



Family logotherapy Logoterapia rodzin¹

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Abstract: The paper outlines the concept of family logotherapy in relation to systemic family therapy, popular in Poland. The basic philosophical and anthropological assumptions of Frankl's logotherapy, and thus the phenomenon of free will, as well as the will to make sense and to find the meaning of life are discussed. Referring to the systemic family therapy dominant in the Polish discourse, the basic assumptions, goals and structure of family logotherapy are presented, according to which the conscious values, senses and meanings of individual members shape the pattern of interactions within the family.

Keywords: logotherapy, family, values, meaning in life

Abstract: Niniejszy artykuł przedstawia zarys koncepcji logoterapii rodzin w odniesieniu do popularnej w Polsce systemowej terapii rodzin. Omówione zostały podstawowe założenia filozoficzno-antropologiczne franklowskiej logoterapii, a zatem fenomen wolnej woli, woli sensu i sensu życia. Odwołując się do dominującej w polskim dyskursie systemowej terapii rodzin, przedstawiono podstawowe założenia, cele i strukturę logoterapii rodzin, według której uświadomione wartości, znaczenia i sensy poszczególnych członków kształtują wzorzec interakcji między najbliższymi.

Słowa kluczowe: logoterapia, rodzina, wartości, sens życia

Introduction

Family therapy is a special type of psychotherapy. It differs from other forms of psychotherapy in that the depository of the therapist's loyalty is the good of the family as a whole (Namysłowska, 2000). In other therapeutic trends, even if they are implemented within the framework of the group therapy method, the beneficiary of psychotherapeutic interactions is a single person. What distinguishes family therapy from other forms of psychotherapy is handling of the family, treated as the basic form of the structure of human populations. In other currents, the beneficiary of psychotherapy is always a single person. At most, the family can benefit indirectly from such therapy, if it is used by an individual. Family therapy and couples therapy indirectly care for the well-being of the

individual as a member of the family system. It is the family as a whole that is more important to the therapist than the well-being of its individual members.

In many classifications, family therapy is presented on a par with psychodynamic and psychoanalytic therapy, behavioral-cognitive therapy or humanistic therapy. Such a combination is a simplification, because family therapy has developed many different schools taking advantage of the different trends of individual and group therapy. Thus, we have psychodynamic family therapy, cognitive-behavioral, strategic, structural, communicative, narrative or postmodern family therapy (Goldenberg, Goldenberg, 2006). Therefore, family therapy cannot be placed in parallel with other trends, because it is interdisciplinary and even transdisciplinary using the achievements of various trends.

1 Artykuł w języku polskim: <https://www.stowarzyszeniefidesetratio.pl/fer/2022-1Sipow.pdf>

One of the newer proposals for family therapy is the use of Viktor Frankl's logotherapy. The aim of the paper is to present the contemporary concepts of family logotherapy and compare them with systemic family therapy, which is popular in Poland.

1. Logotherapy as a psychotherapy focused on meaning in life and values

"Healing through meaning" as a definitional formula is one of the most suggestive and at the same time accurate ways of understanding logotherapy (Fabry, 1968). The natural human need to have a meaning and values in life, although threatened by the subjectivism and relativism of fluid postmodernity, is a key pillar for logothetical anthropological and philosophical concepts, and at the same time a fundamental "life force" (Frankl, 2018). For this reason, logotherapy is also called psychotherapy focused on the meaning of life.

The logotherapeutic trend has been regarded as the third Viennese school of psychotherapy (Russo-Netzer, Ameli, 2021). Viktor Frankl (1905-1997), an Austrian psychiatrist and neurologist, constructing the theoretical foundations of the logotherapeutic approach, argued directly with Freudian psychoanalysis and Adlerian individual psychology (Marshall, Marshall, 2012). At the heart of Frankl's reflections, there was global and overarching motivation that guides human existence, and therefore the question of what makes the person want to live and act. The mind is naturally and constantly guided by a specific intention, which, according to Frankl (2009), can be described as the will of meaning. Confronting the previous theories of needs and aspirations with personal experiences related to the ordeal of the Holocaust, he concluded that man is guided in life neither by the Freudian principle of pleasure, nor by the Adlerian will to power. What gives the potential and trajectory to human existence is the will to make sense.

All logotherapeutic concepts oscillate around the phenomenon of the meaning of life, because the pursuit of finding and implementation of meaning is the most powerful metamotivation in human life.

In psychological terms, the meaning of life is understood as a subjective sense of purpose and experiencing values; understanding oneself and the world; self-esteem; a stock of life goals; mechanisms of self-regulation and coping with existential situations (Vos, Vitali, 2018). The operability of such a specific concept, however, does not fully include the logotherapeutic concept of the meaning of life, located in the spiritual (so-called noetic) area rather than in the psychic one.

Using the philosophical anthropology of Max Scheler, Frankl found arguments for considering the phenomenon of spirituality as a being separate from the psyche and the body (Lehman, Klempe, 2015). The bio-psychological dimension of human functioning is the basis of the existence, but it is subjectively underdeveloped, being in some way closed by biological and environmental determinism. The body and psyche are the starting point in the process of "becoming" a person, they are the area of expression of existence, not its essence. The specific shape of personal existence is given through the "quality" of the noetic area (Popielski, 2018). The man reaches the noetic dimension through self-transcendence (Frankl, 1984) – going beyond the psychosomatic area of functioning to self-reflection, making himself an object of observation and moral evaluation.

One of the pillars of Frankl's thought is the question of free will, which opposes the deterministic concept of man (Frankl, 2018). It defines a specific type of personal freedom that does not exempt from general conditions and does not distance oneself from responsibility. It is realized through self-experience and personal self-qualification of existence (Popielski, 2008). It expresses freedom to phenomenologically interpret one's own existence and to adopt an attitude towards fate. Another aspect of the concept of free will is directly related to personal responsibility for who a person becomes. The ideas developed on the basis of psychology and psychiatry, regardless of the paradigm adopted, describe the concepts of human being in the soma - psyche terms as a reactive system with specific properties and a way of functioning determined by adaptation to external factors, realizing certain innate potentialities (Zamiara, 1992; Pietras, Witusik, Mokros, Sipowicz, 2019). Frankl opens the closed circle of biological and environmental conditions, expanding the vision of human existence

to the noetic (spiritual) area, which is filled with freedom to realize values. “Man is sometimes driven by his drives, but attracted by meaning” (Frankl, 2018, p. 62), and thus it is within the scope of his freedom that the decision remains as to whether or not he wants to fulfill this meaning.

The man fulfills the meaning of his existence through the realization of values. There are three ways to do this: (1) through what he gives to the world himself; (2) through what he draws from the world and (3) through the attitude he takes toward fate (Frankl, 2018). The first two ways are naturally accessible to man - because a little talent and power is enough to shape the world and the senses to experience and live. Attention should also be paid to their limitedness and exhaustibility. It is not difficult to find oneself suddenly in such a life situation, in which both action and experience will turn out to be significantly limited or impossible to fulfill (e.g. the experience of illness). The third way is related to the ability to endure the inevitable fate and suffering. When a man is unable to shape his situation, he always has the opportunity to overcome it by realizing the values associated with his own attitude (Frankl, 1984). The logothetical thought carries a certain tragic optimism (Russo-Netzer, Ameli, 2021). Even if a person has already lost everything in life and is deprived of the possibility of realizing the meanings resulting from the value of creation and experience, the meaning invariably hidden in suffering still has to be fulfilled (Frankl, 2018). From this perspective, it becomes clear that human life never loses its meaning.

The acquisition of the capacity to suffer is the supreme act of self-formation. The noetic qualities of freedom and responsibility (Popielski, 2008) place before the man a constant need to decide – about something, about someone, but above all about himself. Each resolution should be understood as one’s own decision, which shapes the decisive person. In the act of self-transcendence, the man is able to rise above his own psychological and somatic conditions in order to choose the attitude he will take towards himself and towards the world. Thus, the man has the freedom to shape his own character and to take responsibility for who he becomes, thus implementing values and fulfilling meanings in the highest moral way.

The inherent longing for the meaning of life and the freedom to realize values is not always the same as the real and full experience of that meaning. The existential frustration thus experienced shapes a barren place in the noetic dimension of human functioning. Existential vacuum becomes a dangerous area of acute lack - a void in the soul that the man wants to fill at all costs (Frankl, 1984). Emptiness can become saturated with meaning and values, which logotherapy tries to support, and human existence thus acquires a healthy fullness. Unfortunately, acute emptiness is filled all too often with psychopathological and existential symptoms: anxiety, depressed mood, addiction, aggression, despair, confusion, anomy, etc. (Marshall, Marshall, 2012).

In the process of psychotherapy, the logotherapist implements the appropriately targeted techniques and elements of psychoeducation based on the fundamentals of logophilosophy, in order to enable the person to clarify and fulfill the individual sense – in the dimension of individual events and situations (meaning of the moment) and in the universal and holistic aspect (ultimate meaning) (Dezelic, Ghanoum, 2015). In the course of logotherapy, through self-transcendence and exploration of the noetic dimension of existence, the client discovers the “to” freedom belonging to him, the ability to decide in accordance with the values and the essence of responsibility for his own existence.

2. Logotherapy as a new approach in family therapy

In contrast to systemic family therapy, popular currently thanks to long-term of activity of teams led by Prof. De Barbaro in Krakow and Irena Namysłowska in Warsaw, logotherapy perceives the family from the perspective of the system of values and meanings inherent in its individual members (Lantz, 1993). Systemic therapy of families assumes that the family is a self-regulating system with its boundaries and subsystems, constituting at the same time a subsystem of a larger system such as the society. There are such phenomena in the family as the creation of subsystems, triangulation, the presence of transgen-

erational myths, intra-family loyalty, or the family ego (Goldenberg, Goldenberg, 2006). Logotherapy of families, in turn, focuses on the mutual relations between the values and meaning of life of the individual members and the interactions between them. The awareness of meanings and values within the family shapes the correct pattern of interpersonal relationships, which in turn favor the clarification of the noetic area (Fig. 1).



Source: own elaboration based on (Lantz, 1986).

Fig. 1. The relationship between the awareness of meanings among family members and the pattern of interaction.

Logotherapy of families was developed in the 1970s by James Lantz. The assumptions of the therapeutic process, the foundation of which is Frankl's psychotherapy focused on meaning, have been enriched with a transactional orientation (Lantz, 1993). Family psychotherapy in the logotherapeutic approach refers directly to the objectives of the individual logotherapy process, and thus it serves to search for meanings and values. And although he does not perceive family members as the elements of a certain system, it would be wrong to understand family logotherapy only through the prism of the sum of clarifications of the meanings and values of the individuals. Lantz (1992) also refers to the phenomenon of meaning lived by the family as unity.

The family is a unique, irreplaceable entity with a three-level structure of interaction - analogous to the personal structure of its individual members - in the physical (somatic), mental (emotional, intellectual) and noetic (spiritual) areas (Marshall, Marshall, 2013). It should be emphasized that while family therapy in systemic terms oscillates around the psychological dimension of family interactions, logotherapy is focused on the noetic aspect. It is assumed

that working out effects only at the emotional and cognitive level leaves family members with a sense of some kind of incompleteness (Lantz, 1989). The apparent improvement in the family functioning does not include constructing a common system of values and sharing meanings, and thus looking at life in the same direction.

The work of a logotherapist oscillates on a delicate border between what is common and what is individual. The subject of interactions includes both the family as a unique set of shared meanings and values, and the axiological universes of each member individually. Similarly, in the systemic understanding of the family, one speaks of both the "ego" of its individual members and the "family ego" and the consolidation of both constructs (Goldenberg, Goldenberg, 2006). Logotherapy makes it possible for individuals to find and live the meaning of existence in relation to being part of a group of people close to each other (Lantz, 1986), who, despite many significant differences, are connected by the most durable bond, which is mutual love.

Lantz (1992, 1993, 1986, 1989) uses the concept of family meaning without specifying the exact scope of its understanding. The relationship between the meanings and values that define the individual members and the axiological construct inherent in the family as a whole requires a thorough examination. The question concerning the process of constructing meanings, or perhaps making them common within the family also seems to be extremely interesting².

Logotherapy of families facilitates the process of searching for meaning by the family, supporting the individual members in clarifying and implementing the noetic dimension of their functioning (Marshall, Marshall, 2013). It should be emphasized that the role of a logotherapist is to facilitate the process of discovering and realizing the axiological universe, not to provide ready-made meanings tailored to the client's needs. Experiencing values and meanings is possible only through self-transcendence (Frankl, 2018), which is a detachment from the psychosomatic dimension of functioning towards reflection

² It is necessary to emphasize the urgent need to expand and update the theoretical and methodological framework of family logotherapy, and above all the need to design and conduct research enabling the construction of an empirical base. As an extremely niche area, logotherapy of families is a thread barely mentioned in the logotherapeutic literature..

and self-reflection at the noetic level. Such a directed peregrination makes it possible both to look at oneself (emotions or behavior) from a certain perspective and to establish a self-transcendent relationship with objects outside the “ego” - nature, other people, as well as the world of ideas (Lantz, 1992).

Seemingly ordinary subjective interactions or contact with objects take on a completely different meaning, going beyond the somatic area (what we can see, hear, hug, etc.) as well as the psychic one (what arouses our emotions, requires understanding or remembering), and reaching the noetic area (what is the essence of this? is it important to me in life? is it worth devoting to it? what values and meaning are hidden here?). Logotherapy, therefore, provides the family members with the opportunity to have an existential meeting with themselves and, above all, with their loved ones. It is impossible to discover one's own noetic potential without simultaneously exploring the values and meanings and needs that determine the existence of those closest to us (Lantz, 1993). Family members discover logophilosophical paradoxes - to strengthen themselves (improve their self), they need to give themselves to others; to find oneself, one must get lost; to understand oneself, one must challenge narcissistic self-absorption. Realizing the noetic potential of this type of relationship is an invaluable remedy in family therapy (Lantz 1992).

Family logotherapy faces many symptoms and problems that are a signal that the experience of meaning has been disturbed within the family and its individual members experience existential vacuum. That emptiness is filled with anxiety, depression, aggression, addictions or other psychopathological symptoms. The axiological sterility of the family disturbs and reduces the relations between its members (Lantz, 1989). In family logotherapy, it is assumed that the proper functioning in the noetic area of all relatives implies the correct pattern of interactions between them, and therefore the proper functioning of the institution. The opposite relationship is also mentioned - healthy relationships among family members are conducive to shaping the maturity of the noetic dimension of existence (Lantz, 1993). A somatic illness, mental disorder or suffering of one of the family members is perceived in family logotherapy

not in terms of specific symptoms, but rather as an impact on the noetic dimension of existence struggling with a difficult experience of a person, which in turn implies both the interactive pattern in the group and the noetic functioning of other family members (Lukas, 2014).

For comparison, it should be emphasized that according to the main assumption of systemic family therapy, a mental or behavior disorder is a manifestation of the pathology of the whole family, and the symptoms are presented by the family member who is the weakest or delegated to present symptoms. According to systemic family therapy, the disease is morphostatic in character, which means that it pathologically strengthens the ties within a disturbed family (Goldenberg, Goldenberg, 2006).

According to Lantz (1992, 1993), the pathology of the family can be understood also as a set of non-adaptive thinking patterns and behavior strategies, which cover the fear of experiencing and realizing common meanings and values, and the consequent resistance. Apparently, it seems absurd to say that any individual or group seeks to avoid discovering the meaning of life. However, it should be understood that following the axiological compass is burdened with the necessity of conscious acceptance of the basic noetic qualities, which are the freedom of the subject “to become” and the responsibility for one's own existence. They make the individual delicate and vulnerable, because they cause a deprivation of the protective armor in the form of escape into appearance and illusiveness.

The pathological strategies for avoiding meaning presented by Lantz (1992) resemble the typical mechanisms described in the literature on family therapy, referring to the systemic understanding of the family. A perfect example is the “minor as marital therapist syndrome”. As a result of stress associated with conflicts between spouses, their offspring manifests escape behavior, tantrums or symptoms of psychosomatic disorders, which assumes a regulatory function in the context of cohesion of the family. The parents consolidate in caring for the child, temporarily silencing the dispute and thus masking the existential vacuum that accompanies the family. Care for the child is created as a substitute meaning. It should be

noted that a similar mechanism is described in the field of systemic family therapy, where it is assumed that the disease has a morphostatic function in the family (Goldenberg, Goldenberg, 2006).

Typically, the structure of the family logotherapy process includes three stages (Lantz, 1987; Marshall, Marshall, 2013). The first of them focuses on learning the family history with particular emphasis on the system of values, senses and meanings. The next phase involves family negotiation of the meanings and values they have become aware of. The family has a chance to learn to communicate with each other at the noetic level, as well as to define, name and understand each other's axiological universes of the individual members, constructing the system of values, senses and meanings, as well as attitudes characterizing the family on the principle of commonality. During that time, the logotherapist has the opportunity to collect further information. The third stage involves facilitating the process of

self-transcendence and self-knowledge in the noetic dimension, focusing on discovering the previously unconscious values and meanings, implying the attitudes and patterns of interaction.

Conclusion

Family logotherapy is a relatively new and not yet widespread approach in the therapy of families. It differs in its fundamental assumptions and views on the functioning of the family from the systemic family therapy popular in Poland, with some points noticeably common to both systems. After all, the creator of family logotherapy, James E. Lantz (1992) was inspired not only by Frankl's psychotherapy focused on the meaning of life, but also by other approaches. Logotherapy of families is based in its fundamental assumptions on logophilosophy, but it is no stranger to the influence of the classical approach to family therapy.

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