

**Edyta Zierkiewicz**  
University of Wrocław

## **Future counsellors' assessments of self-help books and their utility**

The paper presents the results of a study involving 50 education majors specialising in psycho-pedagogical counselling. The aim of the study was to find out what future counsellors knew of self-help books and how they assessed their usefulness in shaping one's future vocational role and/or in coping with one's problems. The students were first asked to complete a survey about attitudes towards self-help literature and, then, to read a self-help book of their choice. The findings reveal that reading self-help literature can effectively support self-development and informed decision-making about one's future career.

**Key words:** self-help books (advice books), counsellors, counsellological research

Public debates on advice literature (guides or, more specifically, self-help books) are a relatively new development in Poland even though the "genre" is anything but a novelty in our culture. The Polish term for "guide" – *przewodnik* – was probably coined in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Prior to that, people were more accustomed to seeking help from individual guides, i.e. the members of the public who provided advice to others, rather than through reading printed publications (cf. Linde and his definition of a "guide," 1858, p. 353: "One who gives advice, supports others"). The earliest instances of advice literature, however, can be traced as far back as to the 15<sup>th</sup> century. They are books whose authors, acting as guides, attempted to influence their audience's behaviours, lectured and gave advice on how to face up to new or difficult situations, or suggested the desired conduct patterns in a number of circumstances. Prime examples of what one would call an "advice book" today include medieval texts on *ars (bene) moriendi*, i.e. art of dying (well) (Włodarski, 1987; Rok, 1995a); Renaissance and later literature underpinned by the concept of *ars (bene) vivendi*, i.e. art of living (well) (Rok, 1995b); the entire body of hortatory and speculum literature, calendars and 17<sup>th</sup>-century letters (especially by fathers writing to their sons going abroad to study) (cf. Kargulowa, 1996, pp. 16-24); 18<sup>th</sup>-century books on good manners and proper conduct (Rok, 1998, pp. 77), etc.

Regardless of how advice- and guidance-giving literature was described, its main and universal purpose was to promulgate information from a particular field

of knowledge, information easily applicable in real life, formulable in a set of precepts (rationalisation principles; Czerniawska, 1973, pp. 85) and conforming to the norms of the day or the findings of contemporaneous science. Information disseminated through advice books was (and still is) of the run-of-the-mill variety: it referred to matters of everyday life and the impact of ascribed social roles on behaviours of various social actors. At the same time, self-help books aimed to increase the efficiency of relevant activities performed by their readers, thus facilitating the regulatory function of secondary socialisation. Educating readers about a given issue and its root causes, they advised for or against an action, persuaded, convinced, lectured, prescribed, suggested, directed, provided examples, asked specific questions and induced readers to mull over particular problems within a preconceived framework whilst their authors believed they only provided support, mobilised, encouraged, boosted self-esteem, empowered, etc.

It was not until the mid-1990s that self-help books came to be recognised by Polish researchers as a literary genre in its own right and deserving scholarly attention. They were rarely included in national readership surveys even though the latter were conducted as early as in the 1920s (cf. Szocki, 1986, pp. 15). Furthermore, they were not deemed a sufficiently useful tool in teaching adult students outside the formal education system (e.g. those who took self-paced training or attended pre- and post-war adult literacy courses). It was uncommon for opinions like the one below to be publicly voiced:

[r]eadership of weekly magazines was wider than that of books, including popular science publications, with the only exception of self-help books, which clearly appealed to many readers. This is suggested by a study of print runs and reissues of books of this genre, and of the frequency with which they were checked out from public libraries. Every self-help book is taken off the shelf and checked out by a library member at least six times per year, and advice books on medicine and parenting [also] garner a significant readership. (qtd. in Czerniawska, 1973, pp. 45-46).

Consequently, self-help books were situated, so to speak, on the margins of culture, outside the mainstream of the day, unlike in the United States, whose history is founded on the ideals of self-help and personal growth, self-determination and taking control over one's life – ideals constitutive of the American identity (Effing, 2009, p. 128; Lichterman, 1992). Therefore, it was unusual for anyone in Poland to admit to being a reader of such books. In spite of that, many publishers were

interested in printing them,<sup>1</sup> and they did so in, *toutes proportions gardées*,<sup>2</sup> impressive print runs.

Since no systematic research has been done on how self-help books were actually used in Poland – neither when they began to be published nor towards the end of the 1990s (arguably, there is no reliable research available even now<sup>3</sup>) – one can only use findings from andragogic studies (carried out by, among others, Olga Czerniawska and her student Kazimierz Zawadzki) to hypothesise about the reasons why people decided to read them, what effects their use produced, and how they affected the individuals and the culture that allowed them to thrive in the first place. The current assumption is that self-help books are a mirror of their times, reflecting their dominant trends, ideas, aspirations and phenomena (see, e.g. Effing, 2009; Jacyno, 2007). However, researching them, which requires, for example, a historical analysis of people's ordinary lives in the past, has only recently stopped being considered unnecessary, useless, trivial and pointless.

An increase in the number of studies on “self-help books” and, more importantly, a proliferation of advice publications available in bookshops conspicuously point to a steadily growing popularity of “self-help books.”

Soon after the major political changes of 1989, translations of American psychological self-help books, along with texts promoting positive thinking, became available for the first time to Polish readers. Until the mid-1990s, self-help books had been regarded as repositories of basic social knowledge and expected, primarily,

<sup>1</sup> Prior to the 1989 regime change, several advice book series were available to consumers, e.g. *Rodzina i dom* [Family and home] (Instytut Wydawniczy CRZZ), *Z budzikiem* [Alarm o'clock] (Krajowa Agencja Wydawnicza) and a few others by authors who turned self-help writing experts, such as Zbigniew Pietrański, Stefan Garczyński and Jerzy Wittlin, the latter actually ridiculing the convention (cf. e.g. *Vademecum dla lubiących doradzać* [Vade mecum for those who enjoy giving advice], 1978).

<sup>2</sup> Olga Czerniawska notes, with reference to *Nowości w bibliotekach publicznych* [New releases in public libraries] (Siekierski & Andukowicz, 1970), that *O karmieniu i pielęgnowaniu niemowląt* [On breastfeeding and infant care] by W. Szejnach, published in the *Advice for parents* series, had to be reissued eighteen times and totalled 1,440,000 sold copies. *Jak chronić dziecko przed chorobami zakaźnymi* [How to protect a child against infectious diseases] by Jan Bogdanowicz had to be reissued eleven times and was sold in 500,000 copies. It seems incredible today that the total print run of parenting advice books released between 1950 and 1970 by the Państwowy Zakład Wydawnictw Lekarskich [National Institute of Medical Publishers] alone amounted to 30 million copies, “which means that each Pole owned a popular booklet, most likely addressing family issues” (qtd. in Czerniawska, 1973, p. 46).

<sup>3</sup> Even though the National Library's regular quantitative studies on readership in Poland include self-help books (which are consistently ranked third; see, e.g. Strauss & Wolff, 1994), they are subsumed under quite a heterogenous category together with textbooks and reference books, which makes it impossible to conclude reliably about their social reach. Moreover, the NL's reports from recent years (each longer than 100 pages) mention the term “self-help book” only once, which precludes any conclusions about such publications and the public perception of them (cf. Michalak et. al., 2016; Koryś et. al., 2015).

to bridge both the social and the educational gaps<sup>4</sup> between the higher and the lower social strata. At their best, they could improve chances of attaining one's goals (learning the etiquette and emulating refined upper-class behaviours [See Czerniawska, 1973, p. 162; Kolbuszewski, 2006]). In the new realities, the freshly set-up publishing houses opened to their readers a world of as yet unknown opportunities, revealed secrets of a wealthy and/or happy life and invited to taste more than just a morsel of American culture with all its alluring openness and diversity.

In a somewhat surprising turn of events, while in the not so distant past authors resented their books being published under the "advice book" label, at present, the "self-help book" tag boasts a tremendous market power. Books of the genre abound on the shelves of any bookstore (especially in the psychology and education sections), new specialised publishers have appeared (e.g. Jacek Santorski & CO), and professionals have come to consider them a compelling or highly lucrative development, sparking new research ventures (See, e.g. Rok, 1998; Zierkiewicz, 2004; Piotrowska-Marchewa, 2006; Jacyno, 2007; Kędzierska, 2007; Gdula, 2009; Roćko, 2009; Stawiak-Ososińska, 2008; Jakubėnas, 2009; Fabiszak, 2010; Marzec, 2010; Nawrot-Borowska, 2012; Małek, 2012; Błachowicz, 2013; Ficek, 2013; Chrobak, 2015) and, sometimes, encouraging the professionals themselves to write self-help books (e.g. Mieścicka-Mellibruda, 1993; Fijewski, 1998; Wojdyłło, 2011; Eichelberger, 2014).

### **Current self-help literature: Definition and constitutive features**

Because of the sheer amount of publications currently available in bookstores under the "self-help" label, it seems appropriate to at least briefly describe the intrinsic features of these writings. Importantly, self-help books do not form a homogeneous literary genre (therefore rendering it more difficult to define the research field as such), which makes some researchers wary of defining them at all and inclined to assume that readers, when informed about the titles of the books under scrutiny, will intuitively know what type of publication is addressed (cf. Norcross et al., 2000). Other researchers avail themselves of trite ideas, proposing, for example, that a self-help book is any non-fiction and non-scientific publication written to make readers more aware of the deleterious aspects of contemporary culture and to inform them how reading the book helps stave off these challenges, as a result of which anyone will be able to take up new tasks and/or adopt a new attitude towards life and, thus, enjoy a more satisfying and prosperous day-to-day existence (Cheng,

---

<sup>4</sup> Mentioned in the foregoing, Czerniawska is one of the few researchers to have noticed an increase in the social demand for advice books (specifically, addressing family matters). She states that such publications "popularise knowledge about hygiene and medicine and provide practical advice, [because they are] informed by the assumption that even the best-educated individuals from the highest cultural strata are ill-equipped for infant care or first aid provision" (1973, p. 47).

2008, p. 2). Some academics phrase it more aptly: self-help books are those that raise a problem in the title and present a way to solve it in the subtitle, e.g. *End of codependence: How to stop controlling others' lives and take care of oneself* (Neville, 2008, pp. 219-220).

In broad terms, self-help books (a category that at times also includes some periodicals and special websites) contain step-by-step solutions to solving difficulties defined in their titles, and they are advertised as *the* solution to a given problem.

The narrative, so to speak, of some self-help books revolves around a “pathology” as their aim is to elucidate the nature of an aberration to a reader who potentially struggles with its repercussions or to explain how the problem affects one’s daily life. The authors often assume that by giving a name to (i.e. diagnosing) a difficulty that limits the choices available in a person’s life or that otherwise disrupts its course, they will convince their readers that the problem is not insurmountable and immune to the actions they take. To the contrary: they claim that readers alone will be able to recognise these problems (e.g. timidity, submissiveness, etc.) and, aided by targeted reflection coupled with perfected emotional-intelligence, to keep them at bay or to bring them under control. Moreover, readers can legitimately expect the promised change to stand the test of time and its positive effects to be reflected in various spheres of life as it will affect an essential part of their identity (who they are) or address the issues precluding their self-fulfilment (the way they would like to live).

Other self-help books emphasise the ways of coping with a particular problem and/or the end result of seeking advice, not so much identifying the cause of a life crisis or other recurring issues as rather developing strategies of confronting it/them head-on. In such instances, the readers are expected to acquire knowledge essential to learning certain methods of action to be implemented – less successfully at first, but more so with time – in the nearest future. Having mastered them, everybody will be able to overcome any obstacles that might come their way (e.g. problem-solving skills related to childrearing acquired when the kids are young are equally important, if not more relevant, in their adolescence and even adulthood). Additionally, it is presumed that learning and honing certain skills will help the readers develop a sense of agency, competence, responsibility, independence and autonomy.

Thus, if the purpose of self-help books is to bolster the readers’ mental capacity for action (because this is where the origin of the problem purportedly lies) or to rationalise those actions, “manage” them (because many people desire efficacy), and if publications combining both goals are not uncommon, a *sui generis* continuum emerges along which all self-help books can be located, depending on the scope of help they promise to deliver.

Besides their authors’ intentionally expressed desire to help the readers become aware of the causes of their difficulties and/or learn to cope with them, self-help books carry a promise of future successes and convey a practically-oriented message. Their readers are often assured that the presented advice (guidance, instructions, information, etc.) is useful and are encouraged to employ it in real life. It

is precisely its “usability,” or its close fit with the readers’ needs, that tends to determine the place the genre is given in professional and nonprofessional rankings though, admittedly, this is not the only assessment criterion.<sup>5</sup>

Self-help books also commonly foster a para-social interaction that resembles a direct relationship between a counsellor and a counselee (see Zierkiewicz, 2004). Like clients of counsellors and psychotherapists, readers seek answers to such questions as: What is wrong with me? What should I do with my problem, how should I deal with it? The authors of self-help books assume that the issues will be addressed by the content of their works through presenting operationalisable solutions. Authors inclined to convince, instruct, give directions, or urge their readers to act edge towards directive counselling. Authors more focused on illuminating problems, encouraging, stimulating serious considerations, commending, inspiring, facilitating the experience of certain emotions, etc., embrace liberal counselling. Authors promoting profound situation-analysis, pondering over values, asking open questions, eliciting action, sharing experiences, allowing the partner-cum-counselee to “join” the conversation (e.g. by leaving an empty page for the reader’s own thoughts) establish contacts characteristic of discursive counselling (cf. Kargulowa, 1986, pp. 13-28; Wojtasik, 1993, pp. 55-65). Regardless of the kind of interaction between the “mediated” counsellors/guides and their “literary” clients, self-help books typically make use of rhetorical devices fostering such interplay: direct language (a casual, fluent style, imitative of real *tête-à-tête* meetings), straightforward address-forms breaching social conventions (the informal “you”) and second-person singular verbs (Fabiszak, 2010; cf. Ficek, 2003). All this is done to engage the prospective readers.

Besides the characteristics delineated above, there are also other essential features of self-help books. Namely, they are easily obtainable and relatively cheap (especially as compared with the cost of direct professional help); they adopt a short-term perspective (i.e. they do not require regular sessions with a specialist continued sometimes over a few years); they are based on self-imposed dictates (readers obey the authors’ prescriptions voluntarily); they are personally managed (i.e. it is expected of the reader to perform a self-diagnosis, to personally monitor the course of reading/self-help and to assess the overall progress) and anonymous (they help avoid the embarrassment of having to reveal one’s problem or deficiency to a stranger). Self-help books tackle the most obvious and the most uncommon topics/problems: ones deemed too trivial to speak about with a psychotherapist or ones which deviate too far from the norm and may therefore morph uncontrollably into a stigma (Popiołek, 1995; Starker, 1986). Crucially – and this may come

---

<sup>5</sup> Recently, negative readerly responses have been triggered in Poland by Beata Pawlikowska’s self-help book *Wyszłam z niemocy i depresji. Ty też możesz* [I overcame powerlessness and depression. And so can you]. Many of the opinions were voiced by regular users and concerned the purported efficacy of the method advocated by the author as well as her unfounded claims replete with potentially harmful, nonsensical beliefs (cf. Bańkowska and Przybyszewski’s comments on the text, 2016).

as a surprise to the disparagers of the genre – self-help books are instrumental in establishing or strengthening relationships (when they are discussed by acquaintances, friends and family, or when they are borrowed or gifted) and in deciding to seek further help (as authors of self-help books often advocate the therapeutic ideology, they encourage their readers to buy other books and/or to see a therapist) (see Lichterman, 1992).

It seems, however, that readers of self-help books are ready to invest more time and effort in following their guidance than both the authors and the detractors of such literature presume. Rather than wishing to swiftly “get to the heart of the matter” and put the book aside as quickly as possible, the readers are keen to diligently broaden their minds and better understand matters essential to them. This is suggested in the 2012 Readership Survey conducted in Poland by the National Library. Its authors observed that “it is rare for Poles to read self-help books for the purpose of dealing with a particular difficulty. More often than not, such books are perceived as a means to stimulate self-development and enhance one’s knowledge and also as a pleasurable pastime” (Dawidowicz-Hynkowska & Michalak, 2015 qtd. in Harbuz-Karczmarewicz, 2017).

In summary, self-help books provide their readers with an enticing message; they meet their demands (and societal demands as well) which cannot be met by other cultural artefacts. They are easily accessible and comprehensible, encourage learning and self-therapy and facilitate re-adaptation and self-growth. Given this, it should not come as a surprise that, despite an overall decrease in readership of both books and magazines,<sup>6</sup> a stable, if not increased, interest in the self-help genre is observable among the Polish population (Wolff, 2009; Molicka, 2008, p. 30).<sup>7</sup> Moreover, this seems to have been a worldwide trend in the last two decades (cf. Furedi, 2004; Wolff & Straus, 1996).

As criticism levelled at such literature should not be ignored, the most common objections are presented below. Self-help books are criticised for the colloquial, even banal language used to convey their message (Śliwerski, 2015), for supporting

<sup>6</sup> Thirty seven percent of respondents reported reading at least one book in 2015. In 2009, Katarzyna Wolff wrote (p. 1) that the beginning of a decline in readership could be traced back to 1992, when systematic research on readership was launched. The drop encompasses both a lowered intensity of reading (between 1994 and 2004) and an overall decline in the number of readers (from 58% in 2004 to 50% in 2006, 38% in 2008 and 37% in 2015 – with the reservation that the total number of so-called “intense readers,” i.e. those who read more than 7 books every year, dropped from 22% in 2002 to 11% in 2012 and only 8% in recent years; see: Michalak, et. al. 2016, p. 15-16). It remains to be seen whether the reason for the decrease lies in a peculiar fad of not-reading or whether the respondents are simply bolder in admitting to a lack of interest in “high-culture entertainment.”

<sup>7</sup> In 2008, readers’ most frequent choice was popular novels (of manners/romance – 18% and crime/thriller – 15%, as compared with reference/self-help books – 14%; Wolff, 2009, p. 1), but among single-genres, self-help books were clearly the most common choice (23% as compared with textbooks and obligatory school readings – 15%, novels of manners – 13%, books for children and young adults – 10% and thrillers – 9%) (Wolff, 2009, p. 1-2).

the currently dominant ideologies (first and foremost, gender stereotypes and gender inequality [see, e.g. Schrage, 1993; Singleton, 2004]), for disseminating harmful beliefs (e.g. “all problems can be solved,” “we get what we deserve,” hence, “only we are to blame for the situation we are in”), for proposing simple solutions to complex problems (Gokhale, 2012) and for denying scientifically verified claims. Importantly, however, the readership rates do not fall despite the grave accusations against self-help books. At best, criticism makes it more difficult to agree on the reasons why the public choose to read them in the first place, and whether reading a self-help book translates into any tangible results. What is more, such denunciations are often extended beyond the “genre” itself, and serve as a useful tool for upbraiding advice literature readers, or, at the very least, they make it easier to dismiss the readers’ opinions about motivations behind their decisions to use such publications and about the impact of self-help literature on their daily lives.

The aim of this paper is to discuss factors that make self-help books valuable in the respondents’ opinions. Below, I present the methodology of my research and proceed to analyse my findings, concluding that they corroborate other researchers’ insights about effectiveness of self-help books.

### **Research methodology and aims**

Normally, reading self-help books is a private matter as no external force dictates the readers’ choice (triggered by either an acknowledged want or an impulse), and the reading itself takes place in leisure time. Fairly often, though apparently less so in Poland, professional therapists and education staff use self-help guides when working with their clients (cf. Starker, 1988). Notably, psychotherapists and bibliotherapists are aware that weekly (or even less frequent) meetings do not always produce the desired outcomes in their clients’ lives and that the most lasting and constructive changes take place in personal, every-day realities (also for those who do not seek professional help; Prochaska, 1995; Markwith-Grzyb, 2012). For this reason, some therapists rely on ostensibly nontherapeutic strategies in their interventions, when helping or instructing their clients how to negotiate goal-achievement (cf. Lampropoulos & Spengler, 2005).

Western therapists seem to accept self-help books and openly recommend them to their clients. Numerous studies suggest that such literature is highly effective (e.g. in coping with divorce, depression or loss and, the other way round, in enhancing the self, relaxation skills and self-control [Ogles, et. al., 1991] as well as in overcoming fear and correcting dysfunctional behaviours [Martinez-Serrano & Sierra, 2005]). Moreover, the market has recently seen a surge of specialised guides advising therapists on the selection of books suited to assist their clients with specific problems (cf. e.g. Katz & Sternberg-Katz, 1985; Fried & Schultis, 1995; Norcross, et. al., 2000). Clearly, therapists do not need count on chance or intuition anymore

and need to be assured that given publication is actually relevant to their needs. Additionally, many professionals believe that self-help books are valuable sources of practical knowledge, all the more so when they resort to publications specifically addressed to them, such as *Helpen macht müde* by J. Fengler or *The gift of therapy: An open letter to a new generation of therapists and their patients* by I. Yalom (also published in Poland).

The aim of my research was to find out how self-help literature was assessed by future counsellors, i.e. education majors specialising in psycho-pedagogical counselling. An implicit goal of the research was also to raise the students' awareness (1) of self-help phenomena in Poland, which, depending on the students' initial perception of self-help books, might supplement their ways of providing professional help in the future or be a counter-discourse tempering their efforts; and (2) of potential benefits of reading self-help literature in coping with personal issues and envisioning their (future) professional careers. Still, the research aimed primarily to elicit the future counsellors' general assessments of self-help books, to identify publications of this kind they were familiar with and establish what they had learned from them. In the central stage of the research, the respondents were to read and critically analyse a self-help book of their choice. As a result, reports on the effects of implementing the self-help book's instructions were produced. Additionally, the students filled in a survey questionnaire on their general opinions about self-help literature (Self-Help Reading Attitudes Survey, SHRAS). The questionnaire was developed on the basis of an article by Dawn Wilson and Thomas Cash (2000).

### **Assessments of self-help books: Analysis of results**

The study was carried out in the academic year 2015/2016. It involved 50 participants, whereof the majority were females (94%) aged 20 to 46 (mean age 24.6). Most respondent (92%) admitted that they had read at least one self-help book in the previous five years. This, however, did not mean that they appreciated such literature, especially not as a means of helping oneself and/or others (no one stated that, in the initial stage of the research, four weeks before the main stage in which they were to read a chosen book). Furthermore, 22% of the participants regarded self-help books as a viable alternative to psychotherapy, and 91% declared that they knew better ways of helping others than encouraging them to read such books. At the same time, they did not believe that self-help books were dangerous or harmful to readers (only four participants agreed with such assessment), difficult to read or productive of disquiet or discomfort.

Most participants declared that they had been reading self-help guides for a long time, even before enrolling in their programmes. Mostly, their purpose was to find particular information and practical advice (e.g. on negotiation techniques, breeding and training of pedigree dogs, new games to play with their children,

infant care, etc.); however some consulted such literature when faced with psychological difficulties (to discover and understand the reasons behind failures in their intimate relationships) and even to organise their spiritual exercises.

Contrary to the findings of P. Lichterman (1992), who argued that talking about self-help books might foster relationships, the respondents said that they were not interested in sharing insights about the advice books they read. However, if a conversation on such topics were initiated, 46% would be willing to hear others' opinions.

The survey results turned out to be incongruent. Besides the cited inconsistencies, surveys showed that most participants (91%) did not consider self-help books a useful vehicle for help-provision. At the same time, they thought that reading such books could be interesting (63%), that one could learn something useful from them (96%) and that reading them could induce reflection (54%), trigger change (74%) and even offer real insights (62%).

Results of the survey were inconsistent with what the personal reports seemed to suggest. The reports, in which the students described their experience of reading a self-help book, did not reveal ambivalent attitudes towards such literature. Four people who disliked self-help books had never read any prior to the study and were guided mainly by fear-underpinned but not firmly entrenched prejudice.

*Nie bój się życia* [Don't be afraid of life] by Katarzyna Miller was given to me as a gift by my husband's mom when our son appeared in our life and turned it upside down. I had been sceptical about it (because I don't like publications with such titles) until I actually started to read it. The book is about regular existential problems we all face, so I soon found something for myself in it. I think that at that point in time this self-help book helped me restore order in my life.

Self-help books are not always read from cover to cover. Readers cannot also be assumed to assimilate all of their content. Besides, even if one comes to find a given book important (be it for a short time only), it does not happen immediately as reading takes time, thought and analysis, compelling one to appraise different pieces of information, etc.

When reading a self-help book, you can stop and look deeply inside you, at your own life, analyse your priorities and see some things in an entirely different light. For me, *You don't have to be the best: A guide for women addicted to success* was the most important self-help book. It made me ask myself what the most important things in my life were and why I was actually rushing through life so quickly.

This is especially true of self-help books that urge their readers to implement the proposed concepts in particular areas of life or, to at least, to perform

the recommended exercises. The assessment of merits of a self-help book depends on the changes expected to follow actions undertaken in keeping with its instructions.

Notably, the respondents' reports revealed critical attitudes towards the content of self-help books. As time went by, experience accumulated and changes happened in their lives, even those who had been fascinated by and first gave in mindlessly to their persuasive message scrutinised the authors' promises, discerned flaws in the visions unfolded before them and saw "cracks" in the discourse as well as unfounded claims (e.g. simplicity, excessive generalisations, the authors' tendency to impose their belief systems).

I eagerly read self-help books when I was pregnant. I wanted to know everything about raising children, giving birth and about all the matters related to motherhood. I thought of all the advice as valuable. Now, however, when I'm a mom, I believe that the advice books misinformed me about many things. I can't say that no information proved useful, because I did use it, but on my own example I can definitely say that self-help books have to be taken with more than a grain of salt sometimes. One shouldn't just automatically accept everything. In the books on pregnancy and motherhood, I've noticed sweeping generalisations. All of them aimed to prove that all women feel the same when pregnant, that all children are the same at a given development stage. This just isn't true; each pregnancy is different, and children aren't all the same. Self-help books lack an individual perspective and should avoid generalising everything, sketching everything in broad lines.

A positive assessment is sometimes prompted by one sufficiently practical piece of advice, one apt explanation of a problem or one appropriate recommendation. This is the reason why even if other suggestions are considered useless or inadequate, a self-help book can still be appreciated to a degree.

I have read many self-help books in my life; I still have a number of them on my bookshelves. *Droga do zdrowia* [The road to health] by Tombak is a book I no longer have in my collection, but I do think about it, because it meant a lot to me back in the day. Several years ago I worked pretty closely with it. I still use much of its advice, but some of the guidelines it gave were, to my eye, weird. I have mixed feelings about them. However, I've never focused too much on them; I've skipped them, and they were not interesting to me.

Sometimes the opposite was the case:

Until recently I only had a few self-help books in my hands. I don't see any value in reading them. I agree that they can help, but personally, if I need help, I speak to my mom, sister, friend, or I speak to a person who is an expert in

the field related to my problem. Frankly speaking, I don't read self-help books for help, but out of curiosity.

Sometimes, the respondents disapproved of the promises made by the authors of self-help books, especially when the values expressed in the promises were incompatible with the participants' own values and beliefs.

From my personal experience of reading self-help books, I remember *The Secret* by Rhonda Byrne especially well. I don't consider myself someone who can say anything about the efficacy of following the advice coming from that book. It claims that there is an easy and generally accessible way of achieving happiness and everything else we might want in our lives. You just need to know the "secret"... I think, however, that if you want to be successful, to have a fulfilled life, it won't be enough to just learn about the "secret," you need to work hard and be patient. This is, of course, my personal and subjective opinion, and others may have a different one.

The sample statements cited above imply that, instead justifying their scepticism about self-help literature declared in the questionnaire, the respondents rather revealed a somewhat critical, but still positive attitude to it. It turned out that they have quite a lot of contact with such publications: on the average, the participants read had four self-help books in the past 5 years.<sup>8</sup> What is more, they readily acted as reflective researchers-counsellors and began to evaluate the "genre" as a means of self-development and/or successful counselling performance.

As already mentioned, in the main stage of the research the respondents chose each a self-help book to read and reflect on their future professional role and/or work on the individually chosen personality traits central to the counselling profession. Gerald Corey's idea of two fundamental components of the counsellor identity served as a starting point for this assignment. The two elements are: (1) specialised knowledge and professional skills; and (2) values, conduct and personality. Both must be consciously developed in order to help the clients, to enhance the counsellor's professional acumen and to prevent occupational burnout (Corey, 2005, pp. 36-69). Study reports and self-evaluation notes were the final products at this stage.

---

<sup>8</sup> The research participants cited almost 200 publications of this kind. Besides the already mentioned ones, they also listed: a negotiation guide by A. Pinet, *Entertaining & educating babies & toddlers* by C. Young, *Gardener's guide, 100 ideas for a pretty garden, How to become a good mother, Success is in your hands* by A. J. Palla, *Zmień życie z Ewą Chodakowską* [Change your life with Ewa Chodakowska] by Ewa Chodakowska, *How to talk so kids will listen and listen so kids will talk* by A. Faber and E. Mazlish, *The magic of thinking big* by D. Schwartz, *Why men love bitches* by S. Argov and *How to win any argument*. They did not always remember the authors or even the titles of the books they read; in such instances, they tried to describe them in general terms: self-help books for pregnant women, self-help books on natural and alternative medicine, self-help books about healing the soul, cookbooks, self-help books on health and beauty, etc.

Among the books the respondents chose to read were books on personality and coping with personal struggles (e.g. *Learning to love yourself: Finding your self-worth* by Sharon Wegscheider-Cruse, *Zaproszenie do życia* [An invitation to life] by Ewa Woydyłło, *How to be happy (or at least less sad): A creative workbook* by Lee Crutchley, *Jak rozwinąć skrzydła* [Spreading your wings] by Piotr Fijewski and *God knows you're grieving: Things to do to help you through* by Joan Guntzelman) as well as books supposed to crystallise the participants' concepts of their future professional roles, i.e. offering specialist knowledge and support in acquiring the relevant skills (e.g. *Krokodyl dla ukochanej. Warto wspierać rozwój mężczyzny* [A crocodile for the loved one: Supporting men's development] by Jacek Pulikowski, *How to talk so teens will listen and listen so teens will talk* by Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish, *Anoreksja od A do Z, Przewodnik dla nauczycieli i wychowawców* [Anorexia from A to Z: A guide for teachers and educators] by Beata Ziółkowska, *Thou shalt not be aware: Society's betrayal of the child* by Alice Miller and *Jak rozmawiać z tymi, co stracili nadzieję* [How to speak to those who lost hope] by Krzysztof Jedliński).

Below are two examples of insights from this stage of the research:

I began to search for a self-help book meeting my unusual needs – being aware of the problems I face every day, but not being able to pinpoint their source. I glanced through a number of titles and descriptions of self-help guides. This method led me to the “assertiveness” section. I came to see this character trait as an attractive object to analyse and particularly interesting in terms of developing it myself. (...) What I expected from reading the book was to become more confident and less stressed out about events over which I have little or no control, to find strength to say “yes” or “no” whenever I want to and feel that it's good for me. A lack of assertiveness leads to heightened fear and anxiety, which I would like to get rid of or at least keep under control.

The self-help book of my choice was written for therapists, and, indeed, going through it was difficult at the beginning, because I came across a lot of concepts I saw for the first time in my life, which meant that I needed to educate myself about them before moving forward with the book. On the whole, I expected something else from a self-help book. This was the first self-help publication in my life. I expected ready-made solutions to different life problems, but nothing of that sort was to be found in it. There were too many theoretical notions, historical references and fairy tale analyses. After reading it, I became more convinced that each case is different, and when working with other people you can't just follow a predefined framework. Apart from that, I agree that even if an adult's behaviour can be justified by difficult childhood experiences, one has to take into account what they could have gone through and how that has affected their psyche. If someone wants to be a good therapist, they can't treat each case in the same way and shouldn't ignore their client's personal history. It's important not to allow the client's problems to overwhelm you or

to get too engaged in the client's personal situation. In your professional life, you have to be able to keep a safe distance from the client, otherwise you'll end up hurting all the parties.

As the respondents could choose a self-help book of their own liking, they could be expected to display a greater interest in the book's content and to get more involved in the reading process. In general, everyone considered reading a self-help book an interesting and important experience. Most participants saw a potential for real-life applications of the advice, dictums and tips they had come across; some even went as far as to state that they had already had some success with it (e.g. greater ease in establishing relationships due to suggestions from *How to win friends and influence people* by Dale Carnegie). Everyone also agreed that the language of self-help books (personal, direct, cordial, lucid) was their considerable advantage as it facilitated remembering the relevant concepts, triggered serious considerations and was emotionally stimulating. In a similar fashion, the participants expressed their approval of the way in which the books' content was organised (clear structure, consistent message, highlighted sections of the text, etc.). It also turned out that, unlike the genre's critics, the reflective and discerning readers found the information conveyed by the books their big advantage.

I am delighted that the author aimed to effect a gradual transformation of my beliefs and cognitive structures, without introducing entirely new ideas into my life that could upset my understanding of the world, or be at loggerheads with the value system I cherish. The new elements were brought in based on what I already knew, which is why I didn't see it as drastic or sudden.

Interesting though all these observations may be, the study was originally designed to find out how the respondents assessed self-help books (in particular, their educational and therapeutic impact), that is, how the reading process affected the two facets of the professional counsellor identity mentioned in the foregoing. Research reports indicate that the students focused either on the professional dimension of their future occupation (hence, they spoke about acquiring new knowledge or enhancing their expertise) or on the personality dimension (hence, they wrote at length about developing certain attitudes or modes of conduct). Some underscored that they had learnt about new phenomena and raised their awareness of a variety of human life problems; sometimes it was important for them to find their university knowledge corroborated by the self-help book. Others were satisfied with nudging themselves to systematic effort, being motivated enough to undertake new actions and mustering the courage they needed to accomplish their plans and attain a greater self-confidence. They were also pleased with acquiring new interpersonal skills or employing them more effectively.

Below, I quote at length four statements that show how the respondents made sense of their assignment:

I am pleasantly surprised with the effects of reading the self-help book of my choice. It became a source of change I hadn't expected at all. I had tried many times to motivate myself to action, positive thinking, physical activity, etc. but was never able to persevere in my commitments. This is why I was sceptical about working with a self-help book; I was almost certain that, as always, no lasting change was going to take place. In this case, however, from the very beginning I felt strangely calm. The time slowed down and only I was important. I was surprised by this feeling, which was really pleasant. Even though I had not met the author of the book in person, I felt as if I was really talking with him. I quickly grasped what he was saying and felt that he had chosen the content with only my needs in mind. At times, it felt funny that he was able to influence me so easily. However, I have to admit that everything worked the way he'd planned. I know that I took his recommendations seriously, and I think that this allowed me to accomplish many goals. I noticed that I was starting to subconsciously transpose the mood the reading of this book had evoked in me onto other ordinary activities. Despite some minor setbacks, I kept smiling. It was a sign of an enormous success for me. I've learned to push my problems out of my head. The exercises presented in the book have taught me view these problems as less important. I've attained a peace of mind which allows me to focus more on my job than on the things I can't control.

I've noticed that I began to treat myself with more understanding and started to leave myself more room for mistakes. In my personal relations, I try to treat everyone with due respect, but now I also take into consideration my own views, needs and values so as to live in harmony with myself. While it happened a lot to me in the past, I think now I've stopped convincing myself that what I'm doing doesn't have to be good for me because what's important is that others should be happy, and when they are, I'll finally be content. But I think I never was. I take care of myself more now and I accept who I am more than before.

The self-help book gave me a lot of knowledge on how I should cope with my feelings, where they come from, what to do to shake them off, how to cope with the feelings without hurting others and myself, how to become an emotionally mature person, how to overcome fear, shame (when taking risk) and how to start making free choices, stand up for what I consider legitimate beliefs and not limit my chances for growth.

Thanks to this self-help book I realised how limited my knowledge of human problems and of the ways of solving them was. A lot of things still shock me, even if I know that they happen every day. Hence, I realise that as a counsellor it would be too soon for me to speak to people who have experienced a lot of bad things in their lives. On the other hand, I've taken interest in psychoanalysis, and in the future I intend to learn more about it and work on being able

to use it in my professional life. I think that my curiosity about psychoanalysis and working with people may help me find my own place in professional life and guide my future work.

### Conclusion

Noticeably, the research participants appreciated various elements of their assignment. They addressed the importance of issues tackled in self-help books (and the way these issues were framed), their “interaction” with the book (dialoguing with its author, establishing internal monologue methods), the style of working with such books (structured and proactive approach), their commitment to the task and the preparation their programme had given them for the exercise. Self-analysis and reflection on their future professional role led most participants to conclude that self-help books could stimulate self-development and provide valuable information on how to work with other people. Given this, it should also be added that even when expressing some concerns, the respondents did not refer to the efficacy of advice or truthfulness of information (because they could critically assess that on their own), but to the duration of the rather laboriously achieved “self-help effect” (e.g. raised self-confidence, awareness of previously unknown problems, heightened motivation to act). This means that students training for helping professions can be inspired by self-help books on how to become reflective counsellors and what counselling studies could be worth undertaking at present.

Translated by Karol Maślany

### References

- Bańkowska, A. & Przybyszewski, B. (2016). Pawlikowska nową książką „leczy” z depresji. Chorzy: „To niebezpieczne bzdury.” I opowiadają swoje historie [Pawlikowska “cures” depression with her new book. Patients say: “This hogwash is dangerous.” And they tell their stories]. *Gazeta Wyborcza*. <http://wiadomosci.gazeta.pl/wiadomosci/7,114883,20891703,beata-pawlikowska-nowa-ksiazka-leczy-z-depresji-to-bzdury.html> Retrieved 5 November 2016.
- Błachowicz, E. (2013). Oddaję do rąk czytelnika książkę, która pomoże ustrzec się choroby – wstęp w dawnym i współczesnym poradniku zdrowia [I bestow this book upon the readers’ hands, assured that it will help them avoid any disease: Therole of introductions in old and modern health guides]. *Słowo. Studia językoznawcze*, 4, 35-52.
- Cheng, M. (2008). The selves of self-help books: Framing, argument, and audience construction for social and autonomous selves. *Lore*, 6(2), 1-27.
- Chrobak, K. (2015). Poradnik w (nie)dobrym stylu. Literatura poradnikowa – na wybranych czeskich i polskich przykładach w ujęciu aksjologicznym [A self-help book in bad

- taste: An axiological view of self-help literature based on selected examples of Czech and Polish translations]. *Bohemistyka*, 3, 269-286.
- Corey, G. (2005). *Teoria i praktyka poradnictwa i psychoterapii* [Theory and practice of counseling and psychotherapy]. (K. Mazurek, Trans.). Poznań, PL: Zysk i S-ka. (Original work published 2001).
- Czerniawska, O. (1973). *Poradnictwo kulturalno-wychowawcze: Problemy i formy działania* [Cultural and educational counselling: Issues and intervention forms]. Warszawa, PL: Instytut Wydawniczy CRZZ.
- Effing, M. M. (2009). The origin and development of self-help literature in the United States. The concept of success and happiness: An overview. *ATLANTIS: Journal of the Spanish Association of Anglo-American Studies*, 31(2), 125-141.
- Eichelberger, W. (2014). *Pomóż sobie, daj światu odetchnąć* [Help yourself, and give the world a break]. Warszawa PL: Wyd. Drzewo Babel.
- Fabiszak, J. (2010). O językowej deprecjacji potencjalnego klienta na przykładzie tytułów polskich i angielskich poradników [On the linguistic depreciation of potential clients: Selected examples of Polish and English self-help books.]. *Poznańskie Studia Językowe*, 17, 11-24.
- Fengler, J. (2000). *Pomaganie męczy. Wypalenie w pracy zawodowej* [Helfen macht müde. Zur Analyse und Bewältigung von Burnout und beruflicher Deformation/Helping exhausts: Analysing and addressing occupational burnout] (K. Pietruszewski, Trans.). Gdańsk, PL: GWP. (Original work published 1996).
- Ficek, E. (2013). *Poradnik. Model gatunkowy i jego tekstowe aktualizacje* [The self-help book: The generic and its textual revision.]. Katowice, PL: Wyd. UŚ.
- Fijewski, P. (1998). *Jak rozwinąć skrzydła* [Spreading your wings.]. Warszawa, PL: W.A.B.
- Fried, S.B. & Schultis, G.A. (1995). *The best self-help and self-awareness books: A topic-by-topic guide to quality information*. Chicago & London: American Library Association.
- Furedi, F. (2004). We are losing the book habit. *The Telegraph*. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/3343323/We-are-losing-the-book-habit.html>. Retrieved 5 November 2016.
- Gdula, M. (2009). *Trzy dyskursy miłosne* [Three discourses about love]. Warszawa, PL: Oficyna Naukowa.
- Gokhale, M. (2012). *Simplification in contemporary self-help literature*. Paper read at the International Conference on Society, Humanity and History in Singapore, 23-24 July 2012. <http://www.ipedr.com/vol44/019-ICSHH2012-W00031.pdf> Retrieved 5 November 2016.
- Harbuz-Karczarewicz, N. (2017). Szczęście w trzy dni. W niektórych poradnikach psychologicznych można wyczytać głupie, szkodliwe i nieprawdziwe treści [Happiness in three days: Some psychological self-help books convey foolish, harmful and mendacious messages]. *Gazeta Wyborcza*. <http://weekend.gazeta.pl/weekend/1,152121,21198527,szczescie-w-trzy-dni-w-poradnikach-psychologicznych-mozna.html> Retrieved 15 January 2017.
- Jacyno, M. (2007). *Kultura indywidualizmu* [The culture of individualism]. Warszawa, PL: PWN.

- Jakubėnas, R. (2009). Reklama poradników w prasie wileńskiej w II połowie XVIII w [Advertisements of self-help books in the Vilnius press in the latter half of the XVIII century]. *Kalbotyra*, 2, 266-277.
- Kargulowa, A. (1986). *Poradnictwo jako wiedza i system działań: Wstęp do poradownictwa* [Counselling as a source of knowledge and a system of interventions: An introduction to counselling]. Wrocław, PL: Wyd. UWr.
- Kargulowa, A. (1996). *Przeciw bezradności: Nurty, opcje, kontrowersje w poradnictwie i poradownictwie* [Against helplessness: Trends, options and controversies in counselling and counselling]. Wrocław, PL: Wyd. UWr.
- Katz, B. & Sternberg-Katz, L. (1985). *Self-help: 1400 best books on personal growth*. New York, NY & London, UK: R. R. Bowker Company.
- Kędzierska, J. (2007). Instruktorzy życia szczęśliwego. Fenomen współczesnych poradników – wybrane aspekty [Instructors of happy life: Selected aspects of the modern self-help book phenomenon]. *Global Media Journal – Polish Edition*, 1, 99-116.
- Kolbuszewski, J. (2006). Poradnik towarzyski [Savoir-vivre books]. In T. Żabski (Ed.), *Słownik literatury popularnej* (pp. 441-444). Wrocław, PL: Wyd. UWr.
- Koryś, I., Michalak, D. & Chymkowski, R., (2015). *Stan czytelnictwa w Polsce w 2014 roku* [The state of readership in Poland in 2014]. <http://ksiegarnia.bn.org.pl/pdf/Stan%20czytelnictwa%20w%20Polsce%20w%202014%20roku.pdf> Retrieved 5 November 2016.
- Lampropoulos, G.K. & Spengler, P.M. (2005). Helping and change without traditional therapy: Commonalities and opportunities. *Counseling Psychology Quarterly*, 18(1), 47-59.
- Lichterman, P. (1992). Self-help reading as a thin culture. *Media, Culture & Society*, 3, 421-447.
- Linde, B.S. (1858). *Słownik języka polskiego* [Dictionary of the Polish language] vol. 4. Lwów: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich.
- Małek, A. (2012). Tradycyjne i nowatorskie myślenie o dziecku w poradnikach wychowawczych z okresu Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej [Traditional and innovative approaches to children in educational guides of the inter-war period]. *Przegląd Pedagogiczny*, 1, 213-223.
- Markwith-Grzyb, N. (2012). Źródła wsparcia dla kobiet w rozwiązywaniu problemów wywołanych klimakterium [Sources of support for women in solving menopause-related problems]. *Nowiny Lekarskie*, 3, 197-202.
- Martinez-Serrano, P. & Sierra, J. C. (2005). Efecto de la lectura de material de autoayuda sobre algunas variables psicológicas en una muestra no clinica [The effect of reading self-help resources on selected psychological variables in a non-clinical sample.]. *Universitas Psychologica Bogotá*, 4(2), 197-203.
- Marzec, J. (2010). O samorealizacji w epoce „instant” [On self-realization in the “instant” age] *Teraźniejszość – Człowiek – Edukacja*, 2, 23-34.
- Michalak, D., Koryś, I., & Kopeć, J. (2016). *Stan czytelnictwa w Polsce w 2015 roku: Wstępne wyniki* [The state of readership in Poland in 2015: Preliminary results]. Warszawa: Biblioteka Narodowa. <http://www.bn.org.pl/download/document/1459845698.pdf> Retrieved 5 November 2016.
- Mieścicka-Mellibruda, L. (1993). *Jak być matką dorosłych dzieci* [How to be a mother of adult children]. Warszawa, PL: W.A.B.

- Molicka, M. (2008). Terapeutyczne funkcje literatury [Therapeutic functions of literature]. *Scripta Comeniana Lesnensia*, 6, 27-40.
- Nawrot-Borowska, M. (2012). Higiena małego dziecka w świetle poradników z początku XX wieku [Young child hygiene in the light of advice books from the early 20th century]. *Przegląd Pedagogiczny*, 1, 169-197.
- Neville, P. (2008). Reading self-help books. In M.P. Corcoran & P. Share (Eds.), *Belongings. Shaping identity in modern Ireland* (pp. 217-230). Dublin, Ireland: Institute of Public Administration.
- Norcross, J. C., Santrock, J. W., Campbell, L. F., Smith, T. P., Sommer, R., & Zuckerman, E.L. (2000). *Authoritative guide to self-help resources in mental health*. New York, NY: The Guilford Press.
- Ogles, B.M., Lambert, M.J., & Craig, D.E (1991). Comparison of self-help books on coping with loss: Expectations and attributions. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 4, 387-393.
- Piotrowska-Marchewa, M. (2006). „Trzech masz wrogów, którzy czyhają na zabicie twej duszy...”: Zagrożenia moralne w ujęciu polskich poradników i prasy dla służby domowej na przełomie XIX i XX wieku [“Three art thine adversaries, craving for thy soul...”: Moral dangers as described in Polish advice books and press for domestic servants at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century]. In A. Żarnowska & A. Szwarc (Eds.), *Kobieta i rewolucja obyczajowa. Społeczno-kulturowe aspekty seksualności: Wiek XIX i XX* [The woman and the counterculture revolution: Socio-cultural aspects of sexuality. 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries] (pp. 247-264). Warszawa, PL: Wyd. DiG.
- Popiołek, K. (1995). Bariery korzystania z pomocy profesjonalnej [Obstacles to professional help]. In A. Kargulowa (Ed.), *Poradnictwo w okresie transformacji kulturowej* [Counselling in the age of cultural transformations] (pp. 109-116). Wrocław, PL: Wyd. UWr.
- Prochaska, J. O. (1995). Common problems: Common solutions. *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice*, 2, 101-105.
- Roćko, A. (2009). „Uwagi do zupełnego zabierających się w stan małżeński szczęścia służące...” – osiemnastowieczny poradnik byłego pijara, Aleksandra Pawła Zatorskiego. Próba wyzwolenia czy tradycja? [“Advice on attainment of marital bliss for those on the threshold of matrimony ...” – an 18<sup>th</sup>-century guide by a former Piarist, Aleksander Paweł Zatorski: An emancipation attempt or bolstering the tradition?]. *Napis*, 15, 47-59.
- Rok, B. (1995a). *Człowiek wobec śmierci w kulturze staropolskiej* [Man in the face of death in Old Polish culture]. Wrocław, PL: Wyd. UWr.
- Rok, B. (1995b). Polskie poradniki dobrego życia w XVIII w. – poszukiwanie inspiracji współczesnego poradnictwa [Polish guides to a worthy life in the 18<sup>th</sup> century: In search of inspiration for modern counselling]. In A. Kargulowa (Ed.), *Poradnictwo okresu transformacji kulturowej* [Counselling in the age of cultural transformations] (pp. 73-80). Wrocław, PL: Wyd. UWr.
- Rok, B. (1998). Poradnik Józefa Legowicza o pożyciu małżeńskim z XVIII wieku [Józef Legowicz's 18<sup>th</sup>-century guide to marital life]. *Prace Pedagogiczne: Z podstaw poradnictwa*, 2, 75-131.
- Schrager, C. (1993). Questioning the promise of self-help: A reading of *Women who love too much*. *Feminist Studies*, 19(1), 177-192.

- Singleton, A. (2004). Good ad vice for godly men: Oppressed men in Christian men's self-help literature. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 13(2), 153-164.
- Starker, S. (1986). Promises and prescriptions: Self-help books in mental health and medicine. *American Journal of Health Promotion*, 1, 19-24.
- Starker, S. (1988). Do-it-yourself therapy: The prescription of self-help books by psychologists. *Psychotherapy*, 25, 142-146.
- Stawiak-Ososińska, M. (2008). *Ponętna, uległa, akurdatna: Ideal i wizerunek kobiety polskiej pierwszej połowy XIX wieku (w świetle ówczesnych poradników)* [Alluring, submissive, respectable: Ideals and portrayals of Polish women in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century as presented in the period's advice literature]. Kraków, PL: Impuls.
- Straus, G. & Wolff, K. (1996). *Czytanie i kupowanie książek w Polsce w 1994 r.: Raport z badań* [Reading and buying books in Poland in 1994: A study report]. Warszawa, PL: Biblioteka Narodowa.
- Szocki, J. (1968). *Czytelnictwo i lektura ludzi dorosłych* [Readership trends in the adult population]. Wrocław, PL: Wrocławskie Towarzystwo Naukowe.
- Śliwerski, B. (2015). Potoczna wiedza pedagogiczna w popularnym piśmiennictwie poradnikowym [Colloquial pedagogy in popular advice writings]. *Studia Poradownicze/Journal of Counselling*, 4, 15-29.
- Yalom, I. (2003). *Dar terapii: List otwarty do pacjentów i ich terapeutów* [The gift of therapy: An open letter to a new generation of therapists and their patients] (A. Tanalska-Dułęba, Trans.). Warszawa, PL: Instytut Psychologii Zdrowia. (Original work published in 2002).
- Wilson, D.M. & Cash, T.F. (2000). Who reads self-help books?: Development and validation of the Self-Help Reading Attitudes Survey. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 29, 119-129.
- Włodarski, M. (1987). *Ars moriendi w literaturze polskiej XV i XVI w.* [Ars moriendi in the Polish literature of the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries]. Kraków, PL: Znak.
- Woydyłło, E. (2011). *Sekrety kobiet* [Women's secrets]. Kraków, PL: Wydawnictwo Literackie.
- Wojtasik, B. (1993). *Doradca zawodu: Studium teoretyczne z zakresu poradownictwa*. [Career counsellor: A theoretical study in the field of counselling]. Wrocław, PL: Wyd. UWr.
- Wolff, K. (2009). Społeczny zasięg książki w Polsce w 2008 roku: Komunikat z badań Biblioteki Narodowej [The social reach of books in Poland in 2008: A communiqué from the National Library study]. *Notes Wydawniczy*, 4, 48-52.
- Zawadzki, K. (1988). Książka poradnikowa dla rodziców jako pomoc w wychowaniu dzieci [Self-help books for parents as an aid in childrearing]. In A. Kargulowa (Ed.), *Perspektywy rozwoju teorii i praktyki poradnictwa* [Growth perspectives for the theory and practice of counselling], Vol. 3 (pp. 125-142). Wrocław, PL: Wyd. UWr.
- Zierkiewicz, E. (2004). *Poradnik – oferta wirtualnej pomocy* [The self-help book: An offer of virtual help]. Kraków, PL: Impuls.