

Family Constellation Method of Bert Hellinger in the context of the Code of Ethics for Psychotherapists

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Summary

Aim. The article describes the Family Constellation Method in the context of the Code of Ethics for Psychotherapists of the Polish Psychiatric Association. The aim of the article is to try to answer the question whether the method fulfils ethical criteria psychotherapists need to comply with.

Methods. The Family Constellation Method of Hellinger raises controversies in the Polish body of psychologists and psychotherapists. The controversies concern the plausibility of using the method, its consequences for the patients as well as answering the question if the Hellinger's family constellations are psychotherapy. Other controversial issues are teaching the method as well as using it in professional educational and therapeutic institutions.

Results. The analysis of the Family Constellation Method by Bert Hellinger in the context of the Code of Ethics for Psychotherapists indicates that this method does not fulfil many rules of the Code.

Conclusions. The Family Constellation Method of Bert Hellinger does not fulfil vital rules of the Code of Ethics for Psychotherapists such as the process, contract, diagnosis, supervision, confidentiality, alternativeness. It also does not fulfil the basic criterion of psychotherapy, which is the process, thus it is difficult to treat this method as psychotherapy. Consequently, it is valid to question using the method by psychotherapists and offering it in professional therapeutic institutions.

family constellations / Bert Hellinger / The Code of Ethics for Psychotherapists

INTRODUCTION

What can be observed in therapeutic practice is the increasing number of people looking for the Family Constellation Method of Bert Hellinger. At the same time, the patients who seek help after having participated in constellations report to mental health centres and private practice offices [1]. It turns out that the Hellinger's method raises controversies among psychologists and therapists working within the framework of similar

theoretic approaches and even working in the same organisational structures. Some psychologists promote and use the Hellinger's method while the other part of them explicitly criticises Hellinger's constellations [1, 2].

PSYCHOTHERAPY – SELECTED DEFINITIONS

Sample definitions of psychotherapy [3]

In Norcross' definition – “psychotherapy is the informed and intentional application of clinical methods and interpersonal stances derived from established psychological principles for the purpose of assisting people to modify their behaviors, cognitions, emotions and/or other personal characteristics in directions that the participants deem desirable” [3].

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According to Urban and Ford – “psychotherapy is still a well-thought-of, and in that matter, planned form of intervention into behavioral circumstances of a particular person for the purpose of correcting or modifying the attitude presented by them towards a specific type of difficulties” [3].

The definition of psychotherapy by professor Aleksandrowicz states: “Psychotherapy is such a form of psycho-social interactions which aims to correct disorders of experiencing and behaving, is supposed to remove symptoms and causes of an illness including personality traits that cause disorders of experiencing. These interactions, influencing a functional state of organs as well as experiencing and behaving through the change of mental processes of the patient, are exerted within the framework of interpersonal relationship between two people or in a group in which a psychotherapist simultaneously treats several persons” [4].

Professor Czabała [3] points out differences in understanding these definitions of psychotherapy. In the first definition “assisting” people in changes, which are deemed desirable, is emphasised while the second one is based on helping with the modification of attitudes that hamper solving difficult situations. In the third definition the attention is paid to the change of mental processes, which the therapist considers necessary to correct disorders of a functional state of organs, disorders of experiencing and behaving.

Czabała emphasises that the problem of change is the most important element of psychotherapy. “Psychotherapy, as a method of treatment, aims to bring about changes that will allow removing or decreasing the intensification of symptoms” [3]. In the introduction to the book entitled *Czynniki leczące w psychoterapii* [Curing factors in Psychotherapy] he shares his own reflection stating that “psychotherapy is a method of treating mental disorders the application of which requires knowledge referring to the results of scientific studies and abilities that can be acquired as a result of learning. Psychotherapy is an art only in a sense that every psychotherapist proportions the acquired knowledge and abilities to his or her own potential of using them and needs that stem from individual problems of the patient” [3].

According to Czabała and Brykczyńska [5] – “psychotherapy fulfills theoretical requirements in order to be considered scientific. The problem is the fact that the results of empirical studies do not unambiguously prove the validity of theoretical statements of many theories. During the last years more empirical facts have appeared which suggest that changes taking place in the course of psychotherapy are connected with the variables of the process of psychotherapy” (The summary of the presentation made at the conference entitled “Podstawy naukowe psychoterapii” [Scientific bases of psychotherapy]). In the summary of the lecture given during the aforementioned conference that took place in Warsaw in June 2010 J.W. Aleksandrowicz writes among others: „what is called psychotherapy is helping healthy people with decreasing their dissatisfaction with their own functioning, gaining knowledge about themselves, capability in interpersonal relationships etc. as well as treating health disorders, especially functional disorders. In the first of these versions, psychotherapy is inscribed in the field of social sciences while in the second one it is a part of medicine (...). Much indicates that putting the discipline of psychotherapy within the framework of science requires among others clear distinction of psychosocial interactions that act as help from treating health disorders [6].

According to the author of the article the proposed distinction between psycho-social actions which act as help and treating health disorders [6] can not only be conducive to distinguish therapeutic approaches classified as psychotherapy as a method of treatment but can also be helpful in taking an attitude towards the Hellinger’s method.

In the context of the presented definitions, a question is raised whether the family constellation method of Bert Hellinger fulfils the criteria of psychotherapy.

FAMILY CONSTELATION METHOD OF BERT HELLINGER

In the note about the author of the book entitled *Porządki pomagania, czyli jak, kiedy i komu skutecznie pomagać* [Orders of helping, i.e. how, when and who to help effectively] [7] we can read: „Bert

Hellinger, one of the most outstanding modern psychologists, spent 25 years in a convent, including 16 years as a missionary to the Zulu. He studied philosophy, theology and pedagogy, gained extensive psychological education [...] He discovered entanglements of an individual into present and past vicissitudes of family life. He developed an original method of ordering entangled and broken bonds – family constellations” [7].

The introduction to the book includes Hellinger’s reflections on helping which he formulated as “five orders”. In his opinion “helping is an art. And, as every art, it requires certain skills. They can be learnt. It is also an ability to show empathy to a person seeking help. Empathising enables to learn the situation of the other person and notice both the limitations as well as the thing that makes it possible to go beyond them” [7]. According to Hellinger – “the first order of helping is the rule, that you can give only what you yourself possess and that you expect and take only what you need” [7]. In the opinion of the article’s author, it is difficult not to agree with that rule as far as by the expression “what you yourself possess” we understand not only personality-based predispositions and life experience of the “helper” but also his or her knowledge on the field psychopathology and psychotherapy as well as clinical and therapeutic experiences.

“Second order of helping” on the one hand serves to survive and on the other one contributes to development and growth. Survival, development and growth depend on specific external and internal circumstances. “Second order of helping is based on accepting limitations and help (sustaining intervention) which reaches as far as it is indispensable. Such helping is restraining. It has power” [7].

In the “third order of helping”, Hellinger concentrates on setting boundaries and processes of transference and counter-transference. “Many helpers yield to transference and counter-transference from a child to a parent and as a result make it difficult for their clients to part both from the parents as well as themselves” [7]. “The third order of helping – concerns the situation when a helping adult gives help to an adult seeking help [...] In that case the negation of helping is to allow an adult client to make

demands of the helper, the kind of demands a child makes of his or her parents. It is also allowing the helper to treat the client as a child: in that way he or she deprives the client of the possibility to take responsibility and the consequences, which he or she can, or even need to take himself or herself” [7].

While describing the “fourth order of helping” Hellinger writes: “classical psychotherapy treats the client as a separate individual. When taking such an approach persons who help are easily in danger of child-parent transference [...] It means that the helper should treat the problem systemically not personally. The point is that the helper does not get into a personal relationship with the client. This is the fourth order of helping” [7]. Thus, in the fourth order of helping Hellinger brings up ethical issues which are included in the *Code of Ethics for Psychotherapists* [8]: “Therapist is not allowed to transfer the relationship with the person being treated beyond the area of the therapy” – I. General Principles, point 4. [8].

“The fifth order of helping – family constellations – aims to connect what has been divided and parted. In this sense, they serve to conciliate, in the first place with the parents [...] Many helpers follow their own conscience and judgments [...] Because of that, help may only be given by the person who is able to place in their soul both the person of the client as well as things the client complains about. The helper is the first one to accomplish in his or her soul what the client has to achieve. The fifth order of helping is love for every man, such as he is, regardless of differences. The helper opens his or her heart for the client. He becomes a part of him or her. What has been conciliated in his or her heart can also conciliate in the client’s heart” [7].

In the aforementioned „orders of helping” the attention can be paid to the fact that Hellinger uses the term „helping” and not “psychotherapy”; he calls a person giving help a “helper” and not a “psychotherapist”, next, he names people who he applies his method to a “client” and not a “patient”.

In the “orders of helping” Hellinger pays a lot of attention to transference and counter-transference as well as to taking a family system and setting boundaries into account. They are also key principles of therapeutic work in different

paradigms: psychoanalytical, psychodynamic or systemic among others. On the other hand, in the author's opinion the interpretation of these terms in the Hellinger's description very often differs from understanding them in a classical way, as it is difficult to distinguish boundaries, autonomy or individual values in the above quotation: "the helper opens his or her heart for the client. He becomes a part of him or her. What has been conciliated in his or her heart can also conciliate in the client's heart" [7].

FAMILY CONSTELLATION METHOD OF BERT HELLINGER FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF ITS FOLLOWERS

Below I present fragments of several descriptions of Family Constellation Method of Bert Hellinger. I base on selected websites and literature available in Poland.

1. On the website "Ustawienia systemowe rodzin" [Systemic Family Constellations] we can read: "Family constellations are not a form of psychotherapy. In typical psychotherapy, the roots of a problem can be found in difficult childhood experiences or other traumatic events and next realised, understood and reevaluated. Systemic work is an activity including histories of whole families and events that are barely noticed by an individual, events-secrets which still somehow influence the quality of life and choices that have been made [9]. „Constellations are set up in supervised groups. After a short introductory conversation with the client the therapist determines which family members will be needed to set up a particular constellation. For the pointed out family members the client chooses representatives from among the rest of the workshop participants. He or she invites the chosen persons to represent for example their father, mother, sister, brothers. He or she also chooses his or her own representative. Next, he or she sets up a family constellation, without saying a word chooses one by one a place in the room for each representative. When the representatives stand in their places they start to experience clear and specific sensations, feelings. While the constellation is being set up, the therapist observes body language and reactions of particular representatives in or-

der to understand the dynamics working inside the family. When the structure seems to be already clear the therapist searches for balancing and healing moves in such a way as to find an alternative for the revealed, destructive entanglements. He or she can reposition some of the participants and observe their reactions to such an intervention. The process of searching for resolutions can take several minutes or over an hour. At the end of the constellation the client may be asked to stand in his or her place and change his or her representative. However, in most cases it is sufficient that the client is a witness to the constellation and observes how the harmony appears in place of old entanglements and ambiguities. Work with a family constellation is a one-time event, it is not performed every week like in the case of psychotherapeutic sessions. It can take even a year to observe the effects of a constellation. Many participants of the workshops notice favorable changes taking place not only with reference to themselves but also other family members" [10].

2. On the website entitled "Polski Instytut NLP" [The Polish Institute for NLP] [11] there is a notation: "Family constellations of Bert Hellinger are an "ultra-short-term" method – they usually allow to identify the source of a problem and go through it in a short period of time. Due to this fact the time of the whole therapy gets shortened because constellations speed up constructive passing of crisis stages of the therapy and facilitate the identification of the essence of problems that are systemically conditioned" [11]. On the website "Polski Instytut NLP", contrary to Hellinger's views, the method is described as an "ultra-short-term therapy" and the person conducting the constellations is defined as a "therapist". Thus, the question arises whether it is the same kind of work but described in different words or another type of family constellations.

3. On the website entitled "Systemowa terapia według Berta Hellingera" [Systemic Therapy by Bert Hellinger] [12] we can read: "Bert Hellinger developed and deepened a new method of setting up a family constellation – with the help of representatives the person searching for a resolution is vividly and intensely shown his or her own family. They can take in relations and so

far unsolved relationships over a span of several generations. Such a constellation, reaching the past, can be said to be a live family tree. In a constellation tensions, conflicts and unfavourable relations within a family are revealed. As a result, by working with them it is possible to find resolutions" [12]. According to the author of the article the question that arises here is to what extent "tensions, conflicts and unfavourable relations that are being revealed" depend on the narration of the person conducting constellations. Next, on the website we can read: "The constellation surprises with its form, course of action and interaction. It can clearly show us facts we had no idea about and which cause not only problems but also illnesses [...] By setting up a constellation of our family we can find a problem and set a new, correct order. It should be such that each of its members could feel the supporting power of the family behind them" [12]. Another question that arises concerns "finding a problem": do the people experiencing a constellation find a problem or do they find out about a problem from the person conducting a constellation? Who and to what extent decides about the "correctness of the order" – a client/patient or the person conducting family constellations? Next, we can read "[...] a client chooses representatives for each living and also dead member of the family of origin as well as for him or herself. From this moment until the end of the constellation he or she is only an observer and is exposed to what the therapist and representatives say and do" [12]. The statement "until the end of the constellation he or she is only an observer and is exposed to what the therapist and representatives say and do" causes a question to arise about the participation of a client as well as taking into account his or her thoughts and emotions in the situation concerning both him or her and his or her family. In the next part of the described website a "guiding principle" is presented. "What is surprising in the method is the fact that the positioned representatives gain the access to feelings and relationships of particular family members; even to these ones that are very often deeply hidden. It quite often happens that they even feel physical changes such as: shaking knees, staggering, flexing knees, stomach cramps. Representatives feel who they like or do not like in their role,

who they are angry with or who they would like to have closer relationship with" [12]. According to the author of the article referring to feelings that stem from the "role" may lead to the next question that concerns taking into account the processes of projection and transference. Next on the website we can read that "The purpose of the constellation is to find the strongest entanglement in which someone is trapped and which blocks his or her energy. Constellations show that such entanglements are particularly clear. When they are recognized and resolved a new order very often appears in which everyone feels well in their place. Then, the client takes the place of the representative, knowingly adopts the new image and order in his or her family and absorbs it this way" [12]. According to the author of the article it is difficult not to ask the question about the share of introjection and suggestion as far as the statement "then, the client takes the place of the representative, knowingly adopts the new image and order in his or her family and absorbs it this way" is concerned.

4. Bertold Ulsamer, in his book entitled *Techniki ustawiania rodzin – wprowadzenie do terapii systemowej Hellingera* [*The Art and Practice of Family Constellations..Leading Family Constellations as Developed by Bert Hellinger*] [13] states that „a person setting up a family surely needs courage in order to listen to his or her own inner voice which will lead them to an unknown field, to unexpected convictions without showing the way [...] While setting up a constellation various steps are taken; some of them are more suitable in a given situation whereas the other ones are less suitable. In this field full of tension a therapist moves". Ulsamer considers among others setting up families in the context of arts and crafts stating that: "art and depth cannot be learnt contrary to craftsmanship. However, we should not forget about craftsmen who keep conquering new countries" [13]. In his book he also explains terminology that is used; he calls a person setting up constellations a "supervisor, therapist or setter". Those who set up their families are called "clients" [13].

Referring to the proposal suggested by prof. Aleksandrowicz which concerns differentiating therapeutic interactions, constellations, on the basis of the aforementioned terms, can be un-

derstood as “psycho-social interactions acting as help and not treatment of health disorders” [5].

5. Gunthard Weber in the book entitled *Terapia systemowa Berta Hellingera* [*Bert Hellinger's systems therapy*] writes that „set up family constellations develop their elementary potency because they speak non-verbal, graphic language and thanks to them past, farewell and new orientation in the future approximate in short, concentrated time” [14]. Next, Weber writes: „Bert Hellinger once quoted a sentence: >>What is the best cannot be said whereas the second one in turn after the best one will be misunderstood<<” [14]. In the Weber's opinion Hellinger's statements „are very often formulated as if they contained timeless truth, important in every situation. However, if one takes a closer look at these statements it can be noticed that they are almost always therapeutic interventions in which Bert Hellinger follows his life intuition. These interventions are directed towards a particular person and current development of a situation. If someone wanted to make of it generally valid formula all he would be left from fruit was peel” [14]. According to Weber, Hellinger defends himself “against squeezing his views and ways of behaving into the frameworks of some theory” [15]. Weber quotes Hellinger who thinks that “theory disrupts practice” [14].

In the author's opinion the statements quoted above: “what is the best cannot be said whereas the second one in turn after the best one will be misunderstood” or “theory disrupts practice” can be a challenge when compiling programs that teach the Hellinger's method.

SELECTED APPROACHES AGAINST THE HELLINGER'S METHOD

1. On the website of Wielkopolskie Towarzystwo Terapii Systemowej (WTTS) [The Great Poland Association of Systemic Therapy] [15] it is noted that “there has recently been in Poland a rise of the interest in Bert Hellinger's methods of work. In the literature on that subject as well as in the consciousness of the body of psychotherapists, which is also moulded by persons spreading this method of working with a client, one may notice a phenomenon of identifying systemic therapy with the family constel-

lations method of Hellinger. We state that there is no background for such conclusions. We are quoting an open letter published in the “Systeme” journal that presents the official stance of the Systemic Association in Germany on that subject. We are aware of the fact that the views presented in the aforementioned document are quite radical. Then, let them be the voice setting certain boundaries in the discussion on that subject” [15].

2. The stance of the Systemic Association in Germany concerning the Family Constellation Method of Bert Hellinger – fragments [15]:

“Preliminary remarks [15]

While setting up families the point is the activity in which we turn for help by setting up our own family context and searching for answers to the questions that are of existential significance to us. In the middle of a very often spectacular process important scenes from family history are set up with the help of family members representatives. Then, conclusions concerning the place of a person searching for advice in his or her family system are drawn. The way in which conclusions are drawn and constellations interpreted depends on the idea of the person conducting constellations. Although the author of this method of treatment does not call it psychotherapy any more, among experts as well as in the broader body it is still recognized as not only psychotherapeutic treatment but, what is more, as a systemic one. Originally presented to the limited body of experts, this way of treatment has been taking place in front of the audience for years. A small group of clients, who are very often in a dramatic life situation, experience interactions in the presence of 300-500 spectators. In this situation it cannot be said that clients entrust their matters solely to specialists. Except for public constellations, trade in video recordings and books that are available to everybody has developed. In that way this method of treatment has become a subject of public discussion which has started to become more and more critical.

The Family Constellation Method of Hellinger is consistent neither with the theory nor practice of systemic therapy, nevertheless, it is not only called systemic but is also very often considered to be the exact systemic therapy. It has recently been leading to disorientation among those who,

while being in need, put their trust in systemic therapy. Because of that reason, the German Systemic Association feel obliged to take a stance on work with family constellations by Hellinger in order to defend those who are seeking help against misleading identification of this way of treatment with systemic therapy" [15].

In the summary of the stance of the Systemic Association in Germany we can read: "Summing up, we forcefully state: equaling work with constellations with systemic therapy is incorrect and misleading. The practice of confronting client with the "truth" cannot be reconciled with the rules of systemic therapy and the commercialisation of constellations raises a lot of reservations. From our point of view it should be feared that the benefit the client gains from a constellation does not balance potential losses. Moreover, such practice – by identifying – is also harmful to systemic therapy. It should be simultaneously stated that work with constellations in the context of systemic therapy is completely possible. This "systemic" input to work with constellations can further be a subject of a constructive dispute. This dispute should be limited to the circle of professionally qualified persons" [15].

3. Some Polish authors are explicitly critical of the Hellinger's method [1, 6]. Professor Dolinski points out that „classical scientific tools cannot be applied to" the Hellinger's method. According to Dolinski, Hellinger's constellations "are shows made on the basis of psychodrama and perhaps collective hypnosis. They are in such great demand because people participating in them want very much to see and experience certain things" [1]. In Dolinski's opinion "all those who take part in this madness are infected with euphoria and eagerness peculiar to most new methods of therapy [...] constellations may, at least at the beginning, bring effects desired by their participants. They can "work" similarly to placebo therapy" [1].

FAMILY CONSTELLATION METHOD OF BERT HELLINGER IN THE CONTEXT OF THE CODE OF ETHICS FOR PSYCHOTHERAPISTS

The Code of Ethics for Psychotherapists

The Code of Ethics adopted at the General Assembly of the Psychotherapeutic Section of the

Polish Psychiatric Association and the General Assembly of the Family Therapy Section of the Polish Psychiatric Association constitutes a set of rules that are accurately connected with the specificity of this form of interaction [8].

The Code of Ethics includes: introduction, general principles, practical principles, therapeutic conduct and rights of therapists. The Code is published in every issue of the "Psychoterapia" quarterly journal and on the journal's website [8, 16]. In the introduction to the *Code of Ethics for Psychotherapists* there is a notation stating that "the process of psychotherapy is based on a particular kind of a relationship between a person in therapy and a psychotherapist and is integrally connected with ethical issues. The interpersonal contact should be a source of positive changes but can also be a cause of failures and abuse. Therefore, it is necessary to define ethical responsibility of a psychotherapist towards participants of the therapeutic process" [8].

In the opinion of the article's author the Hellinger's procedure, based on a one-time contact with a person experiencing a family constellation, does not fulfil the criterion of a "psychotherapeutic process". If the described family constellations are not based on a process then they make it practically impossible to examine this method as psychotherapy, and what follows, to examine it also in the context of the code of ethics. It is also difficult to talk about "ethical responsibility of a psychotherapist toward participants of the therapeutic process" if there is no process. In the "Practical Principles of the Code" [8] we can read among others: "The process of psychotherapy should be preceded by a therapeutic contract determining objectives and methods of work as well as rules of financing it". Thus, the question arises whether it is possible, in case of one-time appointment and lack of the therapeutic process to enter and then fulfil the contract concerning objectives and methods of work.

The form of audience used in the Hellinger's method and a numerous group of observers (from a few dozen to a few hundred) are, in the author's opinion, questionable in terms of a subject matter and ethical issues. On the other hand, work with a client/patient in front of the audience in the context of financing principles is not rather questionable.

In accordance with point 4 of the “Practical Principles of the Code” [8] “the obligation of a therapist is to use different forms of cooperation and supervision in order to minimise the risk of errors stemming from his or her personal problems and emotional entanglements”.

Thus, more questions arise – Is work based on family constellations supervised? What should supervising constellations consist in if there is no therapeutic process?

Next questionable issue concerning the Hellinger’s method is another entry in the Code within the scope of Practical Principles: “It is unethical for a therapist to take action in order to treat when he or she does not have generally available knowledge that enables diagnosing and knowledge about indications to apply different form of therapy” [8].

Therefore, it is questionable to diagnose when there is not even one diagnostic session. And, as it stems from practice, one diagnostic session very often turns out to be insufficient to make a diagnosis. Moreover, during the process of therapy the diagnosis can be verified and modified.

Other ethical doubts referring to Hellinger’s constellations concern the principles of the „Therapeutic conduct”, particularly the ones dealing with confidentiality of the therapeutic process [8]. According to the author of the article, particularly questionable is setting up family constellations in front of the wide audience of observers. In case of a numerous group of observers a dilemma concerning rules of confidentiality appears. It can be assumed that participants experiencing family constellations are informed in advance about the presence of observers and give their consent to it. However, it is not known whether they also agree to reveal transgenerational conclusions that will be presented publicly. Moreover, hypotheses or rather theses that are put forward during constellations and which refer to the origin of disorders, concern not only a person experiencing a constellation but also his or her family members. It means that a wide body of observers finds out about the alleged experiences of people who are absent without their consent on making the opinion about their traits, experiences and functioning public.

In the next part of the *Code of Ethics for Psychotherapists* [8] there is a notation: “Therapist, without a consent of a participant of the therapy, has no right to reveal the fact itself that someone is in therapy or to give information got during the therapy to persons not participating in the therapy (other therapists, doctors, family members, institutions)” [8]. According to the author of the article, using the Hellinger’s constellations publicly is entirely contradictory to the above notation concerning confidentiality.

Next two points of the Code concerning confidentiality of the therapeutic process raise the question of making documents available and using the process of therapy as didactic materials [8]. We can read in the Code: “Including in the process of therapy persons in training as well as using documents from the therapy (including audio or video recordings) requires a separate written consent of the therapy participants. Persons participating in the therapy need to have a free hand in not giving their consent to use their therapy for didactic processes” [8].

Another point of the Code on using materials states: “When using the therapeutic process as didactic materials (also in publications such as case study) one should, as far as it is possible, secure the anonymity of participants of the therapy by distorting information to such an extent as to make it impossible to identify the patient” [8].

The problem concerning non-compliance with the rule of confidentiality in the Hellinger’s constellations moves the Systemic Association in Germany. In the Introduction to their stance we can read among others: “Except for public constellations, the trade in video recordings and books available to everyone has developed” [15].

In the subsequent part of the Code of Ethics that concerns Techniques in psychotherapy [8] there is a notation stating that “It is unethical to apply, without particular reflection and care as well as attention to the patient’s interest and respect, various techniques or procedures which can be unconventional, spectacular or manipulative in nature”. Assuming that the person conducting family constellations performs his or her work with reflection, care and pays attention to the patient’s interest a question arises whether

such a procedure is conventional or spectacular in nature?

The answer to this question is not easy and would require among others defining terms “unconventional” and “spectacular”, especially when referring to therapeutic interactions [17]. These terms, however, seem to describe the Hellinger’s method and thus, they may violate the next point of the Code of Ethics for Psychotherapists.

CONCLUSIONS

When referring to the previous selective analysis of the Hellinger’s family constellations it seems that this method does not fulfil the criteria of psychotherapy. In the opinion of the article’s author it is difficult to treat it as psychotherapy because of at least two reasons. Firstly, the constellations do not comply with two important points of the code of ethics, such as: the process, contract, supervision, confidentiality, unconventionality. Second of all, in Hellinger’s own declarations, as well as many followers of the method, constellations are not psychotherapy.

Thus, if we assume that Hellinger’s constellations are not psychotherapy the question arises about substantiation of applying them in professional therapeutic institutions.

According to the author of the article it would be incoherent and substantively groundless for a psychotherapist to apply the method which is not psychotherapy. The above question implies the next one:

If the method is not therapy, as Hellinger claims [7], who are the persons applying them? Are the persons applying family constellations therapists or “setters” or “supervisors” as Ulsamer suggests [13].

The next question concerns teaching Hellinger’s constellations within the framework of educational programs of higher education institutions [2]. If the constellations are not psychotherapy, then should teaching be perhaps adequately qualified as a psychosocial action of helping character.

The raised questions need a discussion in a wide body of both lecturers as well as therapists or supervisors working in different paradigms,

including those using the method of Hellinger’s constellations.

Controversies and discussions on the Hellinger’s method may polarise the body of therapists. The author’s intention is to search for an answer to pervading questions and clarifying and confronting convictions concerning the described method. The intention is also, in accordance with the systemic approach, looking for boundaries, in this case in therapeutic work. Such boundaries have been set by the German Systemic Association and the Great Poland Association of Systemic Therapy [15, 17].

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