania wskazują, że stawanie się Żywą Książką nie jest procesem liniowym; istnieją różne ścieżki do stania się Żywą Książką, które mogą współistnieć. Bycie Żywą Książką wiąże się ze złożonym odkrywaniem siebie i transformacją osobistego doświadczenia. Zachęca do autonarracji i samoopisu, umożliwiając jednostkom kwestionowanie narracji społecznych, odzyskiwanie tożsamości i przeciwstawianie się opresyjnym normom. Stawanie się Żywą Książką w społeczności Żywej Biblioteki oferuje zarówno możliwości, jak i wyzwania. Możliwości te obejmują dzielenie się wyjątkowymi doświadczeniami, angażowanie się w dialog, edukowanie innych na temat kwestii związanych z dyskryminacją i stereotypami oraz pracę na rzecz zmian społecznych. Jednak długoterminowe zaangażowanie w dzielenie się swoimi historiami może być emocjonalnie obciążające. Opowiadanie ich historii wiąże się z pracą emocjonalną i epistemiczną.

Słowa kluczowe: Edukacja dorosłych, inność, Żywa Biblioteka, społeczne uczenie się, eksploatacja epistemiczna, uczenie się (o) inności.