FORUM PEDAGOGICZNE

COLLOQUIA

2022, 13, 2: 321–333
p-ISSN 2083-6325; e-ISSN 2449-7142
DOI http://doi.org/10.21697/fp.2022.2.24

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Received: 29.10.2022; revised: 16.11.2022; accepted: 18.11.2022

THE EXPERIENCE OF CONFLICTS (INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL) AND THE SENSE OF MEANING IN LIFE. AN EXISTENTIAL APPROACH

DOŚWIADCZANIE KONFLIKTÓW (WEWNĘTRZNYCH I ZEWNĘTRZNYCH) A POCZUCIE SENSU ŻYCIA. PERSPEKTYWA EGZYSTENCJALNA

Streszczenie: Chociaż badania nad mechanizmami leżącymi u podstaw konfliktów (wewnętrznych i interpersonalnych) mają stosunkowo długą tradycję, to perspektywa egzystencjalna powstawania konfliktów nie była do tej pory przedmiotem szerszych badań psychologicznych i pedagogicznych. Z punktu widzenia filozofii i psychologii egzystencjalnej konflikty są przede wszystkim wyrazem konfrontacji człowieka z podstawowymi faktami egzystencjalnymi: wolnością i związaną z nią odpowiedzialnością za samego siebie, losem, skończonością bytu ludzkiego oraz samotnością w wymiarze egzystencjalnym. Mimo że konflikt w takim rozumieniu jest zasadniczo immanentną właściwością bytu ludzkiego, to problem pojawia się wtedy, kiedy zaczyna mu towarzyszyć silne poczucie bezradności i patologiczny lęk na skutek utraty sensu życia, braku akceptacji własnej wolności i realizacji wartości osobistych.
Przeprowadzone badania miały na celu odpowiedź na pytanie, czy istnieje zależność pomiędzy zachowaniem jednostki w reakcji na konflikt (wewnętrzny i interpersonalny) a poczuciem sensu życia i preferowanymi wartościami. Badania zostały przeprowadzone na grupie 153. studentów w wieku od 19. do 26. roku życia. Poczucie sensu życia było badane przy użyciu testu autorstwa Crumbaugh i Maholick. W celu badania preferowanych wartości posłużono się portretowym kwestionariuszem wartości Schwartz. Zachowania osób badanych w reakcji na konflikt analizowane były przy zastosowaniu analizy językowej (frekwencyjnej) czasowników zawartych w swobodnych wypowiedziach osób badanych.

Słowa kluczowe: konflikt, sens życia, egzystencjalizm, wartości.

Abstract: Although research on the mechanisms underlying conflicts (internal and interpersonal) has a relatively long tradition, the existential perspective of conflict formation has not been the subject of broader psychological and pedagogical research so far. From the point of view of existential philosophy and psychology, conflicts are primarily an expression of man's confrontation with the basic existential facts: freedom and the associated responsibility for oneself, fate, the finitude of human existence and loneliness in the existential dimension.

Even though conflict in this sense is fundamentally inherent in human beings, a problem appears when it begins to be accompanied by a strong sense of helplessness and pathological fear triggered by the loss of the meaning of life, lack of acceptance of one's own freedom and realization of personal values.
The conducted research was aimed at answering the question whether there is a relationship between the behavior of an individual in response to conflict (internal and interpersonal) and the sense of life and chosen values. Studies have been conducted on a group of 153 students aged 19 to 26. Meaning in life was tested using a test by Crumbaugh and Maholick. In order to study the chosen values, the Schwartz Values Portrait Questionnaire was used. The behavior of the subjects in response to the conflict was analyzed using the linguistic (frequency) analysis of verbs contained in the free utterances of the subjects.

Keywords: conflict, meaning of life, existentialism, values.

Although there is a relatively long tradition of research into the mechanisms underlying conflicts (both internal and interpersonal ones), the existential perspective of conflict has not as yet been the subject of extensive psychological studies. From the standpoint of existential psychology, conflict is primarily an expression of an individual's confrontation with objective existential facts: freedom and the responsibility for oneself that freedom entails, the finitude of human life, existential loneliness and fate in its broadest sense. Although conflict, so defined, is essentially an immanent feature of human existence, it becomes a problem when a strong sense of helplessness and anxiety starts to accompany it, as a person loses their purpose in life and fails to realize their personal values.

This research aimed to answer the question of whether there is a relationship between an individual's behavior in response to (internal and interpersonal) conflict and his/her sense of meaning in life and preferred values. The study covered a group of 153 students aged from 19 to 26 years. Purpose-of-life was measured using the test developed by Crumbaugh and Maholick (1964). The Schwartz Portrait Values questionnaire was used to assess the respondents' preferences for fundamental values. The behavior of the subjects in response to conflict was examined using linguistic (frequency) analysis of the verbs used in their open-ended answers.

Introduction

From an existential perspective, the experience of conflict is inextricably linked to the constitution of human identity in relation to oneself, the other person, and the world. Finding solutions – or some form of unity with the world, other people, and ourselves – is generally the driving force of all human effort and a source of emotion and fear (Fromm 2013). Humans are the only creatures who see their existence as a problem which they must address and from which they cannot escape. They must constantly make choices at the meeting point of opposing poles: freedom and necessity, finitude and infinity, loneliness and being with other people, the inner world and external reality. In an existential sense, however, the choice is not a simple

either-or, i.e., it does not mean opting unambiguously for only one alternative. According to prominent scholars of existential philosophy, the only way in which an individual can relate to the contradictions they experience is the moment one makes the choice about the value and meaning of life (Tillich 2000; Kierkegaard 1969; Jaspers 1973; 1994, Frankl 1975, 2000; Yalom 1980; May 1982, 1996).

Sources of conflict from an existential perspective

Human beings grow aware of their own possibilities and limits most acutely in "special circumstances", i.e. situations in which they succeed in distancing themselves from their everyday world and the routine of quotidian life. It is then that one stands "face to face" with such existential concerns as death, isolation, freedom and the meaning or meaninglessness of life (Yalom 2008). In such situations a person also confronts their own fate, in the shape of absolute randomness and all those regularities that determine their physical, psychological and spiritual existence (Guardini 2018). What accompanies a person when confronted with their worries or existential facts is anxiety, which is a form of warning that we are in a state where we are not what we should be according to our essence. Although anxiety is fundamentally a natural and even necessary human characteristic, it can nevertheless evolve into pathological anxiety (Tillich 2000). This happens when a person adopts an unrealistic, rigid attitude towards the world and people, thus shutting themselves off in a narrow fortress of certainty, coming into conflict with reality and avoiding the risks of danger, imperfection and uncertainty.

Freedom (and necessity)

The most fundamental characteristic of human beings is freedom, thanks to which a person can discover their own possibilities, change, act, and exceed existing limitations. However, this freedom is not absolute. A person lives in the space between freedom and necessity. If one does not accept one's necessity and does not understand the innate dispositions that make up one's psychological self, one inevitably experiences a high level of tension and anxiety (Kierkegaard 1969; Le Senne 1930). A person gives up their freedom when one begins to perceive oneself only in terms of necessity. One lacks the courage, engagement, and self-discipline to grow internally (spiritually) and become something more than one is (Kierkegaard 1969). Then, one confines oneself to the superficial, submitting oneself to public opinion, choosing mediocrity, idle talk, curiosity, and ambiguity (Heidegger 1978). In this way, one avoids responsibility for becoming oneself, and is content with what one is.

Finitude (and infinity of human possibilities)

Humans live on the boundary between finitude and infinity, which causes tension between the awareness of inevitable death and the desire to continue to live (Yalom 2008). The tragedy of existence is that life is finite. We can either accept this and endeavor to fill our lives with meaning, or we can reject this thought by escaping into the world of material things and consumption, assuming that we are someone special, or annihilating ourselves by renouncing conscious choices. Only a full awareness of one's finitude and one's inevitable end provides a chance to be an "authentic being" (Heidegger 1978; Jaspers 1973). Human beings realize the truth of their own existence most clearly in crisis, in borderline or limited situations that remind them suddenly of their mortality and make them abandon their inauthentic way of being. To make an existential choice is to refer to the infinity of human freedom. However, it is not about infinity in the sense of seeking for pleasure or egoistic self-realization, but about infinity in the sense of searching for value and meaning (Fromm 1976; Marcel 1965).

Unpredictable fate (and striving for harmony and certainty)

The anxiety of death is strongly linked to the anxiety of the threat of fate. While the former is absolute, the latter is relative. Relativity, however, does not mean that the anxiety of fate is less acute, but only that an absolute threat can also emerge at any time (Tillich 2000). Random events include unpredictable circumstances, a sudden unexpected death in the family, illness, but also happiness and love. One feels fate as a force, that is sometimes favorable, helpful, in other cases, however, threatening and dangerous**.** There is something mysterious, transcendental and unpredictable in the randomness of fate, something opposed to a human being's natural tendency to strive for certainty, harmony and a sense of security (Fromm 2013; Yalom 1980). In other words, a person feels the need for something to be permanent and final, and constantly attempts to introduce some sort of an ordering principle into their life. Unfortunately, trying to secure oneself physically and mentally removes the sense of adventure and deprives life of joy and intensity. The fear of upsetting the equilibrium and transgressing existing boundaries basically contradicts the commitment and courage to become oneself (Kierkegaard 1969, 1992). From an existential perspective, human fate is a result of an independent course of events and at the same time the product of human activity and initiative (Frankl 1950, 2000).

Existential loneliness (and relationship with another human)

The rudimentary, dialectical contradiction inscribed in human existence also lies in the desire to maintain a state of separateness and loneliness, to separate oneself

from others and, concurrently, the need to break free from this state. Loneliness in the existential sense means that the human being, as a unique and separate entity, cannot be replaced by anyone in their existence and experiences. This singularity does not necessarily lead to a negative feeling of loneliness, which only arises when a person feels some kind of absence and suffering because of being cut off from others. A person who is more capable of being alone not only feels a greater sense of comfort, but is also more prepared to enter into closer relationships with others. Fromm (1956, p. 94) even notes that "the ability to be alone is a condition of the ability to love". In order to live for and with others, it is first necessary to experience one's own loneliness, to understand it, finding support in oneself and, at the same time, accepting one's own freedom and responsibility. Loneliness in the existential sense does not stem from a lack of the need to be among people, a fear of them, or a feeling of abandonment. It is rather a state in which a person feels that they are, as it were, "at home" (Guardini 2001, p. 132).

Commitment and values

The most salient postulate of existential philosophy and psychology is involvement, i.e., active participation in the world and the creative use of human possibilities (May 1957,1972; Jaspers 1994; Abbagnano 1957; Yalom 1980; Fromm 1994). By becoming engaged, one experiences oneself as an active subject, notices one's abilities, activates one's own imagination and develops oneself based on internal and external conditions. Of course, one can avoid being involved by retreating from the world and people, but then one is bound to experience the internal tension that is associated with the sense of helplessness (May 1957, 1972). The importance of commitment and activity takes on special significance in difficult situations, when a task requires maximum mobilization of various resources: skills, energy, time and, above all, courage (Guardini 2001; Tillich 2000).

According to Jaspers (1973, 1994), Kierkegaard (1969), and Frankl (1975, 2000), it is difficult to talk about becoming fully human without referring to the higher values and the axiological dimension of human existence. From an existential point of view, value is what enriches and ennobles a person, what changes them for the better and imbues their needs and actions with deeper meaning. Value understood this way cannot be arbitrarily imposed but must be autonomously decided on.

The sense of meaning in life

For Frankl (1975, 2000), values are closely tied to meaning in life, by which he understands "possibility in the horizon of reality" and thus the best opportunity to act, experience, and take a specific attitude towards life. According to existential analysis and to logotherapy – which is its practical implementation – experiencing

a high degree of conflict is not only the effect of a split between the conscious self and the subconscious drives, as Freud (2010) asserted; nor is it an effect of contradictory ambitions – as Horney (2001) claimed – or an expression of a sense of threat to personal self-worth – as Adler (2010) theorized – but it is primarily the outcome of a failure to discover meaning in life.

According to Frankl (1975, 2000), the search for meaning is the primary motivation that prompts a person to act. In this approach, the sense of purpose in life is dynamic because it requires the individual to be active in finding it. The desire (will) for meaning is always realized in connection with a specific person and in a specific situation. Every situation poses a question which one must answer by taking a particular action. The choice of action is made because of the values that one holds. Therefore, value precedes meaning, since it is a condition of meaning, and at the same time, it is a value only if it has a meaning. A sense of meaning is also linked to a state of satisfaction, which is the consequence of an overall positive assessment of one's own actions, attitudes, and responses to the absolute (Frankl 1975). In this interpretation, the sense of meaning in life is also static. Meaning is what enables the constitution of the self through a multidimensional reference to oneself, another human being, and the world in terms of facts, values, and faith in transcendence.

Research problem and hypotheses

The guiding idea of this study was the assumption that experiencing conflict is the result of an inevitable confrontation with fundamental, objective existential facts: freedom (as well as responsibility), finitude, existential loneliness and fate in the broadest sense. With such assumptions in mind, we formulated the research problem, which took the form of the following question: Is there a relationship between an individual's behavior in response to (internal and interpersonal) conflict and their sense of meaning in life and preferred values?

In this research, we took into account the following behaviors of the subject in response to conflict: 1) undertaking action-oriented tasks; 2) activating thinking about one's own resources and possibilities, including the positive aspects of reality; 3) activating thinking about the behavior of third parties and actions taken towards one, and 4) activating thinking about one's own limitations and disadvantages, including the negative aspects of reality. The idea behind this research was also the assumption that every human experience has a linguistic component, and that words are the basic tools with which human beings create and articulate their world (Harris 1988). Language not only reflects thought but is also an active agent in shaping reality.

Based on theoretical suppositions drawn from existential psychology, the following hypotheses were made:

- Activating thinking about one's own resources and potential (including the positive aspects of reality) in response to conflict is associated with a strong sense of meaning in life.
- Activating thinking about one's own limitations and disadvantages (including the negative aspects of reality) in response to conflict is associated with a weak sense of meaning in life.
- Undertaking specific task-oriented actions in response to experiencing conflict correlates with a strong sense of meaning in life.
- Activating thinking about the behavior of third parties and actions taken towards the subject is correlated with a weak sense of meaning in life.
- Taking specific actions and activating thinking about one's own resources and potential in response to conflict is related to a preference for the specific values of "openness to change" and "self-transcendence".

Methods

Participants and procedure

The study included a total of 153 subjects, aged 19 to 26 years (M = 22.6). The respondents were students of two universities in a medium-sized town (up to 150,000 inhabitants). 55 pct. of the respondents were men and 45 pct. were women. The selection criterion was the age of the subjects, i.e., early adulthood. This is the stage of development in which a young person is initiated into adult life, learns to make and keep commitments, stabilizes his/her identity, and exhibits a growing interest in other people (Havighurst 1981).

At the first stage of the study, the respondents were asked to provide a written, open-ended answer to the prompt, "Conflicts (inside me and with other people) in my life." Thanks to this form of data collection, participants had an opportunity to organize their experiences, provide them with meaning, and hierarchize their personal world of meanings.

After the first part of the study was completed, the following tests were distributed: Crumbaugh and Maholick's Purpose in Life Test (1964) and the Schwartz Value Survey (Schwartz et al. 2012). Crumbaugh and Maholick's Purpose in Life Test (1964) was based on Frankl's existential analysis and is used to quantitatively measure the intensity of the subject's perceived life meaning.

The Schwartz Survey (Schwartz et al. 2006, 2012) is used to measure preferred values, which is defined as a cognitive representation (usually a belief) of a motivational goal which is desirable and supra-situational. In the Portrait Value Questionnaire (PVQ), the respondent assesses the similarity of the description to themselves on a six-point scale: from 1 (very unlike me) to 6 (very much like me). A lower nominal score indicates greater attachment to a particular value.

In order to study human behavior in response to conflict, we used frequency analysis and semantic analysis of the verbs used by the respondents in their open-ended answers. Attempts to analyze the relationship between the use of the parts of speech and human mental conditions were undertaken in the research of Chang and Pennebaker (2007), Pennebaker and Stone (2003), Semm (2007), and Semm, Rubinm and Fiedler (1995), among others.

We identified the following groups of verbs in the study:

1. Task-oriented, first-person action verbs (including reflexive verbs that denote mental processes), e.g., *I'm leaving*, *I moved out*, *I draw conclusions*, *I fight*, *I scream*, *I called*, *I say*, etc.) These verbs have the lowest level of abstraction and, at the same time, the highest flow of energy. An accumulation of this type of verb in a text is an indication that a person takes specific actions in response to experiencing conflict.
2. State verbs oriented towards one's own capabilities and resources, e.g., *I can*, *I am able to*, *I am brave*, *I like*, *I respect*, *I love*. Volitional verbs are a special representative of this group (e.g., *I want*, *I would like to be a manager*, *I expect*, *I want*). Verbs that belong to this category are declarative and undoubtedly exhibit a high degree of self-reflection in the subject.
3. Action and state verbs in the third person which describe the behavior of third parties, e.g., *he said*, *he did*, *they never supported me*, *she started shouting at me*, *they hurt me*, *they have no ambition*, *she isn't a good person*. An accumulation of these verbs at the expense of action verbs may point to a shift in emphasis towards others, which may correlate with a shift of the source of agency from oneself to others.
4. State verbs indicating one's own limitations and inability (*I have no influence*, *I am fat*, *I have no friends*, *I can't change it*). These verbs express a passive attitude towards oneself. This group consists of modal verbs (*I must*, *I should*) and phrases such as "have + an object,' which signal a lack of sense of control, and locating the source of the problem outside the subject (e.g., *I have a tendency*, *I have a problem*, *I have suicidal thoughts*, *I was depressed*) etc.

Results

An analysis of the results allowed verification of the research hypotheses regarding dependencies formulated in the form of research problems. In the test developed by Crumbaugh and Maholick (1964), the students who took part in the study achieved an average of 103.75 points (SD = 16.48). There was no statistically significant difference between men and women; the average score for men was 101 points (SD = 18.63), while for women it was 104.8 points (SD = 14.96). These findings are slightly lower than the average results in various non-clinical samples, which were about 112 points (106–118) (Crumbaugh 1968).

When analyzing the survey results about preferences for basic values, we found that the subjects cherish the values assigned to the "self-transcendence" dimension the most. These include loyalty (1.69), helping others (2.12), respect for other people (2.19), equality (2.23), and tolerance (2.42). However, forgiveness (3.15) was not included in this group, which may suggest that where the situation calls for a much greater moral effort – rising above one's own resentments and offended ego – the value of self-transcendence loses importance. The respondents favored such "self-transcendence" values as autonomy (2.16), curiosity about the world (2.39), and self-fulfillment through creativity (2.8). The value of taking risks scored considerably lower among the study participants (3.57), which seems to correspond to the higher-ranking value of safety (2.58). Among the values grouped under "conservatism," the lowest-rated ones were tradition (3.39), religion (3.53), and modesty (referring to a lack of major demands from life = 3.79). In this category, the students assessed the values of conformism (2.77) and humility (in the sense of not exalting oneself above others = 2.67) higher. The values of "self-enhancement", such as wealth (3.52) and power (3.19), were evaluated by the respondents as relatively low priorities. The young people attributed more importance to their own achievements (2.69) and hedonism (2.9).

The analysis of the results confirmed the three hypotheses. The first hypothesis stated that activating thinking about one's own resources and potential (including the positive aspects of reality) in response to conflict is associated with a strong sense of meaning in life. The second hypothesis posited the opposite relationship: Activating thinking about one's own limitations and disadvantages (including the negative aspects of reality) in response to conflict is associated with a weak sense of meaning in life. There was a clear relationship between the number of mentions of one's own resources and capabilities (as indicated by the number of state verbs in the first person which were oriented towards the subjects' own capabilities, potential, and abilities) and the perceived meaning in life ($R = 0.4242$; $SD = 15.007$; $P < 0.0001$). This suggests that the higher the sense of purpose in life, the more often the subject starts thinking about their own resources and potential in response to conflict. Conversely, there was a clear correlation between one's concentration on limited resources and possibilities (as indicated by the number of state verbs which were oriented towards a lack of capabilities and limited potential) and a weak sense of meaning in life ($R = 0.43991$; $SD = 14.88266$; $P < 0.0001$). Our results seem to indicate that a weak sense of meaning in life is associated with a lack of self-worth and, consequently, a failure to recognize one's own resources and potential in situations of conflict (internal and interpersonal).

The third hypothesis was also confirmed, although in comparison to the results presented above, a slightly weaker correlation was observed between the number of actions taken in response to conflict (as indicated by the number of task-oriented action verbs in the first person) and the sense of purpose in life ($R = 0.31531$; $SD = 15.72694$; $P = 0.00148$). This suggests that the higher the perceived meaning

in life, the more the respondent reacts to conflict in a task-oriented manner by taking specific action in order to change the situation. In other words, people who discover meaning in their intentional and value-oriented activities seem more likely to choose involvement and action in difficult and problematic circumstances.

The fourth hypothesis was not supported by the results. It stated that diverting one's attention to third parties in response to conflict correlates with a weak sense of meaning in life. It was assumed that the tendency to assess and describe other people's behavior may be linked to a negative assessment of one's own abilities and a low sense of purpose in life. The analysis of the study, however, did not show a correlation between the number of mentions of the behavior and actions of other people (indicator: the number of action and state verbs in the third person expressing actions taken by third parties or the subject's assessment of people who are close to them) and the sense of purpose in life ($R = 0.09657$; $SD = 16.4948$, $P = 0.34165$). It can therefore be presumed that regardless of whether or not young people have a positive image of themselves and of reality which is oriented toward searching for purpose and taking control, they still discern the disadvantages and weaknesses of their loved ones and quite extensively describe behavior they disapprove of. A critical attitude towards other people and even blaming them for one's own failures, hence, does not correspond to a sense of meaning and purpose in life. It seems that another way to interpret this finding is that experiencing a conflict with another person can paradoxically be treated as an impulse to defend one's beliefs and stick to one's values.

The fifth hypothesis has been partially verified. It assumed the existence of a relationship between taking specific action or activating thinking about one's own resources in response to conflict and favoring the values of "self-transcendence" and "openness to change." There was no statistically significant correlation between the number of mentions of actions taken and one's own resources (as indicated by the number of task-oriented, first-person action verbs and the number of state verbs oriented towards one's own resources and potential) and values of "self-transcendence" (providing help, loyalty, tolerance, equality, respect for other people, and forgiveness). The only relationship that was found was a correlation between the number of mentions of actions taken and one's own resources (indicated by the number of task-oriented action verbs in the first person and the number of state verbs oriented towards one's own resources and potential) and the values assigned to the category "openness to change" (independence, self-fulfillment through creativity, curiosity of the world, and risk-taking) ($R = 0.3519$; $SD = 0.1622$; $P = 0.0003$). These values are close to the attitude of "determination," which one should understand as the will to act and open oneself to the world.

We decided to also compare the results obtained with the results of the study of the relationship between the values assigned to "self-transcendence" and "openness to the world" and the sense of meaning in life. Because the sense of meaning of life seems to be related to taking control of one's own actions and

the belief in one's own resources and capabilities, the question was asked whether there is also a correlation between one's sense of meaning in life and the values of "self-transcendence" and "openness to change". There was a clear correlation between perceived meaning of existence and the values of "openness to change" (independence, self-fulfillment through creativity, and risk-taking) (R = 0.46603, SD = 14.662 P = 0.0001). No relationship was found again between the sense of purpose in life and the values assigned to the group of "self-transcendence" (helping others, loyalty, equality, tolerance, and forgiveness). These results deserve a separate comment. What seems to help young people "cope" with difficult and problematic situations and, at the same time, to fill their lives with meaning are mainly the values of "openness to change" (independence, curiosity of the world, openness to adventure, and risk-taking). On the other hand, the values to which the respondents refer less often in situations of conflict and which do not seem to correlate with their sense of meaning in life are those assigned to the category of "self-transcendence" (helping others, forgiveness, loyalty, tolerance, and equality).

Study limitations

This research has its limitations. The study was conducted among students studying in a medium-sized town, with 56 pct. of the respondents in the study coming from rural areas. The methods of responding to conflict situations were studied using frequency and semantic analysis of verbs, which, compared to standardized research tools, also presents a limitation. Nevertheless, it is one of the first empirical studies on conflict understood in the existential sense. The results obtained can be regarded as an introduction to further, more detailed research in this field. In order to broaden the research on conflict done from the perspective of existential psychology, similar studies should be carried out on a larger and more diverse population of subjects.

Summary and conclusions

From an existential perspective, conflict (internal and interpersonal) is seen as an expression of human confrontation with the basic existential facts: freedom (including responsibility), the finitude of human life, existential loneliness and fate in a broad sense. Not recognizing one's own existential situation or accepting one's freedom are perceived as a source of a high level of inner conflict, and indirectly of interpersonal conflicts as well. Although, in an existential sense, these contradictions cannot be fully resolved, in the unanimous opinion of most psychologists and existential philosophers, a person can respond to them in terms of values and purpose in life. This in turn implies taking specific actions, mobilizing one's own resources and potential, and adopting a specific attitude towards life.

This study aimed to explore whether there is a relationship between an individual's behavior in response to conflict (internal and interpersonal) and their sense of meaning in life and preferred values. Our findings seem to suggest that people who have a high sense of meaning in life more often undertake specific actions in response to conflict, and much more often activate thinking about their own resources and potential in such situations. Conversely, the lower the sense of meaning in life, the greater the tendency to react to conflict in a passive manner, which implies focusing on one's own limitations and flaws, and undertaking considerably fewer actions in face of conflict. This study also poses the question of whether there is a correlation between the number of mentions of the behavior of third parties in response to conflict and one's perceived meaning in life. It was assumed that people who have less satisfaction in life will be more likely to divert their attention to the actions and behavior of others. However, our study did not confirm this hypothesis. There was no correlation between the number of mentions of other people's behavior and the sense of meaning in life. It can be assumed, therefore, that a negative attitude towards other people does not correlate with the way in which the respondents regard themselves or their own existential situation.

The way we respond to conflict also seems to correlate with our preferred values. Our findings reveal that people who prefer the values of "openness to change" (independence, self-fulfillment through creativity, curiosity about the world, and risk-taking) are more likely to respond to conflict in a task-oriented manner, by taking action and emphasizing their own capabilities and positive character traits. At the same time, no correlation was shown between preference for values of "self-transcendence" (helping others, loyalty, forgiveness, tolerance, and equality) and taking action and mobilizing one's own resources in response to conflict. Moreover, the values of conservatism and self-enhancement do not seem to be sufficient inspiration to search for purpose in life in conflict situations.

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