The Invisible Violence: Symbolic Violence and Relations of Sociability in Brazilian Schools

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Abstract

This article aims to present the results of a study that focuses on the invisibility of violence in schools. The data of three large surveys, one global, the OECD Talis report (2014), and two surveys conducted throughout Brazil, supported by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) were analyzed: Youth Brazil Agenda: The National Survey on Profile and Opinion of Brazilian Youth (2013) and The Participatory Diagnosis of Violence in Schools (2016). For the data analysis, the categories of physical violence, structural violence and symbolic violence were used. The study also discusses the changes in the relations of sociability and civility from the process that aimed to universalize the access to school in Brazil. The study allowed us to conclude that the existence of an institutionalized form of school violence presents aspects that are not explicit and producse a sense of social invisibility, resulting from humiliation, contempt, rejection or exclusion.

Key Words: Invisibility of school violence; Symbolic violence; Relations of sociability and civility *the history of childhood has been a nightmare from which we have only recently begun to awaken.* **Lloyd deMause, The History of Child Abuse, 1998**

1. Introduction

Among the issues that affect daily school life and educational processes, not only in Brazil, but also in several countries is the violence in schools. Only recently has this topic attracted the attention of researchers, even in the face of the constant manifestations of teachers and school leaders about the growing seriousness of the problem. School community, managers and educational leaders have considered violence in schools one of the main problems to be faced in the school environment. It seems to be a general trend to consider violence at school as a reflection of social violence and to relate schools with higher rates of violence to their location in regions considered more violent or with higher poverty indicators. However, little has been discussed about the role of the school itself in the production of violence that has marked school relations. Researches dealing with violence in intra-school relationships are rare and researches wich study violence and personal suffering in daily school life are still rarer.

Considering the school environment as responsible for the constitution and learning, relations of violence and arbitrariness contradict the traditional image of the school as a socializing institution. The last thing we want to imagine about school is that it may have become a space for learning violence. However, the relations of violence are so naturalized that they have become a commonplace to the point they are not even perceived as such. The use of more aggressive gestures, terms or intonations, arbitrary orders and authoritarianism, among other forms of expression of daily violence, are so deeply impregnated in the school culture that their violent sense is marginal and obscure.

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Violence at school is present not only in the relations between fellow students, but also in teacher-student relationships that permeates all school activities. This study deals with the invisibility of violence in the relationships between subjects in the school environment. To reach its accomplishment were selected data, related to the problem in from three researches: TALIS 2014 Report, Research Youth Brazil Agenda, of 2013 and the Participative Diagnosis of Violence in Schools. From the data selected, an analysis of situations of humiliation, suffering and violence in the interpersonal relationships in school environment was carried out.

2. The TALIS Report (Teaching and Learning International Survey)

According to the report of the OECD's TALIS (Teaching and Learning International Survey) survey in 2013, with the participation of more than 100 thousand teachers and principals from the second cycle of primary and secondary education (pupils aged 11 to 16) from 34 Countries, Brazil leads the world ranking of violence against teachers. In Brazil, 14,291 teachers answered the questionnaire, in addition to 1,057 directors from 1,070 schools. The result shows that 12.5% of Brazilian teachers interviewed suffered verbal aggression or intimidation by students in contrast to countries such as South Korea, Malaysia and Romania, where the index was zero. In addition, Brazilian professors reported spending 20% of their time in occupied classrooms maintaining order, well above the average of 13% of the 34 countries interviewed by TALIS.

The focus of the TALIS survey is the working conditions and environment of the teachers, so only the teachers' opinions were considered. The data show that schools and classrooms constitute spaces where violence is constant interfering directly in the learning process and in the intra-school relations.

The fact that Brazil occupies the first place among the 34 countries surveyed by the TALIS, denotes the high degree of disaggregation of the relations of sociability in the school environment, making the Brazilian school one of the privileged spaces for manifestation of social violence. Another research, presented below, points out a greater complexity in the relationship between teachers and students and in the school relations themselves.

3. The Youth Agenda Brazil

The "Youth Agenda Brazil Research", held in 2013, was a project of the National Youth Secretariat (SNJ) of the Brazilian government, of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Participatory (Observatory Participatory Youth). The study was carried out with the population aged 15 to 29 years in the whole Brazilian territory.[i]

The survey found that twenty-six percent (26%) of the total interviewees had some experience of humiliation, disrespect or discrimination. Among those interviewed between 15 and 17 years (school age) twenty-two percent (22%) reported having had situations of this nature. One third of the respondents (33%) of the respondents who reported having felt themselves victims of humiliation, disrespect or discrimination stated that their worst experience of humiliation, disrespect or discrimination occurred until the age of 14.

Among those interviewed who reported humiliation, disrespect or discrimination, between the ages of 15 and 17, sixty-two percent (62%) affirmed that their worst experience of humiliation occurred in school settings and fifty-three percent (53 %) stated that this was practiced by people from the school environment. The school presents itself, as well as a space conducive to humiliation, personal disrespect and discriminatory treatment among people of the age group analyzed.

In the response regarding the reason for the worst experience of humiliation, disrespect or discrimination in school, the items related to appearance (19%), personal reasons (18%) and social condition are the dominant ones. However, the school environment appears in fourth place (11%) followed by racial discrimination in fifth place (10%). This item reveals the difficulty of interpersonal relationships in the school environment.

In particular, high rates of responses regarding physical appearance, social status, and racial discrimination are certainly fostered by the school environment if they are not explicitly combated or recriminated. Such experiences of humiliation, disrespect, or discrimination are hardly ever recognized and the resulting conflicts are unknown to the school authorities, who indicates a lack of awareness or the low importance attributed to this type of problem. On the other hand, it should be considered that the violence of intra-school relations makes teaching conditions even more difficult. Unprepared to deal with these problems, most teachers prefer to ignore their existence or let the students solve their difficulties among themselves, considering that this type of violence is beyond the scope of their activities.

This type of attitude contributes to the invisibilization of violent relationships in school, leading to the abandonment of the victims, which after being humiliated, disrespected or subjected to discrimination, are left to their own fate. One of the most interesting aspects of the research is the type of humiliation suffered. The question presented to the interviewees asks the respondent to describe how was the worst experience of humiliation, disrespect or discrimination he/she suffered suffered, indicating what happened, what the reason for the disrespect was and whose attitude was taken. An important aspect of this research refers to a type of violence, called symbolic violence, which will be detailed later. Among young people between 15 and 17 years of age, more than nine out ten respondents (94%) reported having suffered some kind of symbolic violence, which was discriminated according to the categories below:

a) Embarrassment, cursing, humiliation, insult (without mentioning that it was public);
b) Prejudice, racial discrimination - being black, being called black, monkey, vulture;
c) Discrimination by physical appearance - (fat) thin, ugly, handsome, having large eyes, short stature, having physical disability;
d) Mock, sarcasm, bullying, receiving nicknames
e) Social class discrimination - because one is poor, wore simple clothes or shoes, cannot have consumer goods;
f) Commercial service, disrespectful public service - refusal to attend, disrespect to priority servicing, door of the bank is not released;
g) Discrimination by place of residence or origin - being from the northeast (one of the poorest regions of Brazil), being from the interior or suburban areas;
h) Prejudice or discrimination based on sexual orientation by gender - gay, lesbian, bisexual; called fag, bufu;
i) Citizen's rights, non-compliance with the laws that protect the citizen
j) Slander, defamation, gossip, lying accusation
k) Love relationship - conflicts, disagreements, amorous contempt, jealousy;
l). Considered inferior;
m) Expulsion from home, community, church, bar;
n) Religious discrimination;
o) Discrimination due to illness - convulsion, diabetes, inability to walk;
p) Violation of privacy;
q) Discrimination for being a woman;
r) Discrimination for the way one is dressed, by the clothes;
s) Public embarrassment, public humiliation, public scolding;
t). Discrimination for being a single mother;
u) Abandonment, contempt, being denied by father, mother, responsible, spouse;
v) Age discrimination - do not believe in the age one has;
x) Discrimination for drug use (marijuana / crack);

4. The research called Participatory Diagnosis of Violence in Schools

The research called Participatory Diagnosis of Violence in Schools: speaks the young, was published in 2016 and coordinated by Miriam Abramovay, under the responsibility of the Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences (Flacso), the Brazilian Ministry of Education and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). A total of 6,709 students were interviewed between January and November 2015, aged 12 to 29 years, from primary and secondary public schools. The research was carried out in the seven Brazilian capitals whose homicide rates were the hihest by comparison to the national average, which is 82.7 homicides per 100,000 young people, according to the Map of Violence 2014. The research results points out to the existence of a culture of violence established and naturalized in the school environment, which affects not only students, but also teachers and school principals. According to the survey, seventy percent (70%) of students would have experienced some type of violence in the school they studied in the last 12 months. One out five students reported physical or verbal violence, of which sixty-five percent (65%) reported a colleague as an aggressor. The aggressions, however, are not restricted to the students. More than fifteen percent (15%) of the students claimed that the aggression came from the teachers themselves.

To the question: "Does something bother you at school?" The obtained answers were: robbery 18.6%; Other students 11.3%; Fights 12.0%; Threats 12.1%; Teachers 7.6%; Cyberbullying 7.2%; Invasion of people outside the School 7.0%; Other 5.8%; Physical aggression 4.1%; School director 3.6%; Gangs / rival groups 3.3%; Weapons 2.6%; Police 1.1%; Sexual violence.We can note that the robbery comes first, presenting itself as a routine situation in the school environment.

The reports point out the constant use of verbal violence, often disguised as jokes, involving social, racial and homophobic discrimination. The different forms of violence, verbal, physical and symbolic have as substratum a culture of latent hatred, based on prejudices and fixation of traditional patterns of normality.

The thefts of objects such as cell phones are often considered common, revealing an absence of conception of the school space as a place of relations of sociability. The frequency of school thefts, according to the report, leads to a feeling of insecurity in the school environment, as well as the idea of not belonging and distrust.

Physical assaults are triggered in various situations, often for futile reasons or, according to the research, for deficiencies in coexistence codes, and occur routinely during socialization activities such as in sports competitions. Physical aggression thus reveals itself as a form of socialization where the imposition of the will prevails without the recognition of the other as an interlocutor. Frequent fights are represented as natural events or jokes, even among teachers. Violence thus becomes trivialized and not a problem to be combated (Abramovay, 2016).

The report of the research concludes that the most common violence in schools are: the cursing among students; Insults from some students to teachers; The Cyber bullying; The confrontation, the calumnies, the insults among teachers; The lack of respect and ethics of school professionals; Authoritarianism and excessive verbal aggression in a variety of ways, both directed at pedagogical coordination, teachers, staff and especially students, by teachers and school leaders (Abramovay, 2016).

5. The school institution and the sociability processes

The research presented reveals a mismatch between the role of the school as a space for learning, not only of school contents, but also of coexistence and the constitution of social relations, preparing students for social life. Traditionally, school should be the privileged space for the development of civility and for learning respect for the other and for human rights. School violence reveals a grim reality about the school environment and the social interactions learned in this space.

One of the problems that may be contributing to the dissolution of the relations of civility in the school is an absence of the understanding on the part of the teachers and school authorities of the role of the school as institution and the ignorance of the social relations that do not obey the formal condition of the school like organization.

As Aquino (2006) observes, the problems that teachers are facing today in school were tipically solved fifty years ago with the corporal and psychological discipline. The teachers were allowed to beat, curse, segregate, punish, and exclude. Not a few teachers complain nowadays that they can no longer use these resources. The new regulation on the rights of children and adolescents, which classified these practices as criminal and punishable, withdrew from teachers' hands their main instrument of coercion. Fear and the corresponding submission can no longer be used as disciplining strategies and they are forced to view students as subjects averse to disciplining. Moreover, with the process of democratization and universalization of the school, the conflicts moved to a different scale, because the number of enrollments increased dramatically. The school was taken and forced to shelter precisely those whom the old school practices aimed at excluding. Hence the sense of impotence and the discourse of violence at school reveal the tension, the panic, and the discomfort in attending to the students whom the teachers feel do not belong to the school space as they conceived it.

The democratization of access to schools has brought a great deal of new social sectors into the classroom making the school a mass institution.

This new organization demands a new form of institutional arrangement and requires a greater understanding of the relations of sociability constituted within it. The study of interactions between school subjects should be considered in two distinct planes: on the one hand the formal and conscious plan must be considered since school is an organization instituted through a rational and deliberate ordering by the public or private powers. On the other hand, it should be considered that the school presents a broader aspect, including all the relationships and interactions that derive from its existence as a social group (Candido, 1971).

In addition to officially and legally established relationships, with hierarchies, rules and proper ordering, there are relationships between the different school subjects that are born of the school dynamics itself as a social group.

In this perspective, although there may be regulations that establish a homogeneous administrative organization for all schools of a certain type or region, there are also, for each school, relationships that are determined by the specific characteristics deriving from their own sociability. (Candido, 1971)

The relationships and interactions among school subjects express the aspects that are specific to school life and the forms of sociability that are established in the daily school life are not always immediately recognizable because they present themselves diffusely to the mere observer.

In general, it is believed that the school should be a place for the development of sociability through the acquisition of habits necessary for life in society.

This perspective, however, is always established from the viewpoint of adults, teachers and school authorities who privilege the senses and meanings they consider important to instill in young people and adolescents, thus ignoring the specific aspects of the sociability relationships of children and adolescents, Both in the face of a world already established by adults, and in the face of the very grouping relations developed by them.

Teachers and school leaders exert a set of pressures that serve the interests of social organization more than the interests of the relationships proper to the sociability of children and adolescents, who react in their own way, seeking to express their own forms of sociability.

This establishes a tension between the two patterns of sociability: on the one hand a pattern that expresses the need for students' adjustment to the model of sociability from the adult world and another pattern which expresses the interests and tendencies proper to the relations of sociability among students.

The educational pedagogical action should be situated at the confluence of the two forms of relations of sociability, attenuating the tension between the two branches. However, the actions of teachers and other school authorities only consider the need to incorporate students into the adult world, rejecting the forms of sociability proper to children and adolescents, often leading to the development of socially deprecated attitudes and norms that deviate from School social organization. In this sense, it is possible to understand school violence as an aspect of the tension between the students' sociability of their social, cultural and economic origins and the rejection of this form of sociability in the school environment. The school is understood by the students, not as a space of interaction and integration, but as a space of segregation and exclusion, which refuses and make invisible socially.

The violence described in the surveys also shows the school's inability to deal with the structural violence of society itself, which is present in the lives of students in the out-of-school environment. Focused exclusively on their interests as a social organization, the school, through teachers and school leaders, ignores the forms of sociability developed among students and does not problematize the conditions of their production. Impotent before a network that they does not know and does not understand, teachers and school leaders simply refuse this reality, solving the problems through other forms such as verbal violence, imposition of authority or in many cases expelling the student or transferring him or her to another school.

The results of the research have shown that in the absolute majority of cases there would be an invisible and silent violence, established in the very relations of sociability of the school and manifested through a form of communication that neglects relations of civility, even by teachers and school leaders. It is a communication that allows the circulation of a language that manifests itself through specific prejudices, ignoring small violent actions, considered minor acts without any meaning, which, meanwhile, propagates a process of invisible violence.

6. The concept of violence in school

The concept of violence has different meanings and has been classified by scholars and specialists of different forms according to their areas of interest. As an abstract concept, violence can be considered as an act of force that transgresses the limits of the physical, psychic, social and cultural existence of the human being, disregarding their fundamental rights. Violence deprives man of his own dignity, transforming him into a pure and simple object.

(Rocha, 1996) Considered in its effective and objective aspects, violence is a dynamic social, cultural and historical construction resulting from different mechanisms of social interaction. It is the perception of the transgression of a limit and the suffering caused, which allows one to characterize an act as violent. Violence therefore comprises several aspects that may vary according to culture and society historically and may range from physical violence to psychological violence. (Bobbio, 1992) For the purpose of this study, we will use three conceptions of violence: physical violence, structural violence and symbolic violence.

6.1. Physical violence

Physical violence is the most easily recognizable and comprises the aggression, subjection or mutilation of the body, causing visible marks of suffering. It presents different degrees of severity depending on the intensity of the physical force used by the aggressor resulting in physical and psychic sequelae. (Faleiros & Faleiros, 2008)

6.2. Structuralviolence

Structural violence is an indirect form of systemic violence perpetrated on population groups through economic and social exploitation, through the subtraction of material goods and resources or through the limitation or exclusion of access to the material, social, political or cultural conditions of existence. Examples of the results of structural violence in Brazil are high mortality rates of children and adolescents, caused by economic and social exclusion; drug trafficking, gang activity and extermination of adolescents in conflict with the law. (Minayo, 2004) The school violence can be considered as one of the reflexes of the structural violence that determines conditions of social vulnerability of young people and adolescents. The social vulnerability to which young Brazilians are exposed can be observed in the data of the Map of Violence in Brazil published in 2016. The data from the map, according to Waiselfisz (2016), shows that the homicide rate among young people between the ages of 15 and 29 increased from 3,159 in 1980 to 25,255 in 2014, representing a growth of 699.5%. (Waiselfisz, 2016, 49)

Waiselfisz notes that, considering that 15-29 year olds accounted for approximately 26% of the country's total population according to IBGE estimates in 2014, youth participation in the total homicides of 58% more than doubled their demographic weight among young people. School-age mortality ranged in 2004 from 0.3 (per 100,000) at 10 years of age, reaching 9.7 (per 100,000) at 14 years and 60.6 at 18 years, with a peak at 20 years of age, when firearm homicides hit the staggering mark of 67.4 deaths per 100,000 young people (Waiselfisz, 2016, 51) Another impressive figure refers to the number of black victims rising from 20,291 in 2003 to 29,813 in 2014 representing an increase of 46.9%. In relation to the white population, in the same period, 13,244 were committed in 2003, and in 2014 this number drops to 9,766, representing a fall of 26.1%. (Waiselfisz, 2016, 62)

6.3. Symbolicviolence

The concept of symbolic violence was first elaborated by Pierre Bourdieu and Jean Claude Passeron in the 1970s, who expanded the concept of violence by creating the concept of symbolic violence. According to these authors, a culture is defined objectively by a symbolic system constituted by meanings which are proper by their own. (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1975). The symbolic system is a cultural construction perpetuated by the internalization of the set of meanings that characterizes it and that allows each subject to locate his place and the place of others in the social order. The process of interiorization is naturalized in social practices and its arbitrariness is not identified by the subjects who undergo this process. Symbolic violence is defined by Bourdieu and Passeron as the imposition of meanings that, being internalized as natural, present them as legitimate, dissimulating the relation of force that constitutes them. Symbolic violence is not an act of physical or violent intimidation. It manifests itself in the invisibility of socially and culturally accepted internalized meanings as such and is therefore not considered unfair or opposed to good social interaction. This violence, however, is felt by the subject in an unspeakable and often unclouded way, being difficult to detect. Its character is symbolic because it binds to a network of social meanings that banish and exclude from social existence those who do not conform to it. It is here, in the field of symbolic violence, the greatest tension on the subject and therefore constitutes the greatest source of suffering. Prejudices, humiliations, and discrimination are seen as acts of extreme violence because they cause suffering that cannot manifest as socially unfair.

6.4 Symbolic violence as invisible violence

An important aspect that characterizes symbolic violence is the invisibility of the victim's aggression and suffering process. This makes the subjects who suffer violence invisible beings, who cannot even be recognized as victims. Systematically ignored, the victimized becomes doubtful of his own social existence, doomed to eternal invisibility.

Anxiety and resentment are the only feelings they can express and so they often react more aggressively in an attempt to become visible and socially recognized. It is possible to identify in the aggressive forms of treatment against teachers and school authorities a form of self-appreciation and search for recognition or, in other words, an attempt to react using the same aggressive language that they recognize in the way they feel treated. Many teachers enunciate this type of aggressive behavior as "the student wants to appear," recognizing to some extent that without violent action the subject would be doomed to invisibility (Riscal & Riscal, 2014). There is in school relations, and more specifically in the case of teachers, an implicit discourse that manifests itself in invisible violent practices such as disdain, detachment, lack of interest or, more often, a constant expression that there is nothing that can be do.

The processes of invisibilization have as one of their sources the fact that both the victim and the aggressor are not recognized in the aggressor / victim relationship. While on the one hand the aggressor appreciates his act as confirmation and legitimation of his superiority and authority, the victim, even though he identifies suffering, often does not recognize himself as such. This is not only an effect of the naturalization and trivialization of violence, but rather results from the fact that conceptions of violence and of victim are socially constructed and therefore the suffering associated with violence often depends on a process of legitimation social. The social demands associated with the recognition of the processes of suffering perpetrated to the victims, allowed the characterization of racism, gender discrimination and prejudices in general as acts of violence. However, apart from these socially recognized sufferings, there is a range of sufferings of a personal and absolutely individual nature, whose subjective character makes it difficult to recognize them as violence. In addition, in many cases, this unacknowledged suffering, accompanied by indeterminate anguish and resentment, ultimately leads to indiscriminate acts of aggression by the part of the victim, precisely because he is not recognized as a victim. Understanding the victim's construction process from the psychic pain engendered by violence is an important aspect of giving social recognition to suffering because it allows it to become socially intelligible. To grasp the social logic that underlies the notion of violence is therefore an important element for understanding the process of school violence, making possible the adoption of educational policies focused on this problem (Riscal & Riscal, 2014).

The feeling of pain caused by violence must find a form of socially recognized manifestation, but for this it must find a form of expression that makes sense for itself and for others. Sarti (2011) notes that the expression of suffering supposes cultural codes that sanction the forms of manifestation of feelings. In this sense, only when expressed through established and recognizable forms, the feelings become socially intelligible. The victim of violence can only become visible when his suffering can be represented by a socially intelligible language. The suffering, embarrassment and humiliation provoked by violence constitute an experience that, in order to acquire intelligibility, needs to articulate its subjective aspects to the social relations where it is inserted, allowing the constitution of a socially oriented language that allows to come to the surface what is left in the shade. This process of recognition, on the part of the subject and the other in relation to the violent act, can allow the constitution of a new collective knowledge about the silenced violence in schools. The process of sociability and civility is a symbolic learning that continually reaffirms the representations of the relations between the self and the other. It is not just about learning new habits or behaviors, how to behave in front of the other, but above all, a process of empathy, where the suffering of the other is experienced in me as my suffering.

7. Final considerations

The purpose of this article was to present the initial results of a study on school violence, considering the relationships of sociability, symbolic violence and the suffering caused by this form of violence in students, teachers and school authorities. The problem of violence in intra-school relations has been aggravated by the increasing democratization of access to schools. Social sectors that were previously segregated or excluded now constitute the majority of students in schools. The three studies presented allowed to establish the high degree of suffering caused by the violence relations present in the school environment.

The TALIS report presented the problem of violence from the point of view of teachers who, in addition to suffering various forms of hostilities, have to dedicate much of their classes to solving problems of school violence. The other two researches allow us to establish the different aspects and forms of suffering resulting from the environment of violence in schools.

In addition to being a reflection of the violence of society, which particularly affects young people and especially those belonging to the poorest and most excluded sectors of the population, school violence has its own aspect because it points to violence characteristic of the school institution itself.It is an institutionalized violence that permeates all aspects of school life in its pedagogical, political, social or cultural dimensions. Explicit violence actions that inflict physical harm are easily verifiable and can be officially banned in school organizations. More difficult to perceive are the forms of violence that produce a sense of humiliation, contempt or exclusion. In this case are all forms of bullying, racism, and homophobia, and gender, social or cultural violence. The impotence of the victim who cannot share suffering with anyone else can lead tto accept his or her social invisibility or to respond to aggressions in the same violent manner, thus seeking to ensure some visibility. The study presented here allows us to conclude that a project of social transformation aimed at an egalitarian society should aim not only at the democratization of access to school, but also, and perhaps mainly, the relations of sociability and civility that determine daily life through a change in the very organization of the school institution. It is in this space that, through a conspicuous invisibility, subjects are submitted to an invisible type of violence because they do not have yet any relevance or social protection.

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Note

[i]The sample consisted of 3,300 interviews distributed in 187 municipalities, stratified according to their geographic location, the nature of the municipality (capital, metropolitan or inland) and locality situation (urban and rural areas) and population size (divided into small municipalities, According to the data of the PNAD - 2011 (National Survey of Household Samples) carried out by IBGE (Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics). The sampling process was the probabilistic selection in multiple stages (COCHRAN, 1977)