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## WORKING WITH DEPRIVED AND DEPRAVED CHILDREN IN THE PERSPECTIVE OF SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONISM\*

**Introduction:** By creating a framework composed of such concepts as the self, definition of the situation, meaning, joint action, making indications, and social labelling, symbolic interactionism (SI) provides us with a useful conceptual apparatus for understanding human behavior and analyzing the process of criminogeneity.

**Research Aim:** Similar to the way that Howard Becker has discussed the social character of deviations using excerpts of interviews that he carried out with marijuana smokers and jazz musicians, I try to show on the basis of interviews with counsellors how we can use methods of rehabilitation drawing from SI to social work and treatment of at-risk and delinquent youth.

**Method:** These findings were based on data drawn from in-depth interviews (semi-structured) with counsellors from day care treatment centres (sociotherapists).

**Results:** The article presents four methods of rehabilitation and social work with at-risk and delinquent youth, which were generated from collected data and from the theory of SI.

**Conclusion:** Probation officers, social workers, counsellors, street workers, sociotherapists are professions that can use the ideas and methods presented in the article in their professional practice.

**Keywords:** social rehabilitation, social work, children at risk, delinquency, methods of rehabilitation, symbolic interactionism.

### INTRODUCTION

Symbolic interactionism (SI) has proven to be useful as a theoretical framework for analyzing many diverse social problems (e.g. the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, race relations, low self-esteem and effectiveness of counseling, utility for social assessment and social intervention, etc.) (Horner, 1979; Meddin, 1982; Mucha, 2003; Baghdadi, 2009). I use SI to explain strategies for effectively working with

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at-risk and delinquent youth. The problem of children breaking the law (destitute, deprived and delinquent, depraved) is one of the great preoccupations of modern times (Goldson, 2004, p. 122).

From an SI perspective, people are primarily symbolic creatures. Therefore, human behaviour is caused not by objective facts that result from a particular social situation, but by concepts that people attribute to those facts and by the perception-choice process. This process can be either automated (e.g. the result of a habit) or reasoned (e.g. making a judgement through a deliberate and rational thought process). When behaviour is the result of some automatic process, like a habit, it was first the object of reflection or making a judgement. Thus, the real root of a behaviour is based on the meanings inferred by a person (Lynch and McConatha, 2006; Wikström, Oberwittler, Treiber, and Hardie, 2013).

The basic question that arises from an SI framework is as follows: What is the origin of meanings? Blumer has commented that human beings are living in a world of meaningful objects. This world is socially produced in that the meanings are fabricated through the process of social interaction (Blumer, 1966). From the perspective of SI, the processes of rehabilitation and social work may be perceived as a particularly important kind of social interactions that, if properly planned, can equip social service clients with new meanings. Personal change is the product of a larger social context. In fact, self-change is expected as the nature of important social relationships shift (Ziółkowski, 1981; Meddin, 1982; Stryker, 2002; Wikström et al., 2013). Meanings, definitions of the situation, social stocks of knowledge (Mead, 1934; Blumer, 1969; Thomas, 2002; Stryker, 2002; Hałas, 2006; Keller, 2011) derive from interpersonal interaction and from personal life experiences. Sources of meanings are other people and one's individual memory of facts and events (commonly referred to as reflexivity). Giddens states this in the following way:

All human beings routinely "keep in touch" with the grounds of what they do as an integral element of doing it. I have called this elsewhere the "reflexive monitoring of action" using the phrase to draw attention to the chronic character of the processes involved. Human action does not incorporate chains of aggregate interactions and reasons, but a consistent – and, as Erving Goffman above all has shown us, never-to-be-relaxed – monitoring of behaviour and its contexts. (Giddens, 1996, pp. 36–37)

It may be said that a child at risk for delinquency often defines situations without regard for commonly accepted social norms. Thus, an opportunity to steal, engage in bullying, or avoid school responsibilities become situations which s/he willingly takes advantage of. On the other hand, in case of children who commonly accept social norms (the so-called conformists), such opportunities are either viewed as a temptation they must overcome, or as an unacceptable and prohibited behaviour. The primary reason why most people often do not engage

in most delinquent or criminal situations is that they generally do not perceive delinquency and crime as acceptable alternative behaviours but as the threat of losing something of value (Wikström et al., 2013; Polizzi, 2011). For example, if a child who is at-risk for delinquent behaviour by dint of rejection of social norms notices an unattended wallet, s/he will not spend considerable time thinking about whether or not to steal it. This type of child would act quickly because his/her definition of the situation would cause “a pang of conscience” (i.e. would feel guilty) if s/he did not do that. Simply put, such a definition of this situation triggers in his/her mind the following interpretation: A wallet is defined as money and potential benefits that the child can derive from it. Such a situation is perceived by this child as a chance instead of threat. S/he will boast to his/her peers that s/he has “cash” to buy things. Through this type of thinking, the child also believes that s/he is gaining approval and respect of the community of people who are significant in the child’s world.

The mind of a conformist, on the other hand, will trigger or initiate a reverse process of the interpretation in a similar situation. This thinking process results in restraining a natural inclination to acquire ill-gotten gains. The interpretation of the situation results in the acceptance of the fact that the money belongs to somebody else, and regardless of potential benefits that the stolen wallet (a symbolic representation of money) would bring, the conformist embraces the definition that it would be theft to take the unattended wallet. That being said, even if the conformist succumbed to temptation, s/he would likely experience troubling pangs of conscience, guilt, and regret. Ultimately, such feelings of guilt would likely lead to the conformist returning the wallet.

At-risk and delinquent youth possess a different set of definitions of situations (i.e., ascribing meanings to objects) than the rest of the society who abides by a different set of socially accepted norms. In general, people mostly adhere to specific values and comply with socially adopted norms not because they feel a moral responsibility that is inherent in them and not because they have a general inclination for appropriate or inappropriate conduct. Instead, they do so because other people made them aware of the significance of those values and norms. The process of the transmission of these values and norms is socialization. Socialization involves numerous intricate social interactions with primary and secondary groups. Only in acquiring language from others in the group do individuals develop capacities for thought, at least where thinking refers to meaningful, reflective, communicative conceptions of “what is” and “what is not” (Grills and Prus, 2019, p. 26). Through socialization, human beings develop values and norms. Making indications to others of these values and norms, and their concomitant interpretations by individuals and social groups form the basis of a theoretical understanding of delinquency from an SI perspective.

## RESEARCH AIM AND QUESTION

The aim of the research was to confirm the validity and effectiveness of the methods of social rehabilitation, known in Polish pedagogy of rehabilitation as psychotechnics, sociotechnics, and cultural technics (Górski, 1985). A question was asked whether the SI theory can additionally justify these methods; whether the previously known methods of social rehabilitation could be reconciled with the terminological apparatus of the SI theory. In the course of the research, it was possible to confirm that methods described in Polish pedagogy of rehabilitation in the 1970s and 1980s are still used by practitioners working with at-risk youth. However, in terms of SI, one could update the names of these methods, which was also made in the text. This study should be treated as a preliminary contribution to the development of the theory of correctional treatment.

Becker's book *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance* (1963) provided inspiration for my idea to illustrate a theory of SI by means of real correctional practice, or rather to deduce the methods of rehabilitation from this theory. In Becker's book, classic for a labeling theory, the author shows his own theses concerning a social character of deviations and accompanies them with excerpts of interviews that he carried out with marijuana smokers and jazz musicians – at that time labeled as “deviants”. The excerpts of these interviews supported the author's theses that he had proposed previously. The excerpts of interviews conducted by me show how we can use methods drawing from SI in social work and rehabilitation of delinquents and at-risk youth. The answer to this question is the purpose of this text. Deprived and depraved children are outsiders in my research, while the respondents are trying to change them into “insiders” (conformists).

The four methods of working with at-risk and delinquent youth generated from the data in this article (in the further part of the text, I characterize them as the method of corrective presence, positive feedback method, method of organization of new social experiences, and corrective community) are already known in education and rehabilitation as ways of developing personality but they are appearing under other names as the impact of counselors, organizing experiences of learners, setting boundaries, structuring behavior, offering individual attention, complementing/rewarding, or counseling (Mincey and Maldonado, 2011; Bastiaanssen, Kroes, Nijhof, Delsing, Engels, and Veerman, 2012; Górski, 1985). The methods presented here are my conceptualizations of rehabilitation of at-risk and delinquent youth. The ideas for these methods emerged from an SI framework and I have been trying to apply it to the theory of rehabilitation for many years in order to improve the notions (see also Bernasiewicz, 2011, 2012, 2017).

## RESEARCH METHOD AND SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS

The people involved in the study are leaders of day care treatment centres, which offer educational assistance and counselling for youth aged 3–18. Besides helping children and their parents by means of educational and therapeutic work, the respondents also cooperate extensively with the local social assistance institutions such as schools and local government organizations that provide youth and their parents with additional assistance.

Purposive sampling of counsellors (T1–T4) was used to collect data on methods of working with at-risk and delinquent youth who participated in different social and rehabilitation programs. I interviewed each of the counsellors once. The interviews lasted from two to three hours and were tape-recorded and loosely structured. Each of counsellors involved in the study have over ten years' experience in providing services to at-risk and delinquent youth, social work, diagnosing and preventing of substance addiction, supporting of children in day care residential centre, working with parents of problem children and conducting programs for street children.

## RESULTS

The involvement of a counsellor among at-risk and delinquent youth is a protective factor, i.e. it facilitates corrective methods for thinking and interpreting situations. Through the counsellor's physical presence, the counsellor brings his/her own knowledge-base, his/her own definitions of the situation and, above all, his/her own attitudes towards a client, all of which have an influence on the social experience and meanings activated by the problem child. The *method of corrective presence*, the first of four that I want to characterize, focuses not only on the cognitive reconstruction of client's consciousness, but also on the fulfilment of his or her needs and creating new normative orientations. These normative orientations activate desired meanings and, as a result, a positive social actions of the child. In this way, an increasing number of outside world referents gain positive significance, which consequently activates proper social behaviour. Thus, the child – even subconsciously – adopts the counsellor's world of values and the definitions of the situation. The method of corrective presence activates the processes of identification with a role model, modelling, copying or emulating. Górski included this method in the group of psychotechnics of rehabilitation and called it the “method of personal influence” (1985).

One of the counsellors describes how problem kids treat staff of agency and how educators use it:

We model, especially if there is already some relationship with a kid, e.g. girls often want to have the same hairstyle as we do. Or they speak in a way that we do, they use similar expressions that they often do not understand. They perceived me as somebody superior and ideal; similarly when they asked whether I drink. Well, I said that I drink beer and I like to go out with friends. We are also authentic [...] they ask because they are curious how it is possible to live in another way; for them if somebody drinks it means that he is an alcoholic. Simple deduction. (T3)

Obviously, we are much more ideal counsellors than people because, let's admit it, we pay much more attention to our behaviour at work, or to the way we function there, in order to make our behaviour a model. It is clear that, for example, a therapist who sits with his client for an hour is a very positive, ideal model since the therapist focuses only on the patient; but at home, the therapist does not necessarily always focus on a spouse or partner. So obviously, we always pay particular attention to the way we behave, not only in that sense to behave well, but also reasonably, in order to model by means of what I do, say, how I solve conflicts in a group, and how I react to arguments (e.g. in a group, or how I respond to requests). (T2)

In my experience I have found that children at risk feel that they cannot rely on an adult [...] I have also found that there is nobody who protects the child, who teaches them different things, who supports the child, is older, and has more life experience. Often, our children's relationships with parents are more like partnerships. When this occurs, children treat their parents as friends, and they cannot rely on their parents for the wisdom expected. Often, mothers treat their daughters as friends and put them in a position in which children become confidants in whom the mothers confide their personal problems with men, which is often too much for the children. (T3)

A good counsellor maintains the authority of an adult since this authority has degraded among juvenile delinquents and at-risk youth. An adult should infuse associations with responsibility, safety, and initiative; however, these associations are often reversed. The theory of SI explains the way people gather and adopt meanings, which precede and determine human behaviour. This process takes place not only as a result of adopting the social perspective (*generalized other*) by the person – which is the last stage of socialization – but mainly because of the phase of the observation of social roles performed by the people in the immediate settings (interactionists talk about the “play stage” and “game stage”). The internalization of the value system and the rules of social life may also occur as a result of an accidental meeting that may turn out to be significant for the life trajectory of an individual. I am referring here to the contiguity and bonds with the significant others. Most problem children have problem parents (addicted, unemployed, frequently changing partners). The counsellor then becomes the only adult the child can rely on.

It is hard not to appreciate the influence of conversations with certain people in our life. According to Zimbardo, people who he has met during his life have exerted the greatest impact on his life and career. In an interview with Osiatyński, Zimbardo recollects:

The reason why I have become successful [he] and my brother not, is not because of the difference of personalities but due to the fact that I had different teachers and friends, I have been in other situations, etc. The conditions made me focus on the future and my friends taught me how to plan. I kept thinking what my life might look like. And it helped. My brother was more presence oriented. He could live for the moment and enjoy it but he could not change his life. (Osiatyński, 1980, p. 195)

The method of corrective presence works through the processes of identification of children with a role model. Hence, the counsellor should represent high level of moral character (high stage of moral development). Quoted counsellors are firmly convinced that they represent a world of values that should become the world of their clients. It is a perspective that is the exact opposite of solution-focused therapy (Miller, 2004). According to solution-focused theory, clients have their own ideas of how to solve the current problem. In my research counsellors know better what and how things will begin to get better thanks to their intervention.

The second method, I want to describe, is the *positive feedback method*. Górski included this method also in the group of psychotechnics of rehabilitation and called it the “method of persuasion” (1985). Words have a performative dimension. Interpretations and definitions we formulate in order to understand diverse social situations activate social actions. According to Thomas’s theorem, if people define situations as real, they are real in their consequences (LaRossa and Reitzes, 1993). One of the most important definitions for our performance is the one in which we do not refer to objects of the outside world, labelling them with particular meanings, but we ourselves become such objects to which the outside world attaches significances. The point of rehabilitation lies in the assumption that it is possible to redefine the self of delinquent or at-risk youth. However, even the same personal traits may be treated as either liabilities or assets (Koczanowicz, 1994). It is important that a counsellor believes in the possibilities of a child/young person and is able to guide him or her towards proper social actions. One counsellor describes how one can undertake that kind of verbal intervention based on the communication of meanings:

I notice that somebody is a leader in a group. So I tell him: you are a leader, you have leadership abilities, you eagerly get involved, you organize something well. Taking this into consideration, when I talk with a child and he tells me that he is the greatest rascal of them all, I can tell him: Man, you have such a predisposition that you can become a very good manager and sales representative. You know, ‘cause he is efficient. For example, here children collect chestnuts and sell them to a passer-by and say: ‘scuse me, sir, will you buy it? I need money for a pencil case. This is an excellent sales re-

presentative, who makes money on nothing, on any worthless product, thanks to his work. But this is blameworthy because children say: You beg, you trade, you cannot do that. And I say: Why not? He meets new people, gets to know them, makes contacts. Of course, there are some boundaries. (T1)

The above theoretical analysis indicates that in methods applied in social work and rehabilitation it is very important to praise these personality traits exhibited by the child in learning situations which may constitute a constructive element of their self – the element (one's resources) that they will later invoke while making life decisions. According to Blumer,

The possession of a self converts the human being into a special kind of actor, transforms his relation to the world, and gives his action a unique character. [...] The human being may perceive himself, have conceptions of himself, communicate with himself, and act toward himself. As these types of behavior imply, the human being may become the object of his own action. (Blumer, 1966, p. 535)

While working with juvenile offenders, neglected and abused children during everyday activities and games organized by a day care centre in disadvantaged neighbourhoods, counsellors engage in active listening, commenting on emotions expressed by children, setting boundaries and giving clear feedbacks. Such actions have power to create a self of children.

Further, I would like to characterize the *method of organization of new social experiences*. Górski included this method also in the group of sociotechnics of rehabilitation and called it the “method of instructive situation” (1985). Organizing intentionally planned social experiences constitutes the third method of rehabilitation, which can be derived from SI. If, due to poverty of his or her family, a child has been humiliated (sneering, rejection by peers at school), a counsellor should – not always being able to solve this problem directly – change the social experiences of that child by showing him or her respect, giving individual attention, and appreciating his or her personal talents. In this way, the educator counteracts the embarrassment (shame, guilt) that creates depression, violence and aggression (Konecki, 2014). On the one hand, the new social experiences are created by changing objective living conditions (social work), but on the other, by cognitive reorganization of the hitherto social experiences (new definitions of the situation). Perception and action of an individual depends not only on the features of the setting in which the individual takes part, but also on his or her relevant previous experiences and personal characteristic (Wikström et al., 2013). Below, one of the counsellors describes his own interventions. The first part of his statement concerns social work. The second part refers to a cognitive and emotional reorganisation that – following SI – may be called “transformation of the definition of the situation”:



1. Everyday work, these daily interventions, constitutes equalisation of opportunities. [...] we have a washing machine, a dryer, a shower and a toilet, soap, washing powder in all centres. Actually, we do not have problems with children school attendance anymore; mostly due to the fact that children have an opportunity to have a shower, do the laundry, and they are clean when they go to school the next day. Another problem is when they are not understood by teachers, which is a slightly different problem. But when they have a good appearance, there is no such a chasm, so they go to school willingly. This is the first step when you change the child's world. It is giving the child support in his or her reality, education, work, family, so it is the family support. I believe the actions aimed at family support are most successful. We have most failure if for some reasons we do not manage to cooperate with the family.

2. I will not tell an eight-year-old boy that he cannot rely on his parents. To a fifteen-year-old, I can already say: "Man, I know one thing – you can rely on yourself". I can ask him: "Who else can you rely on?" And he will mention child welfare institutions, maybe something else, and I can have a serious conversation with him when he can feel frustrated that he cannot count on his parents. When I tell him: "You know, your parents' life is maybe not necessarily as they have planned it". I can seek understanding. I can stir certain emotions in him. I will not do it with an eight-year-old. Children do not talk about problems, but about facts. Corrective social work, within an individual or a group therapy, starts when somebody acknowledges that he has a problem and knows what it is. [...] These children have crises. They have a problem when, e.g. they get a bad grade at school. And these are the topics we talk about, making them aware that there are different situations and one does not have to receive only As; you start to teach them "adequacy". (T1)

In the first part, the respondent notices that in most cases cooperating with parents is more effective than just working with a child. The counsellor and parents should aim to satisfy the different needs of the child together: trendy clothes, slim appearance, medical care (correct speech, healthy teeth, etc.), which is very important for the child's position in the peer group and for his/her self-esteem. The second part shows that there are situations when it is too late to work with parents (a parent in prison, an addicted parent who does not want to get treatment). Then one has to work on the child's awareness.

It is very important to hone an identity of delinquent and at-risk youth. The adoption of important social skills, such as the ability to "ask others for help", without which nobody can function optimally in our world, depends on the comprehension and definition of one's abilities. Below there is a description of an organisation of social experiences for people, who at a particular time show exaggerated self-esteem:

In a sense, I "catch out" these megalomaniacs at a different moment. For example, somebody says that they are very good at something, that they can manage, that they will improve these fifteen Fs on their own, they do not need our help. OK. You have two weeks. We will see what you will be able to do. Let's try. Or a guy tells me he will

cook a delicious dinner as it concerns various aspects of life. Now I am providing such trivial examples. He does not need anybody's help, we should get off his back, he can repair his bike. I say: OK. Let's arrange for some time that you will try to do that. And only such experiences teach them when, e.g. somebody messes up dinner or a cake [...] and then we talk about it but not in a way: Well, didn't I tell you but: you see, what was the use of it? It turns out that you cannot cook but what would have happened if you had said that you cannot do it? (T3)

A day care residential centre is a place where children and teenagers can meet after school – if possible, in similar age groups – to spend their free time with their counsellors in a planned way. Therefore, it is a perfect place to implement the social and corrective work methods described above. Besides group therapy during which children sit in a circle and talk about their personal problems and conflicts with their peers, they can do homework, prepare meals, cook, and clean. All these activities enable counsellors to influence children constructively. The children residential care facility provides optimal conditions to use the *corrective presence method*, allows for the application of the *positive feedback method* as well as the *organization of social experiences*.

The residential treatment centre is a place for organizing “joint actions” that include common cleaning, learning, having fun, preparing and having meals, trips, common discussions about common and mutual problems during meetings of the so-called “corrective community” (sociotherapy). Apart from the notions, such as the self, an act, a social interaction, and an object, the concept of “a joint action” is a central element of Mead and Blumer's analyses, and thus, of the whole SI (Da Silva, 2006). These common activities can be called “joint actions” because collective social actions are the result – which is highlighted in SI – of a mutual adjustment of social actors' lines of actions. Initially the lines of children's actions in the residential treatment centre, which are often characterized by rivalry for social attention, selfishness, fear, sometimes aggression, do not match the lines of counsellors' actions. A residential treatment centre is an institution created to help problematic children adjust their own actions (lines of actions, interpretation schemes, normative models) (Lyman, 1988) to the lines of actions of counsellors and to the behaviour of other children. The effect of this adjustment is a common, collective, harmonious joint action. Problematic situations and conflicts are generally inevitable in a residential treatment centre. The planning and negotiating of joint actions triggers the unity of individual lines of action. Children have to adjust to the requirements of joint actions, which include the norm of cooperation, non-aggression, self-activity or the obligation to tell the truth. Rehabilitation with the use of the *corrective community method* is an example of a joint action in a residential treatment centre. Górski included this method also in the group of cultural technics of rehabilitation and called it the “method of shaping of group norms” (1985). One of the respondents talks about it:

We also have a corrective community that does a lot of work. What does a community do? First and foremost, the group exerts an impact on an individual, on peers. Teenagers, at some age, when they are listening to an adult, they are thinking: Whatever you say [...] this stupid a... is again picking on me, etc. But you cannot escape peer pressure in these situations. [...] whoever comes here and cheeks and tries to cheat, is quickly readjusted by the group, if it is really a corrective community [...] the rules are made jointly with children. As well, there are some norms which are undisputed about which we do not talk with children, such as the rule of non-aggression in the centre. And there are rules that the clients themselves establish. The truth is that whatever they establish, they identify with it; they comply with it more because it is theirs. We do not have cooks or cleaners here, so they together arrange work, e.g. if you do not cook, you cannot eat, there is nothing for free, if you do not clean, you must not enter this place. If you clean, you are kindly welcome. It is amazing how children know which rule they should set for whom; for example, when there is somebody new, they are more lenient, they make allowances for those who are in crises but when somebody cheats and plays tricks, they can be very strict. (T3)

A residential treatment centre becomes a place where children learn to coexist with others and follow certain rules and norms. It is not an effect of some sudden magic awakening of altruistic motivation here, but it is because children start to realize a beneficial behaviour strategy in those pro-social actions. One of the respondents, who has been bringing up and caring about the same children for many years, first at a residential treatment centre (first for kindergarten children, then primary school children and later for high school teenagers) and then in a youth club, highlights this evolutionary developing process of the assimilation of certain social attitudes in the centre (e.g. the keeping a promise, conscientiousness, responsibility for a set task, a consistent action). These are the social attitudes that determine the development of vital life skills at a later stage of life (competence in action, professional offer of services):

graduation from a school, education, some job – these are commonly accepted determinants of success; however, in order to achieve it, one must change his or her attitude towards these issues. There will not be any long-lasting effects if basic skills are not developed. If somebody cannot work, if they cannot be conscientious, if they do not take responsibility for cheating, even if they finished the best vocational classes or schools, they will simply not make any use of it. At the first opportunity, they will spoil everything. I do not know how they will cheat their boss, they will go mad, shout at somebody, get drunk. These are the problems they cannot solve. So, our work with children focuses on the change of their attitude to each other, to people, things, education, different issues and then on the development of their skills or, if there is enough time for it, we try to do both simultaneously, but never another way round. It makes little sense to teach somebody skills if the person is unconscious, it simply does not work. This process is a waste of time, because the person is not going to use it. It is a success if we can change the attitude with which they came to the center [...] and through

looking at teenagers in the youth club, who had previously undergone this therapeutic process [in our therapeutic circles], we see some effects. For example, now they attend vocational classes, they learn some profession. Some boys have decided to do a driver's license to operate motor scooters so that they can deliver pizzas. This is a very concrete, measurable activity that has meaning to the clients at the center. This is something they are able to do. One boy at the center, for example, is presently attending classes to become a lifeguard assistant. But these are youth that are here for many years and their attitude [...] at that moment is changed. Now we can invest in them because they have significantly changed their behavior. They really want to achieve something and they believe they can do it. Even though they cannot immediately see the effects, they are willing to put forth efforts because they are ready to take responsibility for their lives and do not wait for something they can receive without effort from the welfare systems available to them. These are successes, since in work with the dregs of society it is a success if some unadjusted person changes his attitude towards himself, to the world, to his responsibilities and people (...) Obviously, they learn a lot of things here, because it is not only a matter of their psychological change but they simply have to learn how to cook, do the laundry, clean, glue, cut, paint, dance and do a lot of other things. They do homework, they have tutoring here. But everything is founded on this attitude towards the self and each other. (T2)

The described practice can be classified as a program focusing on individual traits of at-risk and delinquent youth and as mentoring. Counsellors (mentors) teach children how to be assertive rather than aggressive, how to negotiate with others, how to manage their anger, and how to respond to a range of problematic situations, including teasing from peers and criticism from teachers. Counsellors form a close relationships with the children, then, have the potential to reduce strain, increase control, and foster the social learning of conventional behaviour (Agnew and Brezina, 2018).

## DISCUSSION

While analysing the biographies of juvenile delinquents (Bernasiewicz and Noszczyk-Bernasiewicz, 2017), it has to be stated that the transition from being influenced by poor home to the influence of destructive groups of peers is not anything coincidental, but a natural consequence of having a dysfunctional family. It is understandable that a family with many problems (criminal record, parents' addictions, violence, pedagogical helplessness, and frequent reconstructions of family result in losing contact with the biological father/mother) is the reason why young people seek contact with their peers who are similarly lost and frustrated, and who start to stimulate each other to criminal behaviours (synergy effect). Consequently, in the absence of appropriate conditions at home (disturbed family relations), young people start showing behaviour disorders and, sooner or later,

violate culturally sanctioned social norms (legal rules). Lack of appropriate family relations leads to various emotional problems, i.e. rebellion and a negative attitude towards the world and adult people in general (teachers, educators, and, last but not least, parents, as people who heavily disappointed them). Peer-groups in day care treatment centres are an alternative to street mates and street culture. The so-called *street culture* is characteristic of children and youth who spend most of their time in the street environment of disadvantaged neighbourhoods. The street culture is created by particular norms and values, such as the necessity of being tough, respect for strength, and aggressive protection of one's own reputation. Following these norms results in violence, conflicts and tolerance for lawlessness and criminal behaviour (Zdun, 2008). Day care residential centre is the place where deprived and degraded children can meet counsellors and non-deviant colleagues. It is the institution where one can use methods described in this article.

Yoshikawa, presenting the results of the study on the effectiveness of family and children support programmes, divides them into those supporting only the child (*cognitive, verbal ability, school achievement*), those focused on the family (*parenting behaviours*), and those encompassing both objectives simultaneously. The meta-analysis of 40 programmes concludes with the statement that combination programmes produced long-term declines in antisocial behaviour and delinquency in the highest degree (Yoshikawa, 1995). The Family-Based Prevention offers forms of classes that are used by specialists to achieve correction objectives. In these programmes, the counsellors talked to the boys, took them on trips and to recreational activities, tutored them in reading and arithmetic, encouraged them to participate in the summer camps, played games with them at the project's centre, encouraged them to attend church, kept in close touch with the police, and gave advice and general support to families as well as reduced the number of risk factors to which adolescents were exposed, through family services, skills training, mentoring, education, and after school activities (Welsh and Farrington, 2006). Counsellors appear to be the most important factor for successful rehabilitation. Much depend on their competencies, compassion, and trust which they inspire by showing children respect, interest in their affairs, and commitment to solving their problems. Good counsellors are interested in the children's way of thinking and their emotions, they interact with children in ways that make them comfortable. They assist them in their problems, teach them how to think ahead, how to search for different and better solutions, help with the insight, and deal with their own problems.

## CONCLUSIONS

A human being is a reflexive creature who is able to draw conclusions from one's own experiences and is able to divert one's own consciousness from outside world objects to one's "inner" self (*sein Bewusstsein von den Gegenstände abwenden*

*und sichnach „innen“ zuwenden*, Mutzeck, 2008). He/she reflexively organizes the memory of these situations and experiences and, in a process of his ontogenetic development, learns to attribute the meanings to those past situations that constitute his individual *Lebenswelt*. The more traumatic life experiences – poverty, the premature death of a mother, abandonment of the family by a father, an alcoholic parent, etc. – the more destructive meanings and interpretations of reality derived from those experiences which may result in antisocial behaviour. Negative meanings that arise in the minds of the people who have experienced such events (the world is evil and endangering because it deprives the persons of the priceless “things”) make us use a psychological terminology in their scientific analysis. The frustration caused by the lack of basic needs is identified here, which results in various forms of aggression and generalized anger. However, negative energy, which appears in such situations, is not always defined and does not determine any obvious course of action, but only properly directed – e.g. by a reference group – is expressed by means of the simplest forms of recovering from stress (autoaggression, self-mutilation reducing high emotional pressure, verbal and physical aggression towards others).

Some lawbreaking and antisocial behaviours are strictly of biologic provenance, so they do not have a symbolic basis (Mead referred to “non-symbolic interaction”) (Blumer, 1966, p. 537). However, even in such cases, individuals who thoughtlessly orient their social actions have a chance to change their attitudes with the help of certain people. Thanks to them, delinquents and at-risk youth can obtain a different perspective, adopt proper definitions of the situation, attribute the meaning that would dramatically change their behaviour. A counsellor as a significant other is able to instil definitions of the situation into his or her clients, the ideas of how one can and should take social actions in accordance with social standards. The four methods described in the text in the field of interventions and social work are ways of creating identity and an individual worldview and as such these are methods that SI helps us understand better.

#### STUDY LIMITATIONS

The research was carried out on a very small sample of interviews, because data was collected from four experts. The examples of correctional situations collected from the respondents, however, did not enable me to build the theory based on the induction procedure. Neither the representativeness of the results nor the possibility of extrapolating the conclusions put forward in the text was the purpose of this study. Therefore, it is difficult to assess the prognostic usefulness of the conclusions drawn here. The described methods of working with delinquents and at-risk youth derive from the theory of SI and the information collected from the experts served

me only to illustrate the possibilities of applying the described methods in rehabilitation practice. The description of four methods of rehabilitation and social work presented here does not prove the effectiveness of these methods nor does it mean that from SI it is not possible to develop more corrective methods.

While acknowledging the importance of educators and usefulness of the methods described in the process of rehabilitation, one must remember that the cases of deviation (and morality) presented in the interviews denoted any situation (activity, actor, ideas, or state of affairs) that the counsellors perceived as threatening, disturbing, offensive, immoral, disreputable, or negative in some way. However, people may develop different notions of what constitutes deviance and how they might deal with these matters (Prus and Grills, 2003). Hence, the examples of deviance and implemented methods described in this article could have their unique cultural character.

The indicated methods of social rehabilitation should be the subject of further studies, which would include a larger research sample, because the present study should be treated as a preliminary contribution to the development of the theory of correctional treatment.

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PRACA Z DZIEĆMI ZAGROŻONYMI WYKLUCZENIEM I DEMORALIZACJĄ  
W PERSPEKTYWIE SYMBOLICZNEGO INTERAKCJONIZMU

**Wprowadzenie:** Interakcjonizm symboliczny (SI) tworząc ramę teoretyczną złożoną z takich koncepcji jak: ja, definicja sytuacji, znaczenie, wspólne działanie, wskazywanie, naznaczanie społeczne, dostarcza nam użytecznej aparatury pojęciowej do zrozumienia ludzkiego zachowania oraz przesłedzenia procesu krymionogenezy.

**Cel badań:** Podobnie jak Howard Becker omówił społeczny charakter dewiacji na podstawie fragmentów wywiadów, które przeprowadził z palaczami marihuany i muzykami jazzowymi, staram się na podstawie wywiadów z wychowawcami pokazać, w jaki sposób możemy metody wychowawcze wygenerowane z SI zastosować do pracy socjalnej i resocjalizacji młodzieży zagrożonej i przestępczej.

**Metoda badań:** Wnioski badawcze wygenerowano z danych pochodzących z wywiadów pogłębionych (częściowo ustrukturyzowanych) z wychowawcami pracującymi w świetlicy (socjoterapeutami).

**Wyniki:** W artykule omówiono cztery metody resocjalizacji i pracy socjalnej z młodzieżą zagrożoną i przestępczą, które udało się wygenerować na podstawie zebranych danych oraz teorii SI.

**Wnioski:** Kuratorzy sądowi, pracownicy socjalni, wychowawcy, streetworkerzy, socjoterapeuci to profesje, które mogą skorzystać w swojej praktyce zawodowej z idei i metod przedstawionych w artykule.

**Słowa kluczowe:** resocjalizacja, praca socjalna, dzieci w zagrożeniu, przestępczość nieletnich, metody resocjalizacji, interakcjonizm symboliczny.