Contact building: Emotional exchanges between counsellees and counsellors in Polish late socialist sexual advice

Author: Agnieszka Kościańska

Affiliation:
Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology
University of Warsaw
AND: Leverhulme Visiting Professor, Russian and East European Studies, Oxford School of Global and Area, University of Oxford

Address:
Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology
University of Warsaw
Zurawia 4
00-503 Warszawa, Poland
akoscianska@uw.edu.pl

Abstract: In Poland after the Second World War, the related fields of sexology, sex education and sex counselling developed a distinctive model of communication between counsellees and counsellors. This article focuses on Wiesław Sokoluk, one of the key Polish youth counsellors and sex educators active during the late socialist period (the 1970s and 1980s), looking at his path to becoming a sex educator and youth counsellor as well as his practice in both fields. It treats his story as a case study that illustrates the distinctive development of the related disciplines of sex counselling and education. It specifically focuses on the communication between Sokoluk and his counsellees, school pupils, correspondents and readership. It shows how the distinctive methods underpinning emotion-driven communication between counsellor and counsellee developed, while presenting them as products of particular economic, political and religious conditions of late socialism, including state-funded education and healthcare as well as the relative sexual openness resulting from the struggle between the state and the Catholic Church.

Keywords: Gender studies, Sexual medicine, Cultural History, medical anthropology
Patient and Public Involvement statement
It was not appropriate or possible to involve patients or the public in the design, or conduct, or reporting, or dissemination plans of our research.
Word count: 8246

"In psychotherapy, in counselling, but also in education, it is the human who is most important. Choosing the method is a secondary issue", Wiesław Sokoluk, a sex educator and youth counsellor, once told me (Sokoluk 2016a). Sokoluk started his career in the early 1970s at an experimental humanistic psychiatry ward under the supervision of a pioneer of humanistic psychiatry Kazimierz Jankowski. He was an active member of the Polish Planned Parenthood Association[1], and caused a nationwide scandal in 1987 by writing a highly progressive sex education handbook for high schools that was banned after just two months (Kościańska 2021a, 2021b). Above all, in the 1980s, Sokoluk became one of the major sex educators and youth counsellors in Poland. Sex education and counselling were, for him, a full-time job. He not only worked at a youth counselling centre run by the Planned Parenthood Association, where he answered letters and talked to young people in person, but also travelled around Poland to teach sex education in schools, collaborated with several youth magazines, for which he wrote sex advice articles and answered letters from readers, and offered advice once a week to young people calling a special hotline (Sokoluk 2016a, 2016b, 2016c). Admired by young people, he based his practice on the achievements of the Polish school of sexology (Kościańska 2021c) and developed his therapeutic skills within the context of courses and workshops mainly organized by the Polish Planned Parenthood Association. The training he received at these was focused on what he called 'contact building,'[2] during which the primary emphasis was placed on how to build a relationship between counsellor and counsellee, between educators and those being educated, and between doctor and patient.

In this article, I discuss in detail Sokoluk's path to becoming a sex educator and youth counsellor as well as his practice in both fields. I treat his story as a case study that illustrates the unique development of the related disciplines of sex counselling and education, and I argue that he was the product of a specific approach to both fields that developed in Poland under late socialism (the 1970s and 80s) and continued during the first years of postsocialism. However,

as I will show below, the particular personal and educational path that Sokoluk chose to follow enabled him to build on the achievements of his predecessors in Polish sex counselling and education, raising them to a whole different level as he gained mastery of them, which makes him both typical of a tradition yet unique in the scale of his accomplishment in the field. His story shows that the specific conditions of state socialism, in particular, large-scale state funding (and in the Polish case, the space for the development of sex education and counselling created amid a struggle over sexuality and reproduction between the state and the Church) led to general advancements in sex education and counselling methods as well as enabling the activities of committed, and in many ways extraordinary, individual educators and advisers. I specifically focus on the communication between Sokoluk and his counsellees, school pupils, correspondents and readership. In so doing, I seek to answer the following questions: i) How did the distinctive methods underpinning emotion-driven communication between counsellor and counsellee develop and to what extent were they implemented? ii) What was their role in the unique approach of Polish sexology practice in general, and sexual counselling, specifically? iii) What were the relations between emotion-driven counselling and the economic, political and religious settings of state socialism in Poland?

This article is based on a series of in-depth interviews I conducted with Sokoluk (twenty hours of formal, recorded conversations along with countless informal exchanges that allowed me to build trust and rapport; these conversations were partly published in Polish in Kościańska and Sokoluk 2018). I also use correspondence he engaged in with young people as a planned parenthood counsellor and sex columnist working for youth magazines, as well as a collection of questions asked by pupils before sex education classes he taught at schools in multiple locations in Poland.[3] Finally, I draw on other sources, such as interviews with other counsellors and materials used during training sessions for counsellors and educators, which I collected in

the course of my research between 2008 and 2020 on the history of sexuality in Poland (Kościańska 2021b, 2021c).

This article builds on earlier work on sex education and sexology in socialist and postsocialist Poland, and more broadly Central and East Europe, and contributes to the new body of work problematizing the development of sexuality in the region, while emphasizing its non-linear character and placing a special focus on the innovative and often progressive nature of sexual expertise as well as its preoccupation with "psy-ences", an approach more traditionally associated with the liberal and capitalist West (Lišková 2018, Lišková, Jarska and Szegedi 2019, Kościańska 2021b, 2021c, Ghodsee 2018, Ignaciuk 2019). However, these studies have mostly concentrated on the social, cultural, legal and political aspects of sexual expertise. Within this body of work, the relationship between doctors and patients, or counsellees and counsellors, has only been discussed in the context of knowledge production (Kościańska 2021c). This article focuses on communication practices between counsellees and counsellors in youth and sexual counselling developed in Poland under late socialism that have never been analysed before.

In what follows, I first present a concise history of sexuality under socialism in Poland, in which I draw attention to the distinctive development of the related fields of sexology, sex counselling and sex education during this period. Next, I move on to Sokoluk's path to becoming a sex education practitioner and youth counsellor. I look at the training that shaped his work and show how he implemented it in practice.

My analysis is informed by the latest developments in the anthropology of emotions (Beatty 2019), which combine a power-centred social constructivist approach (Abu-Lughod 1986, Leavitt 1996, Lutz and Abu-Lughod eds. 1990) with a phenomenological, new-materialist one (Alldred and Fox 2017; Gammeltoft 2002, see also Berggren 2014). As Andrew Beatty put it in his recent search for a synthesis of the study of emotion: "The anthropologist's

job is to get the experience right and to work out its significance in the stream of life – to recover what Malinowski called the imponderabilia. That effort will take account of local interpretations, representations, and genres, and of other modes of experience which may be non-verbal, non-narrative, embodied, tacit, or inarticulate" (Beatty 2019: 282). Therefore, in my analyses, I not only look at discourses, but also the embodied experiences and specific material realities that inform the communication between the counsellee and the counsellor.

Sexuality and its science in Poland under socialism

The history of Poland after the Second World War is usually depicted through the lens of authoritarian communism and conservative Catholicism. For years, this predominant perspective prevented researchers from seeing innovative developments in the history of sexuality in the country (cf. Ghodsee and Lišková 2016, Kościańska 2018) that were often quite progressive in comparison with Western countries (Ghodsee 2018). Birth control, including abortion, was legal and accessible (Zielinska 2000, Mishtal 2015) and women enjoyed relative economic freedom that led to some degree of sexual autonomy (Fidelis 2010; Stańczak-Wiślicz et al. 2020). There were no discriminatory laws against homosexuality (Basiuk and Burszta 2020), the legal 'changing' of gender was relatively easy (Dębińska 2020) and the penal code provided the tools to punish marital or same-sex rapes. The Planned Parenthood Association operated a network of advisory centres (Kuźma-Markowska and Ignaciuk 2020). That said, state socialism should not be idealized. Often, the precepts of progressive law were not fully adhered to. For instance, although homosexuality was legal, it was stigmatized in many circles and seen by the state as anti-social and criminogenic, with the result that cruising spaces were under constant secret service and police surveillance (Basiuk and Burszta 2020). Although women were encouraged to work, the state did not promote the equal division of labour within

the household. Pronatalist state policies were translated into a discourse of expert knowledge of sexuality within which good sex was seen as a marital practice open to the possibility of procreation that took place between women and men who fulfilled traditional gender roles (Kościańska 2021c).

The religious landscape further complicates the picture. The Catholic Church's approach to sexuality and gender caused internal divisions. Polish Catholics followed the discussions about birth control that were taking place in other Catholic countries and in the Holy See. Some supported the 'legalization' of multiple birth control methods such as the pill, while others (including Cardinal Karol Wojtyła, who later became Pope) maintained hard anti-choice stances (Harris 2018, Kościańska 2018). Although the Catholic Church was unhappy with the Polish state's approach towards family planning, and especially with the 1956 law that liberalized access to abortion, it did not have enough political power to counteract it (Czajkowska 2012, Kościańska 2021a).

However, Poles, unlike other Europeans, had become increasingly religious in the second part of the 20th century, so the influence of the Catholic Church gradually grew. In the late 1980s, Catholic circles were strong enough to force the Communist Party to remove Sokoluk's progressive handbook from schools (Kościańska 2018, 2021a). At the same time, throughout the entire state socialist period, communists used sexuality as a tool for reducing the influence of Catholicism (Jarska 2019, Kościańska 2021a). As a result, sexologists and planned parenthood activists were able to author and publish sex manuals, and they proved to be very popular. The most famous one, *The Art of Love* by Michalina Wisłocka (1978), sold about 7 million copies (Kościańska 2021c). Sex education appeared in Polish schools in the 1960s (Kościańska 2021b, Lišková, Jarska and Szegedi 2019).

Advances in the related fields of sexology, sex education and sex counselling – all three of which were supported and funded by the socialist state, thus independent of the economic

rules of market economy and available to everybody for free – also attest to how unexpectedly progressive they were, especially when it came to communication between experts (that is, doctors, counsellors and educators) and their patients or counsellees. Although the roots of Polish sexology date back to the late 19th century (Kościańska 2021b), it did not reach its fullest stage of development until the 1970s and 1980s. The advances during this period were facilitated by Kazimierz Imieliński (1929-2010), a medical doctor dedicated – like others such as the psychiatrist Kazimierz Jankowski (1931-2013) – to the 'humanization' of medicine (for more details, see Kościańska 2021c). Imieliński drew on multiple sources, such as the newest international developments in sex research—thanks to his books, Polish readers learned about modern North American sexology and began to take an interest in the works of Alfred Kinsey, and William Masters and Virginia Johnson. But he also referred to early sexology, mostly from German speaking regions, for instance, the works of Magnus Hirschfeld. More importantly, however, he continued earlier Polish traditions of viewing medicine within its broader cultural and social context (espoused, for instance, by Ludwik Fleck 1896–1961; see Fleck [1935] 1979). In choosing to do so, he was following the example set by some of his teachers, for example, Kazimierz Dąbrowski (1902-1980), who combined psychiatry, philosophy and pedagogy. Building on these inspirations, he looked at sexuality holistically from what could be retrospectively called an intersectional perspective. He stressed that sexual problems could only be understood if they were viewed not only as bodily disorders, but also in the context of their social, political, economic, class, cultural, religious or gendered aspects (Imieliński 1982).[4]

This approach resulted in sexologists taking an interest in their patients' lived experiences, and they treated those experiences very seriously. Experts often reformulated their ideas about what entailed 'good' sex, following their patients' concerns and the cultural settings in which their experiences took place (Kościańska 2016, 2020a; for this kind of knowledge

production in sexology in other contexts, see Oosterhuis 2000, Terry 1999, and in medicine in general, see Fleck 1979, Oudshoorn 1994). This process of knowledge construction led to the reinforcement of conservative stereotypes grounded in the assumption that some forms of sexuality (in particular, marital) should be supported, while others, for instance, teenage sexuality, should be tabooed (Kościańska 2016, 2021c, Dębińska 2020). Conversely, it also led to the introduction of progressive reforms (Kościańska 2020a, 2020b, 2021c) in the realm of gender and sexuality. But overall, it was undoubtedly methodologically innovative and patient-oriented. As a prominent sex expert told me about his homosexual patients, "I saw how they suffered [because of the lack of acceptance and discrimination]" (Lew-Starowicz 2017). As a result, this sexologist moved away in his writing from pathologizing homosexuality and began to advocate for homosexual rights (Kościańska 2020a, 2020b). Sexology based on these processes of knowledge construction, which was institutionalized by Imieliński and further developed by his followers, managed to successfully manoeuvre between the Church and the state.

In the Polish context under socialism, sexology (*seksuologia*) was closely related to sex education (*wychowanie płciowe*) and sex counselling (*poradnictwo*). The three fields were often exercised by the same people. Sexology was more of a medical discipline, so tended to focus on treatment (of issues such as 'impotence', 'frigidity', 'transsexuality', and in the 1970s, homosexuality as well) and research. Sex education was not only conducted in schools, but also through handbooks, manuals, advice books and sex or advice columns in the press (addressed to both young people and adults). Counselling was usually offered at planned parenthood clinics, either in person or via mail, and would consist of elements of both psychotherapy and education. The issues of reproductive health and birth control were of major importance in all three fields. It is worth noting that is virtually impossible to draw a clear distinction between them. The same people, as was the case with Sokoluk, would conduct research, author marriage

or youth manuals, work as counsellors at a planned parenthood clinic and teach sex education at school.

Overall, the expert approach towards sexual health and sex counselling significantly differed from other branches of healthcare. Holism and interdisciplinarity, and even more so creating a space for patient agency, was not the usual approach of Polish medicine of that time. Sexological approaches contrasted with how relations between patients and doctors were shaped in other branches of medicine, even closely related ones, such as gynaecology and obstetrics. For instance, histories of childbirth in state socialist Poland suggest that obstetric wards were Goffmanian totalitarian institutions, with no space for patient agency (Wochna-Tymińska 2012, Duch 1993; for other national contexts, see Hrešanová 2016, Michaels 2014). Labouring women were supposed to follow doctors' orders. However, it is worth noting that a 'humanization' process was visible in Polish psychiatry. Some Polish psychiatrists in line with the Western counter-culture anti-psychiatry movement were working to develop humanistic psychiatry (see, for example, Jankowski 1975).

Finally, developments in Polish sexology also contrasted with those in sexology in other socialist countries, for instance, in Czechoslovakia, where sexologists developed strictly scientific procedures and collaborated with the state to manage "delinquency" (Lišková 2018). It was, in many ways, unique not only in this region, but globally as well, also differing from the body-centred approach of North American researchers, and Masters and Johnson, in particular (Kościańska 2021c). This unique humanistic and patient-oriented approach shaped Poland's multiple elements of sex education and sex counselling under late socialism and the early years of postsocialism.

To sum up, the development of the connected fields of sexuality, sex education and sex counselling during late state socialism in Poland was supported by state funding and shaped by unique humanistic and patient-oriented methods, local traditions favouring the humanization of

medicine and global trends in sex research as well as the local dynamic of the power struggle between the Catholic Church and the socialist state, which created a climate of relative openness within the realm of sexuality.

The three elements of Sokoluk's education: humanistic psychiatry, sexology, and planned parenthood

These developments in sexology translated, in concert with the underlying political processes, into the creation of spaces in which new advisory and educational methods were advanced. The pioneering work of Imieliński, supported by state funding, laid the foundations upon which the younger generation (including experts like Sokoluk, born after the Second World War) could modify counselling methods further. In what follows, I narrate Sokoluk's path to becoming a counsellor and educator. It exemplifies the path to sexual counselling that was taken by many educators and counsellors of his generation. There were three major elements in this path: sexology, humanistic psychiatry, and planned parenthood—as I show below.

Sexology

Sokoluk was not directly affiliated with Imieliński's sexology unit, but the methods being developed there influenced the entire milieu of experts interested in sexuality. Sokoluk was not an exception – throughout his education and career he had been under the constant influence of Imieliński's sexology: he gave himself a solid grounding in Imieliński's work by reading his books, through informal conversations with other sex experts and learning about

them during Planned Parenthood training sessions where Imieliński's achievements were presented.

Imieliński's unique approach translated into novel training methods as well as the development of close relations between patients and doctors. Although the sexologists working with Imieliński were medical doctors, they received training in the humanities and behavioural sciences, including sociology, anthropology, history, the history of art and psychology. They were also encouraged to participate in cultural life as well as following new trends in literature and the fine arts. Some of them belonged to the Planned Parenthood Association and collaborated closely with psychologists and educators. The sexology unit established by Imieliński in Warsaw in the early 1980s also gathered together not only physicians but also therapists, and even a Catholic priest hired to offer spiritual support for transsexual patients (Kościańska 2021c). This knowledge and these interdisciplinary exchanges allowed them to better contextualize their patients' experiences and more accurately reply to their concerns.

It is worth highlighting that Imieliński's patient-oriented approach to sexual therapy was not limited to sexologists' understanding of patients and their writings about them. It was also exercised in much more difficult-to-uncover modes for contact situations with patients that required specific kinds of behaviour and deep (emotional) engagements on a very personal level. Imieliński introduced some practical solutions to facilitate these. He believed that sexology cannot be practised in regular hospital or clinical settings. Although the sexology unit he established in Warsaw in 1981 was placed in a hospital, he arranged the space to look home-like. He advised doctors to wear their own clothes and trained them to be polite and establish a relationship with patients on equal terms. That also involved creating a special space, for instance, for trans patients who may not only have been seeking (gender transition) treatment, but also the company of other trans people attending the clinic (Dębińska 2020). Furthermore, years before he established his sexology unit in Warsaw, Imieliński and other doctors from his

team often gave open lectures to the general public addressed to various social and age groups, and spent extra time with their participants, often after hours (Imieliński 1967: 10), listening to their stories and answering their questions in totally 'unmedical' spaces such as community centres.

Knowledge about the functioning of the unit was widespread among other sex experts and disseminated through such intermediaries as planned parenthood networks which, as Imieliński was already highly respected at the time, tended to follow his example. Consequently, Sokoluk, and other educators and counsellors knew about his efforts to engage with patients beyond the standard patient–doctor relationship.

Humanistic psychiatry

The effect of humanistic and patient-oriented developments on sexology was strengthened by both local and global trends. Two famous Polish psychiatrists, Antoni Kępiński and, even more so, Kazimierz Jankowski, pushed for the 'humanization' of psychiatric wards as well as the adoption of a changed model of the relationship between doctor and patient. Kępiński was "famous for his close relationships with his patients" (Zawiła-Niedźwiecki 2016: 26); he would always find time for them, as he put it himself, "in the clinic, at home, and even on the street" (quoted in Zawiła-Niedźwiecki 2016: 26). In the early 1970s, Jankowski ran an experimental programme in humanistic psychiatry at a psychiatric ward in the city of Garwolin, close to Warsaw. The experiment was modelled on similar pre-existing programmes in Sweden and the United States, and was carried out in collaboration with the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare in Washington D.C. (now the United States Department of Health and Human Services). Surrounded by a group of enthusiastic young people, Sokoluk being one of

them, Jankowski tried out experimental psychiatric methods on young male offenders who were being sent to the ward for compulsory treatment.

Jankowski's primary goals were to create home-like settings for those boys, enable them to gain a sense of self-governance and put them in touch with "emotionally involved non-professionals" (Jankowski 1975: iv). In practice, the latter were "young people … who declared their readiness to work with a large degree of personal engagement in the boys' lives" (Jankowski 1975, 16), like Sokoluk, who work in the ward as "educators."[5] Jankowski wrote that such educators "had a very positive attitude towards their educational work" (Jankowski 1975, 16). Sokoluk, for whom this was his first job (he was yet to even graduate), recalls today that his role was just to 'hang out with' patients who were not receiving any 'proper' therapeutic treatment. He was highly committed to his work at the ward. He and the other members of staff were supposed to "build contact with the patients, offer them positive stimulation, kindness and love, all the things they did not know" (Sokoluk 2016b). He spent three years there, but he recalls today that this relatively short period was so intense that it felt like ten years.

Jankowski described the people who signed up for this job as follows: "This function was sometimes taken on by people who had interrupted their studies, e.g. due to disappointment with their choice of profession" (Jankowski 1975, 16). Sokoluk was one of those people who had "interrupted their studies". His MA thesis in pedagogy argued for the presence of more educators in youth psychiatric wards. He spent an entire summer hitchhiking from one hospital to another, researching how they functioned. He presented his results alongside his ideas on how to improve the system. But he became embroiled in a conflict with his supervisor and refused to follow her suggestions for revision. It was only after working for Jankowski that he returned to the university and graduated, adding a chapter on the Garwolin psychiatric ward where he fleshed out his reformist ideas. Although Sokoluk was critical of Jankowski's

experiment, claiming that this method was not suitable for patients who were under compulsory treatment, he did learn that building 'contact' with them was a crucial element of counselling.

Jankowski himself saw that his experiment at the Garwolin ward was not entirely successful, drawing the same conclusion as Sokoluk about its lack of suitability for patients facing compulsory treatment (he also ran similar – highly successful – experiments for voluntary patients). But for Sokoluk and others, who later became major Polish therapists, it provided a highly intensive schooling in methods for working with emotions and building 'contact'. In this way, the experiment influenced the development of sex education and therapy, and counselling more generally.

Planned Parenthood

The final element that contributed to the education of Sokoluk and others was the work of the Planned Parenthood Association, which was established in the mid 1950s. Its advice on sex education and birth control was based on local Polish traditions, but it was also in constant contact with the International Planned Parenthood Federation. The Association not only organized family planning clinics and sex education classes in Poland under socialism, but also contributed to the development of psychotherapy (for more, see Klich-Kluczewska 2017, Kościańska 2021b, Kuźma-Markowska and Ignaicuk 2020).

Sokoluk was an active member of the Association in the 1970s and 1980s. During this time, the Association ran extensive training sessions for its members. Knowledge about sexuality and family planning was, of course, transmitted in such sessions, which included lectures by sexologists, including Imieliński's collaborators, and discussions centred around statistics, sexual behaviour and various sex education traditions as well as approaches to sexuality in various cultural contexts. However, the members also completed multiple training

sessions dedicated to learning how to deal with counsellees. These mostly focused on marital therapy as well as sexual counselling for young people.

Here again, as Sokoluk and others recall, building proper deep relationships with counsellees was crucial. Training programmes included lectures and workshop sessions with Polish and international experts from both sides of the Iron Curtain representing various disciplines, such as gynaecology, psychology, psychiatry and sexology (Sokoluk 2016a). The lecturer they remember most from these sessions was Czechoslovak psychotherapist and sexologist Stanislav Kratochvil, who was considered "the most brilliant psychotherapist" (Sokoluk 2016c). Sokoluk and others learned about various psychotherapy methods, such as the group psycho-dramatic method, which encouraged counsellees to prepare a theatre-like presentation of their concerns and enhance their own methods of 'building contact'. They also addressed their own sexual and relational problems to better prepare themselves for their work with counsellees.

In the interview, Sokoluk stressed that Planned Parenthood training sessions and workshop were essential for his and his peers' vocational formation: "I had the feeling that we were creating some kind of vocational milieu. … I would say that with most of these people I was actually on a first-name basis, if you know what I mean" (Sokoluk 2016a). These training sessions also contributed to the creation of new therapeutic methods. Sokoluk talked about the entire days he and other Planned Parenthood members would spend sitting on a floor in cotton sweatpants and sweatshirts in a training centre in the middle of nowhere and talking about sex education and counselling: "I remember our conversations during training sessions and after lectures. There were discussions and people would spar with each other. There was some kind of intellectual ferment. There were speakers from outside of our milieu, all of this was really [intellectually] stimulating. We had the feeling that we were pioneers, that we were paving the way" (Sokoluk 2016a).

The people who completed these training sessions later worked at the Planned Parenthood Association's clinics, consulting centres and mail advisory centres. They also, like Sokoluk, wrote manuals and handbooks for couples and for young people. The Association gathered together people of various professions – psychologists, educators but also physicians. Their clinics and counselling centres were organized, as was the case with Imieliński's sexology unit or Jankowski's experimental psychiatric ward, to look "home like". Even the physicians working there not only conducted strictly medical examinations, but also talked with their patients about sexuality and about life. The most famous example is Michalina Wisłocka, who wrote the most popular Polish book on sex based on her conversations with her patients, which went far beyond the medical. Her patients adored her, and her examination room was sometimes referred to as a "confessional" (Wisłocka 1979, Ingbrant 2020, Sadowska 2017).

'Contact building' in practice

Wiesław Sokoluk's work as a sex educator and youth counsellor was a product of these developments. In his practice, he combined sexology's openness to patients' concerns and a home-like atmosphere with the contact-building strategy he learned at the humanistic psychiatry ward and during the training programme at the Association of Planned Parenthood. These approaches required counsellors to draw on their personal experiences. Sokoluk came from what was an upper-class family before the Second World War and was raised by a single mother declassed by communism (his father died when he was an infant). From his early years, Sololuk was a hippy, hitchhiker and rebel who was in a perpetual state of conflict with his teachers and other adults; he even experienced homelessness after being expelled from the dormitory for improper behaviour. In other words, he relished spending his time in deep conversation on human nature with his peers but was never afraid to fight his corner or court

controversy. It might seem that this personal background would have made him an outsider, but he was actually part of the system and knew very well how to operate within it; for instance, he worked at the Ministry of Education and Upbringing and managed to organize a pilot programme for sex education in kindergartens. For Sokoluk and other counsellors and therapists of his generation, building 'contact' was such a crucial tool in sex education and counselling that these personal experiences were equally, if not more, important than formal training. It did not matter to Sokoluk whether education or counselling were done in person, at one-to-one in therapy sessions, during workshops or classes, or via telephone, by mail, or in publications. Answering letters, however, was a particularly important element of his activity.

In general, letters to experts played an important role in state socialist Poland. All major magazines ran various advisory services where readers could write to their favourite editorial board and seek counsel. Magazines used to hire experts to answer these letters, either in the press, or in the form of private letters. Letters from readers were treated seriously, and if printed, they remained in their original form. Only spelling or punctuation corrections were allowed, though letters were sometimes shortened.[6] Polish magazines ran sex advisory columns from the late 1950s. The majority of these were organized around letters from readers. Sokoluk served as a letter-answering expert for several magazines. In the late 1980s and early 1990s he worked for *Na Przełaj* (*Cross Country*), a progressive scouting magazine. His column was advertised as being written by the co-author of the "controversial" handbook – the one that had been banned from schools just two months after its publication in 1987, but was very much appreciated by young people (Romaszkan 1989). Writing to a magazine to ask for advice was a standard procedure for young people under socialism. However, Sokoluk was perceived by readers as a particularly sensitive, friendly, and competent expert.[7]

The most vivid example of how Sokoluk and other sex counsellors and educators worked and gave advice via mail is provided by a story from early February 1991. Socialism in

Poland had already ended by that point, but the structure of youth counselling was yet to undergo any significant change. A teenage girl wrote a letter to Sokoluk and sent it to the editorial team at *Cross Country*. She wrote: "This is the last letter in my life. I want to explain why I am leaving, why I have had enough of wandering between my dreams and the reality" (quoted in Sokoluk 1991, 8). She talked about a conflict she had had with her parents. "I was three months pregnant when my mother slapped me in my face. And then she said: 'Either you have an abortion, or you should move out'. I was telling her, I am an adult, I have a job, but she didn't listen" (1991, 8). The girl moved out. "Although everything was falling apart, I was the happiest person in the world. I was caring for the child of the man I loved. He was my first love. I am not holding it against him that he left me. I managed to understand him" (1991, 8). For the next four weeks, she had been homeless, and she was then helped by "those who one would never expect to be helped by" (1991, 8), namely a group of heavy metal fans wearing black leather jackets. They found a spare room for her. She was happy again, but it did not last long, as she had a miscarriage and later spent two months in hospital. She was depressed and blamed herself for the miscarriage: she heard her unborn child asking her "Mum, why did you kill me?" (1991, 8). Already by that point, she wanted to kill herself to "join her son" (1991, 8). She was fired from her job and soon found a new boyfriend. However, he was called up for compulsory military service. Once he got to the barracks, he sent a postcard telling her that it was "the end" of their relationship. After this, she decided to plan her suicide for 22 March 1991, her birthday. The letter was signed "Nic" (meaning, "Nothing" in Polish). There was no name, no return address.

After receiving the letter, Sokoluk needed some time to compose his reply. He was carrying the letter everywhere he went, trying to understand her situation as best he could. Not only on an intellectual level, but also on an emotional one. He told me: "I felt that this girl had just crossed a certain line. You could just feel it; needless to say, you could make two movies

based on her life story. … I felt that I was holding her life in my hands. Literally … In such a situation, it is easy to panic and make an insufficiently thought through decision. This case required deep consideration, especially as I couldn't contact her directly" (Sokoluk 2016b). At the same time, he thought that there was hope, as the girl sent the letter, instead of just killing herself. "I saw it was as a cry for help" (2016b). He felt he had to act. He was very deeply moved by the letter, which drew on experiences he knew well – conflict-driven homelessness, acting rebellious – but also viewed it as deeply disturbing because of the great responsibility that had been placed on him. It took him a week to write a reply. The letter from 'Nic' was published, along with Sokoluk's answer, on 17 February.

He wrote: "Your letter has been with me for the last few days. In the evening, it lies on the desk by my bed, in the morning it comes to work with me. … I believe that since you wrote, you are expecting something from us … You signed your letter as 'Nothing', but I would say – 'Too Much'" (Sokoluk 1991, 8). He continued "I keep looking at this date, 22nd March, and I am still hoping. It seems to me that you are giving yourself a chance. Not only to yourself, but to me as well. I will try to make use of it" (1991, 8). He explained to her that she had become stuck in a vicious circle of despair that was denying her the broader perceptive that would allow her to see that there were possibilities for improving her fate. He suggested that 22 March should be the day not of her death but of her second birth. "Imagine you are born again, but now you can direct your own life and are better placed to avoid all its traps and pitfalls" (1991, 8). He assured her that there were people who cared about her and offered to put her in contact with a psychotherapist in her hometown. He finished his reply to her in poetic fashion: "Your letter is lying on my desk in a circle of light. As if you were waiting for yourself. I am also waiting there. This is all we have now. We can't just dismiss it" (1991, 8).

There was also one more paragraph addressed to *Cross-Country* readers. Sokoluk asked them for their support. He made clear that the letter from 'Nic' was actually the second one he

had received in just a few weeks from a suicidal reader: “It is very sad and difficult [to process] that the various shades of love in our column appear alongside the shadow of death. Please write … Write how you feel while reading her letter, tell her something nice” (Sokoluk 1991, 8). He promised that if ‘Nic’ got in touch, all the letters would be sent to her.

Readers sent over a thousand letters. But there was no letter from ‘Nic’. On 10 March, the editors decided to publish some of the letters they had received, hoping that she would read them. For instance, Czesława, just like Sokoluk, had needed some time to reply: “After reading your letter quite a few times, I have been talking to you for the last two days. I am doing this despite my multiple commitments (I have five children). I call you my Little Daughter who is very unhappy and lonely. I am convinced that this is how a lot of people, adults as well as your peers, talk to you. Everybody is screaming ‘LIVE!’ And if you don’t want to live for yourself – live for us, for all of us who are frightened by your decision” (Letters to *Cross Country* 1991, 9). Czesława concluded by telling her own story, about how when she was 18, her boyfriend had left her and she had lost her job. She wanted to jump from a bridge but changed her mind and she did not regret it. At the very end of her letter, she invited ‘Nic’ to come over to her house to celebrate her birthday, making it clear that her presents were already waiting for her.

An entire large-format page of *Cross-Country* was full of letters like this. Readers wrote: “We are with you” (Letters to *Cross Country* 1991, 9). Some were so moved by Sokoluk’s answer that they decided to share their own problems, believing that he was the only person who could help.[8] Some of them pointed out to ‘Nic’ that the columnist’s answer was really powerful and directly referred to it in their letters. For instance, Janusz wrote to ‘Nic’ as follows: “You know, before you leave this world, I would like you to do something to make my dream come true. Get in touch with this guy from *Cross-County*” (Letters to *Cross Country* 1991, 9).

Finally, ‘Nic’ got in touch. When her letter arrived, Sokoluk was not at the editorial office. He got a phone call, dropped everything he was doing at that moment and headed directly

to the office to read it. She was alive and didn't want to kill herself anymore. Her life was saved. This time she gave her name and address. The editors packed all the letters and sent them out to her.

Sokoluk commented on this experience. "This is one of the letters to which I replied in a very personal fashion. … This is how I was taught to work. Here and now, something important could happen between two people. Of course, expert knowledge is important, but at the same time, we have to reach inside the other human being and we need to commit on a very personal level. This is the specific nature of psychotherapeutic work and any other work that intervenes in human fate" (Sokoluk 2016b).

It is true that this was the most personal published answer to a teenager's letter that Sokoluk ever gave. But from his archive, in which he stored letters and copies of answers, it is clear that every reply was composed in a very personalized manner. When people asked for some advice, for instance, on contraception, he would not only send a leaflet with birth control methods, but also refer to the letter writer's specific situation. When, for instance, a girl wrote to ask about contraception for her first intercourse with her boyfriend, who was insistent despite her being a bit afraid (of pregnancy, but not only), Sokoluk would advise on birth control, but would also write to the girl in an empowering fashion, encouraging her to think about what she wanted out of that relationship, but also from life generally. He would exchange several letters with some correspondents, or even meet them in person. He travelled a great deal around Poland, so he would meet up with young people from all over the country.[9] 'Building contact' was, therefore, an important element of sex education and youth counselling conducted via mail.

Similar methods of communication were used in the sex education classes Sokoluk taught. He asked pupils for their questions in advance and would prepare his lectures accordingly. Often, he stayed behind after a lecture, as young people wanted to continue their

conversation. For instance, he was often invited to give sex education classes in specialized high schools for future nurses. These were often boarding schools in socialist Poland, and after classes, he would stay overnight in a dorm. For instance, in a school in a small town in South-West Poland, pupils knocked on his door and invited him to their room for a chat and coffee. A whole group of them gathered, and they talked until 4 am. They shared their problems and talked about their anxieties, as most of them had come to this school from small villages. Becoming a nurse was a major upward rise in social mobility for them, but life in the boarding school was difficult, they felt lonely and were highly disciplined by the school. When they met Sokoluk there, they asked him about sex, birth control and physical pleasure more openly than during their normal classes (Sokoluk 2016c). Through these conversations, he was able, as an educator, to build 'contact' with them, and he could present the expert knowledge of sexuality in a way that was suited to the situation and experiences of those being educated.

Finally, this method led Sokoluk to co-write a sex education handbook for high schools (Sokoluk, Andziak, Trawińska 1987). He followed his counsellees' needs and feelings when he was writing the book: "When I was writing it, I saw the faces all my pupils and counsellees I had met over the years" (Sokoluk 2016c). He also remembered all the letters he had received in which young people shared their feelings and begged for help relating to sexuality and reproduction. As he had built 'contact' with them, he felt more affinity towards them than to other sex experts and the predominant conservative norms. Sokoluk's counsellees were especially eager to learn about their sexual initiation – when and how to do it to make it pleasurable and how not to get pregnant. Some worried terribly about issues such as their sexual orientation. All these questions were answered in the handbook in a very straightforward manner. Its publication caused a scandal as the book was attacked by conservative Catholic circles for "demoralizing" young people and banned from school use (more Kościańska 2021a, 2021b).

In all the cases outlined above, a specific mode of relations operated between the counsellor and counsellee. When advice was given, this was not reduced to the transmission of knowledge. Instead, such counselling sought to place sexuality and its consequences in a very personalized context. In order to become acquainted with this context, the counsellor needed to get to know the counsellee and build a deep emotional contact with them. This could be done via conversations until 4 am or by a counsellor carrying a letter around in his pocket for a week or by the 'sensing' of the letter's presence. These innovative modes of operation were at the core of state-funded socialist sexual counselling and education, but also advancements that were made possible by Sokoluk's personal engagement.

Conclusion

The moment when 'Nic' wrote to Sokoluk could be seen as the very last moment when Polish sexology, sex education and sex counselling were operating in parallel and based on socialist rules that enabled them to benefit from state funding and at least partly resist the influence of the Catholic Church. In the 1990s, sex education in Polish schools was taken over by Catholic conservative milieus and the open discussions on sex that were being conducted in schools by people like Sokoluk ended (Kościańska 2021b, Mishtal 2015). The Polish school of sexology become more medicalized (Kościańska 2021c), and the Planned Parenthood Association gradually closed down most of its clinics and services (Kościańska 2021b). The socialist press with its letter-answering columns was replaced by global titles such as *Bravo* and the rules of commerce, and correspondence by mail was supplanted by email.

Under socialism, Sokoluk and other specialists in sex education and counselling based their practices on the development of Polish sexology and worked by building very emotional and personal contact with their school pupils and counselees. This type of communication

between counsellors and their counsellees was possible thanks to local (humanistic) and global (driven by sex research in the West) developments in sexology, humanistic psychiatry and psychotherapy and their influence on sex counselling and education, but also facilitated by how society operated under the conditions of late state socialism. Although the state of that time is often presented as totalitarian and depriving its citizens of freedom and privacy, it did in fact offer the necessary material conditions and created spaces in which intimate conversations could take place. It financed various elements of sexual healthcare and education—in particular, sexology clinics, planned parenthood advisory centres and the advisory youth press—as well as training and hiring counsellors. The socialist state also moderated the influence of the Catholic Church on sex education and counselling, which after socialism become an increasingly conservative institution. As a result, counsellors and educators were afforded the space and means to implement advisory and educational methods for the transmission of knowledge, but also, like Sokoluk, to draw on their experiences to build emotional and personal contact with counsellees in order to give them not only standard advice but also offer more personalized and counsellee-oriented conversations. They not only built contact with people they met personally, but also with letter writers. They helped counsellees and placed their letters in a "circle of light" to enable better understanding and communication. When socialism was over and letters were replaced by emails, Sokoluk told me that he lost his ability to build contact as he was unable to fully experience, and hence understand, the emotions of the new societal and economic order.

Acknowledgements
Many thanks to the editors of this special issues for inviting me to contribute to this volume and for their helpful comments. I am also grateful to three anonymous reviewers for their suggestions. I am grateful to Philip Palmer for polishing my English writing.

Funding
Writing this paper was possible thanks to a Leverhulme Visiting Professorship at the Oxford School of Global and Area Studies (OSGA) and an OSGA research allowance. Collecting materials for this article was supported by the Department of Ethology and Cultural Anthropology, University of Warsaw.

Competing interests

There are no competing interests.

Ethics approval statement

There is only one human participant involved in the study: a senior sex educator who is also a published author of manuals and handbooks. He was interviewed by the author about the history of his work. He agreed to be interviewed and for his name to be used. There was no funding needed to conduct the interview.
Under the rules of the University of Warsaw, where the author was employed while conducting the interview, the formal ethical approval was not required.

Contributorship Statement

Agnieszka Kościańska is the sole author of this article. She designed and conducted the research on which this article is based herself.

References

Abu-Lughod, Lila. 1986. *Veiled Sentiments: Honor and Poetry in a Bedouin Society*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Alldred, Pam and Nick J. Fox. 2019. "Sexualities education and sexual citizeship: A materialist approach." In *Youth, sexuality and sexual citizenship*, edited by Peter Aggleton, Rob Cover, Deana Leahy, Daniel Marshall, and Mary Lou Rasmussen, 118—133. London: Routledge.

Basiuk, Tomasz and Jędrzej Burszta eds. 2020. *Queers in State Socialism: Cruising 1970s Poland*. London: Routledge.

Beatty, Andrew 2019. *Emotional Worlds: Beyond an Anthropology of Emotion*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press

Berggren, Kalle. 2014. "Sticky Masculinity: Post-structuralism, Phenomenology and Subjectivity in Critical Studies on Men." *Men and Masculinities* 17:231–52.

Czajkowska, Aleksandra. 2012. "O dopuszczalności przerywania ciąży. Ustawa z dnia 27 kwietnia 1956 r. i towarzyszące jej dyskusje". In *Kłopoty z seksem w PRL. Rodzenie nie*

całkiem po ludzku, aborcja, choroby, odmienności, edited by Marcin Kula, 99-186. Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego and Instytut Pamięci Narodowej.

Dębińska, Maria. 2020. "Diagnosing transsexualism, diagnosing society: the blurred genres of Polish sexology in the 1970s and 1980s." In *Queers in State Socialism: Cruising 1970s Poland*, edited by Tomasz Basiuk and Jędrzej Burszta, 59-73. London: Routledge.

Duch, Danuta and Elżbieta Przecławska. 1993. Szpital położniczy – bastion totalitaryzmy w: Prawa kobiet. Instytucje państwowe i społeczne a przemoc wobec kobiet. Medycyna a zdrowie kobiet, 9-19. Warszawa: Polskie Stowarzyszenie Feministyczne.

Fidelis, Malgorzata. 2010. *Women, Communism, and Industrialization in Postwar Poland*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Fleck, Ludwik. (1935) 1979. Genesis and Development of a Scientific Fact. Translated by

Fleck, Ludwik. (1935) 1979. *Genesis and Development of a Scientific Fact*, trans. by Fred Bradley and Thaddeus J. Trenn. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Fred Bradley and Thaddeus J. Trenn. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Gammeltoft, Tine. 2002. "Seeking trust and transcendence: sexual risk-taking among Vietnamese youth." *Social Science & Medicine* 55: 483–496.

Ghodsee, Kristen and Kateřina Lišková. 2016. "Bumbling Idiots or Evil Masterminds? Challenging Cold War Stereotypes about Women, Sexuality and State Socialism." *Filozofija i Društvo* 27(3): 489-503.

Ghodsee, Kristen. 2018. *Why Women Have Better Sex Under Socialism and Other Arguments for Economic Independence*. London: The Bodley Head

Ghodsee, Kristen. 2019. *Second world, second sex: socialist women's activism and global solidarity during the Cold War*. Duke University Press.

Harris, Alana. 2018. *The Schism of '68. Genders and Sexualities in History*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.

Hrešanová, Ema. 2016. "The Psychoprophylactic Method of Painless Childbirth in Socialist Czechoslovakia: From State Propaganda to Activism of Enthusiasts." Medical History 60 (4): 534–56.

Ignaciuk, Agata. 2019. "No man's land? Gendering contraception in family planning advice literature in state-socialist Poland (1950s-1980s)", *Social History of Medicine* 34(1):349.

Imieliński, Kazimierz. 1982. *Zarys seksuologii i seksiatrii*. Warszawa: Państwowy Zakład Wydawnictw Lekarskich.

Imieliński, Kazimierze. 1967. "Kilka słów o seksuologii" (interview by Sławomir Kryska). *Itd,* no. 24

Ingbrant, Renata, 2020. "Michalina Wisłocka's The Art of Loving and the Legacy of Polish Sexology." *Sexuality & Culture* 24:371–388.

Jankowski, Kazimierz. 1975. *Effects of psycho-, kinesi-, and pharmacotherapy in emotionally disturbed adolescents as evaluated with psychological and physiological methods : (a comparative analysis of therapy in in-patient and out-patient settings): final report*, trans. Helena Janet Grzegołowska-Klarkowska. Warsaw: self-published.

Jarska, Natalia. 2019. "Modern Marriage and the Culture of Sexuality: Experts between the State and the Church in Poland, 1956–1970." *European History Quarterly* 49(3): 467–490.

Klich-Kluczewska Barbara, "Biopolitics and (Non-)Modernity. Population Micro-Policy, Expert Knowledge and Family in Late-Communist Poland." *Acta Poloniae Historica* 115 (2017): 151–74.

Kościańska, Agnieszka and Wiesław Sokoluk. 2018. *Instruktaż nadmierny. Historia pewnej przygody seksualnej*. Wołowiec: Wydawnictwo Czarne.

Kościańska, Agnieszka. 2016. "Sex on equal terms? Polish sexology on women's emancipation and 'good sex' from the 1970s to the present." *Sexualities,* 19(1-2): 236-256.

Kościańska, Agnieszka. 2018. "Humanae Vitae, Birth Control and the Forgotten History of the Catholic Church in Poland." In: *The Schism of '68. Genders and Sexualities in History*, edited by Alana Harris, 187-208. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.

Kościańska, A.. 2020a. "'Treatment is possible and effective'?: Polish sexologists and queers in correspondence in late state socialism." In *Queers in State Socialism,* edited by Tomasz Basiuk and Jędrzej Burszta, 74-85. London: Routledge.

Kościańska, A. 2020b. "« Le droit de cité » : sexologie, homosexualité et discours des droits de la personne dans la Pologne socialiste des années 1970." *Sextant* 37: 135-148, https://doi.org/10.4000/sextant.336.

Kościańska, Agnieszka. 2021a "'The Handbook of Masturbation and Defloration': tracing sources of recent neo-conservatism which appear." In *Intimacy and Mobility in an Era of Hardening Borders: Gender, Reproduction, Regulation*, edited by Haldis Haukanes and Frances Pine, 218–234. Manchester: Manchester University Press

Kościańska, Agnieszka. 2021b. *To See a Moose: The History of Polish Sex Education,* trans. Philip Palmer. New York & Oxford: Berghahn Books.

Kościańska, Agnieszka. 2021c. *Gender, Pleasure, and Violence: The Construction of Expert Knowledge of Sexuality in Poland*, trans. Marta Rozmysłowicz, Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Kuźma-Markowska, Sylwia. 2013. "Międzynarodowe aspekty działalności Towarzystwa Świadomego Macierzyństwa w latach 50. i 60. XX w." In *Problem kontroli urodzeń i antykoncepcji. Krytyczno-porównawcza analiza dyskursów*, edited by Bożena Płonka-

Syroka and Aleksandra Szlagowska, 263—282. Wrocław: Uniwersytet Medyczny im. Piastów Śląskich.

Kuźma-Markowska, Sylwia and Agata Ignaciuk. 2020. “Family Planning Advice in State-Socialist Poland, 1950s–80s: Local and Transnational Exchanges.” *Medical History* 64(2): 240-266. doi:10.1017/mdh.2020.5

Leavitt, John. 1996. “Meaning and feeling in the anthropology of emotions”. *American Ethnologist* 23: 514–539.

Letters to *Cross Country*, 1991. “Nikomu nie wolno się z tego śmiać.” *Na Przełaj* 10: 9.

Lew-Starowicz, Zbigniew. 2017. Interview by the author. Warsaw. January 17, 2017.

Lišková, Kateřina, Natalia Jarska and Gábor Szegedi. 2019. “Sexuality and gender in school-based sex education in Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland in the 1970s and 1980s.” *The History of the Family*, DOI: 10.1080/1081602X.2019.1679219.

Lišková, Kateřina. 2018. *Sexual Liberation, Socialist Style: Communist Czechoslovakia and the Science of Desire, 1945–1989*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Lutz, Catherine & Lila Abu-Lughod (eds.). 1990. *Language and the Politics of Emotion*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Michaels, Paula A. 2014. *Lamaze: An International History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Mishtal, Joanna. 2015. *The Politics of Morality: The Church, the State, and Reproductive Rights in Postsocialist Poland*. Athens, OH: Ohio University Press.

Oosterhuis, Harry. 2000. *Stepchildren of Nature. Krafft-Ebing, Psychiatry, and the Making of Sexual Identity*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Oudshoorn, Nelly. 1994. *Beyond the Natural Body: An Archeology of Sex Hormones*. New York: Routledge.

Romaszkan, Anna. 1989. “Młodzi i seks.” *Zwierciadło* 1:7

Pankowski, Rafal. 2010. *The Populist Radical Right in Poland: The Patriots*. London, New York, Routledge.

Sadowska, Maria, dir. 2017. *Sztuka kochania. Historia Michaliny Wisłockiej* [film]. Warsaw: Watchout Studio.

Sherry, Samantha. 2018. "Introduction: New Perspectives on Censorship under Communism." *The Slavonic and East European Review* 96 (4): 601-613.

Sokoluk, Wiesław, Dagmara Andziak, and Maria Trawińska. 1987. Przysposobienie do życia w rodzinie. Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Szkolne i Pedagogiczne.

Sokoluk, Wiesław. 1991. "Nikomu nie wolno się z tego śmiać." *Na Przełaj* 7:8

Sokoluk, Wiesław.2016a. Interviewed by the author. Warsaw. April 4, 2016.

Sokoluk, Wiesław.2016b. Interviewed by the author. Warsaw. March 21, 2016.

Sokoluk, Wiesław.2016c. Interviewed by the author. Warsaw. April 25, 2016.

Stańczak-Wiślicz, Katarzyna Piotr Perkowski, Małgorzata Fidelis, Barbara Klich-Kluczewska. 2020. *Kobiety w Polsce 1949-1989. Nowoczeność, rónouprawnienie, komunizm*. Kraków: Universitas.

Terry, Jennifer. 1999. *An American Obsession. Science, Medicine, and Homosexuality in Modern Society*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Wisłocka, Michalina. 1978. *Sztuka kochania*. Warszawa: Iskry.

Wisłocka, Michalina. 1979. "Sztuka kochania" (interview by Janina Pałęcka). *Zwierciadło* no. 12.

Wochna-Tymińska, Agnieszka. 2012. "Zakład Produkcji Dzieci. Oddział Połoniczy w Polsce Przełomu Lat Osiemdziesiątych i Dziewięćdziesiątych XX Wieku," in *Kłopoty z seksem w PRL. Rodzenie nie całkiem po ludzku, aborcja, choroby, odmienności*, edited by Marcin Kula, 187-240. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego and Instytut Pamięci Narodowej.

Zawiła-Niedźwiecki, Jakub. 2016. “Antoni Kępiński’s Philosophy of Medicine – an alternative reading.” *Acta Universitatis Lodziensis. Folia philosophica*, 2016 (28): 23-35.

Zielińska, Eleonora. 2000. “Between Ideology, Politics and Common Sense: The Discourse of Reproductive Rights in Poland.” In *Reproducing Gender. Politics, Publics, and Everyday Life after Socialism*, edited by Susan Gal and Gail Kligman, 23-57. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

[1] During its history this organization has had three different names: the Society for Conscious Motherhood, the Family Planning Association and the Society for Family Development. For the purposes of simplicity, I refer to it in this article as the Planned Parenthood Association (for more on the history and activity of the Association, see Ignaciuk 2019, Kościańska 2021b, Kuźma-Markowska 2013)

[2] In Polish: *praca na kontakcie*.

[3] Letters and other unpublished materials have been stored by Sokoluk in his private archive and were given in 2016 to the author for research use. Under Polish law, letters are owned by the recipient and s/he can freely decide what to do with them. It is worth stressing the uniqueness of these archival materials. Many socialist magazines ceased to exist in the 1990s and the Planned Parenthood Association has significantly limited its activity for the last 30 years. These changes resulted in the destruction, usually through incineration, of papers – such as letters – stored in editorial offices and planned parenthood clinics.

[4] In comparison to today’s intersectional perspective, race and ethnicity where absent in his thinking as the Communist Party pushed for an image of Poland as monoethnic, see e.g. Pankowski 2010; for the communist roots for intersectionality, see also Ghodsee 2019.

[5] When Jankowski’s report was published in English, the word ‘educator’ was used. However, when Sokoluk was talking about this experience, he used the Polish term ‘wychowawca’, which has a slightly different meaning as it may indicate that the person in question is not only teaching someone but also bringing them up, showing them how life works, etc.

[6] I based these claims regarding letters from readers on my own research. I acquired a vast collection of letters sent to the press and was able to compare published and unpublished versions and could see how changes were

made. Furthermore, I interviewed counsellors hired by youth journals during late state socialism as well as a journalist who worked there, and all of them confirmed my observations. This is not to say, however, that there was no censorship in state socialist Poland, but clearly, direct censorship interventions were usually avoided through the self-censorship practiced by counsellors, usually performed through the careful selection of letters and an indirect style of writing (see, e.g., Kościańska 2020a; for a more general analysis of censorship under state socialism, see, e.g., Sherry 2018).

[7] The majority of letters we received that were from young people started by praising him as an excellent expert. Letters to Wiesław Sokoluk. Wiesław Sokoluk's Private Archive. Warsaw.

[8] Letters to Wiesław Sokoluk. Wiesław Sokoluk's Private Archive. Warsaw.

[9] Letters to Wiesław Sokoluk. Wiesław Sokoluk's Private Archive. Warsaw.