BEHAVIOUR STRATEGIES IN ASSERTIVE BEHAVIOUR WITHIN
MARGINAL GROUPS

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ABSTRACT

The marginal groups and the assertive style of behaviour in these groups represent considerable part of
the process of social work. The skill to practice assertive style of behaviour as certain number of
abilities necessary for expressing our feelings, thoughts, attitude, in suitable manner in a particular
moment, can be achieved through suitable education including prevention programmes in the various
marginal groups.

Key words: marginal groups, assertive behaviour, choice of strategy, crisis intervention

During the last years in the social work
practice, the idea of the so called assertive behaviour is more and more strengthening its
position. By its origin this idea has an instrumental character, but it gives an
opportunity for a wider integration of the personality in the context of the personal and
social skills.

This idea comprises both the aims and the
procedures through which the activity
regarding the formation of the assertive
behaviour is developing. According to many
authors, the idea of assertive behaviour, the
used models, through which it develops,
outline the specific social paradigm which
includes: aims, contents and technologies.

This new paradigm exceeds our general
notions of a protection from a definite type of
behaviour and outlines the developing of new
type of trends in the whole social model – the
one of the coping behaviour. Continuing this
plan of reasoning allows the outlining of
notion of complete personality development
within the frames of the individual
characteristics.

To date, the social work practice shows

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sufficient negatives concerning the formation
or recognizing the manifestations of assertive
behaviour in each separate individual in the
society. In the cases when the manifestations
of assertive behaviour are among the marginal
groups, the adequate assessment of its
manifestation in a specific personality can be
objectified still more difficultly.

The determination of the behaviour reactions
in the marginal groups the most frequently is
related to transfer of the assessment from
preliminary manifestations and adaptations to a
specific manifestation. The status of each
specific member of these groups is burdened
with the negative assessments of the society,
with the slighting or indifferent attitude to their
personal experiences and natural reactions. The
social worker, in his/her direct work with these
groups, is not always able to overcome and
change these attitudes in the society, all the
more when the manifestation of the self-
confirming (assertive) behaviour shows itself
as an attempt of self-expression and self-
confirmation.

According to R. Albert and M. Vonnegut,
1994, three styles of behaviour can be
differentiated: non-confirmation, self-
confirmation and aggression. The self-
confirmation is the middle point of the
continuum and in the most situations is the
most suitable reaction, in contrast to the
aggressive behaviour. The self-confirming
behaviour includes the defense of the own
positions and wills and despite that – respect of
the other and ensuring of fair ‘game rules’ for
each one among the interacting persons.

In the realization of the social practice is not
observed work with the specific client,
representative of a marginal group for
developing skills for defending the own rights
which on its turn advances the process of
forming bigger resistance in the client towards
manipulation, pressure, suggestibility etc. The
specific representative of each marginal group
needs specific support in this direction and in
this sense the ideas for assertive behaviour is
weaved into the context of the I-conception.

The skills related to the demonstration of
assertive behaviour in the representatives of
the marginal groups are acquired in the
ambience where they live and due to this
reason the manifestations of assertive
behaviour very often are masked and joined to
the understanding of the personality itself
regarding the manners in which it manifests.

In this sense, a few essential and important
questions arise in the practice of the social
worker, which define the discourse of each
specific step undertaken in the process of the
professional decision taking:
1. How to differentiate the aggression from the
assertive behaviour which in these groups
is deeply masked and is explicited as
aggressive behaviour?
2. What procedures are to be undertaken to put
in practice the manifestation of the self-
confirming behaviour with clearly
expressed a favourable attitude?
3. To which extent and how these procedures
shall affect the groups as a whole, reaching
to each of its members?
4. Can we deduce markers by which we shall
be able to clearly define the character of
the behaviour reaction?

The deduced questions orientate to the
processes of the social learning and the
solutions resulting from it about the social
practice.

Similar conclusion is also imposed by the
opinion about the essence and characteristics
of the marginal groups. The notion appears in
1920 as a definition of the impossibility for
adaptation of the emigrants to the new social
conditions. In the individual characteristic,
marginality is assumed as the incomplete
adaptation of the individual to the group. In
case of changes which occur with the society
structure, a marginalization also arises which
is accepted as a group marginalization. As many
scientists notice, ‘the marginalization not
always leads to taking the ground’, what is
more – the marginals often undertake actions
(individual or group) for re-integration in the
socium. With these actions, they take a choice
of behaviour which to confirm them and
defend them in the new conditions for them
related with various social changes.

As we have already emphasized, the assertive
behaviour is one of the styles of behaviour
which the personality can choose and
demonstrate in definite circumstances. It is
interesting to note that in the assertive type of
behaviour the personality defends his basic
human rights, without breaching the rights of
the others. In this sense, the personality who
realizes this type of behaviour knows well the
limits between himself and the others.

Reasoning on the different styles of behaviour,
it is proper to note that in the marginal groups
is observed the non-assertive style of
behaviour where some limits are crossed, but
still, in contrast to the aggressive style, the
rights of others are not breached.

Exactly the clear differentiation between the
assertive and non assertive style of behaviour
in the marginal groups and in each of the
members of these groups is a question which
the social worker has to decide with the
purpose of the professional choice of
behaviour to the group as a whole or to each
member of the group.

The difficulties of the process of differentiating
contain in the fact that both in the assertive
style of behaviour and in the non-assertive one,
the personality has the liberty of expressing his
thoughts and feelings in positive, as well as in
negative aspect. In the non-assertive
behaviour, the personality is impeded to
express his thoughts, convictions and feelings
and it allows the others to take advantage of
this.

In the marginal groups, as well as in the
society, all three styles of behaviour are
encountered. In most of the cases the non-
assertive and aggressive style of behaviour
prevail, which also determines the direction of
the social work with them for building up an
assertive behaviour.

Considerable part of the theoreticians, who
examine the human behaviour, is united
around a few general rules, defining them as ‘assertive’.
1. To have an opinion and express it.
2. To be independent.
3. To change your opinion.
4. To say ‘I don’t know’.
5. To say ‘I don’t understand’.
6. To say ‘I don’t worry’.
7. To make mistakes.
8. To feel and to express anger.
9. To refuse requests without feeling guilty.
10. Not to justify and not to excuse your behaviour when you refuse.

However, in order to apply these rules and achieve positive result from the whole activity regarding definite style of behaviour, as well as to make a precise choice to intervene into the marginal group or in specific person, it is necessary to make distinction of the behaviour style. According to C. Kolley, there exist some helping ‘keys’ to distinct the assertive, non-assertive and aggressive style of behaviour, namely:
- type of the felt emotion;
- manifested non-verbal behaviour;
- used verbal language.

These three leading determinants are of particular importance and decisive for the precise diagnosing of the behaviour style for the social worker.

The choice of assertive behaviour has to be supported with the purpose of overcoming the aggression in the marginal groups, overcoming the unconscious and uncontrolled behaviour, for the successful uniting of the latter to the socium. The process of forming an assertive behaviour is very often accompanied with a series of concomitant situations provoking definite behaviour stereotypes which not always can be inserted in the expectations of the social worker. The differences between the formed perspective for the manifestation of the assertive behaviour and its real manifestation as non-supporting behaviour or aggression is in many cases able to discourage the social worker. The process of forming is also burdened by the conditions and the ambience where the assertive behaviour is ‘worked off’. When working with marginal groups, the social worker periodically has to diagnose the change and to interfere, observing the ethic rules in the behaviour correction work. The practice analysis proves that the skilful use of the instruments for individual influence, the change and the overcome of the aggressive and non-assertive behaviour can be realized, the results of this change being solely in the benefit of the specific individual and the society as a whole.

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