

**ADOLESCENCE IN THE EXISTENTIAL PERSPECTIVE - THE
PROBLEM OF SEARCHING FOR THE SENSE OF LIFE AND
CREATING OF VALUES` HIERARCHY IN YOUNG PEOPLE**
**DOJRZEWANIE W PERSPEKTYWIE EGZYSTENCJALNEJ – PROBLEM
POSZUKIWANIA SENSU ŻYCIA I KSZTAŁTOWANIA HIERARCHII
WARTOŚCI U MŁODZIEŻY**

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ABSTRACTS

The article takes problems of the period of adolescence as a particular stage of life in which young people seek a sense of their existence and create their hierarchy of values. The author starts by discussing the feeling of sense of life issues and relationship to values which are presented in many different ways in psychological literature. The concept of Viktor Emil Frankl – the creator of the logotherapy - will be emphasized here, because it was the inspiration for the author`s research study. The next chapter will present the developmental factors in the experience of the meaning of life with particular focus on adolescence as a period of stabilizing the formation of identity, the crystallization of attitudes and beliefs, and finally the creation of personality. Then the author will take the issues of existential emptiness and neurosis called by Frankl “noogenical” as examples of failures in the search for sense in young people`s life. In the next chapter, the author will present both Polish and international researches on issues of values among young people. The last part of the article focuses on author`s international Polish-Italian comparative research on the sense of life and attitude to values of the humanistic faculties` students. The surprising results of this study allowed the reflections and conclusions that have not confirmed Frankl`s concept and the factors that help or make harder young people find the sense and purpose of life.

Artykuł podejmuje problematykę okresu adolescencji jako szczególniego etapu rozwojowego, w którym młodzi ludzie poszukują poczucia sensu życia i kształtują swoją hierarchię wartości. Autorka rozpocznie pracę od omówienia zagadnień poczucia sensu życia i stosunku do wartości wy-

stępujących pod różnymi postaciami w literaturze psychologicznej. Szczególnie zostanie tutaj zaakcentowana koncepcja twórcy logoterapii Viktora Emila Frankla, która stała się inspiracją dla badań autorki. W kolejnym rozdziale przedstawione zostaną czynniki rozwojowe w doświadczaniu sensu życia ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem okresu adolescencji jako czasu kształtowania się i stabilizowania tożsamości, krystalizowania się postaw i światopoglądu, czy wreszcie formułowania osobowości. Następnie autorka zajmie się problematyką pustki egzystencjalnej i nerwicy nazwanej przez Frankla „noogenną” jako przykładami niepowodzeń w poszukiwaniu sensu życia u młodych ludzi. W kolejnym rozdziale autorka przestawi polskie i międzynarodowe badania nad problematyką wartości u młodzieży. Ostatnią część artykułu wypełni omówienie porównawczych międzynarodowych polsko – włoskich badań autorki nad poczuciem sensu życia i stosunkiem do wartości u studentów kierunków humanistycznych. Zaskakujące rezultaty niniejszych badań pozwoliły na refleksje i wnioski, które nie potwierdziły koncepcji Frankla dotyczącej czynników utrudniających i ułatwiających znalezienie młodym ludziom sensu i celu w życiu.

KEY WORDS:

adolescence, sense of life, values, egzistencjalizm, logoterapia
dojrzewanie, sens życia, wartości, egzystencjalizm, logoterapia

The period of adolescence is a special time of searching for the meaning of life and the development of values' hierarchy, essential for the development of the personality and identity of the young man. Analyzing developmental factors in experiencing of the sense of life, puberty turns out to be a period in which crystallizing attitudes and beliefs, and finally formulating and stabilizing personality is particularly evident. Failures in this area often result in consequences that affect the adult life of a man, causing difficulties in achieving satisfaction in relationships or in the workplace, which have prevent reaching full health defined as physical, mental and spiritual welfare.

The phenomenon of existential emptiness and “noogenic” neurosis are examples of the causes of failures in the searching for the meaning of life in young people. Although the state of research on issues of values in adolescents is rich and varied, these problems have been particularly highlighted in the concept of logotherapy creator - Viktor Emil Frankl.

An illustration of the issues above will be a discussion of author's international comparative Polish - Italian studies on feeling of sense of life and relation to the values in the humanistic faculties' students. The methods' applied in the study were *Kwestionariusz stosunku do życia*, *Kwestionariusz poczucia niezależności* and *Kwestionariusz wartości* (Ostrowski, 2008), and *Skala samooceny* by W.H. Fitts (in preparation by Anna Saldińska - Pyko) derived from *Skala Tennessee do Badania Własnej Osoby* (Fitts, 1964). The surprising results of this study allow on the reflections and conclusions that do not support the concept of Frankl on factors that make young people find the meaning and purpose in life easier or more difficult.

THE PROBLEMS OF SENS OF LIFE'S FEELING AND RELATION TO VALUES IN THE PSYCHOLOGICAL LITERATURE

The issue of the sense of life's feeling is presented in the psychological literature in variety form of concepts. Irena Heszen - Niejodek describes them as spirituality (Heszen - Niejodek, 2003). Although this issue is interdisciplinary and mainly belongs to theology and philosophy, psychologists also use this term. But estimates it as a concept difficult (Miller, 1998), or impossible (Socha, 2000) to formal define (after-Heszen-Niejodek, 2003).

Spirituality in psychology has the status of a theoretical construct and is not directly measurable. Using terminology borrowed from theology Heszen - Niejodek defines it as a kind of transcendence which is "up movement", whose direction is determined by the value of the person in the immaterial sphere. The personal area of self-transcendence means self-improvement, personal development, and in the wider significance is directing towards the Higher Being or selected values (ibidem). The term "spirituality" and "spiritual dimension of man" are related to already present in the psychology concepts of: noetic dimension of personality (Popielski, 1993), self-actualization (Maslow, 1990), sense of coherence (Antonovsky, 1995), or transgression (Kozielecki, 1987) . The spiritual dimension is increasingly being considered in the literature as a fourth health dimensions, in addition to the physical, mental and social (Heszen, 2005).

Very important in health psychology is the concept of "sense of coherence" by Antonovsky. Psychologist defines it as: "a global human

orientation, expressing the degree in which the man is overwhelming, persistent, though dynamic feeling of confidence, that 1. stimuli incoming during the life from the internal and external environment are structured, predictable and explicable; 2. resources, which allow to meet requirements placed by the stimuli are available; 3. These requirements for him are challenge worth the effort and engagement (Antonovsky, op.cit. p.34). People with a strong sense of coherence more often than people with a low sense of coherence see stimuli as non stressfull or classified them as stressors, evaluate them as harmless or neutral.

Thematically close Antonovsky's concept is a theory of stress hardy personality proposed by Kobasa. It contains three inseparable, interrelated elements: commitment, control and challenge. As the author writes, "The commitment is the ability to believe in the authenticity, validity and attractiveness of who you are and what you are doing (...), and thus, tend to fully engage in many areas of life, such as work, family, relationships with other people, social institutions (...), a generalized sense of purpose" (Kobasa, 1982, p.6). Kobasa characterized people who have a sense of control by lack of a sense of powerlessness in the face of external factors, and the belief in the possibility to influence the events they experience and acting according to this belief. They do not rely on the actions of other people or fate to explain the different events, but they try to explain the events, pointing at your own risk. Feel competent to operate effectively without the help of others.

Stress hardy personality rejects the belief that his fate is controlled by luck, chance, or other people, and is filled with optimistic belief that he is the architect of his own fate and that he'll get lucky. Those that achieve high scores in the dimension of the "challenges" consider the variability of fate to be the rule, not the exception. "When you treat life as a challenge, interference caused by stressful life events are perceived as an opportunity and stimulus for personal development (...) people positive about the challenges (...) are characterized by openness and cognitive flexibility and tolerance for ambiguity" (op.cit., p.6-7).

The issue of the meaning of life has a special place in humanistic and existential psychology. In existential terms, the human is not a slave of the environment, or creation of instincts, needs and desires. On the contrary, it has freedom of choice and is responsible for its existence. A man may go beyond their physical environment and their physicality. All that does is a matter of choice. People themselves define who they become and

what they will do. The most important concept in existential meaning of development is “becoming”. Human existence is never static, it is always in the process of becoming something new, exceeding himself. The aim is to become fully human, which means using all possibilities of Dasein, which means to be - in the world (Hall and Lindzey, 2002).

Humanistic psychology gives to the modern world, in which failed all the political economic and religious system, checked and applicable system of human values in which we can believe and sacrifice to. Lack of values` system is the psychopathogenic state, because a human being live and oriented themselves according to the directions needs a corpus of values, philosophy or religion system, or its substitute (Stachowski, 2002).

CONCEPT OF VIKTOR EMIL FRANKL

Viktor Emil Frankl, founder of logotherapy, contrasts the image of a man who “does not reach beyond itself to the meaning and value, and thus it is not oriented towards the world, but only interested in himself” (Frankl, 1984), with the image of man which “tends to exceed himself. (...) To be human means to be directed at something or someone, to be devoted to the work, which we sacrifice, a man who we love, or God, who we serve “(op.cit., p.147-148). The essence of human existence lies not in self-actualization (self-fulfillment, self-realization) but in what Frankl calls self-transcendence.

Frankl says that human existence is manifested in three forms: noetic¹, or spiritual, psychological and physical. Noetic sphere is superior to the other two. The concept of a person is the overriding Frankl`s anthropological category. Saying that man along all his life “becomes” a person gives human existence direction to unreachable creature. The body, physical and mental sphere of human existence are given to him, but in the field of noetic he develops in his capabilities to values. Implementing values a person can be free from physical, psychological and social conditions, can become a free for values. Despite the predetermination of the human by the organic, psychological and social sphere, Frankl says that “man is

¹ *Noetikos* (gr.) - cognitive, from *neotos* - giving to know, here: typically human. According Popielski term “noetic” comes from the ancient Greek *nous* category, expressing “mental activity (rational) of the human (K. Popielski, *Noetyczny wymiar osobowości*, Redakcja Wydawnicza KUL, Lublin 1994, p.9). *Nous* (pronounced *nus*) is for the Greeks reasonable, the original reason for the existence of reality: the idea, the mind, the spirit (for: T. M. Ostrowski, *Choroba niedokrwienna serca w perspektywie egzystencjalnej*. [in:] K. Wrześniewski, D. Włodarczyk (ed.).

actually dependent on the conditions, but the optional independent from them” (Frankl, op. cit, p.225).

According to Frankl, “what is essentially human, is himself only so far as it rises above its own conditions and if it exceeds, so far transcends them. A man is a man only if - as a spiritual being - is something much higher than the same physical and mental existence “(Frankl, 1998).

The human being lives in a full of tragedy constant tension between existence - that it is, and the essence - that it should be. Frankl in “Homo patiens” writes: “Being human is realized in the tension between what is and what ought to be, and this voltage is needed. A man does not exist in order to be, but it would become ... “(ibidem). Man is motivated to be “over” their limits by the “will to meaning”, which tells him to look for sense of his each activity and each situation in which exists, which gives him the strength to stand for higher values, despite serious sacrifices.

Giving meaning of existence is inseparably connected with the implementation of creative and experiential values, and especially attitude values which give power to a dignified struggle with fate and rise above the situation. Frankl suggests three ways to realizing value. “(...) the first way is to act, some shaping of the world, the second possibility is the experience of the world, absorption and assimilation of the beauty and truth of existence and finally the third way of realization of value is suffering, the removal of fate, of being” (ibidem, p 73). According to Frankl noetic sphere distinguishes man from other creatures, because only man while existing he still respond to himself.

Frankl introduces the concept of logotherapy, which means finding the place for logos in psychotherapy. The purpose of the existential analysis is the inclusion of the existence in psychotherapy. Awareness of the logos in psychotherapy means awareness of the sense and the value. Awareness of existence is to realize human`s freedom and responsibility.

Feeling of the sense of life can be defined as a subjective state of satisfaction with life flowing from the fact that human` activity or goals he placed are appropriate to his values hierarchy. This state is existentially and emotionally experienced, and cognitively discovered (Popielski, 1994). Feeling of the sense of life can not be achieved once for all because it is the result of human development, the implementation of important values and achieving its goals. Klamut says that experienced of feeling of the sens of life is related to the selection of specific values, commitment

to implementation of values and making new goals (Klamut, 1998). The sense of life is important for people who came in their development on a subjective level of functioning. Implementation lower needs can also give the sense to life, although the quality of such state will be of course quite different (Obuchowski, 1993). What is interesting, the declining of the sense of life is the motivating factor.

DEVELOPMENTAL FACTORS IN THE EXPERIENCE OF SENSE OF LIFE

Firstly among particularly important factors that influence the experience of the sense of life should be presented the age of the person, which is directly connected with the multiplicity of experiences and the development of personality, self-perception and perception of the outside world.

Popielski distinguishes three stages in the formation of the importance of the sense of life: childhood, defined as a period of “binding the content of life”, the period of adolescence when we are going to the personal experience of life and the period of maturity - time of conscious and subjective existence, time of creation (Popielski, op.cit.).

Obuchowski points the importance in the child development the emergence of the phenomenon of intrapsychization, psychological autonomy which allows both the passive and the active response. Introspective attitude allows for reflection on themselves and their own experiences. The emergence of the need to understand opens the perspective of looking for the new information and ask questions. At the same time the child begins to give value and meaning of the informations he learn. Question of the sense is possible when he knows how to manipulate Abstracts concepts (Obuchowski, 1983).

Ways of fulfilling the needs of sense of life are associated with the development of personality, level of cognitive functioning and social maturity. Identification is the first way to meet your needs. It consists on the identification with ready designs known in the environment. However, this way is blocking for the development in the long-term. The most important in the context of the searching for answers to the question of life's sense is so called “space phase”. However, concepts formulated then, are in-concrete, Abstracts and philosophical. Young man has lack of experience that make this knowledge real. Specification of meaning occurs just in the mature phase of the needs of the sense of life. The problem of the sense can be then translated on their own individual way of life (ibidem, p. 241-246).

Erikson describes human development over eight periods, each of which is connected with the need to solve the crisis of development. The final stage situates human between integration and despair. The virtue of wisdom, coming from a sense of personal integration, which we can gain at the end of life, gives a sense of life and purpose in human existence. Coping with all developmental crises gives also a feeling of the sense at all stages of life (Hall and Lindzey, p. 87-108). However, the most intensive problem of the sense of life occurs in adolescence. This time of “moratorium” is a specific period of suspension between the security of childhood and adult human autonomy. This is period of formation and stabilization of identity, the crystallization of attitudes and beliefs, and finally formulating the personality. Then the young man is looking for value and trying to define its identity on the new adult level. Success or failure in resolving the problems of identity in this period often decide how the life will continue, has the important impact on self-development and satisfaction (Oleszkowicz, 1993).

THE PROBLEM OF THE EXISTENTIAL EMPTINESS AND THE SEARCHING FOR THE LIFE`S SENSE IN YOUNG PEOPLE

Today, in the generation of young people is seeing increasing problems of drug and alcohol addiction, conflicts with the law and eating disorder. They are often signals of “the existential emptiness”, which requires a multilateral intervention, both in the functioning of the family system and on the level of education, politics, economics, and religion (Fizzotti, Gismondi, 1998). In the Club of Rome report results was underlined the weakening of moral values, the increase of indifference and withdrawal into himself (King and Schneider, 1992). These issues are particularly important at this time of dynamic changes in social phenomenon. More and more important are questions about the value of post-communist generation (Jung and Roberts, 1995).

Viktor Frankl was particularly interested in the problems of young people. Escape from the family home, suicide and other psychological problems of students, which he often met in his therapeutic work, make him create the Consultation Centers, which offers young people the opportunity to confront, verify and think about their problems by learning the skills to manage their conflicts. The first such center was established in Vienna in 1927 and gave birth centers in other European cities. Thanks to the cooperation of doctors, teachers and educators, Frankl`s psychological

theory could be gradually improved and converted on the basis of specific therapeutic problems. Logotherapy, in frustration of “the will of sense” searched the cause of existential problems such as aggression, psychoactive substance dependence or suicide. But on the other hand it allowed to re-discover the sense and the individual goals of human existence, that are the way to achieve inner maturity and consistency of personality (Fizzotti, Gismondi, op.cit.).

Every day, more than a thousand people worldwide commit suicide, and ten thousand try to kill themselves. This means one suicide every ten minutes. More than half of suicides make young people between 10 and 25 years old. Statistics point to the intensification of this phenomenon, which indicates a total lack of faith in the sense and value of human life (ibidem). Frankl argued that suicide is the most important and most difficult problem occurring in young people. No one is able to make sense of the existence of others. The searching for sense is an independent, private work (Romeo, 1998). Frankl wrote about a new type of neurosis occurring in young people, which is characterized by a complete lack of interest and initiative, with a dominant sense of boredom and apathy. Human existence is called “Boomerang” by the creator of logotherapy. “The man turns to himself, starts interesting only in himself when he lost his mission when his search for the meaning of life failed.” (Frankl, 1964). Only a man who believes in his “will of sense” can create a hierarchy of values that gives the strength, joy and satisfaction of needs. They are the result of the implementation of the sense of life (Fizzotti, Gismondi, op.cit.)

From a social point of view it can be noticed a gradual loss of traditional values. The development of human society first helped dominate nature, and then left him alone. Because today neither the instincts nor tradition does not indicate human what he should do, he often does what others are doing. However, modern man does not suffer from being less talented than others, but because of the feeling that his life has no sense (Frankl, 1993). Joseph Febrý writes “Our life is not governed neither by the red light that says to stop, nor by the green light that says to go ahead. We live in the era of yellow light that leaves human with weight of the decision” (Febrý, 1970).

Freedom and responsibility are phenomenon belong only to human who realize out through them their individuality. In today’s generation of young people next to the loss of consciousness and loss of responsibility it is evident the loss of primary trust. Difficult every day life experiences

are defined as problems of the risk of life and cast doubt on its sense. For young people difficult experience are phenomenon which are impossible to understand, that make life impossible to continue. Young people do not have trust and faith that the difficult life can have its value, and in situations of suffering and frustration they also can find sense. Lack of faith in life and self-confidence causes a generalized fear of the future.

Most people in middle and old age have already made life experiences that have sense for them. They are a base, a kind of „granary full of crops,” which brings joy and satisfaction at the end of life. Young people have not yet discovered the structure of sense, because their existence is characterized by the possibilities they have not yet noticed. They do not have full of sense experience on which they could rely on. Young people often do not know yet that human carries the potential strength, normally invisible, which can draw on when you take in the life tasks full of sense. Who does not see the sense of his actions, he does not find in himself any power or motivation to take up responsible tasks in life.

A necessary condition to say “yes” to life is positive self-esteem. Positive self-image is the foundation that allows a flexible response, the ability to adapt to changes in the environment. A mature personality is capable of transcendence, which seems to be an antidote to self-destruction, manifested in contemporary culture by narcissism and selfishness. Autotranscendence allows human to objectify themselves without losing the ability for introspection, it gives personality the dynamism and mature. According to Frankl to be a human means concentrating on something or someone. Sacrifice his life for work, person we love, friend, or God, whom we serve (Frankl, 1998).

The consequence of focusing on myself is perfectionism, which in the face of failure carries the risk of depression. Focus on your external image characteristic for narcissism always results in poorer and “empty” inside. Investing more in image than their “true self”, causing chaos in the world of values, lower self-esteem, self-destructive behavior and an inability to maintain stable emotional relationships with other people. Fixation in psychosexual development of the child, makes a person able to focus only on himself. In the long and difficult process of maturation of personality, personality should move from egocentric and narcissistic love, typical for a child and teenager, to the sacrificial love, providing for adulthood and maturity.

Narcissistic personality is looking for signs of interest, stimulation in

other people and expects them to meet their needs. The opposite of narcissism is self - transcendency - basic openness to otherness. Frankl's man thanks to its ability to transcendence turns to someone or something different from himself. "A man realize himself serving something or loving another person. (...) Can be realized only to such extent that they forget about themselves."(Frankl, 1978).

There is an inseparable link between self-transcendency and self-realization. Achieving happiness and realization of one's personality is in fact a consequence of the pursuit of the goal of the existence for the other. Searching only for its own success, pleasure and power becomes destructive and frustrating.

Logotherapy, defines by Frankl as psychotherapy focused on the search for sense, is the answer to the existential emptiness caused by "noogenic" neurosis. However the problem of the sense changes from person to person, from situation to situation. No one can make sense of the life of another person. A man must himself find it in your intimate search.

Just values as a subjective factor activating the personal activity should become the center of modern education. According to Halina Świda "values recognized by the person appoint its assessment of various social phenomena, assessment of individuals, evaluation of works of art, works of scientific research, assessment of their own behaviors and skills, assessment of daily events, assess their situation in the world. (...) Values determine in some way the cognitive network of the person (...) It can therefore venture to say that recognized values will determine the perception of different objects "(Świda, p. 38 - 39).

Today young people are struggling with the formation of a mature personality, which causes difficulties in answering the question about the meaning of life. One of the most important reasons is the crisis of the family, not only as a social institution, but also the psychological structure, in which the parental roles have diminished.

Therefore logotherapy therapeutic program and re-education for young people should be based on the development of values and personality traits in interpersonal and group relations demanding commitment and responsibility, self-confidence, respect for themselves and others.

POLISH AND INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH ON THE PROBLEMS OF YOUNG PEOPLE

Shalom H. Schwartz of the Hebrew University in Jeruzalem, analyzed the basic concepts of the value put in the work of numerous theorists and researchers (eg. Allport, Feather, Ingelhart, Kohn, Kluckhohn, Morris and Rokeach). He made also the international research in this area on research samples coming from 67 nationalities. They prove that the hierarchy of values has particularly significant impact on social behavior such as “white collar crime”, shoplifting, youth crime, risky sexual behavior, alcoholism, use of contraceptives, hunting, consumer behavior (buying, selling), use of internet and mobile phone, choice of career, education or medical specialization, the way of education, social contacts with foreign groups, social contacts in their social group, religious beliefs, political orientation and attitudes towards voting, behavior characterized by cooperation and rivalry, taking the advice, or attitude towards innovation.

Therefore values are impact on most if not all behaviors enabling the analysis, prediction and explanation of the relationship value - behavior. Behavior requires the balance between competing values. Almost any behavior being the expression of certain values, have simultaneously a negative impact on the opposite value. People have a tendency to behave in the way that make possible have balance between opposing values (Schwarz, 2006).

Manuel Morricone, Francesca Cardinali, Michele Vecchione from the Centre for Research on the genesis and development of pro-social and anti-social motivation in the Department of Psychology at the University “La Sapienza” in Rome studied the relationship between the values and students` personality potential. The study used two tools: “Indywidulizacja of Potential Personality” (*Individuazione del Potenziale Personale - IPP*), and the Portrait Values Questionnaire (*Portrait Values Questionnaire - PVQ*) measuring core values and their relation to academic success. The sample covered 329 students aged 18 to 33 years. The study showed that the results of the questionnaire IPP were significantly more predictive than the values measured by questionnaire PVQ for actual academic achievement of the students measured by number of passed exams and average grade. Therefore the study found that academic achievement is much more determined by the personality traits than by values. The latter seem to have an impact on the behavior during studies and their effectiveness (Morricone, Cardinali, Vecchione, 2005).

Laura Di Giunta, Marinella Paciello, Maria Gerbino also from the Centre for Research on the genesis and development of pro-social and anti-social motivation of the Department of Psychology at the University “La Sapienza” in Rome conducted research on the relationship between values and family relationships during late adolescence (Di Giunta, Paciello, Gerbino, 2005). Values can be understood as the result of social inheritance through numerous agencies of socialization, which together with the standards of conduct constitute an individual philosophy of life (Brewster Smith, 1963). In this context, the values passed in the family are important socialization context. The family is the social institution whose function is to reproduce society and promoting development of its members (Gecas, 1990). In most families, conflicts are particularly common in adolescence, but they decrease when the children grow up and parents are beginning to see their maturity (Laursen, Coy, Collins, 1998).

The presented study has the aim to detect the relationship between the values of adolescents and the quality of their family relationships. The study group consisted of 553 persons (238 men and 315 women) aged 19 to 26 years. The relation to the values was measured by *the Portrait Values Questionnaire* in Italian version. Family relationships were measured by following tools: The sense of efficacy scale, The parental support scale, The open communications scale, The present conflict scale, The prosocial scale, The family satisfaction scale. The results of the study showed that the conformism and kindness seem to be the values that have the greatest impact on the quality of family relationships in late adolescence period (Di Giunta, Paciello, Gerbino, op.cit.)

Existential problems and issues of the sense of life in young people currently attract increasing interest of researchers. An example might be Marian Ledwoch from the Catholic University of Lublin, who has studied depression in students. Author developed a questionnaire to examine the existential dimension of depression (EWD). Also applied other methods, such as: *Sense of Life Scale* (PIL) by J.C. Crumbaugh and L.T. Maholick, *Symptom Inventory* (SCL) L.R. Derogatis and colleagues and *Adjectival Test* (ACL) H.G. Gough and A.B. Heilbrun. The study involved about 1,000 people (497 men and 502 women). These persons were students of various universities in Poland. In this way there was able to determine the structure of the existential dimension of depression in the main aspects such as: emptiness, helplessness, guilt, isolation and despair. Research has shown that the psyche of young people is affected by the loss of sense of

life and inhibition of self-actualization process. According to the author, the results may allow in the future for easier identifying people who are depressed and may be suicidal (Ledwoch, 2005).

RESEARCH ON THE SENSE OF LIFE AND THE HIERARCHY OF VALUES IN POLISH AND ITALIAN STUDENTS

The aim of the study was to show the relationship between the nationality of students (Polish and Italian) , their gender and age, and the sense of independence, the hierarchy of values and self-esteem. General hypothesis on the relationship between nationality and sex of surveyed young people, their sense of meaning in life, a sense of independence, relation to values and self-esteem were formulated in parallel for students of Polish nationality, and for students of Italian nationality.

The study group consisted of Polish and Italian students of humanistic profile at the University of Catania (Italy) and the Jagiellonian University at the age of 20 - 29 years. The sample group consist of 209 people - 100 Polish students (50 women and 50 men) and 109 Italian students (55 women and 54 men). The age of selected sample group of respondents situates them between late adolescence and early adulthood. Polish students were at the age of 20 - 28 and Italian students were 20 - 29 years old.

This is the period particularly important and abundant in changes in young people growth, when the hierarchy of values should stabilize and give sense to the life. When there is no such hierarchy or it is instable, young man is particularly exposed to the problems in interpersonal relationships, lack of adequate self-esteem, behaviors dangerous for the physical and mental health, substance abuse, or emotional disorders significantly hinder taking mature roles of partner or parent. In the study group, 60% of people are still dependent on their parents (including 40% of Poles and nearly 80% of Italians), 91.4% of students are single, and 96.2% does not have children. These sociometric data and today's socio-economic situation in Europe makes transition to independent living harder for young people, and causes location of students still in adolescence period, rather than in adulthood as the birth metric indicate.

The study group was selected from the students of the humanities, mainly pedagogics faculty. Because in theory these prospective teachers and education workers, should be particularly sensitive to issues of value and sense of life, as they have become in the future the authority figures for

the younger generations with whom they will have contact while working in the educational institutions.

The tools used in the research were three questionnaires by Tadeusz M. Ostrowski: *Kwestionariusz stosunku do życia*, *Kwestionariusz poczucia niezależności*, *Kwestionariusz wartości* (Ostrowski, 2008), and *Skala samooceny* by W.H. Fitts (in preparation by Anna Sadlińska - Pyko) derived from *Skala Tennessee do Badania Własnej Osoby* (Fitts, 1964). The study group of Italian students used similar methods translated by the author into Italian. There were used descriptive statistics and research methods suitable for the single and multi-variable analysis. Especially there were used the analysis of one variable variance (UNIANOVA), T-student test and nonparametric Mann - Whitney test.

Each person filled in the presence of a researcher four questionnaires one after another. The survey was conducted in the form of both individual and group work. Italian students filled in questionnaires in February 2006 while the author was at the University of Catania in Italy during her Socrates – Erasmus scholarship. Polish students were examined in April, May, October and November 2006. The dependent variables consist of: attitude to life, a sense of independence, self-esteem level and the relation to the values, which consists of: sensitivity to values (overall score), sensitivity to the value of attitude, sensitivity to the experiential values, sensitivity to the creativity values and openness to the values of attitude (noetic activity). Independent variables consist of: nationality (Polish or Italian) and sex. The side effects variables are: age, place of origin, marital status, financial situation, religion.

The study gives the following results:

- Polish surveyed students scored higher than Italian students in *Kwestionariusza wartości* by T.M. Ostrowski ($p = 0,010$) (*dignity, love, nostalgia, parenting, beauty, sacrifice, immortality, friendship, entertainment, sex, family, beauty, faith, faithfulness, hope, freedom, salvation*) and in *Skala samooceny* by Fitts ($p = 0,0001$)
- At p value equals 0,002 surveyed Italian students received significantly higher scores than Polish students in the field of openness of attitude value (*disability, illness, loneliness, suffering, injury, arrest, longing, humiliation, dependence*)
- Male respondents obtained significantly higher scores than female on a scale of sensitivity to the value of attitude ($p = 0,002$), on a scale of

sensitivity to the creative values (*material goods, duty, truth, career, development, power, fame, knowledge, work, creativity, homeland, success, health*) ($p = 0,039$), and on a scale of openness to the values of attitude ($p = 0,009$) from *Kwestionariusz wartości* by T.M. Ostrowski

- At $p = 0,033$ Polish female respondents received significantly higher scores in self-esteem scale than male Poles respondents
- At $p = 0,045$ Italian female respondents received significantly higher scores compared to the Italian males using *Kwestionariusz stosunku do życia* by T.M. Ostrowski
- Male Italians received significantly better results than the female Italians on the sensitivity to values scale ($p = 0,013$), on the scale of sensitivity to the attitude ($p = 0,001$), on a scale of sensitivity to creative values ($p = 0,013$), and on the scale of openness to attitude values ($p = 0,000$) using *Kwestionariusz wartości* by T.M. Ostrowski
- At $p = 0,000$ Italian male respondents obtained significantly higher scores than Polish male respondents on a scale of openness to the attitude values using *Kwestionariusz wartości* by T.M. Ostrowski.
- Polish women obtained significantly higher scores than Italian women on a scale of sensitivity to values ($p = 0,008$), on a scale of sensitivity to creative values ($p = 0,032$), on a scale of experiential sensitivity ($p = 0,006$) using *Kwestionariusz wartości* by T.M. Ostrowski and using *Skala samooceny* by Fitts ($p = 0,000$)

Table 1 presents a summary of the research, indicating which tested group achieved a significant better results compared to the other in the designed scales.

The results allow to conclude in the following points:

- In terms of the sense of life in questionned subgroups significant difference was noted only between Italian men and women. Women group achieved significantly higher scores than Italian male
- The scale of a sense of independence does not differentiated groups significantly.
- In terms of self-esteem scale Poles have achieved better results compared with the Italians. The same applies to Polish women compared to Polish men and also Polish women compared to Italian women.
- More sensitive to the values are Italian men than Italian women and subsequently Polish women compared with Italian women.

- More sensitive sensitivity to the life-going values turned out to be male Poles than the Italians, and in the group of women – Polish female students.
- Men more likely than women choose the creative values. The same applies to the subgroup of Italians - the Italian men get better results compared with Italian women. Among the women more sensitive to the creative values were Polish women compared with Italian.
- The choice of attitude values was the domain of men. This was caused by dominance in the results of this scale obtained by Italian men compared with Italian women.
- Italians were more open to the attitude values than their Polish counterparts. The advantage in this scale was also on the side of men compared to women, the Italian male respondents compared to Italian females and Italian men compared with Polish males.

Table 2 shows the score values that were most differential for the Polish and Italian groups.

CONCLUSIONS

Our results indicate, that the Italian students are significantly more sensitive and receptive to the value of attitude than Polish students. This result is very interesting and not confirming the stereotypical images of Poles and Italians. The study showed that not the Poles, the nation marked by martyrdom, but considered to be fun-loving Italians, especially Italian men, who have problems with independent life start as is shown in actual media reports, are much more sensitive and open to the perception of disability, illness, loneliness, suffering, injury, arrest, failure, humiliation or addiction. Perhaps these surprising findings are the result of long-term socio-economic transformations in Poland after 1989. The current economic situation in Poland which causes continued high unemployment level and the phenomenon of migration for work, they all affect the outlook and self-esteem of young people. In fact, the difficult Polish reality can make young people feel confused and helpless. In the absence of an elementary sense of security when material goods are highly valued for up to 51% of Poles (while they are valid only for 20.2% of Italians), it is difficult to see the transcendent value of disease, disability and suffering. They are probably for these young people another issue in difficult, insecure daily reality.

So the study did not confirm the views of Frankl, who claimed that the

public welfare which gives young people the comfort in life and not leaving them space for creativity and effort prevents integration and maturation of personality. Founder of logotherapy believed that young people living the “easy, light and pleasant” life see the difficult experiences as impossible to understand, making life impossible to bear. A man who never had to make responsible decisions and not thinking about the future, when he will have to decide without the possibility of escape he will be afraid of responsibility. But not the welfare state, but the situation of chaotic and uncertain transition, the anxiety about the future and the lack of security, which are experienced by Polish students probably hinder for them the sense and purpose in life.

The study presented in this article could therefore serve as an inspiration to the extensive cross-cultural research on historically and culturally shaped differences in temperament and personality. The research could also take into consideration the psycho-social conditions that determine the attitude to life, a sense of independence, the relation to the value and self-esteem of young people which enter their adult lives and the impact of these factors on their fate and life choices. In the context of current psychological knowledge the long-term consequences of these differences can be subjectively and objectively observable differences in health understood as a complete physical and mental well-being, and a feeling of sense of life. The conclusion of the article can be also the importance of the adolescence in human life and the crucial issue of creating values` hierarchy and the sense of life then. So maybe education to the values and elements of logotherapy should be important element of bringing up young people. The applicability of this study therefore relates to both pedagogy, health psychology, logotherapy, education (especially in the field of education to values) as well as social psychology, cultural studies, or area of wide range of social sciences.

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ATTACHMENTS

Table 1. Summary of test results. In the table with „+” sign marked group of respondents who obtained significantly higher scores.

SCALES	POL	IT	WOMEN	MEN	W POL	M POL	W IT	M IT	K POL	K IT	M POL	M IT
FEELING OF SENSE OF LIFE							+					
FEELING OF INDEPENDENCY												
SELF-ESTEEM	+				+				+			
SENSITIVITY TO VALUES							+		+			
SENSITIVITY TO EXPERIENTIAL VALUES	+								+			
SENSITIVITY TO CREATIVE VALUES				+				+	+			
SENSITIVITY TO ATTITUDE VALUES				+				+				
OPENNES TO ATTITUDE VALUES		+		+				+				+

Table 2. Values, which in terms of frequency selection significantly diversified group of Polish and Italian students.

VALUE	FREQUENCY OF CHOICE		p
	POLISH STUDENTS	ITALIAN STUDENTS	
LOVE	96%	85,3%	0,009
FAMILY	93%	84,4%	0,052
FRIENDSHIP	92%	77,1%	0,011
FAITHFULNESS	79%	64,2%	0,018
DEVELOPMENT	74%	42,2%	0,000
FAITH	67%	48,6%	0,007
BEAUTY	58%	36,7%	0,002
MATERIAL GOODS	51%	20,2%	0,000
LONGING	45%	28,4%	0,013
CREATIVITY	45%	65,1%	0,003
SUFFERING	17%	30,3%	0,025
LONELINESS	16%	29,4%	0,022
DISABILITY	10%	22%	0,012
ILLNESS	9%	19,3%	0,034
HUMILIATION	1%	17,4%	0,000
DEPENDENCE	6%	15,6%	0,027