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Homo Consultans Amidst Pop-Culture

ABSTRACT

The article aims to portray changes in provision and reception of contemporary counselling, which finds itself under a strong impact of popular culture. The pop culture is described as a phenomenon intimately related and saturating social life, scientific research and daily life of modern people.

In postmodern mediatized reality, deeply immersed in popular culture, the guidance is sought by a *Homo consultans* – a reflexive individual that experiences uncertainty/helplessness and establishes an interpersonal relationship (dialogue) with another human being – a counsellor – with a view to solving his/her problems. Seeking guidance and attempting to use the counsellor's help to understand oneself, others and the world, the counselee actually strives after sustainable personal development and decent life.

Homo consultans – is simultaneously the active seeker of a guidance and the passive object of the attack of guidance practices.

Keywords:

counselling, counsellogy, *homo consultans*, popular culture

INTRODUCTION

Popular culture is hotly debated by humanities and social sciences researchers, authors, artists and reflexive participants. Its detractors claim that, superficial, unoriginal and primitive, it appeals to low human feelings. Its advocates contend that while in pop culture, as in any other type of culture, strengths mingle with weaknesses and sublime aesthetic works with mediocre ones, popular culture

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meets social expectations as it affords opportunities of individual appreciation of the works it offers and is informed by open discussions involving authors, artists and the audience, allowing them space for personally chosen expressions. The dichotomies of popular culture are aptly grasped in Polish sociologist Wojciech Burszta's vivid depiction: "It triggers tears and cackles of contentment; it delights and irritates with its formulaic repetitiveness; it repels with shallowness of thought and surprises with an unpredictable wealth of symbolical references" (Burszta, 2002a, p. 9). Burszta insightfully comments that "it [popular culture] has become an inseparable element of everyday life and a topic of conversations and scholarly studies" (Burszta, 2002a, p. 9; cf. also Jakubowski, 2006/2011).

This article is not a voice in the ongoing debates, but, observing neutrally that ambivalent though it may be, popular culture is also ubiquitous, it seeks to explore its impact on the ways in which people engage with contemporary counselling as a form of help and on counselling as such. Counselling tends to be defined in various frameworks and perspectives as a relevant segment of social life, as operations organised within institutions, as a spontaneous, informal activity or as a "pure relationship" (Giddens, 1991, p. 89) between the counsellor and the counsellee. Whatever its definition, counselling is always embedded in culture, being its product and its expression alike. This has been shown in the studies of Anna Bilon and Józef Kargul, who outlined cultural differences in selected aspects of counselling (Bilon & Kargul, 2012, pp. 85–109/265–287; Bilon, 2016; Collins et al., 2013, pp. 109–126/279–295). How can counselling in popular culture be described and how have ideas of popular culture penetrated into counselling theory? What are specific problems faced by counselees who are pop-culture participants and what expectation do they have *vis-à-vis* counselling help? What chances of continuing sustainable development do they see in it? What pop-cultural traits can be found in counselling interventions? These questions can be answered by popular culture research and studies of counselling practice.

THE CONTEMPORARY HOMO CONSULTANS AND THE SOURCES OF HIS PROBLEMS

Seeking others' advice is as old as humanity itself. Over millennia, reasons for and ways of advice-giving have changed and various figures of authority have taken the advisor-function. A range of monikers have been invented to call guidance-seekers. The semantic changes have always been informed by a certain agenda. When simple, straightforward advice was given that boiled down to guidelines

on what to do, the counsellor, or rather the advice-giver, was an expert whose judgement was indisputable. In early Polish publications, a counsellor was called *poradnik* (a guide), the name currently given to books with unambiguous, simple advice on a particular sphere of life (cf. Zierkiewicz, 2016, pp. 51–70/217–236). An advice-giver – as a rule, a doctor, a priest or a family elder – was an unquestioned authority and his advice was a unique gift.

The progress of civilisation brought about professionalisation and institutionalisation of social life together with the development of sciences, in particular advancements in medicine and an increased use of medical advice. As a result, support-recipients came to be called patients. The term was adopted by psychologists, especially by “clinical” psychologists, and has been used till this day. Yet, as the name is associated with treatment administered to sick people, including those suffering from mental disorders that tend to be stigmatising, new, more neutral terms were proposed. Since Carl Rogers (1951/1991), therapists and counsellors have opted for “the client,” which is the most frequent term in the literature now. Since in Polish this term denotes a user/recipient rather than a co-constructor of advice, it is not uniformly accepted though it is becoming less controversial as social life is being economised and everyday language is being inundated with supply-and-demand terminology. In the Wrocław-based community of counselling scholars, we tend to speak of “a counselee” or “a guidance-seeker.” The term is supposed to imply the voluntary use of counselling help guided by an inner need. However, it seems to fail to convey the full image of a contemporary participant in a counselling situation, which has also lost its traditional trappings. The *homo consultans* is a pop-cultural counselee and a specific participant in a counselling situation/event/process.

The term *homo consultans* is justified by the fact that people who use help provided by counselling, in its broad sense, do not always apply for or seek it. They do not always realise that, at a given moment, they are recipients of or co-participants in guidance-provision. The term offers a very broad notion of “counselees” and goes beyond the canonical definition of counselling, counselling situation and counsellor. Now immersed in popular culture, they participate not only through active co-construction of advice but also through the very presence in the “counselling world” as, so to speak, passive onlookers and/or observers. Non-engagement is also an expression of a certain attitude and, consequently, a participation of sorts (Krajewski, 2014, pp. 12–19). So, in a nutshell, a “pop-cultural” *homo consultans* is an individual who seeks advice and is “bombarded” with advice without expecting it (Kargul, 2014, pp. 322–332; Zielińska-Pękał, 2012, pp. 110–125/294–309). Also, this individual watches others use guidance, which is made possible by, among others, “domestication” of counselling through and in the media.

Sociologists insist that people seek advice largely because they feel that “the ordering, nomic structure of the social world” (Marody, 2015, p. 112) has been disrupted. This experience of disruption is expressed in at least four phenomena: social roles are de-normalised, which increases individualisation of behaviours; meanings related to consumer choices are blurred; and reflexivity is enforced (Marody, 2015). These developments have their various consequences. Social roles are linked to the structures of the social world. They form, so to speak, an external framework which determines internalised identities (Guichard, 2001, pp. 87–107). Membership in a social group or in an institution can give grounding to self-definitions (cf. Ribeiro, da Conceição Coropos Uvaldo, & da Silva, 2016, pp. 71–91/237–256). This interplay has been disturbed by openness, liquidity and networked character of current organisational structures (Bauman, 2000; Castells, 2008; Latour, 1993). Today, people as a rule participate in several organisations and individually arrange their schedule of work, entertainment and everyday engagements (Słowik, 2016a; Wojtasik, 2012, pp. 35–47/216–227). In everyday life, ripples have appeared in the sphere of consumption of both tangible, material products and mental and spiritual experiences and sensations. Interpersonal communication has not escaped upheavals as the widespread reliance on digital devices has undercut the expression of the most precious inner feelings, whose depth cannot be conveyed in mediated and visualised forms. The media seek to show the most intimate spheres of human life, but at the same time they are only capable of barely scratching their surface. Steeped in the surfeit of visual communication, the humans of pop-culture, unable to obtain a full image of reality, must reconstruct its neglected areas on their own. This reconstruction is fraught with difficulties since popular culture has not grown in an evolutionary way but is a faithful companion, a product even, of the “future shock” (Toffler, 1970), which, irreversible and extraordinarily accelerated, stuns everybody (also counsellors) with novelty and breeds inexorable effects. It carries yet unknown values, behaviour patterns and discoveries, triggering permanent insecurity. As Krajewski (2005) repeatedly stresses, in traditional and modern societies people were united not only by shared experiences and emotions framed by the communal temporalities and topographies, but also by ways of interpreting them that underpinned the community of values, memory and tradition. Today such uniformity and similarity are hardly imaginable, with new media as one of the reasons for it. Hence, our era demands constant reflexivity and alertness.

Constant reflexivity is a tiresome thing, demanding sustained effort and, with unpredictable changes around, questioning any observations and conclusions. That is why many people, though knowledgeable and highly intelligent, experience dis-

turbances in the “intersubjective obviousness of the social world” (Marody, 2015, p. 115). Confusion and inner chaos are felt by people from all social backgrounds, no matter how deeply committed they are to achieving identification, a sense of belonging, security and a stable rhythm of life (Melosik, 2002, pp. 11–32). No matter how hard they try to attain sustainable development.

As the foundations of social life prove ambiguous and ephemeral, social scientists feel compelled to enquire what more durable “patterns emerge as a result of ongoing interactions of ‘individualised’ people, that is, people socialised to egotism, emotionality and ontological insecurity, people whose actions are driven by a desire of self-fulfilment, authenticity and reflexivity” (Marody, 2015, p. 229). Such queries are also essential to counselling scholars, who explore how culture affects counselling practice to fathom this problem (Zierkiewicz & Drabik-Podgórna, eds., 2010) and find ways of coping with it.

NEW TENDENCIES IN COUNSELLING PRACTICE

One of serious challenges faced by contemporary counsellors lies not so much in glorifying achievements or censuring deficiencies and shortcomings of popular culture, as rather in using what it offers in therapeutic or counselling interventions (Jakubowski, 2006/2011). Among the things it offers are media communications, which have become a relevant source of much of everyday experiences and sensations. They have been largely instrumental in launching an avalanche of novel content, forms, behaviour patterns and often contradictory values, whereby people’s personal lives and social life as such have been transformed. This poses a formidable challenge to people who provide support to others. All the more so, as the sudden emergence of information society and development of communication mediated by the Internet, the mobile phone and the fax have stripped most of the old principles of validity, without supplying any new, clear and univocal rules of the “social game” in spite of multiplying the “toys we use in playing the game,” as Geert Hofstede and Gert Jan Hofstede sarcastically observe (2010, p. 20). We have been given no new tools, nor even clues on how to cope and help others.

Consequently, “helping professionals” are looking for new “means,” bearing in mind that help-provision cannot be viewed any more as an omniscient advisor’s gift; at best, it can be an opportunity for negotiating a new perception of a given problem in a mutual dialogue of an emancipated, help-seeking individual and a counsellor. It thus entails negotiating positions, making sense together of what is going on, meaning-making and discovering values while realising how ephemeral

they all are. In an era of acceleration, the McDonaldization of society (Ritzer, 2004) and demands of instantaneity (Melosik, 2003, pp. 19–37; Kargul, 2013, pp. 53–59), helping can neither involve a long process of counselling nor bring about durable outcomes. It cannot be expected to be always easily separable into discrete stages (Brammer, 1984; Dragon, 2014, pp. 131–143/305–318; Egan, 2002; Malinowska, 2011, pp. 151–168), and obviously not every visit at a counselling service will be preceded by a reflexive experience of “a triple rupture in the everyday” (with the first one occurring when the individual tries to handle problems alone, the second when he/she realises that they cannot be solved without the counsellor’s intervention, and the third when he/she accepts help (Kargulowa, 2016a, pp. 146–157). Rather, it will be a performative event (Siarkiewicz, 2014, pp. 59–71), which now tends to involve a single face-to-face meeting with a counsellor (Milner & O’Byrne, 2002; Leśniak, 1996; and others) or using the media: television, the Internet, phone, advice books or press.

POP-CULTURE AND CHANGES IN COUNSELLING METHODOLOGY

Social reality has been McDonaldized, to use George Ritzer’s coinage (2004). The same is true about counselling institutions and the work of their staff. Institutions invest in interior design to enhance the attractiveness, economy and impact of a counselling service through apt markings at the entrance, rational interior layout and designation of special zones for specialists. Rooms of a counselling institution become a stage which should on the one hand be transparent and friendly but discipline the client on the other, as the rules of McDonaldization require (Mielczarek, 2011, pp. 181–193; Siarkiewicz, 2010; Skałbania, 2012; 2015). Attention is paid to the fact that the building’s location in city space, its design and furnishing as well as counsellors’ appearance are important factors in assessing counselling help. An array of activities, training sessions and exercises are offered to increase the dramaturgy of meetings and the attractiveness of counselling services (cf. Farrelly & Brandsma, 2004).

CONSTRUCTING A COUNSELLING SITUATION

Pop-cultural influences are easily discernible in counselling practiced by counselling institutions. Whether counselling is provided by a vocational counsellor (Wojtasik, 2012), a coach (Podgórný & Drabik-Podgórný, 2015, pp. 30–51/209–

229), a social worker (Czerkawska, 2009, pp. 34–47; Kłodkowska, ed., n.d.; Kola, 2015, pp. 64–82/242–260), or a court mediator (Dragon, 2014, pp. 131–143/305–318), the interaction with the counselee does not commence now from asking “What are your problems?” or “What brings you here?”; now the starting question is “How can I help you?”

Such a formulation makes a lot of sense.

First, the counsellor presents him/herself as a friend, a kind peer who has been waiting for the interlocutor (Mead, 1978) rather than as a mentor, a guardian or a teacher of life.

Second, from the very beginning the client feels to have been assessed as an active agent.

Third, the client is treated as conscious of his/her general condition and, rather than condemned for his/her present or past actions, viewed as someone who needs support in problem-solving.

Fourth, the client knows that help will be related to a particular issue that is now felt to be a problem instead of turning into a general care, therapy or any other holistic treatment.

Fifthly, the client can feel that the solution to the problem requires changing his/her ways or even changing some aspect of identity, but the change proposal will be negotiated rather than imposed and, consequently, the change itself should not be difficult or unpleasant.

Sixthly, the client should feel fully free in using the guidelines obtained, observing the established contracts, etc.

Seventhly, the client understands that he/she bears responsibility for the effects of help-provision as he/she is an “emancipated client” who can decide to commit to or to withdraw from cooperation.

All these points perfectly correspond to the pop-cultural change:

1. **Fragmentation of life.** The client reports his/her particular problem and the counsellor helps solve it. “All other spheres of the client’s life fall outside the intervention of this particular expert. Sometimes, however, these spheres of life are subject to other experts’ impact. The outcomes of circumscribed opinions and recommendations clash with each other, triggering unanticipated and unintended consequences in the client’s behaviours and emotions” (Kargulowa, 2014, pp. 121–132). The human is treated as a “hybrid” (Latour, 1993), “a postmodern subject,” who unlike “the sociological subject, has no core, is fragmented and possesses multiple, often mutually contradictory, contextual, situational identities” (Krajewski, 2005, pp. 244–245).

2. **Break with the past (a-historicity).** The counsellor does not ask the client to trace back the sources of the problem or memories, if they are unpleasant. He/she asks about aspirations and expectations for the present, assuming that “the past offers us impressions rather than meanings, and instead of guiding our actions and giving shape to the future, it amuses, makes us laugh, moves and provides mainly aesthetic sensations and experiences” (Krajewski, 2005, pp. 242–243). Given this, it does not make much sense to rely on the past or to feel about it too acutely; one should rather focus on “the here and now.” Popular culture has taken dominion of memory, which is perfectly encapsulated in an answer a respondent (a male, married 49-year-old) gave when asked by Brazilian researchers about his vocational plans: “live day by day without wanting to predict the future” (Riberio, da Conceição Coropos Uvaldo, & da Silva, 2016, pp. 71–91/237–256).
3. **Responsibilities transferred onto the client** (“controlling”, to use Ritzer’s formulation). Describing the tenets of brief counselling, Judith Milner and Patrick O’Byrne (2002) write: “it also seeks to stay on the surface, avoiding interpretations, and watches out for exceptions and occasions when the person stood up to the problem” (Milner & O’Byrne, 2002, p. 2). The client is regarded as the best expert on his/her life while the counsellor is an attentive listener-friend. The latter frames the dialogue so as to open opportunities for the client to bridge the gap between his/her individuality (mental traits, talents, creative aptitudes, imagination, non-conformity, assessment skills) and the demands posed by collective social life (external “moulding” of individuals into participants in culture, economy, production, etc.) to gently reconcile his/her desire to explore and need to adapt and to reconstruct his/her identity.
4. Typically postmodern **transparency**. There is no explicit assessment of conduct; instead, there are opportunities of taking on various roles, unimpeded presentation of one’s problems and experimentation. The client freely recounts his/her life in a biographical interview, identifies turning points and transitions and discovers his/her influence on the course of events. As popular culture has it, offering such opportunities during help-provision can enhance self-responsibility, self-control and ingenuity of solutions; it can also afford the client a chance to come forth as a unique individual.
5. Counselling help-provision aims to **solve a current problem** (relevant in view of the present) in a way that the counselee enjoys. Listing the advantages of the approach, the authors of *Brief counselling* explain that “a considerable attraction of the approach for us is that it seems to be less stressful than other work we have done – it can be light, and playful even, as it brings forth

the creativity of clients. An equally attractive consideration is the inherently anti-discriminatory nature of the approach, which makes empowering clients more straightforward” (Miller & O’Byrne, 2002, p. 2). In a study of Minta and Kargul, a sample of former clients of counselling facilities admitted that they continued to use their help only when the facility “was nice” and advice “matched what I wanted to find out” (Minta & Kargul, 2016, pp. 210-220).

COUNSELLING ON TELEVISION

Ritzer observes that space has been disenchanting and lost its magic. To restore it in gastronomy, a range of devices are employed to enhance restaurants’ spectacular appeal and attract consumers who, in the world emptied of emotions, search for euphoria and value “décor, scale, theatrics” (Ritzer, 2004, p. 138). In counselling, such manoeuvres are severely limited: they cannot be fully used in a counsellor’s study though information tables, charts, certificates and expressions of gratitude received by counsellors are put on display and can make quite an impression. Mediated counselling, particularly counselling “happening” on the TV screen, can take more advantage of such stratagems. Daria Zielińska-Pękał (2003, pp. 182–197) vividly sketches a TV talk show in which every effort is made to “stage” attractive and inimitable advice-giving that engages three circles of recipients: those in the limelight in the studio, the invited audience and the viewers in front of the TV. Orchestrated in this way, counselling seems to meet several demands posed by popular culture: it is histrionic, practised with a panache and buzzing with events. As Zielińska-Pękał observes, in such circumstances, the counselling situation is open, transparent and devoid of privacy (intimacy). It is enacted publicly and, hence, gives the participants an opportunity to get involved and co-produce it. Its patent aim is to show how help can be provided through dialogue, narrative, openness to others and encouragement for reflexivity (with them all stage-directed and pervaded with ostensible candour). Its latent aim is to increase viewership figures by amusing, astonishing and stirring with sensationalism; briefly, it deliberately seeks to lure viewers with an illusion of taking part in real life. “Today, the media cater first of all to the hedonistic need of good relaxation identified with exposure to heightened impressions,” notices Krystyna Pankowska (2013, pp. 96–97). “Media” counselling resorts to measures that satisfy such expectations and does not shun showing brutal atrocities or forcing people to reveal secret thoughts, personal experiences, life failures and innermost emotions (Minta, 2003, pp. 165–181; Zielińska-Pękał, 2002, pp. 161–177; 2003, pp. 183–197). Another

example of pop-cultural changes in the arrangement of counselling practice can be found in the way it is presented in Science Festivals.

POP-CULTURAL COUNSELLING AT THE SCIENCE FESTIVAL

The very name “science festival” connotes fun, entertainment and carnival. Its chief aim is to provide pleasurable pastime and to disseminate science by acquainting the public with scientific discoveries. Annually organised by universities and research centres, such festivals enjoy considerable popularity with the public. Putting counselling on the event’s programme, on the one hand, shows that counselling is a worthwhile object of study while, popularising and “disenchanted” it on the other. It is perhaps the most pop-cultural way of presenting counselling practice. At the University of Zielona Góra, such a pop-cultural version of counselling has been part of the science festival three times (Siarkiewicz, Trębińska-Szumigraj, & Zielińska-Pękał, 2012), advertised, chronologically, as “A stall of good advice,” “Counselling etudes,” and “A tree of support.” In the first two events, staged in the urban spaces of the market square and the promenade, passers-by were offered advice and interpretations of their experiences as counselees using direct or TV-mediated counselling. In the third event, the festival audience were encouraged to formulate advice, write it down and place slips of paper with maxims, advice, remarks about unsolved problems and other comments on the eponymous “tree of support.” Everybody could become a counsellor. The “popular” character of learning about counselling and opportunities to practice it was enhanced by an option of a walk along various locations where scenes were arranged that “called for” intervention. In the terms of this paper, counselling science and practice were entirely seized by pop-culture in a workshop titled *Wake up your inner counsellor*, designed and conducted by Marcin Szumigraj.

These are only a handful of examples that illustrate, albeit very selectively, pop-cultural changes in counselling.

Not everybody endorses and applauds the impact of pop-cultural ideas on counselling, especially that short-term and, consequently, “pleasant” and, all in all, superficial counselling is touted as superior to traditional counselling. As Zygmunt Bauman puts it, “[w]hatever the contents of the advice it [refers] to things that the counselled persons must do themselves, accepting full responsibility for doing them properly and blaming no one for the unpleasant consequences which could be ascribed only to their own error or neglect. [...] [T]hey [private issues discussed in public] enter the discussion precisely in their capacity of *private issues*

[...] [T]hey are re-confirmed as private and will emerge from their public exposure reinforced in their privacy” (Bauman, 2000, pp. 65–69). Clearly, immersion of both the *homo consultans* and the counsellor in popular culture (cf. Siarkiewicz, 2004) does not facilitate being-in-the-world as the central problem in this world is that people are hardly able to “get their bearings” in postmodern space and to chart new life maps (Ritzer, 2004, p. 200).

POP-CULTURE’S INROADS INTO COUNSELLING THEORY

“The consumer revolution and popular culture – modernity’s guiltily concealed and marginalised facets, unheroic in their direct link to needs and actualised in the private space – are now becoming central social phenomena not only because reality has been *popularised* but also because modes of humanist thought have changed, focusing on the role of culture, everyday life and everydayness,” Marek Krajewski concludes (2005, p. 60).

Cited above, the different approaches to counselling and therapy not only reveal that finding good practical solutions in counselling is a challenge but also, in a sense, confirm that popular culture has made inroads into scientific discourse. They attest that judgments are pronounced based on selected facts and ad-hoc observations and that, rather than making effort to develop an unambiguous, unified position, the tendency is rather to persist in contending that developments are polysemous and opinions about them relative. As Zbyszko Melosik observes (2002, p. 17), “each experience is nearly immediately relativised by another experience,” and choosing to accept one or another version of it is a matter of individual decision. Choosing “the only truth” is all the more difficult as local knowledges and supra-cultural standards of knowledge, which, often dispersed and relativised rather than universal, cannot ground any choice (Burszta, 2002b).

Pop-cultural changes have clearly affected the process of constructing a science of counselling. If in the “modern” period the Wrocław-based researchers attempted to found counsellogy as a separate, though interdisciplinary and interparadigmatic, sub-discipline of the social sciences that would meet all the scientific standards of scholarship (cf. Bilon, 2010, pp. 55–75), now they focus on identifying multiple discourses on and of counselling, defining their tenets and foundations, producing accounts of various forms of counselling and revealing its objectives and goals, whereby they often conclude from observations of everyday life and take into account popular knowledge (Mielczarek, 2011, pp. 146–158). Consequently, as a science of counselling once supposed to provide frameworks

for critical understanding of phenomena and to facilitate synthesising their studied aspects, counselling has changed its status under the influence of pop culture. The major triggers of this shift include the dispersal and popularisation of counselling and radical changes in the modes of humanist scholarship (Czerkawska, 2013; Drabik-Podgórná, 2013, pp. 11–14/187–190; Kargulowa, 2016a; 2016b, pp. 56–74). The impact of some features of popular culture is observable also in other scholarly enterprises.

Career theorists and practitioners also succumb to the impact of contemporary culture in some measure. First of all, they believe that individual autonomy and agency of a pop-culture participant should be counted among theoretical tenets of counselling. Building on constructivism and constructionism, the Life Design paradigm frames people as capable of developing various identities. On this model, the counsellor's task is to reconcile the contradictions that emerge when people pursue their unique personalities and, at the same time, attempt to adapt. This view of counselling foundations is to be found in Mark Savickas' career construction theory, which applies a biographicity framework to view the individuals as actors (imitating behaviours observed in the early stage of socialisation and cherishing the values instilled then), agents (searching for their own place in the world and trying to find a group to accommodate to or, even, to securely stand out), and authors (having developed a sense of their own identities) (Savickas, 2011, pp. 179–181; cf. also Cybal-Michalska, 2015, pp. 52–63/230–241). Affiliated with this theory is Jean Guichard's self-construction model. Guichard proposes that counselling should support an individual as a self-constructing person who integrates various subjective identity forms. Counselling interventions involve enhancing the person's emotional control, developing his/her rational decision-making capacities and showing how to use biographical experiences effectively and how to process signals from the environment reflexively (Guichard, 2001, pp. 87–107; 2016, pp. 17–43). Another somewhat similar approach is proposed in Annamaria Di Fabio's model of Positive Lifelong Self and Relational Management (PLS&RM) (2014a, pp. 13–40/193–213; 2014b, pp. 98–111; 2016, pp. 143–161). Di Fabio uses a positive psychology lens to view a human holistically as a resourceful individual who employs his/her life capital (intrapreneurial self-capital) and is on the one hand creative and on the other willing to adapt to change.

Consistent with the Life Design paradigm, all these concepts view humans as self-directed, success-driven and, in keeping with pop-cultural slogans, capable of achieving their goals (Savickas et al., 2009, pp. 239–250; cf. also Minta, 2013) if only they “feel like really wanting it.” Available across biographical stages, counselling is supposed, by definition, to support people in identity re-construction and

life-planning. Such counselling, verging on self-counselling, seems to be driven by the “become your own counsellor” motto (Pukelis, 2016, pp. 100–122).

Honouring the autonomy of “an emancipated individual,” counselling theorists attempt to outline only general methods of counselling practice. In proposing the basis of counselling, guidance and therapeutic interventions, some authors believe that the meeting with a pop-cultural client calls for dialogue (see Guichard, 2016, pp. 17–43; Drabik-Podgórná, 2009, pp. 103–124; Duarte, 2014, pp. 41–71/214–230) while others opt only for a less profound talk focused on “the here and now.” Consequently, the latter relinquish these counselling tenets that demand that a counselling meeting starts from diagnosing the client’s condition (as psychiatry and psychoanalysis would do, suspecting mental imbalance), from analysing and classifying his/her problems (as pedagogy and andragogy would do, assuming that he/she lacks knowledge or education) (cf. Szumigraj, 2004, pp. 145–150) or from inquiring into the social reasons behind his/her help-seeking (as sociology or social pedagogy would do, supposing family decay, emotional deficits in family life or inadequate life environment). In their view, contemporary clients seek easily applicable help that neither probes into the past nor requires profound changes in the ways they have lived so far. As a rule, instead of offering underpinnings for advice whose effects must be verified several times or guidelines which should be modified in successive meetings, they justify inspiring the client’s creative participation in a short-term counselling process with the focus on its immediate outcome, that is, on solving the client’s current problem (Leśniak, 1996; Milner & O’Byrne, 2007, and others).

On this model, counselling may just happen (Zielińska-Pękał, 2012, pp. 110–125/294–309), a meeting with a counsellor may become a performance of sorts² (Siarkiewicz, 2014, pp. 59–71/231–244), and the planned counselling relationship may be treated as a service one buys at a given price without being obliged to feel grateful to the service-provider.³ Counselling services should spare stress and provide clear and quick answers to questions that plague contemporary buyers-consumers. Hence, counselling is to be easily available on the market and measured by its momentary utility and attractiveness. Advice can pertain to various spheres of life and its assessment should be based on in how far its guidelines and recom-

² “First of all [...] performance does not need a purposefully separated space. Its strength lies in that it takes place absolutely everywhere and, always, on multiple planes. Secondly, its “audience,” who co-create it through active involvement, are more engaged than passive viewers. Thirdly, its themes are usually more mundane and real [...]” (Michalski, 2017).

³ Service is, by definition, immaterial, often incidental, selective, fragmentary, ephemeral and ad-hock (Rifkin, 2003).

mendations conform with the current fashion, as such conformity would in a way command observance (Kargulowa, 2014, pp. 121–132).

Clearly, in this case, theoretical foundations of counselling practice do not diverge from pop-cultural ideas. And given that, basically, an individual can use a counselling meeting as an opportunity of presenting him/herself to another person (counsellor), we could say that popular culture both provides a certain general vision of help for the *homo consultans* and explains the aim of entering a counselling relationship in which one can enact and live one's uniqueness. Popular culture grounds thus the multiple ambiguities of counselling.

USING POP-CULTURAL COUNSELLING

The *homo consultans* is a human seeking advice, using counselling and receiving advice from all corners. Experiencing insecurity/helplessness and starting an interpersonal relation with another person – a counsellor – the *homo consultans* displays his/her self-attitude (*sibi consulere*) and his view of this relation and, by relying on the mass media – television, the Internet, press and self-help literature – or just reading billboards and advertisements, he/she collects a massive amount of information which functions as guidelines, advice, recommendations and warnings (Siarkiewicz, 2010; Skałbania, 2012; 2015; Thomsen, 2016, pp. 25–48/191–213) and can induce his/her need to “become his/her own counsellor.” For the *homo consultans* must handle the excess and aggressive supply of information. As the counselling market's specialists in marketing try to be a step ahead of the client's demands, they introduce various counselling modifications, using, as Foucault would put it (1977, p. 100), a sophisticated “semio-technique” of helping. First of all, however, they are guided by the assumption that the counsellor's task is to make it *fun* (Minta & Kargul, 2016, pp. 210–220), as in the speeding, multithreaded pop-culture counselling must not “destroy” the image of reality by displaying people who regain their balance in life slowly and effortfully.

In traditional culture, people who could not cope with everyday challenges were believed to deserve compassion and to inspire others to offer help based on their altruism and empathy (Aronson, Wilson, & Akert, 2012). In popular culture, this “helplessness” (provided that it is not an artificial pose expressing a freely chosen, unique lifestyle) tends to elicit disapproval in others and low self-esteem in the individual him/herself. As Bauman observes (1991, p. 209), one that fails to be self-sufficient tends to be perceived as lacking diagnostic aptitudes, practical knowledge and skills. Persistent suffering is supposed to attest to one's inability

to find an appropriate helping expert. This is corroborated by the study of Szumigraj, who having asked counselling students *Describe a person you would like to help*, obtained answers pervaded by stereotypes of a “defective” person: helpless, unemployed, homeless, non-resourceful in life, addicted to drugs or other substances and tending to abuse others’ “kindness,” but rarely stirring compassion or readiness to help (Szumigraj, 2015, pp. 101–114).

Still, interventions offered by counsellors employed by institutions account for a mere fraction of the pop-cultural counselling boom. As in other sectors of social life, in counselling, the major role is played not only by the media or public space arrangements (posters, advertisements, billboards, etc.), but also by random inscriptions that serve as a special form of communication (Siarkiewicz, 2010, pp. 168–174). The dispersal and mediatisation of counselling have made Professor Jean Guichard inquire about its limits. The query has indeed inspired a multithreaded discussion, without rendering one, indisputable answer (Kargulowa, Czerkawska, Kłodkowska, Siarkiewicz, Zielińska-Pękał, & Zierkiewicz, 2013, pp. 17–41/193–216). Edyta Zierkiewicz’s research on self-help books (2004; 2001, pp. 75–89; 2016), Bogusław Śliwerski’s reflection on them (2015, pp. 15–29/195–208), studies on the role of the electronic media carried out by Daria Zielińska-Pękał (2002, pp. 161–177; 2008a, pp. 167–176; 2012, pp. 110–125/294–309), Joanna Kłodkowska (2016, pp. 40–62), Aneta Słowik (2016b, pp. 80–103) and others, all reveal the complexity of counselling, in particular of mediated counselling. Its power seems to reside in that it penetrates everyday life with all its details, even the most intimate ones, which in TV broadcasts is enhanced by the simultaneity of the image and the event. Its principle of transparency eliminates cultural, social, moral and physical barriers that have traditionally delimited the field of perception and the range of phenomena we have been able to experience. By this token, it enables individuals to participate, usually as spectators, in events they have been entirely unaware of or have found inaccessible. Studying counselling which has “conquered” the public social sphere, Daria Zielińska-Pękał observes that in taking advice people tend to act ritualistically or as “busy-bees,” i.e., unaware, without actually aiming to get it and watching TV or listening to the radio amidst a flurry of other activities (Zielińska-Pękał, 2008b, pp. 149–162). Addressing deferred advice and dismissal of advice offered in circumstances and forms unattractive to viewers while demanding a reflexive approach to issues (Zielińska-Pękał, 2008a, pp. 167–176), she seeks to show that TV broadcasts tend to generate problems (Zielińska-Pękał, 2002, pp. 161–177; 2012, pp. 110–125/294–309).

Popular culture, in which we are immersed, blurs the boundaries of direct-contact counselling and media-mediated counselling, of professional institutional

counselling organised by the state, the Church and NGOs and non-professional, informal counselling practised in everyday life. Advice is now given on demand, offered out of a sense of social duty, smuggled in media and “live” educational, entertainments and news programmes and imposed in advertisements, recipes, manuals of devices and instructions of use of substances, medicines, cosmetics, etc. Consequently, in pop-culture it is the way that the *homo consultans* defines and uses the communication received that alone determines what is and what is not counselling for him/her.

CONCLUSION

Popular culture shapes values, spurs needs and breeds specific desires. Participating in it, whether one accepts it fully, contests it or passively receives it, takes place in insecure, ambiguous and shockingly changing everydayness. As such, pop-culture makes most people confused and thwarts their self-identification. People clearly fail to navigate the world of surplus and specific consumption. If the pop-cultural *homo consultans* seeks sustainable development, stability, identification and a sense of belonging, all of which underpin identity and regulate the rhythm of life, he/she cannot give up on reflexivity and constant choice-making. Essential to these processes are, generally, such behaviours as collecting information, deciding what deserves our time, getting access to cultural resources and, finally, career designing. However, it seems impossible to acquire traditional forms of help in these pursuits. Hence, new ways of coping emerge alongside new forms of support for people faced with new kinds of problems produced by today’s realities. Frequently, this is expressed in modifying the existing caregiving, therapeutic and counselling interventions by making them immediate, transparent, fleeting, direct and, first of all, pleasurable. These changes are deeply relevant to constructing theories and practice of counselling. It turns out, however, that all these processes and moves are extremely complicated in the pop-cultural, opaque reality, which is reflected both in counselling practice and in the ways of building counselling – a science of counselling.

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