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***Homo consultans*: An opportunity for or a predicament of counselling?**

Participation in institutional counselling, which emerged alongside the development of industry and the establishment of various social organisations in the early 20th century, has evolved under the influence of changes in social, economic and cultural life. In this context, a chronological sequence of three counselee types can be identified, including: the patient, the client and *homo consultans*, each of them guided by different intention behind their engagement in counselling relations. Contemporary *homo consultans* is a unique hybrid that includes people who seek guidance in traditional ways, people who are “barraged” with unsolicited advice, people who watch others use advice, and “adviceholics,” i.e. people who may be addicted to guidance. It seems that this complex situation both opens up new opportunities and triggers organisational and ethical problems which haunt the organisers of counselling and counsellors employed in counselling institutions.

Keywords: *homo consultans*, client, patient, adviceholic

One point which invariably features in the mission of every counsellor is to inspire counselees to make changes in their lives. According to Boris Cyrulnik, as these changes cannot be dissociated from what counselees have been before, they are modifications rather than metamorphoses, but even this is enough to “change the course of our lives” (Cyrulnik, 2014, p. 210). Consequently, counselling scholars must examine both who the participants in the “counselling world” are, how they engage with it and how they modify their lives as well as changes which unfold in their environments. Contemporary participants in counselling – counselees – can be called *homo consultans*¹. Counselees do not form a homogeneous group. Some of them seek counselling in traditional ways, others find themselves “barraged” with unsolicited advice, still others watch others use advice, for example, through

¹ *Homo consultans* is a human being who seeks advice – an individual who experiences insecurity/helplessness and consults a counsellor for guidance. The term captures both the counselees’ relationship to themselves (*sibi consulere*) and the interpersonal relations in which they engage. Because I have already discussed a range of issues related to *homo consultans* elsewhere (Kargulowa, 2017a; 2017b; 2018), some of my previous insights are inevitably restated in this paper.

the media, and yet others are “adviceholics” who are addicted to advice and cannot do without it. As Marcelo Afonso Ribeiro (2016) puts it, the contemporary *homo consultans* is a unique hybrid (see also Latour, 1993) – a four-faced human being. Because in the “counselling world,” the line between those who receive counselling and those who provide counselling tends to be very fluid, sometimes to the point of obscurity (see Kargulowa et al., 2013), counselling research must take it into account that participants in counselling include not only counselees but also counsellors – as individuals and as members of certain communities – who are rarely monolithic embodiments of particular expectations and visions of the counsellor’s social mission (Kargulowa, 2004/2011, pp. 167-187; 2014; 2016, pp. 183-202).

This article aims to outline images of participants in counselling (counselees and counsellors) and to describe their participation modes. It attempts to establish whether a variety of expectations associated with this participation and the general complex situation of participants in the “counselling world” generate broader opportunities for improving and developing counselling, or whether they are a problem for the organisers of institutional counselling. To this end, the argument explores participants in counselling, relationships established in counselling and primarily changes in the organisation of and meanings attributed to counselling as well as the entire cultural context of counselling.

Traditional counselees: Patients and clients

The development of institutional counselling was associated with industrialisation and urbanisation in the early 20th century, with the development of capitalism and the establishment of various forms of help provision offered by state institutions, social facilities and various associations. The first users of counselling help were treated similarly to medical patients. They were instructed how to behave in certain situations, supported financially and educated by – to use Popper’s sarcastic metaphor – having the knowledge they needed to manage in everyday realities poured through a “funnel” into their heads (qtd. in Malewski, 2001, p. 273). The paternalist approach to support-recipients was founded on the same tenets that underpinned schooling for adults and literacy courses. The common assumption was that patients did not need to have either the latent aims of guidance they received explained to them or the deeper reasons why they were offered it revealed to them. The idea was that to prevent people who needed counselling support from causing trouble and to make them as useful to society as possible, counselees must learn socially accepted, rational behaviours. Consequently, patients were as a rule treated as objects and instructed by directive counsellors, who, relying on their professionalism and role, knew what was good for the counselees. Such expert-counsellors built on the knowledge provided by contemporaneous sciences: psychology, medicine and technical disciplines, and used tests to diagnose counselees’ character traits in

order to give them advice or univocal guidelines. The characters of counselees were viewed as inborn and relatively stable “properties.” In counselling, patients were (are) primarily recipients of guidance as a kind of gift which should help them solve their difficulties and inspire them – as beneficiaries – to express gratitude to the counsellor (Mielczarek, 2009). With a view to sustaining the social order as defined by liberalism, the performance of counselling duties was portrayed in public discourse within the framework of human solidarity, where the stronger disinterestedly support the vulnerable, guided not only by knowledge, but also by altruism, charity and the sense of duty.

The rise of neoliberal ideas, which frame the human being as “entrepreneur of himself, being for himself his own capital, being for himself his own producer; being for himself the source of [his] earnings” (Foucault, 2008, p. 226), re-directed attitudes to and notions of counselling responsibilities. Carl Rogers introduced the “client” as a new term referring to users of counselling help (Rogers, 1991). Labelling counselees clients was supposed not only to indicate that they were “mature” enough to consult counsellors, but also to underscore that they were active in the process and well aware of what goals they wanted to achieve. In their professional interventions, counselling practitioners began to apply the so-called Rogers triad – i.e. acceptance, empathy and congruence – which expressed respect for clients. In Rogers’s view, the counselling situation was not so much a gift to clients as rather a specific biographical event which they co-created themselves. Clients were assumed to engage in a counselling situation deliberately, to do it with full consciousness and trust, and – as the dictionary definition of the term “client” has it – to entrust their existential issues to the counsellor, discover certain features of their personalities (rather than of characters) (Malewski, 2003), and analyse their skills and possibilities of employing them. Counsellors ceased to be viewed as omniscient oracles. As confidantes and experts in a particular field, they began to treat counselees as subjects and to take into account counselees’ “human capital,” i.e. their knowledge and biographical experience. Although counselling clients not always felt it fully, counsellors drew both on clients’ emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1997) and on their “instrumental reason” (Kwaśnica, 2014) when constructing their interventions. To analyse problems, counsellors built on the theory of information processing. The cognitive approach they used generally focused on “the exploration of thought processes, i.e. on how individual mental models and cognitive structures are formed and change (changes in preferences, assumptions, evaluations, values, etc.” (Olejniczak, Rok, & Płoszaj, 2012, p. 70). Such an approach to counselees was underpinned by the idea that the counselling process involved clients’ reflective learning, “based on the skills an individual needs to synthesise data and construct mental maps in which various bits of information are combined into a coherent whole” (Olejniczak, Rok, & Płoszaj, 2012, p. 70). As a result, institutional counselling in a way resembled a consultation meeting of two pragmatic specialists: an expert counsellor and a client who was responsible for and modified his/her life.

The aim of counselling help was to optimise clients' actions by enhancing their effectiveness.

For counselling clients, counselling came to be a service, and this is also how it was depicted by scholars. Counselling practice became highly specialised. Facilities focused on counselling in narrower fields, such as health, employment, family life and leisure, were founded. Their interventions helped people in such areas of everydayness as work life, family life, leisure time, education and others. Sometimes they provided support in very circumscribed fields, e.g. job placement, fashion, beauty, entertainment, etc. As a new facet of counselling in this shape, new intervention rules were embraced, including the compartmentalisation of life, that is, the cultivation of some values at the cost of other ones, which not always added up to a homogeneous system. In the organisation of counselling, commercialisation, advertising and marketing of counselling services evidently became justified and expedient. People found themselves under pressure to seek specialist advice in all problematic situations. Clearly, neoliberalism and the economisation of social life made their imprint on counselling, in terms of both its underlying ideas and its implementation. The domination of the economy transformed the style of everydayness in which counselling was expected to intervene, because effectiveness and pursuit of individual success replaced the performance of socially useful work for the common good as people's major goal. Clients were expected not only to "have" (skills, a repertory of behaviours, etc.), but also to "be" (be somebody, be in a certain way). Emphatically, the introduction of the "client" as a term in counselling was not only a semantic alteration; it was also intimately related to the cultural change, the new, abrupt shifts of which resulted in producing new counselee types.

"Barraged" with advice and watching others use advice

Radical changes in the ways of using counselling have been (and are still being) triggered by the prevalence of popular culture. Seeping into people's everyday lives, popular culture "mediates all attempts at constructing everyday life, filters away meanings incompatible with it, reinterprets and disseminates them in forms aligned with its logic, generates interpretive frameworks for reality and sanctions the modes of exploring it and of acting within it" (Krajewski, 2005, p. 7). Popular culture deeply affects the ways of life of counselling-supported individuals; it is visible in counselling interventions and even in how counselling reflection is practised. While in traditional culture, people who failed to cope with everyday issues were believed to deserve compassion and to inspire a desire to help in individuals prompted by altruism and empathy (Aronson, Wilson & Akert, 2012), in popular culture, if people's "helplessness" is not a specific self-expression or a manifestation of a voluntarily adopted, unique life-style, it is often disapproved of and condemned. As observed by Zygmunt Bauman, an individual who fails to cope is

suspected of lacking diagnostic abilities, having insufficient practical knowledge and missing skills. Persisting in this deficiency is supposed to prove that the person is incapable of finding a proper expert helper (Bauman, 1995). That such attitudes are predominant has been established in observations of social life and in research studies. For example, in a counselling research project which Marcin Szumigraj carried out among counselling students, the respondents' answers to "Who is the person I would like to help?" were dominated by stereotypical images of a "defective" individual: a helpless, unemployed, homeless person who is lost in life and/or addicted to drugs and other substances. Even more interestingly, the respondents portrayed such individuals as overusing other people's kindness, but rarely triggering compassion or a desire to help them (Szumigraj, 2015).

The respondents' views can serve as evidence of a growing indifference to predicaments of other people, of a de-normalisation of social roles, of the individualisation of behaviour and of a dilution of meanings invested in choosing ways of action; their responses can also be construed as an outcome of egoistic, intrapersonal reflectivity. They appear to exemplify the sense of distortion in the structure of the social world and of disturbance in the social order (Marody, 2015), in which openness, liquidity and sprawling networks have undercut social stabilisation (Bauman, 2008; Castells, 2008; Latour, 1993), spurring people to resort to an array of actions to restore it. While implementing these actions, people either seek support from others or seal themselves off against others and single-handedly arrange their agendas of work, entertainment and everyday life (cf. e.g. Dragon, 2016, 2018; Minta, 2016; Misiejuk, 2017; Słowik, 2016; Trębińska-Szumigraj, 2015; Wojtasik, 2010).

From the counselling-studies perspective, this state of affairs is deeply worrying, especially that a range of disturbances sends ripples across the broadly conceived daily sphere of consumption, including both real, palpable products and many people's mental and spiritual experiences and sensations. Distortions also sweep across interpersonal communication, which is beginning to be pervaded by digitally mediated contacts, which fail to transmit the intimate and most precious, profound experiences that underlie counselling interactions. Novel values, behaviour forms and inventions have appeared which engender permanent insecurity and tensions, all the more so as these processes prove irreversible, accelerated and producing irrevocable effects. Popular culture has proved to be an unforeseen "future shock" (Toffler, 1970), whose novelty takes everybody (therein counsellors) by surprise.

As repeatedly emphasised by researchers such as Ulrich Beck (2007), Anthony Giddens (1991) and Marek Krajewski (2005), new media have contributed to the fact that today we would be hard-pressed to imagine not only a community of feelings and experiences, but also modes of interpreting them, which are so instrumental in establishing a counselling relationship. Modern people are often assailed by contradictory information, advice, guidelines and recommendations. They are "bomb-shelled with love," but at the same time they feel isolated (Zielińska-Pękał,

2012). Bauman observes that “individuals are called on to invent and deploy individual solutions to socially produced discomforts” (Bauman, 2008, p. 91), which partly at least explains why before making any important decision people read horoscopes, consult fortune-tellers or look for guidelines in the latest digital media, which encroach upon the privacy of everyday life. Hence, across the various spheres of everyday life, people solicit help not only from specialists who are acknowledged experts running psychotherapeutic practice or working in counselling facilities, but also from random “authorities.”

Or perhaps an “adviceholic”?

On the one hand, this invasion of advice, guidelines and recommendation is supposed to help people make choice, and on the other hand, it demands that the addressees and recipients of such messages be permanently alert and reflexive. This only contributes to the chaos unleashed in people’s earlier systems of values and to their relativisation. Such effects are additionally reinforced by the “transparency” of all actions (including counselling interventions). Today, *homo consultans* is immersed in hypermedia reality and, as such, does not have to interact “face-to-face” with a counsellor in order to be an engaged participant in the “counselling world.” Instead, s/he may as well watch tailor-made TV counselling shows and read self-help books, daily newspapers and Internet blogs in order to evaluate their content and compare it with episodes in his/her biography, as this is a convenient channel of learning certain behaviours, obtaining new information, augmenting knowledge, recognising one’s own problems and *sibi consulere*. Living in amidst a surfeit of verbal and visual communication, which is replete with (sometimes mutually contradictory) advice, “beneficial” guidelines and unconditional prohibitions, contemporary active and passive participants in pop culture are admittedly under some pressure to abide by them, yet they are in fact free – without revealing their experiences, feelings and deeply concealed views – to take these messages into account or ignore them, for media-mediated counselling gives them complete liberty in this respect (Zielińska-Pękał, 2008, 2009, 2019). This dichotomous arrangement, which is manifest in continual insecurity and the compulsion of reflection and self-reflection as well as in a surplus of various types of advice, tends to become an additional trigger of mental destabilisation, enhancing the need for having a point of reference, and consequently to make people urgently crave immediate, unambiguous advice. This may well breed helplessness and a complete dependence on certain messages and communications (rather than on other people, such as friends, relatives, therapists and counsellors) which curiously mutate into a unique “guru.” As a result, an adviceholic appears as a new type of *homo consultans*.

Where does institutional counselling go from here?

“Professional helpers,” as John Holt refers to, among others, counsellors (1974, pp. 78-86), take all this into account. They know that while help provided in direct relations with individuals is no longer understood as a gift offered by an omniscient counsellor, it can nevertheless afford an opportunity to facilitate a new perception of a given problem and foster readiness to change the ways in which one defines one’s meaning of life, chooses an occupation, selects modes of cohabiting with others, etc. (see Guichard, 2018a, 2018b). Such help-provision departs from the canon of advice-giving, becoming instead an opportunity to discover together the meanings of undertaken actions, make sense of things, negotiate positions and discover values, without becoming oblivious to how ephemeral such conclusions are and how urgent it is to re-consider them when new circumstances arise (Drabik-Podgórna, 2016; Guichard, 2018b). A technique frequently applied by counsellors, the biographical interview in which the counselee “works through” his/her life is only inspired by counsellors, rather than being a fixed and thoroughly controlled questionnaire. By analysing and self-analysing his/her biography, *homo consultans* is supposed not only to understand that s/he is responsible for his/her life and should be his/her own counsellor, but also to open him/her onto possibilities of making necessary modifications in life and to suggest him/her that s/he can be successful if only s/he “is willing to want it.” This is supposed to make the counselee ready to use his/her own resources and to give him/her a clue how satisfaction can be achieved here and now, how life pleasures can be experienced and, at the same time, how life can be lived in accord with others, without becoming dependent on the counsellor’s help (see Czerkawska, 2018; Drabik-Podgórna, 2009; Di Fabio, 2014; Duarte, 2014; Guichard, 2018b; Minta, 2013; Minta & Kargul, 2016; Wojtasik, 2010). Briefly, the counselee is supposed to develop self-knowledge.

Therefore, contemporary counsellors encourage the counselee to engage in self-experimentation. They try to make the counselling meeting into a “site” where the counselee can find out about him/herself, about the demands of contemporary life and about the risks related to it. Consequently, they can help counselees realise that they will likely have to change jobs several times, that lifelong learning is a must, that flexible behaviour and openness to others are mandatory, that it may be necessary to consciously re-construct their identities, and that both planned and unpredictable consequences of their conduct will have to be taken into consideration. However, accounts of counselling interactions imply that counsellors not always decide to take the risk of directly communicating these challenging issues to the counselee (Duarte, 2014; Guichard, 2018b; Milner & O’Byrne, 2002). They rather try to make the clients they support come to such realisations by themselves. Counsellors as a rule focus on “the here and the now,” whereby they attempt to remain outsiders, so to speak. They transfer the weight of responsibility for undertaken (or, for that matter, not undertaken) actions onto counselees, preparing them to bear

their consequences. Nevertheless, driven by the “market laws” and abandoning professional ethical principles, they sometimes care more about their own image than about what is good for counselees. As a result, they exert themselves to be attractive, to avoid causing stress and to display enough competence to make long-lasting contact with them desirable (Milner & O’Byrne, 2002, pp. 4-12), whereby trying to find a solution to the problem situation together with the counselee becomes a secondary concern. Admittedly, in the mutating reality we inhabit, such a solution may indeed not exist at all in some cases.

As can be seen, in the age of ever accelerating events and the invasion of pop culture, developments that take place in counselling vary widely. Side by side with traditional, institutional counselling practices, new forms of counselling support-provision emerge, and some worrying distortion take place in counselling. At present, counselling help often neither entails a pre-planned counselling process nor aims to achieve permanent outcomes. Consequently, counselling help can no longer be expected to involve interventions which are easily separable into recognisable discrete stages (Brammer, 1973; Deissler, 1998; Dragon, 2015; Egan, 2002), to be always provided at designated, purpose-specific venues (Thomsen, 2016; Siarkiewicz, Trębińska-Szumigraj & Zielińska-Pękał, 2012; Z-art, 2009) or to be preceded by the counselee’s tension-replete wait for a meeting with the counsellor, his/her thoughtful reflection on how to use counselling and/or his/her anxieties about the integrity of his/her own “self” (Kargulowa, 2014). As a fast-tracked service, counselling help focuses on being *cool* in reception and on the stress-free provision of quick, usually shallow and unambiguous answers to the current questions that haunt the contemporary buyer-consumer, whose situation is straightforwardly summed up by Małgorzata Jacyno: “in our present culture of individualism, ‘being oneself’ becomes an individual’s *profession*” (2007, p. 187, original emphasis). A counselling intervention often takes the form of a single, one-on-one meeting with the counsellor (e.g. Milner & O’Byrne, 2002; Leśniak, 1996) or simply involves falling back on the media: TV, the Internet, the phone, a self-help book, a newspaper, etc. It frequently devolves into a random performative incident, as analysed by Elżbieta Siarkiewicz (Siarkiewicz, 2014).

Pop-cultural changes concern not only the counselee-counsellor relationship itself but also the counselling facility as an institution. As counsellors’ studies are supposed to make a certain impression, they are accordingly furnished with deliberately chosen furniture, information tables, visual representations, certificates and grateful clients’ acknowledgements put on display. The dramatic appeal of counselling meetings is enhanced and counselling services are made more attractive by expanding the range of varied interventions, training sessions and exercises (see Zembruska, 2016). These devices are characteristic of pop culture, which is transparent and dedicated to offering pleasure. Hence, easy market accessibility is becoming the most coveted feature of counselling, its basic gauges including temporary utility, attractiveness and non-stressful, enjoyable participation.

Conclusion

To offer any conclusion is a real challenge if a conclusion is meant to establish whether the emergence of *homo consultants*, i.e. a four-faced hybrid counselee, is an opportunity to strengthen the general condition and relevance of counselling help or whether it is a predicament which plagues today's counsellors and organisers of institutional counselling. The counselling situation itself – as a social event/fact/process and as a position and condition of its participants – is a deeply complex matter. Some of this complexity is presented in the Tables below. Table 1 shows socio-cultural contexts in which certain counselee types have arisen, and Table 2 captures the socio-psychological aspects of the “condition” of participants in the counselling world.

Table 1. The counselee in socio-cultural contexts

Counselee images Socio-cultural contexts	Patient	Client	<i>Homo consultants</i>
Period	Early modernity	Modernity	Post-modernity
Age	Early capitalism	Developed capitalism	Late capitalism
Structure of the world	Organism, machine	System	Network
Image of the world	Homogeneity	Unambiguity	Ambivalence
Preferred values	Averageness	Elevated norm	Success
Trends	“Appropriate” action	Collectivism	Individualism
Tasks	Production	Creativity	Consumption
Culture	Modernism	Modernism/postmodernism	Pop culture
Cultural participation	Imitative adaptation, emulation	Creative adaptation	Individualised creativity
Attitude to the past	Complete imitation	Selective imitation	Break with the past
Attitude to the future	Predictable continuation	Measurable, progress	Unpredictable, immeasurable

Table 2. Psycho-social aspects of counselee images

Counselee images Psycho-social aspects	Patient	Client	<i>Homo consultants</i>
Position in the social structure	Part of a bigger whole	Separate entity	Fragmented entity
Mental structure	Character	Personality	Identity
Role of the body	Inevitable	Disciplined	Favoured and cultivated
Development	Horizontal	Vertical	Leaping
Learning	Acquisition of compulsory knowledge	Acquisition of necessary knowledge	Selective knowledge acquisition
Preferences	Effort	Skill	Pleasure
Family	Duty	Site of support	To be exchanged
Orientation in life	To have; averageness	To be; elevated norm	To make a mark; success
Reference points	Past	Future	Present
Compass, strategies in life	Dependence on the fate	Selective choice	Contingency, changeability, ongoing choosing

(Kargulowa, 2017a, pp. 16-17).

The emergence of various counselee types and of various styles of counsellors' interventions is intimately associated with the cultural changes we are currently experiencing. Having considerably accelerated in recent years, these changes produce unpredictable ramifications, which unequally affect various aspects of individual and social life as well as influence different groups of people to different degrees. Consequently, people who expect traditional help once received by patients are still around, as are people who feel like clients and entrust their problems to reliable counsellors, even though they often treat these counsellors as "paid friends" and expect them not so much to provide guidance as rather to exhibit complete acceptance and mindful, kind assistance (Kargulowa, 2014); additionally, people who want to develop their own idea of a meaningful life in collaboration with a supportive counsellor are found side by side with people who believe that they are their own best counsellors, yet seek one or another expert's confirmation of all decisions they make (Kargul, 2018). If some of them expect counselling to inspire them to modify their lives in some way, the role of the counsellor resembles, to use Umberto Eco's metaphor (2008), that of a helper who takes part in opening a new page in the book of their life, a book which they are bound to write further all by themselves. In this process, an encounter with a counselling professional may or may not be important

to them, but they will certainly seek advice of their “personal” counsellors with whom they communicate on the daily basis: the loved ones or, due to technological inventions such as telephones, laptops, TV sets, etc., digital machines. Hence, the “writing” of a contemporary counselee’s “open book” differs from the corresponding venture of early-20th-century counselees from the era when institutional counselling commenced. This is also why it is so difficult to determine whether the rise of *homo consultans* is an opportunity for the development of institutional professional counselling or rather a predicament of “professional helpers.” This difficulty is exacerbated by the fact that on the one hand these professionals more frequently than their predecessors meet not just a helpless patient but an often self-reliant, reflective, responsible and highly competent partner who consults all available sources of knowledge and is prepared for collaboration, while on the other they cannot ground their help-provision on any clear rules, for there are none at the moment. In such circumstances, the only available option, as experts in the field insist, is to engage in honest dialogue in which the counsellor assists and helps the counselee in realising what values s/he prefers, how strongly s/he is attached to them, whether s/he is open to change and how s/he pursues it (see e.g. Czerkawska, 2018; Drabik-Podgórna 2016; Duarte, 2014; Guichard, 2018b). Clearly, contemporary counsellors find themselves in a far more complicated position than their counterparts at the onset of institutional counselling. Given this, they must rely on their own visions of their mission to furnish them with the best clues for solving professional problems caused by the emergence of the hybrid *homo consultans*. It is rather exigent, especially that nothing suggests that popular culture will be replaced by so-called high culture or any other culture, nor does anything herald that social life will be emptied out of people who belong to one of the categories discussed above, embedded in the “super-diversified” realities and experiencing them as arduous, stressful and/or problem-generating.

Translated by Patrycja Poniatowska

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