

**Book Review: Frankl, V. E. (1984) *Man's Search for Meaning Revised and Updated*.
New York: Washington Square Press.**

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Abstract

I have recently read Frankl's book, *Man's Search for Meaning*, as several people had recommended it to me. I found his text had great resonance with my experiences as a child in care, in the sense that, rather than being defined by a potentially harmful experience, I have found meaning and purpose for my life to go on and help others. In my Living Theory doctoral research Frankl has helped me to understand that it is my search for meaning that has led me to live a values-based life. It was not enough for me to just try to come through my childhood with as little damage as I could, I wanted my experiences of coming through the care system to make me the person I am as an adult; not as the third-person research on children in care predicts my life would be. There are many statistics that predict I would fail at school, I would be in prison, a drug addict or prostitute. My living-theory research provides an example of how children can come out of the care system with a passion to help others thrive despite suffering in their lives.

For me love is central. My meaning of love is an action to improve my life and others lives. Frankl describes living the type of love I hold as a value, time and again, in the concentration camps caring for his friends and those who are sick.

Hope is a value I hold and is what enables me to carry on each day. My meaning of hope is that as humans, we hold different possibilities in mind when we think of the future knowing they may end in hope or disaster. Either way, being aware of this knowledge leads us to live a values-filled life that takes care of ourselves and others to have the capacity to cope with the future possibilities we may face. This has helped me as I have

been able to pick myself up from many disasters, still able to hold hope for a better possibility next time around. Frankl describes this as he talks about the many degradations of the camps but that it is the hope for a future of freedom, of being able to live out his life's meaning and being reunited with his loved ones that kept him and others in the camp going. Frankl is able to show evidence that this hope actually kept people alive and that once it was lost, he then watched many people die.

I hold justice as a value. For me justice is the right for everyone to be able to improve their lives, balanced with the respect that this should not be at the expense of others. In addition I hold participation as a value that everyone has a right to have their voice heard regardless of their material wealth or status. Frankl describes how the concentration camps took these rights away and tried to strip the prisoners of their meaning. However, he is clear that no one can take our will for meaning as it is inside of each of us. However, when those in the camps let go of their meaning they died shortly afterwards.

I wanted to review Frankl's text in EJOLTs to encourage other Living Theorists to read his account, as it has had a lot to offer me in developing my ideas in my living-theory research. Frankl's text is easy to read and immediately engages the reader through his compelling personal biography. His story is focused on his time in concentration camps in the Second World War. He uses his experiences to validate his theory, which he calls "logotherapy" that has been called the "The Third Viennese School of Psychotherapy" (p. 121). Frankl contrasts his ideas with Freud and Adler who were the founders of the first two schools of psychotherapy, which he suggests are a "secondary rationalization" (p. 121) of instinctual drives. He summarises Freud's ideas as based on the desire for pleasure and Adler's as the desire for power. However, Frankl points to his lived experience of being so desperate that all secondary rationalisations for living are stripped away by the brutality of the situation in which he, and the other concentration camp prisoners, found themselves. Instead prisoners were left with their primary motivation for survival, which he argues is the will to meaning. He argues that each person has a unique and specific meaning and purpose that they attach to their life, but it is this, after everything else has gone, that keeps you alive. His experience is validated, sadly, by the fact that those that lost their will to meaning died soon afterwards in the camps.

Frankl, through identifying his theory as the primary rationalisation for living, does not negate Freud or Adler as having valid arguments for their theories. Rather he is arguing that his theory is pointing to something deeper than the secondary rationalisations they have identified. In this way Frankl is a kind critic of those who have come before him, rather than trying to overturn or nullify their work, and with their schools of thought he is introducing a concept that can live alongside their theories.

Frankl defines logotherapy as being "confronted with and reoriented toward the meaning of his life" (p. 120). For Frankl this is in relation to a patient overcoming a neurosis. However, his ideas are relevant for everyone and particularly those using a Living Theory methodology

Frankl's text is rich and rewarding for a Living Theorist both in methodology and in content. He shares the same view that validation comes from personal lived experience and that through telling our own story we can identify our own values which give us meaning

and purpose for our lives. Living Theory also encourages researchers to start with their own story to identify the key values that define you. As Frankl says, these are the things people will fight for – and in his experience – die for. Frankl's book is in two halves. He moves from his own story, where he uses what I would recognise as an autoethnographical methodology, to provide evidence for his theory of logotherapy. However, in the second half of the book he moves to using the literature of others, using quantitative studies as evidence that most people seek meaning and purpose to their lives. He then moves into using a narrative methodology to give validation to his findings. I would argue Frankl's book is an excellent example of methodological inventiveness (Dadds and Hart, 2001) as Frankl uses different methods and methodologies as they help him to validate his claims in a way that is in keeping with his values within his research.

In many ways Frankl's concept of logotherapy are what I would recognise as his living-theory, in that he identifies his values through his own story and continues to expand on his ideas throughout his working life. The therapy he practices is embedded in bringing hope for the flourishing of humanity and his message is one that, despite living through one of the worst experiences of humanity, he has been able to live his life to help others find meaning and purpose in their lives. He recognises the idea of living contradictions, which he describes poetically as, "To be sure, man's search for meaning may arouse inner tension rather than inner equilibrium" (p. 126).

Like Living Theory, which identifies that finding yourself a living contradiction as the key to improvement, Frankl identifies this tension as key to survival:

However, precisely such tension is an indispensable prerequisite of mental health. There is nothing in the world, I venture to say, that would so effectively help one to survive even the worst conditions as the knowledge that there is a meaning in one's life. There is much wisdom in the words of Nietzsche: 'He who has a *why* to live for can bear almost any *how*.' (p. 126)

Frankl provides an excellent defence against critics of values-based research and living stating:

There are some authors who contend that meanings and values are 'nothing but defense mechanisms, reaction formations and sublimations.' But as for myself, I would not be willing to live merely for the sake of my 'defense mechanisms', nor would I be ready to die merely for the sake of my 'reaction formations'. Man, however, is able to live and even to die for the sake of his ideals and values! (p. 121)

Frankl's work clearly helped him not only in his own learning but literally in his own survival of the concentration camps. He also shared his theory to help the learning of others and again this was often supportive in their survival in the camps. As logotherapy has become known as The Third Viennese School, his ideas have clearly had an impact on the learning of social formations. However, Frankl's account is incredibly honest and he does not suggest that he always shared his ideas purely for high ideals. He also describes being taken into the trust of one of the guards as his therapist, and gained the favours of being given better work, soup and protection, that saved his life.

Frankl sees values as central to his theory. He identifies three ways we can find meaning and purpose for our lives. First he outlines through work or the, “external world of achievement” (p. 170), like Living Theory, which often relates to practice. However, he goes on to describe two further ways, which I think Living Theory also recognises but in which the word ‘practice’ can sometimes cause confusion. The second way, is, “by experiencing something or encountering someone; in other words ... love” (p. 170) or “the internal world of experience”. Thirdly, the one Frankl sees as most important is to, “turn a personal tragedy into a triumph” (op. cit.).

Frankl argues the main aim of humanity should be to try to live your life as closely to your values as you can, “Live as if you were living for the second time and had acted as wrongly the first time as you are about to act now.” (p. 175)

Frankl urges us not to value our usefulness but the values we have realised, this message is one that is of huge benefit to a Living Theorist trying to argue why values are central. Living Theory is juxtaposed to third-person research, which is often trying to show the benefits of measurements, activity done and successes. However, Frankl provides an antidote to the current drive by society to do more and more regardless of the values of the activity:

The value of each and every person stay with him or her, and it does so because it is based on the values that he or she has realized in the past, and is not contingent on the usefulness that he or she may or may not retain in the present. (p. 176)

Frankl’s book is a rich source of encouragement that, even from the darkest of times, meaning and purpose can be retained. Humanity can and did flourish again after the Second World War and Living Theory very much provides a research methodology in line with Frankl’s theory of logotherapy. *Man’s Search for Meaning* provides a powerful example of how Living Theorists can set out their living-theory to be both readable and influential. Frankl provides a call for us all to do our best as the stakes are high and with growing tension between the West and Russia over Syria and the annexing of Crimea, Trump’s rise to political power and the racist dogma that has gained momentum from Brexit, the closing words to the book – and this book review – are timely:

For the world is in a bad state,
But everything will become still worse unless each of us does his best.
So, let us be alert - alert in a twofold sense:
Since Auschwitz we know what man is capable of.
And since Hiroshima we know what is at stake. (p. 179)

References

- Dadds, M., & Hart, S. (2001). *Doing practitioner research differently*. London: Routledge/Falmer.
- Frankl, V. E. (1984). *Man’s Search for Meaning Revised and Updated*. New York: Washington Square Press.