

Logothetical Understanding of Existential Sources of Bullying Behavior

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The approach of logotherapy is one of many approaches how to understand man. Logotherapy sees a human being in his complexity, as a three-dimensional unity of somatic, psychic, and noetic dimensions. Through logotherapy, man discovers the possible sources for not loving himself and others. The logothetical approach points out that individuals involved in bullying present un developed noetic dimension. This becomes a source of existential frustration or existential vacuum leading to the occurrence of various forms of pathological behavior including bullying. It emphasizes that aggressors present insufficient development of two fundamental capacities of the noetic dimension allowing the contact with other people: self-detachment and self-transcendence. The uniqueness of this approach lies in the search for answers to one's existence that bring more than just a temporary satisfaction. Uncovering existential sources of bullying behavior could be instrumental in finding solutions to prevention and intervention of bullying.

1 Aggression and Bullying in the Context of Logotheoretical Concept

Behavior aimed at harming another individual can vary in forms and intensity. Aggressive behavior may range from ostracism to aggressive, violent, or bullying behavior. Aggressive behavior is defined as “*an intentional action causing harm to another person or a group of people, where important is the intention and not the fact whether the act was really committed or not*” (Lovaš 2010, 12). Aggression means also intentional harm inflicted upon the victim with the aim to cause damage (Čermák 1999), or destructive behavior aimed at physical, verbal or symbolical attack against another individual (Spurný 1996). Aggression can be categorized as either reactive or proactive and, from the perspective of purpose, as affective and instrumental. Bullying is a special type of specific interpersonal aggression (Craig and Pepler 2007, 87), which involves significant power asymmetry between the aggressor and the victim and the repetition of aggressive behavior. Bullying is a form of behavior with an intention to physically, psychologically, socially, and emotionally harm the victim (Smith and Brain 2000, 1). A student is being bullied when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other students (Olweus 1997, 496). Understanding mechanisms of bullying requires knowing how the aggressive behavior works.

The approach of logotherapy is one of many approaches to understanding of man. It perceives human being in his complexity, as a three-dimensional unity of somatic, psychological, and noetic dimensions. The objective of such approach is to avoid all forms of reductionism in relation to understanding human being, and to find answers to existential questions about the value and meaning of life. The uniqueness of this approach lies in the search for answers to one's existence that bring more than just a temporary satisfaction. The very essence of man is in his freedom, responsibility, and self-transcendence. Logotherapy emphasizes the self-transcendence of man when he reaches beyond oneself and acts towards the pursuit of selfless goals and values.

Logotheoretical concept of existence introduces an integral understanding of man in the process of being, becoming, direction, and relationships. It is a conception in which the subjective attributes and the activity of an individual are integrated into the process of personality structure and individual existence formation (Popielski 2005, 27). Central to logotherapy is seeing man as being in three dimensions (Frankl 2006), as a unity of biological, psychological and,



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specifically human, spiritual dimensions interwoven with one another. The *somatic dimension* of the human being involves all of the bodily phenomena. It comprises the biological and physiological bodily functions including the physical and chemical processes. The *psychological dimension* is the realm of consciousness, instinctual feelings, instincts, affects, and desires. It also encompasses emotions and cognition, intellectual abilities of man, acquired patterns of behavior and social interactions. The *spiritual dimension* encompasses a free attitude towards the physical being and existence, independent willful decisions (*intentionality*), artistic interests, creativity, religion and moral feeling (*conscience*), understanding one's values and love (Lukas 2009, chap. 1). Logotherapy emphasizes the spiritual dimension and thus broadens the understanding of the personality structure. Literary sources on psychology (Frankl 1999, 2006) refers to this specifically human dimension as to a "*noetic or noological dimension*" or a dimension invoking human spirit. Frankl operationalized the noetic dimension as that in which man reaches beyond his psychophysical being, responds to his psychosomatic conditions, and exercises some degree of freedom from his determination by external and internal conditions. It is a dimension (Popielski 2005, chap. 2), which defines the existential being, becoming and functioning of a human being, sources of motivation and subjective-personal dynamics of existence. The essence of the noetic dimension is in realization of values and orientation toward the meaning presented in diversity, self-distancing, self-transcendence, freedom, and responsibility. Underdevelopment of noetic dimension results in existential frustration or a vacuum, which then leads to various forms of pathological behavior, with bullying being one of them. Researches (Dědová 2010) showed that aggressors present a lower level of noodynamics, which is closely related to the ability of being in control of one's own thinking, experience, and behavior. Aggressors with lower levels of noodynamics did not express enough interest in others and were unable to express emotional closeness. According to Popielski (2005, chap. 2), persons with undeveloped noodynamics are less spontaneous in their relationship with others; they are less open towards other people and are unable to cooperate. These individuals tend to break the rules and behaviors and do as they please.

Psychoanalysis perceives man as a being driven by the will to pleasure. Adlerian psychotherapy focuses on man driven by the will to power. Logotherapy, however, perceives man as a being driven by the will to meaning. Psychotherapy has come a long way since the time of Freud, characterized by two stages: the first led from the automaticity of existence towards the existence itself, the second one from the autonomy to transcendence. On one hand, the human existence

does not disperse itself in the sheer image of a bundle of instincts or an automaton of reflexes; while on the other hand, the image of the human being steps beyond the horizon of immanence. The logothetical approach does not agree with seeing aggression as some kind of energy that drives a person to look for someone else to vent his anger. In logothetical approach, we let the aggression transform.

On a human level, aggression is aimed either on something or on someone one hates. Love and hatred are human and intentional phenomena that explain the reasons behind one's behavior (Frankl 2006). If man is led to believe that there is no reason for hatred, the hatred itself becomes absurd. On the contrary, however, when man is being convinced that he is endowed with a potential aggression, which he must somehow let out, we only create the delusion that violence and hatred are one's inescapable fate. Man, however, has no fate because he is a co-creator of everything in his specifically human dimension. He is not left at the mercy of aggression. Man resorts to aggression when he is constantly reminded that he is not a creator of his own life, but a victim of innate biological or societal conditions.

Logotherapy draws attention to existentially more profound sources of aggressive behavior that contribute to onset of reactive, instrumental aggression. These sources are also behind the aggression per se, that type of aimless aggression with hostile intent and manifestation of recurrent power over others (Aluede *et al.* 2008; Arseneault, Bowes and Shakoor 2010) that is typical for bullying.

2 Undeveloped Capacity of Self-Detachment and Self-Transcendence in the Act of Bullying

One of the possible explanations of bullying behavior is the characteristic of aggressors involved in bullying. Their behavior is dominated by selfishness and self-centeredness. Bullies think that the world revolves around them and they adjust the rules to suit their own needs. They are only concerned with themselves and are insensitive to what their behavior causes others (Kolář 2011, chap. 4). Aggressors have a strong need to dominate and behave aggressively (Olweus 1995; Rigby 2002); they display a low level of empathy (Gajdošová and Herényiová 2002, chap. 9). They have no conscious feelings of guilt; they are not bothered by the fact that they have hurt someone. They lack the ability to identify their behavior

as immoral and they refuse to see themselves in the negative light.

Theory of mind reflects and describes this fact at aggressors. It emphasizes the role of social-cognitive competences through two different models (Sutton, Smith and Swettenham 1999). The first one presumes existence of a deficit in the processing of information in social context, which results in insufficient ability to process and interpret information coming from social interaction with peers and thus to create adequate social interaction. The second model describes bullying as successful aggression of clever individuals, which comes from understanding of mental states of others and abusing this ability to one's own advantage. Here we speak about qualified social manipulators. The results of a study (Gini 2006, 535) confirms the model of a "manipulator" in the role of the aggressor, who lacks emphatic reactivity toward peers and emotions of the victim (Arsenio and Lemerise 2001, 69). Also, the by bullying achieved popularity has an important positive influence on bullying others (Caravita *et al.* 2010, 161).

Another typical trait of aggressors is the inadequate self-assessment. Bullying behavior is linked with either high level of self-esteem (O'Moore and Kirkham 2001; Bendl 2003) or with the feelings of inferiority, insecurity, and low self-esteem (Olweus 1995; Řičan 1993; Gajdošová 2006), which are then compensated by aggression. Aggression can also be a result of disappointment and resentment at the fact these individuals are not who they think they are; and they are somehow subconsciously aware of that. In order to silence this subconscious voice, the person resorts to aggressive behavior (Sedláček 2015, 268). When the family history and relationship towards the father are concerned, we can observe the following: children from early father-absent homes tend to be less obedient, whereas boys whose fathers left home later in their lives tend to be more aggressive. Additionally, the level of aggression was higher among the individuals whose parents divorced in comparison to those whose fathers died (Sedláček 2010, 43). The behavior of aggressors shows that these individuals present underdevelopment of two capacities within their noetic dimension responsible for the contact with other people: self-detachment and self-transcendence. The uniquely human capacity of self-detachment allows the person to detach from himself and review either own or other person's attitudes, motives and behavior from a certain distance. The ability of self-transcendence allows the person to reach beyond himself, to forget, and ignore himself and devote his life to something or someone other than the self (Frankl and Lapise 2009). Logotherapy sees the essence of the human existence in self-transcendence – a capacity to reach

beyond oneself toward something that is not the self – toward something or someone – be it a meaning to fulfil or another human being to encounter in love (Lukas 1997, 25; Frankl, 2006). Observing the aggressor's behavior, we can point out to insufficient development of the self-detachment capacity, which is presented by one's thinking about his or her own unfulfilled needs, interests, individual subjective wellbeing, and even the pleasure that bullying might bring. In addition, there is no elementary experience with self-transcendence, in a sense of giving oneself to something or someone beyond one's own self-centered interests. Aggressors also lack the behavior aimed at something greater than their own profit.

They are unable to transcend boundaries of the self and be open to others and their needs. Insufficient development of self-transcendence prevents the bullying individuals from working on their own imperfections. At the same time, it will not let them see their classmate's needs. It prevents them from giving up their selfish motives such as: the desire for power or a certain status, experiencing the suffering of their victims or even killing boredom.

The structure of human existence brings up man's desire for something that transcends him, something that is not the self. Self-transcendence of human existence is realized either in service to something or in love towards another human being. To be human means to go beyond oneself, to be intentionally oriented toward someone and devoted to another human being he or she loves (Frankl and Lapise 2009). Being able to give up something for another human being out of one's own will shows one's inner maturity. The perpetrators of bullying do seem to lack this ability too.

3 Denial of Freedom and Responsibility in Bullying Behavior

At the very essence of the human existence lies freedom. Although man is not free from his dispositions and conditions, he is free to choose to take a stand on whatever conditions might confront him. Human being chooses whether he wants to give in to the conditions (Frankl 2006, 166) or what choices he might make. There is a possibility for man rising above his conditionality and entering the uniquely human dimension. Human behavior is, under all circumstances, realized through decisions and it is not dictated by the conditions. On one hand, the free will protects us from denial of deterministic and automatic aspects of human ex-

istence. On the other hand, it also protects us from denial of freedom, which let the human being rise above all of these aspects. In doing so man becomes more than just a free man, he also assumes responsibility. In his responsibility, man has an option to choose for what he understands to be free, and for what or against what he is deciding (Frankl 2007, 71). Logotherapy points out to the dynamics of human being who realizes himself both as an individual of his own kind and as a personal subject. The human being becomes a co-creator and author of his own existence and so the self-realization occurs.

Bullying behavior is induced by the pressure of group norms resulting in man not knowing what he ought to do and what he really wants. That is why he focuses on what others do (conformism) or he does what others want him to do (totalitarianism). Aggressors' aim is to achieve a high status within the group (Sijtsema *et al.* 2009; Bizová and Gubricová 2011); to be accepted and respected by their classmates and to gain popularity among their peers (DeBruyn and Cillessen 2006; Olthof and Goossens 2008). Conformism is based on the adaptation mechanisms of social accommodation (Grác 2009).

A conformist complies with the norms and rules of behavior, which exert the greatest pressure upon him; and it is not important whether these norms are imposed on him openly or secretly. Man denies the freedom of choice; he renounces himself as a self-regulatory personality and shifts the responsibility for his own behavior to the external factors, things, and social institutions. A conformist is often affected by the authoritative parenting style and the strict upbringing in a form of some kind of a drill. Such parenting style does not take into consideration the child's opinions and attitudes. Similar parenting style can be observed in the families of aggressors involved in bullying. They encountered the authoritative parenting style, physical punishment and maltreatment from their parents (Espelage, Bosworth and Simon 2000; Shields and Cicchetti 2001), especially from mothers (Papanikolaou, Chatzikosma and Kleio 2011). It is also linked to the physical absence of fathers showing no interest in upbringing of their children.

The research results (Schore 2001b, 208) also show that behavior disorders may result from negative experiences in childhood caused by mental deprivation, inadequate attachment, which disturbs the development of the brain that helps coping with stress stimuli, emotional regulation and maintaining of personal relationships. The results show direct association between attachment, non-effective regulation of the right hemisphere and maladaptive mental health (Schore 2001a). The child's developing right hemisphere is

deeply connected to the limbic nervous system and plays a dominant role in reacting to stress. This means that inadequate attachment hinders progress in development of child's coping strategies. The hostile and aggressive behavior of bullying aggressors possibly suggests an uncertain-avoiding attachment, which is connected to disorders at increased mental burden as a result of absence of behavioral patterns that would help to cope with traumas, and thus forms a threat to further mental development (Brisch 2011; Hašto 2005).

In their behavior, aggressors tend to evade their responsibilities, justify their bad behavior, and suppress the consciousness of responsibility instead of taking responsibility for that behavior. In order to evade the responsibility, they use their victims and classmates to hide behind. They often use expressions such as "*but he was provoking me*", "*we were just messing around*" or "*we all were having fun*". They talk about their parents, teachers, their environment, and various circumstances in which they find the "source" for justification of their behavior.

4 Conclusion

During his lifespan, man comes to terms with taking full responsibility for his behavior and actions. He knows his rights, but he is not that eager to accept his obligations. One will never cease to hate another human being if subhuman mechanisms and impulses are still used to explain behavior. One will never be able to stop the hatred toward another human being unless he changes his personal attitude towards others. As for aggression, man is free and, at the same time, responsible for his own choice to either identify with or distance himself from that aggression. Our behavior is grounded upon free will, weighing of alternatives, in which peer pressure doesn't justify. It is important to have the ability to take a distance from one's self and develop the ability of self-transcendence, which focuses our view from ourselves to another, to perceive and understand of someone else's situation. So, we open ourselves to the possibility to be there for others and be respectful to ourselves and to others.

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