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SYMBOLIC VIOLENCE WITHIN THE WORK
OF COUNSELING INSTITUTIONS
– THE PARADOX OF COUNSELING

A b s t r a c t. Counseling and helping are generally associated with honorable actions, aimed at the benefit of another person. People take these actions because of individual reasons or taking into account the social and professional role one performs. It is done by interpersonal interaction or within the frames of particular institution. The latter is meant by arranged actions. The aim of this article is to present another dimension of giving help by means of institutions. The presence of symbolic violence related to power is present in the dimension. According to Michel Foucault “the one who was put within the range of perception and realizes that, accepts the limits enforced on them by power.”¹ As the author continues, everybody is placed in the field of power, despite the fact that one does not always realize that. Our deliberations, related to the presence of symbolic violence and its meaning in the process of helping are based on the definition of violence coined by Pierre Bourdieu. The deliberations refer to the way psychological and pedagogical counseling centers work. The violence is a part of the secret scheme of the institution. The authors try to uncover and reveal it with the view to make people think and realize its existence. The hidden dimension embraces what is not visible but palpable, what is meant straightaway but has its place in the course of actions taken by the assisting team and the institutions, what is included in the formal “between” and in hidden actions and which is not realized by people who use the services of psychological and pedagogical counseling centers.

Key words: psychological and pedagogical counseling centre; education; symbolic violence; secret scheme

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¹ After: Zbyszko Melosik, *Identity, Body and Authority. Cultural Texts As Pedagogical (Con)Texts* (Toruń–Poznań: Edytor, 1996), 85.

1. SYMBOLIC VIOLENCE – A(N) (UN)KNOWN PROBLEM

Violence, as a phenomenon that occurs universally, is associated with strength, domination, and in extreme cases – with suffering, humiliation, depriving one of his dignity. Various kinds of violence draw different pictures of symptoms that prove harming somebody, or prove suffering that can be noticed or felt by a person. One kind of violence is *symbolic violence*, defined as soft, subtle, unnoticed; it is a kind of violence that is usually not realized and unintentional, but it is present in the work of institutions, of privileged people, who – owing to their social or professional status – have an advantage over others. It is connected with asymmetry in the relation of two subjects, and it occurs on various levels of a personal relation, like: parent – child, teacher – student, pedagogue – pupil or counselor – a person seeking advice.

Considering the primary and common understanding of the word, violence usually has negative connotations, albeit some positive aspects also may be found in it. As Maria Czerepaniak-Walczak remarks, they concern acquiring emancipation competences by an individual in a situation of using the so-called authority “to”, where an individual participates in the formation of social norms and rules, and also becomes the subject of a social relation.² Positive aspects of violence are also noticed by: Zbigniew Kwieciński and Małgorzata Falkiewicz-Szult, who emphasize the significance of strength and inequality that result in the development of an individual or his involvement in the process of change.³

The discussion conducted in the article is not limited to stressing the negative dimension of symbolic violence, but it aims at discovering and showing it in the counseling work done by people employed in psychological-pedagogical counseling centers. Following the French sociologist, philosopher and ethnologist Pierre Bourdieu it is assumed that there is symbolic violence in any education system, and understanding it requires referring to the author’s social conception; especially the key concepts need explanation, such as: “field,” “symbolic capital” or “habitus.” Here an article by Agnieszka

² Maria Czerepaniak-Walczak, “Nie myśl, bądź posłuszny — dyskurs władzy w szkole” (Do not think, be obedient – the discourse of authority at school,) in *Wychowanie, pojęcia, procesy, konteksty*, Maria Dudzikowa, M. Czerepaniak-Walczak (ed.) (Gdańsk: GWP, 2008), 265; see Maria Czerepaniak-Walczak, *Między dostosowaniem a zmianą. Elementy emancypacyjnej teorii edukacji* (Szczecin: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Szczecińskiego, 1995).

³ Zbigniew Kwieciński, “Ukryta przemoc jako podstawa funkcjonowania szkoły,” in *Socjologia edukacji*, edited by Zbigniew Kwieciński (Olecko: Trans Humana, 1995); Małgorzata Falkiewicz-Shult, *Przemoc symboliczna w przedszkolu* (Kraków: Impuls 2007).

Suchocka⁴ is also referred to, where basic concepts, constitutive for the theory, are defined.

The concept of field is a proof of lack of social cohesion, of a certain fragmentation or division, in which individuals assume a definite position, and using it they are the dominating ones in their relations with others. In the present article this field of authority is the field of activity of counselors who, owing to the habitus, use violence as an unconscious phenomenon, which is subconsciously agreed to by people seeking advice. Hence the habitus "is a kind of laws or rules of the social game, [it is] a kind of a habit, a kind of personal values that determine a man's behavior."⁵ It is defined as "a complex of interiorizations, that is tendencies, attitudes, interiorized dispositions, introduced into the sphere of human habits."⁶ Symbolic capital is one of the four forms of capital distinguished by the author, besides social, economic and cultural, and it is connected with authority, power, knowledge, social recognition, prestige, fame or importance. A person having social, cultural or economic capital has power that is transferred to his relations with other people, without the intention to hurt them. Such an understanding of symbolic violence is seen in the definitions quoted below.

According to the author of the term (Bourdieu) symbolic violence "happens precisely where it is not considered to be violence [...]. It is based on the fact that people accept a set of fundamental, pre-reflective assumptions [...] it affects a social subject with his participation."⁷ In another sociological definition "it is cultural domination of the elite [...] and it is used by the elites that possess educational and cultural capital, to promote their own interests."⁸

As Andrzej Zybertowicz remarks: "we are dealing with an overwhelming situation when an individual or a group is not able to oppose the circumstances, when he does not (they do not) have a choice."⁹ Symbolic violence is also a kind of a game,¹⁰ an element of a latent program of an institution

⁴ Agnieszka Suchocka, "Przemoc symboliczna jako element ukrytego programu kształcenia polskiej szkoły," *Zeszyty Naukowe Akademii Marynarki Wojennej* 52 (2011), nr 4. 293-302.

⁵ *Ibid*, 294.

⁶ Pierre Bourdieu, Jean-Claude Passeron, *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*, Polish edition: *Reprodukcja. Elementy teorii systemu nauczania* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 2006), 13.

⁷ Pierre Bourdieu, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, Polish edition: *Zaproszenie do socjologii refleksyjnej* (Warszawa: Oficyna Wydawnicza, 2001), 162.

⁸ *Ibid*, 430.

⁹ Andrzej Zybertowicz, *Przemoc i poznanie. Studium z nieklasycznej socjologii wiedzy* (Toruń: Wydawnictwo UMK, 1995), 49.

¹⁰ Eric Berne, *Dzień dobry i co dalej? Jak zmienić swój scenariusz życiowy, aby być szczęśliwym (What Do You Say After You Say Hello?)* (Poznań: Dom Wydawniczy Rebis, 2007).

whose employees, using their prestige, impose their vision of interpreting reality on the people whom they serve or in a subtle way force them to behave in a definite way. It is also “a delicate form of manipulation, a variety of latent, oblique domination.”¹¹

Symbolic violence is contained in the latent program of institutions that occurs besides the formal program directed to an ideologically defined aim of the institutions' work. Its presence in counseling institutions was discussed by, among others, Maria Czerepaniak-Walczak, Elżbieta Hałas, Agnieszka Suchocka, Wiktor Żłobicki, Andrzej Janowski, Dorota Pankowska, Aleksander Nalaskowski, Małgorzata Falkiewicz-Szult, Elżbieta Siarkiewicz, Zbigniew Kweciński, Andrzej Gretkowski, Marcin Granosik. Original works focused on searching for symptoms of symbolic authority in the work of counseling psychological-pedagogical centers have been included in this group. The above mentioned authors tackle various subjects in the area of the latent program of educational or social institutions such as: procedures, situation of coercion, evaluating (testing), space, routine actions, methods of work, verbal and non-verbal communication.

As it was already mentioned, the issue of symbolic violence is quite popular in the literature discussing the issue; it is the subject of many ethnographic studies, which makes it possible to gradually discover phenomena that have been less well known up till now, and it also allows “unmasking the latent events that underlie the official, codified structure of an institution.”¹² The latent dimension in counseling is noticed by Luciano Sandrin; he expresses the problem with the words: “[...] even with actions that at first sight may seem absolutely unselfish, potential profits are connected: an increase in respect, in confirmation of one's own value, admiration and praise from others, gratitude from the person whom we have helped.”¹³ However, all forms of aid offered either as a service or as a sign of friendship, „constitute an important aspect of overcoming difficulties an individual encounters on his way of personal development.”¹⁴

¹¹ Suchocka, *Przemoc symboliczna*, 295.

¹² Elżbieta Siarkiewicz, *Różne oblicza niejednoznaczności poradnictwa*, in *Niejednoznaczność poradnictwa*, Elżbieta Siarkiewicz (ed.) (Zielona Góra: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Zielonogórskiego, 2004), 17.

¹³ Luciano Sandrin, *Jak się nie wypalić pomagając innym (Aiutare senza bruciarsi)* (Kielce: Jedność, 2006), 13.

¹⁴ Stephen Murgatroyd, *Poradnictwo i pomoc (Counselling and Helping)* (Poznań: Zysk i S-ka, 2000), 16.

The above remarks are an introduction to the analyses carried out by the authors of the present article, that include: a characterization of an institution as a place where help is provided and its social reception with the consideration of the functioning of psychological-pedagogical centers, an explanation of basic terms connected with psycho-pedagogical help, and a description of selected aspects of the center and of the work of its employees in the context of symbolic violence. Theoretical analyses have been enriched by fragments of Barbara Skałbania's research based on the humanistic paradigm and conducted in psychological-pedagogical centers in the years 2010-2015.

2. COUNSELING INSTITUTIONS – ASSUMPTIONS AND SOCIAL APPRAISAL

Because of the peculiar character of the issue it is just to explain the essence of the institutions and the range of their work along with the explanation of the basic terminology. The term "institution" is defined in various ranges of meaning in numerous academic disciplines – organizational theory, sociology, law, economy.¹⁵ It refers to an organization, a workshop, but it is also a space for the course of socialization.¹⁶

An institution is generally perceived as a hierarchically ordered organization that has its own legal instruments, material base, personnel and its own organizational culture. But apart from its material, real character, there is also its symbolic, imaginable character, about which Ewa Marynowicz-Hetka wrote.¹⁷ Both these elements: real and imaginable, should be equivalent, which secures stable, understandable actions of any institution, irrespective of the area of its work.

An institution is also the basic element of systemic solutions providing aid, including actions of tutelary, educational or emergency character, examples of which are institutions functioning in the domain of social help, like:

- municipal and county social aid centers;
- social aid homes;
- crisis intervention centers;
- family aid centers

¹⁵ Ewa Marynowicz-Hetka, "Instytucja społeczna," in *Elementarne pojęcia pedagogiki społecznej i pracy socjalnej*, Danuta Lalak, Tadeusz Pilch (ed.) (Warszawa: Żak, 1999), 106.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ewa Marynowicz-Hetka, "Tworzenie i przekształcanie instytucji społecznych," *Problemy Opiekuńczo-Wychowawcze* 1998, nr 9.

- tutelary-educational institutions for children and youths working in the domain of education, like psychological-pedagogical counseling centers.

Their fundamental task is to offer social aid, the aid being understood as “organized activities of various subjects enabling human individuals and social groups to overcome difficult situations in their lives.”¹⁸ Phrases like “social work,” “care,” “rescue,” “social support,” with which the concept of “psycho-pedagogical aid” correlates, are synonyms of the term “social aid.” The concept of “psycho-pedagogical aid” defines specialist aid for children and youths that is realized in the education system by psychologists or pedagogues in schools, or by specialists in psychological-pedagogical centers or specialist centers focused on a particular problem.

Counseling institutions are currently an important element of social reality because of an increase in demand for aid, support and professional counseling in various fields of life. Their social appraisal is connected with the process of democratization of social life, in which “instant” culture dominates, which means acting quickly, competently, efficiently and satisfactorily. And it is such expectations that are directed to specialists, to professionals employed in counseling centers.

However, this change became clearly seen [in Poland] only after 1989, since before that date the subject of such institutions was only sporadically mentioned in the media or in social debates. For many years the institutions offering aid, including educational centers, were perceived stereotypically as ones that help people who are less resourceful, give material or emotional aid, solve family, tutelary or educational problems, make diagnoses, qualify children to proper schools or institutions. Counseling centers, especially educational-vocational ones, were perceived as places where people are selected, places that one should be afraid of and should bypass them, and institutions of social aid were compared to Erving Goffman’s total institutions.¹⁹

Viewing institutions offering aid in this way emphasized the presence in them of authority understood as the ability to cause change in others or to influence them according to the accepted plan, to the scenario of offering aid, against the idea of humanism, freedom of choice and autonomy of the individual, and hence the appearance of postulates concerning de-formalization of these centers. This resulted from the assumption that the rules and

¹⁸ Wiesław Ciczkowski, “Pomoc społeczna,” in *Elementarne pojęcia pedagogiki społecznej i pracy socjalnej*, edited by Danuta Lalak, Tadeusz Pilch (Warszawa: Żak, 1999), 196.

¹⁹ Erving Goffman, *Instytucje totalne. O pacjentach szpitali psychiatrycznych i mieszkańcach innych instytucji totalnych* (*Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates*) (Sopot: GWP, 2011).

directives that were binding in the center limited the parents' actions and deprived them of a possibility to make decisions concerning their child. This happened in the structures of the educational-vocational centers in the area of qualifying schoolchildren to special schools or choosing a vocational school by a schoolchild attending the eighth form of primary school. People who used services of this institution were not conscious of the fact that there existed structural violence there that they were subjected to in the course of the aid process. The development of sciences and popularization of the problem resulted in starting research focused on identifying traces of symbolic violence, which was also the source of analyses undertaken by the authors of the present article. Because of the peculiar character of the center the authors use terms from the field of knowledge of counseling, and such terms as "counselor" or "advice seeker" refer to people who offer aid and accept it.

3. THE SPECIFIC CHARACTER OF OFFERING AID IN PSYCHOLOGICAL-PEDAGOGICAL CENTERS

Since 1964 an integrated system has existed of psychological-pedagogical centers that at the beginning had the form of educational-vocational centers, and since 1993 psychological-pedagogical centers have been working. Establishing integrated centers extended the offer of aid by adding organized, professional forms of work that were a supplement for individual help given spontaneously by non-professional advisers. It is legitimate to define the term "psychological-pedagogical center" here. It may be said that by analogy to general counseling it is understood as "interpersonal interaction, organized activity, a form of social aid."²⁰

With respect to education, counseling is "the basic link of the system of psychological-pedagogical aid in education, supplemented in schools by a psychologist and the school pedagogue."²¹ The aiding process in these institutions is based on the relation of the counselor with the one seeking advice (a psychologist, pedagogue, a speech therapist with a parent or a child), that, as it is assumed in humanistic conceptions, should be a dia-

²⁰ Alicja Kargulowa, *O teorii i praktyce poradnictwa* (Warszawa: PWN, 2006), 47-53.

²¹ Wojciech Brejnak, "Poradnie wychowawczo-zawodowe (psychologiczno-pedagogiczne)," in *Encyklopedia pedagogiczna*, Wojciech Pomykała (ed.) (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Fundacja Innowacja, 1997), 609.

logue, an encounter between a person and another person, taking into consideration the current standards, such as: accessibility, being free of charge, professionalism, confidence, discretion. *And what does this relation sometimes look like in the counseling reality?*

Searching for an answer to this question authorizes one to carry out a thorough analysis of the counseling contact in order to learn, but also to show various interpretations of its course that both people focused on the common problem share. The unambiguous character of the work of counseling centers that was kept for a long time, as of institutions aiding pupils and schools, now has lost its value. This has resulted in accepting the ambiguous character of counseling by Siarkiewicz²² who ever more frequently shows its symbolic, and not only real character. Accepting the imposed solution without reflecting on it, or carrying out imposed recommendations obediently ever more often encounters opposition, resistance or negation on the part of the parent or the teacher, and the center's actions for more and more people are ambiguous, not transparent enough, which is an inspiration for researching this still mysterious subject.

Such a state of things strengthens the presence of social stereotypes and myths that do not favor using the institutions offering aid, or even make this aid something forbidden, embarrassing and publicly stigmatized. In fact any situation of asking for help is not a very comfortable one and it is hard for the person seeking advice. In order to illustrate the feelings that accompany an individual in the situation of asking a specialist for aid, one can refer to Fritz Schüze's views that have been developed and described by Alicja Kargulowa.²³

The author has distinguished three cracks that include: perceiving a situation as a problem, the decision to address a specialist and ask him for help, and the confirmation of the problem by a specialist,²⁴ which happens in the interaction of the two subjects. However, even at this stage a conflict may already occur that is seen as one underlying the *play of appearances* or an attempt at imposing one's own definition of aid,²⁵ which is an element of structural violence.

The specific character of psychological-pedagogical counseling is concerned with offering indirect help to a child, the initiator and receiver of the

²² Siarkiewicz, *Różne oblicza niejednoznaczności poradnictwa*.

²³ Kargulowa, *O teorii i praktyce*, 131-143.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid, 140.

help being an adult person (the parent or the guardian). As Danuta Kowalczyk remarks, "it is usually [...] adults who make the decision to seek for aid to a child who has problems, which not necessarily is approved of by the child, and as a result may cause the child's resistance to such an intervention."²⁶ The relation of offering aid is something both the adult and the child experience, just like they both have individual perception and appraisal of the place where aid is offered as well as of the professional work of the counselors, with the children being included in the system of specialist aid by adults, often without asking them for their consent.

Institutional organization of aid originally was supposed to support the social order, to secure transparency of the service, but with time it became an institution of violence, of oppression, in which, despite the counselors' opposition, practices of exclusion and manipulation can be seen, examples of which are cited below. For an average advice seeker this is a quite normal thing, which they accept with the words: *This is an office, so it has to be like this*. They are convinced that one has to submit to the accepted rules, to the imposed order, which causes that they accept such a kind of violence.

4. SYMBOLIC VIOLENCE IN LATENT AID ACTIVITIES

In this part of the article symptoms of symbolic violence are described that are hidden in selected aspects of the work of counseling centers, that is in the space, in the binding procedures, in the ways counselors work or in their language, both spoken and written. The authors base themselves on the assumption that symbolic authority (violence) arises in the routine work with cooperation of the advice seekers who are submitted to it.

Space becomes a place owing to the participation of a man who adapts it to his needs, according to some definite rules and his spatial competences that Ronald Meighan calls abilities to be aware of one's surrounding and to use it for attaining one's own goals.²⁷ Space and place are two categories that are inextricably connected with a person and his activities, and space, in Edward Hall's opinion, is a significant way of communication. Hence its arrangement is important for the course of social interactions, for people

²⁶ Danuta Kowalczyk, "Poradnie psychologiczno-pedagogiczne," in *Formy opieki, wychowania i wsparcia w zreformowanym systemie pomocy społecznej*, Józefa Bragiel, Sylwia Badora (ed.) (Opole: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Opolskiego, 2005), 174.

²⁷ Roland Meighan, *Socjologia edukacji (Sociology of Educating)* (Toruń: Wydawnictwo UMK, 1993).

being with each other, for their mutual understanding, especially with respect to the area of education, which has been written about by, among others, Aleksander Nalaskowski, Augustyn Bańka, Maria Mendel, Elżbieta Siarkiewicz, Anna Adryjanek, Barbara Skałbania.

Awareness of the place is also an important element of helping efficiently, especially as far as meeting the need for security and creating proper conditions of a dialog in the relation between the person that is helping and the person that is helped are concerned. A physical place (a building, infrastructure) is connected with a place in a symbolic dimension, “which is marked by emotions, feelings and values shared by all its participants.”²⁸

In the work of institutions offering aid (psychological-pedagogical counseling centers) there are a few kinds of space: the space where people wait for the visit, the space for contacting the counselor, or the space for contacting the administration clerk, as well as the common (communicative) space. As soon as one crosses the threshold, symbolic violence is marked that is hidden in routine administrative actions connected with filling in the forms, in which the advice seekers reveal their privacy and are situated on the side of those less resourceful, which results in their being qualified for a definite form of specialist aid.

Bureaucracy, and especially too much of it, constitutes a subtle element of violence that provokes people to reveal their weakness, powerlessness, to unmask their personal façade, or it depraves them of their anonymity. Each meeting in the quiet of the specialist’s study is pre-planned and prepared by the person offering help, which is expressed in the arrangement of the furniture, in the places the people occupy, with a clear emphasis put on the better place the counselor takes (a big desk that has a frontal position, a comfortable chair). As the authors’ own research shows, such spatial solutions meet with the acceptance of the advice seeker, who, being aware of some cultural codes sits down at the other side of the desk, on a less comfortable chair and plays the role of the person who is taught and submitted to the counselor. The person comments it with the words: “I think that I may feel more assured as well as more serious, since it is like in an office.”²⁹

The space speaks,³⁰ and its speech is read and interpreted by the users of the place, that is the counselors and advice seekers. An example of influence

²⁸ F. Znaniecki, after: Elżbieta Siarkiewicz, *Różne oblicza niejednoznaczności poradnictwa*, 27-28.

²⁹ Barbara Skałbania, *Instytucjonalne poradnictwo pedagogiczne okresu przemian. Kontynuacja i zmiany* (Radom: Wydawnictwo Politechniki Radomskiej, 2012), 122.

³⁰ Edward Hall, *Bezgłośny język (The Silent Language)* (Warszawa: PIW, 1987); Meighan, *Socjologia (Sociology)*.

and manipulation is the text in the space for the people waiting for their visit, where posters informing about social initiatives or aid projects are displayed. The power of violence is in the message: "Go, enroll and be the first [...] the number of places is limited – we are waiting for you [...]. This therapy will restore joy and the will to live in you." The language of persuasion plays the role of encouragement, directive or verbal urging to engage in a definite activity, or in other words: it aims at triggering off the expected behavior in the recipient of the message.

The space of a counseling center may form various attitudes in both adult people and children, it may encourage them to be open, to cooperate, to establish contacts (sociopetal space) or may discourage them, make interaction difficult, hamper their activity and openness in their relations (sociofugal space),³¹ which is discussed by Aleksander Nalaskowski.³² Subtle persuasion to behave in a certain way may also sometimes be a facilitation, especially for those who do not feel sure in a new place and prefer to have an appointed place and an ascribed role with which they identify themselves, which makes the process of institutional adaptation easier.

We encounter symbolic violence, which was mentioned above, even at the start of a visit to the institution where the dichotomous division begins – into those who are resourceful and those who cannot cope with their children's problems. A peculiar, informal selection into the resourceful and the helpless was begun by the society, and social stereotypes concerning the use of psychological-pedagogical counseling centers were formed, which is reflected by the adults' opinions: "Psychological-pedagogical counseling centers aid people to resolve the problems they cannot cope with by themselves. They also take care of mentally ill ones [...]. Parents with their children come to the center, when the children have problems with learning things at school or with speech."³³

In adults' statements stigmatization may be seen, labeling those who dared to seek aid in an institution, which puts them socially in a disadvantageous situation, in the group of those who have suffered a defeat in their lives. A visit to a psychologist or a psychiatrist is connected with bringing a discredit to the person, with the feeling of shame, or even with being stigmatized; this is why safe conditions of the meeting, anonymity and full trust in the institution and the counselor play such an important role. If the center

³¹ These terms were introduced by Edward Hall.

³² Aleksander Nalaskowski, *Przestrzenie i miejsca szkoły* (Kraków: Impuls, 2002), 11.

³³ Skałbana, *Instytucjonalne poradnictwo pedagogiczne*, 185.

is situated in a place that is easily accessible, but also safe, and if the meeting does not require being registered, it favors anonymity and builds trust, but in our practice it is not in accordance with the vision that people managing centers and organizing the system of specialist aid have.

A bureaucratized model of the work of the centers creates numerous situations in which a man is objectified. They start with the schematic actions connected with filling in an application asking for help, and continue with the situation of an interview that is a formal requirement and at the same time a routine activity in the process of offering aid. A schematic way of conducting it, usually based on the question-answer relation, contributes to treating the advice seeker in the instrumental way; the seeker being in assumption the source of information, and not the subject of a dialog. The predominance of technical (formal) questions does not favor speaking about feelings and experiences that put the issue in an order, supply information, and first of all are focused on the problem. Such a situation indicates a dualism in the counselor's activities, since he is both the person offering aid, and one controlling the advice seeker, which threatens the noble idea of offering aid.

Offering aid as a professional service is based on getting knowledge, manipulating the situation and the information, which has the features of symbolic violence. Both the schematism of the work and the excess of bureaucracy make the idea of subjectivity disappear, instead stressing humiliation and being objectified as the other continuum of the personal relation. The situation of making a diagnosis to which the charge (under-age) is subjected is an element of symbolic violence.

Basing the diagnosing process on testing is directed to the goal that tends to qualify a person as one who suffers from a definite kind of disorder or pathology and to define their dysfunction or limited mental fitness. The schoolchild (the aided person) takes a number of tests that in the practice of counseling are used as an important element of identifying the educational problem. The situation of being diagnosed is forced by the counselor and consistent with the procedures the under-age schoolchild is subjected to; most often the child is not asked to agree to the procedure. The process of diagnosing pervades the help and the counseling process; it is a formal condition for obtaining written advice, e.g. about the need of special education, individual tuition or early support of development.³⁴

³⁴ A psychological-pedagogical counseling center issues certificates and opinions as two kinds of written advice; in the group of issued certificates there are: certificates stating the need of special

Making a diagnosis aims at identifying disorders, functional or developmental abnormalities, and it often omits recognizing subjective, individual deficits that cannot be measured or counted. Hence a voluntary – as it is assumed – character of giving aid takes the form of forced, formal aid that is an unwritten condition for the schoolchild's further functioning in education.

Symbolic violence is also hidden in the language of counseling that sounds like directives, abounds in specialist phrases, and does not favor actual aid but it emphasizes the counselor's authority and knowledge; in this way the counselor takes care of his image of a professional. Research carried out in a psychological-pedagogical counseling center has confirmed the asymmetry in the counselor – advice seeker relation that is manifested in the counselors' dominating verbal activity as well as in their use of directives when formulating written advice.³⁵ The use of the impersonal verb forms that objectify the aided person, like *it has been recommended, it has been granted, it has been discussed, it has been indicated, it is recommended, it should, it is necessary*, is a manifestation of symbolic violence in the counseling communication process; this makes the addressees of the advice (teachers, parents) unreflective executors and – as E. Siarkiewicz remarks – “such a message does not assume partnership, or even does not allow it.”³⁶ It is also an example of the counselors' authority, of their conviction that they are infallible and their views are right. Such imposing solutions and giving directions proves that parents are passed over in the counseling process as they are not treated as subjects and because of the unintelligible language of the advice.

The scanty practical usefulness of specialist advice was described, among others, by Anna Adryjanek, who thinks that “[...] the unintelligibility of the language [...] makes it impossible to translate the concepts contained in the opinion into the child's actual actions and skills.”³⁷

According to E. Siarkiewicz: “the idea of aid understood in the humanistic way, one of treating advice seekers, people looking for support in the issued opinions, in the subjective way, or even treating them as partners,

education, rehabilitation-educational activities and individual tuition. They are issued at the parent's (legal guardian's) request through the agency of the certifying team working in the psychological-pedagogical counseling center.

³⁵ Skalbania, *Instytucjonalne poradnictwo pedagogiczne*; Barbara Skalbania, *Poradnia psychologiczno-pedagogiczna w środowisku lokalnym. Analiza poradniczej praktyki* (Warszawa: WSP, 2015).

³⁶ Elżbieta Siarkiewicz, *Przesłonięte obszary poradnictwa. Realia – iluzje – ambiwalencje* (Zielona Góra: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Zielonogórskiego, 2010), 117.

³⁷ Anna Adryjanek, “Jak rozumieć rozumieć opinię poradni psychologiczno-pedagogicznej? Leksykon pojęć” in *Uczeń z dysleksją w szkole*, Marta Bogdanowicz, Anna Adryjanek (ed.) (Gdynia: Operon, 2004), 117.

clearly vanishes”³⁸. Opinions about the little usefulness of the advice also appear in works by the author of the present article; they show that the language of written advice is “esoteric, sometimes abstract, not very objective, which indicates that the counselor has accepted the role of an expert with a preference for directives.”³⁹

An example of violence is also the routine of addressing the mother as the child’s guardian, omitting the father who also takes part in bringing up the child (all the analyzed opinions were addressed to the mother), which forces exclusively the mother to help her child, as it is she who is instructed what to do in the future. Written advice directed to teachers sometimes in their contents treat them as the ones who are to control the schoolchild and to organize the child’s work according to the recommendations, which makes the aid an activity based on the hierarchy of authority combined with knowledge (*It is me who knows best what is good for my pupil*).

As it was mentioned above, symbolic violence may also have good influence, especially when the planned helping actions take into consideration the child’s activity and they are directed to his/her development. This happens in the situation of an interactive diagnosis that leads to acquiring some skills by the helped one, at the same time emphasizing his/her subjectivity and making a relational dialog possible. Another example of a positive aspect of using symbolic violence is the situation of therapy, in which the therapist resorts to subtle violence, directs the actions, “imposes” on the child the exercises to be done, selecting them according to the needs, which is met both with the child’s and the parent’s acceptance.

To sum up, it may be stated that institutional aid is rationed, strictly planned in time and space, it proceeds in an asymmetric relation and is based on making a diagnosis and labeling that is connected with it. The accepted standardization of the helping service within an institution includes: a visit in a determined place and in an appointed time, a definite time when an opinion is issued and a definite structure of the opinion, a routine course of the meeting and the directive language of the advice. The apparent accessibility of the institution is limited to routine actions and procedures, the lack of choice forces one to accept the person imposed by the institution, social stigmatization of the ones who need aid is common, and requirements of the administration deprave one of anonymity and hinder full trust.

³⁸ Siarkiewicz, *Przesłonięte obszary poradnictwa*, 119.

³⁹ Skalbani, *Instytucjonalne poradnictwo pedagogiczne*, 161.

5. AN ATTEMPT AT A SYNTHESIS

In the light of the presented views several significant conclusions appear. The first one says that an institution offering aid is not free from violence that has a subtle character and is commonly accepted by the recipients of helping services. A psychological-pedagogical counseling center, despite assurances of the voluntary character of the use of its services becomes a place that is rather imposed, one to which the parents “have to” come if they need help for their children as far as educational solutions are concerned (receiving a certificate or an opinion). This constitutes an imposed format of acting of all public educational institutions, and at the same time it confirms the occurrence of the inequality of strength in the relation between one who is offering help and one who is helped.

Symbolic violence is marked in the form of the “latent program” that is present and exists besides formal institutional activities, and is manifested in the organization of the space, in the rationing of the aid, in the way the problem is diagnosed, or in the effects of the diagnosis (labeling the school-child), and in the language of the advice, both oral (conversation) and written (opinion, certificate). The persons receiving aid, contrary to the written rules, do not have a choice, they are included in the process of giving aid according to the counselor’s scenario, the counselors’ schedule, the plans drawn up by the institution, which emphasizes the asymmetry in the relations between the counselor and the advice seeker (the person having authority and the one subjected to this authority).

What is interesting, counselors are aware of the presence of symbolic violence, and they express it in the contents of their narration, where they speak about the discomfort of the situation of being a counselor in the world of bureaucratic pathology; they indicate the conflict between their own views, convictions, professionalism on the one hand, and requirements or expectations from the people managing the education system on the other. The conflict is typical of the activities of the helping people and it also occurs in the work of social workers, where the dichotomy can be seen: professionalism and the client’s good and the work of the administration⁴⁰.

In counseling and institutional aid symbolic violence is connected with the way the services are distributed, with the use of time and space, with the

⁴⁰ Marco Ferreira [and others], *Superwizja jako instrument rozwoju zawodowego w służbach społecznych (Supervision as an Instrument of Professional Development in Social Services)* (Warszawa: WSP, 2014), 24.

imposed forms of communication, and in the effect this is supposed to trigger off in the form of the aided people's definite behaviors. The symbolic, ambiguous image of the psychological-pedagogical counseling center is the cause why it becomes a place where a lot of paradoxes occur, the study and description of which is another challenge for people conducting research on counseling.

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