



EXPRESSING THE CONCEPT OF PRIVACY THROUGH DRAWINGS: A QUALITATIVE EVALUATION OF STUDENTS WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES

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Abstract:

This study aimed to explore the perspectives of individuals with intellectual disabilities in mid-to-late adolescence regarding privacy, using drawings and verbal expressions. The participants of the study consisted of 14 adolescents with intellectual disabilities, aged 15–18, attending a Special Education and Rehabilitation Center located in Halkalı-Merkez, Istanbul, in 2022, including 7 females and 7 males. Participants were selected through purposive sampling. Three data collection tools were employed in the study: (1) a Personal Information Form (PIF) consisting of five questions, and (2) a Ten-Question Draw-a-Girl Test (DGT) and Draw-a-Boy Test (DBT). Necessary ethical approvals were obtained prior to the commencement of the research. The findings revealed that the majority of participants completed their drawings in a short period of 0–2 minutes without paying sufficient attention to details. A significant portion of participants expressed aspirations such as getting married, becoming wealthy, or owning a home in the future, while some indicated that they did not wish to have a romantic partner and desired to pursue various professions. The most admired qualities in the drawings were reported as helpfulness, having a profession, and physical attractiveness. Based on these findings, it is suggested that future studies could address career choice, professional ethics, and readiness levels for individuals with intellectual disabilities. The characteristics of opposite-gender characters drawn by participants often emphasized quick temper and unjustified negative behavior. Therefore, it is recommended that municipalities and relevant institutions develop educational programs on marriage and relationships for individuals with intellectual disabilities who are considering marriage. Additionally, while most drawn characters were depicted living with their families, some participants expressed a desire to live with their partners. This indicates the need for associations and institutions to provide education on the responsibilities, advantages, disadvantages, and relational expectations of cohabitation. Participants' reluctance to resemble the drawn characters was attributed to feelings of anger or frustration toward

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the characters. Accordingly, it is recommended that guidance counselors and psychological advisors provide emotional support to these students.

Keywords: adolescence, special education, ethical values, privacy, drawing analysis

1. Introduction

Privacy education is important at every stage of an individual's life, but certain periods are particularly critical. It is especially significant during adolescence. According to the World Health Organization (2022), adolescence is a developmental period that encompasses the transition from childhood to adulthood, characterized by intense biological, cognitive, emotional, and social changes. This period involves physical maturation, identity exploration, the need for independence, and transformations in social relationships, all of which become pronounced as hormonal changes begin. Adolescence is generally considered to occur between the ages of 10 and 19 (World Health Organization [WHO], 2022); however, the onset and conclusion may vary due to individual and cultural differences.

2. Literature Review

The onset and conclusion of adolescence may differ due to individual and cultural variations. In typically developing individuals, according to the World Health Organization (2022), adolescent development is commonly examined in three stages:

2.1 Early Adolescence (10–13 years)

During this stage:

- Rapid physical growth and signs of sexual maturation begin (puberty),
- Emotional fluctuations increase,
- Desire for independence from family emerges,
- Concrete thinking dominates cognitively,
- Peer influence begins to increase (World Health Organization, 2022).

2.2 Middle Adolescence (14–17 years)

At this stage:

- Physical development is largely completed,
- Identity exploration intensifies,
- Abstract thinking skills become prominent,
- Peer relationships and romantic interactions gain importance,
- Risk-taking behaviors may increase,
- The need for independence is strong (World Health Organization, 2022).

2.3 Late Adolescence (18–21 years)

During this period:

- Physical development is completed,
- Cognitive maturation increases; planning, decision-making, and problem-solving skills improve,
- A sense of identity begins to solidify,
- Education, career planning, future goals, and social responsibilities come to the forefront,
- Emotional balance becomes more stable (World Health Organization, 2022).

As noted above, these are the adolescent stages for typically developing individuals. However, individuals with intellectual disabilities (ID) exhibit different developmental patterns.

According to Isler, Tas, and Beyaztas (2009), adolescence in individuals with intellectual disabilities is a more complex process compared to their typically developing peers. These individuals may experience difficulties in understanding the rapid physical changes of adolescence, regulating emotions, and interpreting social rules. Research indicates that adolescents with intellectual disabilities have lower body awareness and knowledge regarding puberty, highlighting their need for targeted support in areas such as privacy, bodily boundaries, and appropriate social behaviors (Isler, Tas, & Beyaztas, 2009).

Swango-Wilson (2009) emphasizes that privacy is a crucial concept encompassing personal space, bodily boundaries, and appropriate social behavior. Limited awareness of privacy in individuals with intellectual disabilities may lead to inappropriate behaviors in social settings, misunderstandings, and even increased risk of abuse. Therefore, privacy education is critically important during adolescence. The literature highlights that privacy education strengthens self-protection skills, teaches bodily integrity, and supports the development of appropriate social behaviors (Swango-Wilson, 2009).

During adolescence, especially in middle and late adolescence, individuals with intellectual disabilities may exhibit increased risk-taking behaviors and experience difficulties in adapting to societal expectations regarding work, vocational tasks, and social responsibilities. Investigating how adolescents with intellectual disabilities express the concept of privacy through drawings—particularly when this topic has not been studied in the same district—provides both a contribution to the literature and an opportunity to understand the emotions and perceptions of individuals with intellectual disabilities. Consequently, this topic was selected as the focus of the present study.

3. Method

The aim of this study is to determine the perspectives of individuals with intellectual disabilities regarding privacy education through drawings.

In the study, participants were asked to draw one female and one male figure, allowing them to express themselves visually rather than through written or verbal statements. According to Demir (2024), qualitative research techniques—particularly descriptive survey models—enable a deep understanding of individuals' perceptions, experiences, and social realities. Accordingly, a qualitative research approach was adopted, and the descriptive survey model was deemed appropriate for the study design.

The study group comprised 14 individuals with intellectual disabilities, aged 15–18, enrolled at a Special Education and Rehabilitation Center located in Halkalı-Merkez, Istanbul, in 2022. The participants included seven females and seven males. They were selected using purposive sampling, which allows researchers to choose “information-rich” individuals who can provide deep insights relevant to the research question (Palinkas, Horwitz, Green *et al.*, 2015). In purposive sampling, participants are intentionally selected not for randomness or representativeness of the entire population, but to provide meaningful and in-depth data. This approach emphasizes depth, context, diversity, and understanding over statistical generalizability.

Three data collection instruments were used in this study: (1) a Personal Information Form (PIF) consisting of five questions, (2) a Draw a Girl Test (DGT) with ten questions, and (3) a Draw a Boy Test (DBT) with ten questions. Prior to data collection, all necessary ethical permissions were obtained. Consent for voluntary participation was secured from the school administration and teachers. Once permissions were granted, the data collection process commenced. The drawings obtained from participants were analyzed using qualitative methods to reflect their thoughts on privacy.

4. Results and Discussion

The findings derived from the data obtained through the Personal Information Form (PIF), Draw a Girl Test (DGT), and Draw a Boy Test (DBT) administered to adolescents with intellectual disabilities (ID) are presented in the tables below.

4.1 Results and Discussion Regarding the Personal Information Form

The Personal Information Form indicated that the participants consisted of 14 individuals with intellectual disabilities, 7 females and 7 males. Purposive sampling was used to ensure an equal representation of genders. Similarly, Patton (2015) applied purposive sampling in studies involving adolescents with intellectual disabilities. Purposive sampling allows researchers to consciously select participants who are expected to directly contribute to the research objectives. Accordingly, individuals presumed to have experiences related to privacy education were included in the sample (Patton, 2015). Similarly, Tongco (2007) defines purposive sampling as a deliberate selection process based on the participants' specific characteristics and expertise required by the study. According to Togoco, purposive sampling offers significant advantages when studying “rare groups,” “specialized topics,” or “communities with specific characteristics.”

Therefore, the success of the method depends on the researcher's ability to select appropriate participants and adequately justify the sampling.

The second demographic variable of the survey comprised 14 participants, 7 in middle adolescence (15–18 years) and 7 in late adolescence. Individuals in these age groups were purposively selected to express their perspectives on privacy. Supporting this approach, Patton (2015) examined systematic studies involving 14–18-year-old adolescents with intellectual disabilities (middle and late adolescence).

The third demographic variable included participants' cognitive ability levels: 8 were classified as low-ability, and 6 as moderate-ability, totaling 14 participants. According to Koppitz (1968) and Jolley & Thomas (1994), the drawing abilities of individuals with intellectual disabilities are closely related to cognitive processing, motor skills, and visual perception. Literature indicates that as the severity of intellectual disability increases, drawings may show limitations in detail, proportion, and spatial organization. However, it is also emphasized that the drawing processes of individuals with intellectual disabilities reflect their emotional expression, social understanding, and cognitive development (Koppitz, 1968; Jolley & Thomas, 1994). Therefore, drawing skills serve as both projective and descriptive tools for assessing the developmental characteristics of individuals with intellectual disabilities.

Regarding the fourth variable, the completion time of the first drawing showed that 5 participants completed it in 0–2 minutes, 5 in 3–5 minutes, 2 in 6–9 minutes, and 2 in 10–15 minutes. For the second drawing, 8 participants completed it in 0–2 minutes, 5 in 3–5 minutes, and 1 in 6–9 minutes. The importance of the drawing process has also been emphasized by Yamada *et al.* (2022), who state that the drawing process is not only about the final product but also encompasses parameters such as drawing speed, pencil pressure, start/pause points, and overall drawing duration. Analysis of this variable indicated that most participants completed their drawings quickly (0–2 minutes) without attention to detail.

According to information obtained from teachers, regarding the sixth variable of the study, 13 participants did not exhibit attention deficit, while 1 participant was diagnosed with attention deficit. Similarly, for the seventh variable, 13 participants did not show hyperactivity, while 1 participant exhibited hyperactivity.

The fifth variable assessed sexual development, and all 14 participants had shown signs of sexual maturation. These findings are consistent with those of Isler *et al.* (2009) and McCabe & Cummins (1996), who state that while adolescents with intellectual disabilities follow similar biological processes as their typically developing peers, cognitive, social, and emotional limitations may differentiate their experiences. Research indicates that adolescents with intellectual disabilities often have insufficient sexual knowledge and may struggle with boundary-setting, bodily privacy, and appropriate social behaviors. Accordingly, the process of sexual development is strongly influenced by factors such as educational environment, family attitudes, and cognitive capacity (Swango-Wilson, 2009). The literature emphasizes that structured, developmentally appropriate sexual education programs contribute both to risk reduction and to

enhancing privacy awareness among individuals with intellectual disabilities (Swango-Wilson, 2009).

Finally, regarding the eighth variable—the degree of intellectual disability—8 participants were classified as mild and 6 as moderate, resulting in a total of 14 adolescents with intellectual disabilities.

4.2 Results and Discussion Regarding the Draw a Girl Test

According to the behavioral variable findings of the Draw a Girl Test (DGT) administered to individuals with intellectual disabilities (ID), the activities of the drawn characters were as follows: one character was cooking, one was performing a traditional dance at a clan wedding, one was going to school, one was walking, one looked surprised, one held flowers, one was selling pastries at a bakery, one was singing, two were playing ball, two were sitting, one was laughing, and one was depicted going to a hamburger restaurant. Overall, no negative implications regarding privacy were observed in the drawn female characters.

Regarding the age variable of the characters, the drawings included 4 characters aged 5–9, 3 aged 10–15, 3 aged 16–20, and 1 aged 21–25. It can be noted that most drawings were consistent with either the participants' own age or the age of their peers. Concerning the marital status variable, 6 of the drawn characters were depicted as married, and 9 as single, totaling 14 participants. Although participants were in middle and late adolescence and themselves unmarried, the depiction of married characters suggests that they were imagining or aspiring to marriage. Indeed, some participants also indicated a preference for marriage when asked about their desired outcomes.

Regarding the living arrangements variable, 12 characters were depicted living with their families, while 2 were depicted living alone. Thus, most participants illustrated characters residing with their families, and only 2 illustrated characters living alone.

For the sibling variable, 3 characters had no siblings, 3 had one sibling, 3 had two siblings, 3 had three siblings, and 1 had four siblings. This pattern suggests that participants' illustrations generally reflected their own family structures.

Regarding employment, 11 characters were shown as working, while 3 were not employed. Most participants depicted characters who were engaged in work, indicating the perceived importance of labor or activity.

The drawings also reflected the characters' desires as follows: 2 wished to get married, 2 wished to buy a house, 2 wished to travel, 2 wished to be compassionate, 1 wished to be admired, 1 wished to be a performing artist, 1 wished to provide financial support to their family, 1 wished to be an interior designer, 1 wished to be a teacher, 1 wished to have a romantic partner, and 1 wished to be compassionate.

Regarding the traits most admired in the drawn characters, the findings were: 2 were helpful, 1 wrote songs or poems, 1 played on the phone, 1 did not exhibit bad behavior, 1 went to the hairdresser, 1 had a profession, 1 was meticulous, 1 was polite, 1 followed their dreams, 1 was smart and beautiful, 1 painted, 1 knew what they wanted, and 1 had traits they did not admire.

For the traits least admired in the characters, the findings included: 2 were quick-tempered, 2 lacked bad habits, 2 were perceived as unreasonably bad, 1 did not want to read, 1 did not want to help others, 1 did not take advice, 1 did not help animals, 1 had unspecified negative traits, 1 was concerned with others' opinions, 1 habitually demanded attention, and 1 was stubborn.

4.3 Results and Discussion Regarding the Draw a Boy Test

The behavioral variable findings obtained from the Draw a Boy Test (DBT) indicated the following activities of the drawn characters: three were sitting, one was playing a game, one was repairing a computer, one described being loved by the girl he likes, one was singing, one was happy because class had ended, one was playing ball, one was repairing a TV, three were experiencing a happy moment, and one was going to a pizzeria. Similar to the Draw a Girl Test, no negative privacy implications were observed, although the male characters displayed different occupational choices considered socially normal.

Regarding the age variable of the drawn characters, two were aged 5–9, eight were 10–15, four were 16–20, and one was 21–25. These results are consistent with those of the Draw a Girl Test. Concerning marital status, four characters were married, nine were single, and one was depicted as living outside of marriage. For the living arrangement variable, 13 characters lived with their family, and one lived with a partner. In both variables, some participants also depicted their characters as wishing to live with a partner.

Regarding the sibling variable, nine characters had no siblings, two had one sibling, one had two siblings, and one had six siblings. Most participants drew characters without siblings, reflecting a generally low number of siblings in their own families. However, in the education of individuals with intellectual disabilities, the absence of siblings could be considered a potential disadvantage.

Concerning employment, nine characters were shown as working, while five were not. This indicates that participants considered the occupations of their drawn characters important.

Regarding the participants' identification with the drawn character, 11 participants indicated that they wanted to be in the character's place, while three did not. The reluctance of some participants to identify with their characters may be attributed to feelings of anger or resentment toward the character.

The wishes of the drawn characters were as follows: six wanted to get married, four wished to become wealthy, two wished to travel, one wanted to be an ice cream vendor, one wished to have a romantic partner, one wanted to be a football player, and one wished to travel.

For the most admired traits of the drawn characters, three were helpful, four loved their spouse, one enjoyed eating, one was compassionate, one began performing religious practices, one traveled, one admired the eyes and limbs of their spouse, and two were considered very good overall.

For the least admired traits, four were mischievous or bad, three were quick-tempered, two talked too much, one did not help animals, one was dishonest, one was flirtatious, one was lazy, one smoked, and one did not derive satisfaction from life. Most of these findings show similarities with the results of the Draw a Girl Test.

5. Recommendations

- Since most participants completed drawings quickly (0–2 minutes) without attending to details, a detailed investigation into Attention Deficit (AD) and Hyperactivity Behavior (HB) diagnoses for individuals with intellectual disabilities (ID) is recommended. Further screening regarding attention deficits and hyperactivity in these individuals is also advised.
- While most drawings reflected age-appropriate characters, four participants drew younger characters. These participants had inaccurately reported their calendar age during orientation. It is recommended to revise their Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) and for teachers to use alternative methods and techniques to teach age concepts effectively and permanently.
- Municipalities could offer educational programs related to marriage for individuals with intellectual disabilities who may consider marriage.
- Participants expressed a desire for traits such as helpfulness, professional achievement, and beauty in their characters. Future research could investigate career aspirations, work ethics, and readiness levels of individuals with intellectual disabilities.
- Participants indicated that opposite-sex characters tended to be quick-tempered or unreasonably negative. Given that every negative behavior has a cause, and individuals with intellectual disabilities may have difficulty understanding the reasons behind others' actions, it is recommended that special education teachers develop individualized programs that enhance communication skills, emotional understanding, and provide positive and lasting learning experiences.
- Thirteen characters lived with their families, while one lived with a partner. Since some participants expressed a wish for their characters to live with a partner, NGOs and related organizations could provide guidance on responsibilities, advantages, disadvantages, and expectations of partnerships.
- Most participants drew characters without siblings. It is recommended that local municipalities organize quality, educational activities for siblings with intellectual disabilities to spend meaningful time together.
- As some participants did not wish to identify with their characters due to anger or resentment, the support of school counselors and psychologists is recommended.

6. Conclusion

- Examination of the fourth variable indicates that most participants completed the drawings quickly, within 0–2 minutes, without paying attention to details.
- The majority of drawings reflected characters consistent with the participants' own age or their peers' age. However, several participants drew characters younger than themselves.
- Despite being in middle and late adolescence and therefore unmarried, some participants drew married characters, suggesting thoughts or awareness of marriage.
- Most participants depicted characters desiring marriage, wealth, or homeownership, while others reflected choices such as not having a partner and pursuing various professions.
- In the character drawings, the traits most admired by participants were helpfulness, professional achievement, and beauty.
- Participants indicated that the opposite-sex characters they drew tended to be quick-tempered or exhibited unprovoked negative behaviors.
- Thirteen characters were shown living with their families, while one lived with a partner.
- Most participants drew characters without siblings.
- The reason some participants did not wish to identify with their characters may be due to feelings of anger or resentment; school counselors and psychologists are advised to provide support in this regard.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

About the Author

The author has conducted various studies in the field of special education teaching. Their work particularly focuses on intellectual disabilities, drawing/picture analysis, privacy education, and language and communication disorders.

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Appendix

The demographic findings on students with intellectual disabilities' expression of the concept of privacy through drawings are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Analysis Findings on the Demographic
 Distributions of Participants with Intellectual Disabilities (ID)

Variable	Category	N
Gender	Female	7
	Male	7
Chronological Age	15–18 years – Middle Adolescence	7
	18+ years – Late Adolescence	7
Drawing Skill Level	Low Skill	8
	Moderate Skill	6
Drawing Completion Time		
0–2 minutes	Picture 1: 5	Picture 2: 8
3–5 minutes	Picture 1: 5	Picture 2: 5
6–9 minutes	Picture 1: 2	Picture 2: 1
10–15 minutes	Picture 1: 2	Picture 2: 0
Sexual Development	Present	14
	Absent	0
Attention Deficit	Present	1
	Absent	13
Hyperactivity Disorder	Present	1
	Absent	13
Degree of Intellectual Disability	Mild	8
	Moderate	6
	Severe	0
Total		14

The findings related to the expression of the concept of privacy through drawings by a female student with intellectual disabilities in the Draw-A-Person test are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Analysis Findings of Drawings Obtained from a Female Student with Intellectual Disability in the Draw-A-Person Test

Variable	Groups / Participant Responses	N
Behavior Depicted in the Drawing (What is she doing?)	Cooking	1
	Dancing at a traditional wedding	1
	Going to school	1
	Walking	1
	Looking surprised	1
	Holding flowers	1
	Selling pastries in a bakery	1
	Singing	1
	Playing ball	2
	Sitting	2
	Smiling	1
	Going to a hamburger shop	1
Perceived Age in the Drawing	5–9 years	4
	10–15 years	3
	16–20 years	3
	21–30 years	1
Marital Status of the Character	Married	6
	Single	9
With Whom the Character Lives	With family	12
	Alone	2
Number of Siblings Depicted	0	3
	1	3
	2	3
	3	3
	4	1
Employment Status	Employed	11
	Unemployed	3
Character's Wishes	To get married (with her boyfriend)	2
	To buy a house	2
	To have a baby	2
	To become a singer	1
	To travel	2
	To support the family financially	1
	To study interior design	1
	To become a teacher	1
	To have a boyfriend	1
	To be compassionate	2
Most Liked Traits of the Character	Writing songs/poems	1
	Being helpful	2
	Playing on the phone	1

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	Not doing bad things	1
	Becoming a hairdresser	1
	Having a profession	1
	Being tidy	1
	Being polite	1
	Following her dreams	1
	Being smart and beautiful	1
	Drawing pictures	1
	Knowing what she wants	1
	"I don't like her. Because she has had a difficult life (she is me)."	1
Least Liked Traits of the Character	Getting angry easily	2
	Not wanting to study	1
	Not liking to help	1
	Not listening to others	1
	Not helping animals	1
	Being dishonest	1
	"She is simply bad (girls are always bad – remark by a male participant)"	2
	Caring too much about others' opinions	1
	Always wanting something	1
	Being stubborn	1
	Having no bad habits	2
Total		14

The findings related to the expression of the concept of privacy through drawings by a male student with intellectual disabilities in the Draw-A-Person test are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Analysis Findings of Drawings Obtained from a Male Student with Intellectual Disability in the Draw-A-Person Test

Variable	Groups / Participant Responses	N
Behavior Depicted in the Drawing (What is he doing?)	Sitting with a friend	3
	Playing a game	1
	Repairing a computer	1
	Telling a girl he loves her	1
	Singing	1
	Feeling happy because class is over	1
	Playing ball	1
	Repairing a TV	1
	Experiencing a happy moment	3
	Going to a pizzeria	1
Perceived Age in the Drawing	5–9 years	2
	10–15 years	7
	16–20 years	4
	21–30 years	1
	30–40 years	0
Marital Status of the Character	Married	4
	Single	9
	Living together (not married)	1
With Whom the Character Lives	With family	13
	Alone	0
	With partner	1
Desire to Be in the Character's Place	0	9
	1	2
	2	2
	3	0
	4	0
	5	0
	6	1
Employment Status	Employed	9
	Unemployed	5
Character's Wishes	To get married	6
	To become rich (car, summer house)	4
	To become an ice-cream seller	1
	To have a girlfriend	1
	To become a football player	1
	To travel	1
Most Liked Traits of the Character	Enjoying food	1
	Being helpful	3
	Loving his wife	4
	Being compassionate	1

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	Starting to pray	1
	Traveling	1
	Loving his wife's eyes, cheeks, and legs	1
	Being very kind	2
Least Liked Traits of the Character	Behaving badly	4
	Getting angry easily	3
	Talking too much	1
	Being temperamental	1
	Not helping animals	1
	Being dishonest	1
	Being flirtatious	1
	Smoking	1
	"I don't like him, I don't want him to live (he is me). He has a very difficult life. He has no bad habits."	1
Total		14