

Meaning in Life: Central Articles

The science of meaning in life (King & Hicks, 2020)

This review defines and demystifies the construct of Meaning in life by reviewing the ways it has been scientifically measured, its correlates, and its constituent facets, which include comprehension/coherence, purpose, and existential mattering/significance. The review also discusses the various experiences that have been empirically shown to enhance meaning in life, and concludes by considering important remaining questions to be addressed in future research on Meaning in life.

King, L. A., & Hicks, J. A. (2021). The science of meaning in life. *Annual review of psychology*, 72, 561-584. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-psych-072420-122921>

Meaning in life and physical health: Systematic review and meta-analysis (Czekierda et al., 2017)

Using a random-effects models to clarify the associations between meaning in life and physical health, this systematic review and meta-analysis provides insight into the potential role of meaning in life in explaining physical health. Findings indicated that the strongest associations between meaning in life and health pertained to subjective indicators of physical health, and stronger effects were observed when the measures of meaning combined items referring to meaning in life and meaning-related sense of harmony.

Czekierda, K., Banik, A., Park, C. L., & Luszczynska, A. (2017). Meaning in life and physical health: systematic review and meta-analysis. *Health psychology review*, 11(4), 387-41. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17437199.2017.1327325>

The three meanings of meaning in life: Distinguishing coherence, purpose, and significance (Martela & Steger, 2016)

This article provides the first comprehensible theoretical overview that aims to define and pinpoint the differences and connections between coherence, purpose, and significance – the three facets of meaning that are most frequently emphasized in the scientific literature on meaning in life. By arguing that the time is ripe to move from indiscriminate understanding of meaning into looking at these three facets separately, the article points toward a new future for research on meaning in life.

Martela, F., & Steger, M. F. (2016). The three meanings of meaning in life: Distinguishing coherence, purpose, and significance. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 11(5), 531-545. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2015.1137623>

The search for meaning in life – theoretical, experiential, and educational aspects (Russo-Netzer, 2015)

This article briefly outlines three areas to advance understanding and practice of the human search for meaning: (a) theoretical aspects of the search, (b) experiential exploration of what encourages people to search for meaning, and (c) educational venues to enhance the ability to search for and find meaning from a young age. The article discusses how these different areas complement each other, and collectively comprise an endeavor to find how meaning unfolds and is experienced.

Russo-Netzer, P. (2015). The search for meaning in life—theoretical, experiential, and educational aspects. *The ifl*, 38, 72-78.

Meaning sensitive psychotherapy: Binding clinical, existential, and positive psychological perspectives(Mascaro, 2014)

This chapter in Batthyany and Russo-Netzer's (2014) *Meaning in Positive and Existential Psychology* a) reviews theories and research findings that inform a meaning sensitive approach to psychological well-being, b) details a framework for applying these findings in the practice of psychotherapy, and, where appropriate, c) suggests useful research directions. It emphasizes how the intersection and consolidation of findings related to meaning in life within the fields of clinical, existential, and positive psychological research can contribute to a well-rounded and farsighted framework for the conduct of psychotherapy.

Mascaro, N. (2014). Meaning sensitive psychotherapy: Binding clinical, existential, and positive psychological perspectives. In A. Batthyany & P. Russo-Netzer (Eds.), *Meaning in positive and existential psychology* (pp. 269–289). Springer Science + Business Media. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4939-0308-5_16

Life Is pretty meaningful (Heintzelman & King, 2014)

To address the question “How meaningful is life, in general?”, this article examines the growing literature on meaning in life and reviews possible answers from various psychological sources, some of which anticipate that meaning in life should be low and others that it should be high. The epidemiological data and research summarized in the article indicates that diverse samples rate themselves significantly above the midpoint on self-reports of meaning in life, suggesting that meaning in life is somewhat commonplace and likely plays a role in adaptation.

Heintzelman, S. J., & King, L. A. (2014). Life is pretty meaningful. *American Psychologist*, 69(6), 561–574. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0035049>

Wrestling with our better selves: The search for meaning in life (Steger, 2013)

This chapter in *The Psychology of Meaning* (Markman et al., 2013) explores the dual nature of the search for meaning in life and examines some of the research that supports this perspective. It emphasizes how psychological ideas about meaning tend to straddle the duality of two poles: one that suggests meaning in life blends the effort with the outcome, and one that bifurcates meaning in life into two distinct processes – seeking meaning and experiencing meaning.

Steger, M. F. (2013). Wrestling with our better selves: The search for meaning in life. In K. D. Markman, T. Proulx, & M. J. Lindberg (Eds.) *The psychology of meaning* (pp. 215–233). American Psychological Association. <https://doi.org/10.1037/14040-011>

Experiencing meaning in life: Optimal functioning at the nexus of well-being, psychopathology, and spirituality (Steger, 2012)

This chapter in the second edition of *The Human Quest for Meaning* (Wong, 2012) discusses four decades of foundational research on the nature, origins, and consequences of people's beliefs that their lives are meaningful, and how this depth of empirical inquiry was shaped by the overlapping publication of Wong and Fry's (1998) initial edition of *The Human Quest*

for Meaning and Ryff and Singer's (1998) influential treatise on psychological well-being. It also provides an overview and conceptual framework for viewing what the field has learned about the well-being, psychopathology, and spirituality correlates of meaning in life. Steger, M. F. (2012). Experiencing meaning in life: Optimal functioning at the nexus of spirituality, psychopathology, and well-being. In Wong, P. T. P. (Ed.), *The human quest for meaning: Theories, research, and applications* (2nd ed.) (pp.165-184). Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group.

From logotherapy to meaning-centered counseling and therapy(Wong, 2012)

This chapter in the second edition of *The Human Quest for Meaning* (Wong, 2012) presents the basic tenets and principles of logotherapy, a school of psychotherapy established by Viktor Frankl to capitalize on the meaning-seeking and meaning-making characteristics of human beings. It then describes how logotherapy evolves into meaning-centered counseling and therapy (MCCT), and highlights how the quest for meaning represents not only a primary intrinsic motivation for life expansion, but also a powerful capacity for personal transformation.

Wong, P. (2012). From logotherapy to meaning-centered counseling and therapy. In P. T. P. Wong (Ed.), *The human quest for meaning: Theories, research, and applications* (pp. 619–647). Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group.

Positive affect and meaning in life: The intersection of hedonism and eudaimonia(King & Hicks, 2012)

This chapter in the second edition of *The Human Quest for Meaning* (Wong, 2012) seeks to disabuse psychologists and researchers of the notion that the strong empirical link between positive affect (PA) and meaning in life ought to be explained away. It provides compelling evidence that this link is in fact real, adaptive, and important, which in turn elucidates how understanding the role of PA in the experience of meaning in life may have implications for basic notions of the Good Life itself.

King, L. A., & Hicks, J. A. (2012). Positive affect and meaning in life. In Wong, P. T. P. (Ed.), *The human quest for meaning: Theories, research, and applications* (2nd ed.) (pp.125-141). Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group.