February 27, 2020
SPSP New Orleans, LA
Existential Psychology Preconference

Existential Psychology | Thursday, Feb. 27 | 8:00 AM - 4:30 PM

PROGRAM OF EVENTS (at-a-glance*)

Time		
8:00-8:30am	Breakfast	
8:30-8:45am	Welcome, orientation	
8:45-9:45am	**Keynote Address: Sheldon Solomon**	**Being and Time, For the Time Being**
9:45-10:45am	**Poster session**	30 posters
10:45-11:00am	Coffee break	
11:00-11:30am	**Eva Jonas**	**From Threat to Defense or to Direct Resolution?**
11:30-12:00pm	**Nina Strohminger**	**Death and the Self**
12:00-1:00pm	Lunch	
1:00-2:00pm	**Special Address: Roy Baumeister**	**Meaning and Time — and the Self**
2:00-2:30pm	**Data blitz session**	5 data blitz presentations
2:30-2:55pm	Coffee break	
2:55-3:25pm	**Jon Jong**	**Death anxiety and explicit religiosity**
3:25-3:55pm	**Lucas Keefer**	**Born to Fight: The Existential Benefits of Animosity**
3:55-4:25pm	**Elizabeth Pinel**	**Lost in (existential) space: Understanding the phenomenon of existential isolation**
4:25-4:30pm	Closing remarks	

*Detailed programming (w/abstracts) for each presentation on the following pages.
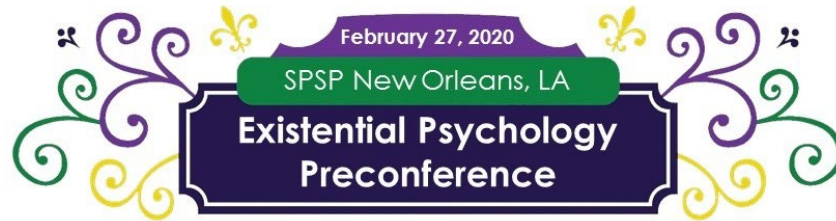
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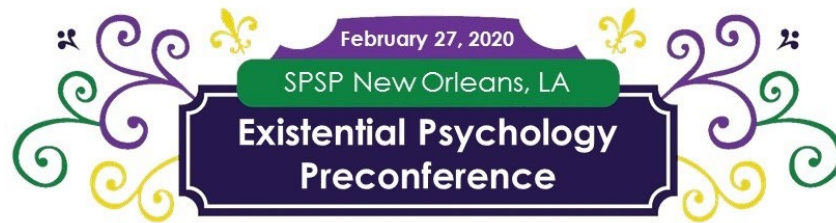
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RESEARCH TALKS

8:45-9:45am   **Keynote Address: Sheldon Solomon**
Being and Time, For the Time Being
Abstract: I will present an overview of Martin Heidegger's 1927 *Being and Time* in light of current theory and research in experimental existential psychology, the "replication crisis" in social psychology, the upsurge of fascism in the U.S. and abroad, and the impending environmental apocalypse.

11:00-11:30am   **Eva Jonas**
From Threat to Defense or to Direct Resolution?
Abstract: Mismatches between actual and desired states trigger anxiety, a neuropsychological syndrome including heightened vigilance, arousal, and avoidance. Efforts to directly reduce the original discrepancy (direct resolution) or anxiety in a palliative fashion (defense) both represent approach-related ways of dealing with threat. This talk will explore the process with standard psychological as well as neurophysiological and neuroimaging methods.

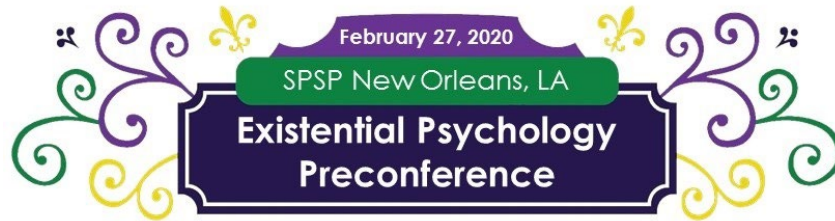11:30-12:00pm   **Nina Strohminger**
Death and the Self
Abstract: How does belief in the existence of a "self" impact decisions about our obligations to others? In this talk I discuss the surprising impact that the Buddhist belief that there is no self has on fear of death and selfless giving.

1:00-2:00pm   **Special Address: Roy Baumeister**
Meaning and Time — and the Self
Abstract: Existential themes of meaning and time are explored in this talk. Recent data indicate that extension across time increases meaningfulness, unlike happiness (which is present-focused). Meaning as nonphysical connection enables the mind to use the future to guide present actions and choices. People moralize the future more than the past. Construction of future as "matrix of maybe" seems limited to humankind, as is the extension of self across time.

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2:55-3:25pm	**Jon Jong**

Death anxiety and explicit religiosity
Abstract: Thinkers throughout the ages have supposed that human religiosity has *something* to do with the fear of death: even now, in social psychology, Terror Management Theory assumes that people are indeed afraid of death and therefore seek immortality, either literal or symbolic. The trouble is that it is rather difficult to verify empirically. This talk surveys the extant evidence, such as it is.

3:25-3:55pm	**Lucas Keefer**

Born to Fight – The Existential Benefits of Animosity
Abstract: Although conflict often seems intuitively negative, our recent research suggests that outrage, out-group animus, and even fear of an enemy offer unique psychological benefits for the individual. This talk highlights the ways in which diverse conflicts promote senses of value and control.

3:55-4:25pm	**Elizabeth Pinel**

Lost in (existential) space: Understanding the phenomenon of existential isolation
Abstract: I will provide an overview of the current research and theory on existential isolation, which differs from interpersonal isolation, or loneliness. Existential isolation refers to being alone in one's phenomenological experience of stimuli. Existential isolation threatens people's epistemic and affiliative needs, with implications for mental and interpersonal health outcomes.

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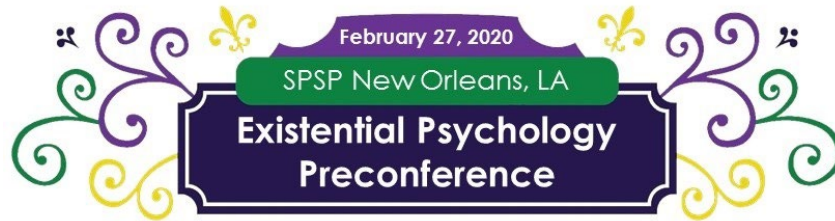
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POSTER PRESENTATIONS (9:45-10:45am)

1. Seeing Harm, Thinking "Humans": Perceptions of Harm Prompt Human-Driven Explanations

Authors: Fa-Kaji, N., & Lowery, B.

Abstract: We examine the causal attributions that people make for events based on the resulting consequences. Using mixed methods, we find that the more harmful an event is perceived to be, the more likely people are to believe that humans had a hand in causing it. We discuss potential mechanisms and implications for downstream consequences like policy support.

Notes:

2. Creating the Self: Testing the relationships between creativity and authenticity

Authors: Steidl, K., & Keefer, L.

Abstract: We tested the relationships between creativity and authenticity by conducting two studies. Our first study established this relationship by showing that individuals who are higher in creativity are also higher in authenticity. Our second study examined the effects of engaging in a creative task on feelings of authenticity.

Notes:

3. Mortality Salience, Threat, and Dehumanization in the 2018 U.S. Midterm Elections

Authors: Sharp, M., Schimel, J., & Scott, A.

Abstract: In data collected the weekend before the 2018 US midterm elections, mortality salience (MS) led US liberal-Democrats to dehumanize high-threat conservatives but not low-threat conservatives. Dehumanization toward high-threat conservatives mediated the relationship between MS and intentions to vote, possibly explaining some of the success of the Democratic Party in the 2018 elections..
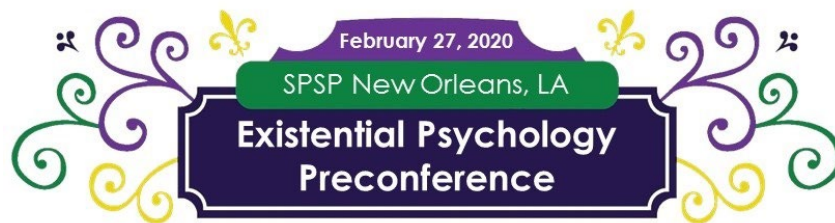
Notes:

4. Identity Disturbance and Isolation in Comorbid Chronic Pain and Posttraumatic Stress

Authors: Reed, D.

Abstract: Comorbid chronic pain and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is highly prevalent, especially among veterans, and is associated with a multitude of adverse outcomes. The present study examines the roles of identity disturbance and existential isolation, potential shared mechanisms of the comorbidity never before empirically tested, with implications for theoretical models and future treatments.

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5. Meditating on Mortality: Daily Death Contemplation, Goal Reprioritization, and Mindfulness

Authors: Chau, R.

Abstract: Using a daily diary paradigm, participants wrote about death for 14 days compared to control participants who wrote about life. Compared to controls, daily death contemplation led to devaluation of extrinsic goals (wealth, fame, appearance) post-diary and one month later, and increased life satisfaction and meaning one month later for participants who showed increased mindfulness post-diary.

Notes:

6. Reframing Mortality: Construing Death as an Experience Facilitates Interest among High Openness Individuals

Authors: Boyd, P.

Abstract: The fear of death is ubiquitous, but it can provoke interest for some (e.g., those high in openness; Boyd et al., 2017). Past research did not determine if the experience or idea of death was driving this interest. In this research, when death was construed as an experience, interest increased for high experiential openness individuals, but so did death anxiety.

Notes:

7. God, Gaia, and Essentialism: Investigating influences on belief in human purpose

Authors: Lewry, C., & Kelemen, D.

Abstract: This study found that adults think about humans as existing for a purpose, particularly that humans exist to reproduce. These anthropic teleological beliefs are correlated with religion (even when non-anthropic teleological beliefs are factored out) and beliefs in the intrinsic agency of nature (Gaia). Interestingly, we found no correlation between anthropic teleology and essentialism.

Notes:

8. Exploring the Landscape of Psychological Threat: A Cartography of Threats

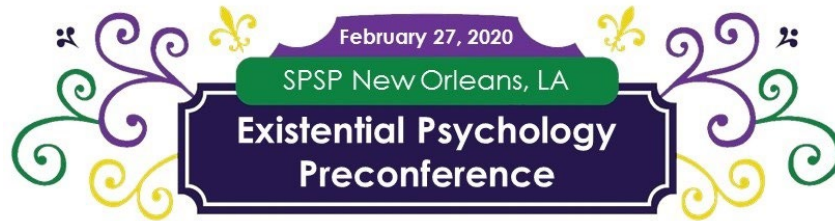**Authors:** Reiss, S., Klackl, J., Leen-Thomele, E., & Jonas, E.

Abstract: To better understand individual responses to psychological threats and their effects on individual and societal outcomes, we suggest approaches to classify and categorize psychological threat. We use both a theoretical and data-driven approach (n = 239) to disentangle the threat landscape, and discuss commonalities and differences between threats.
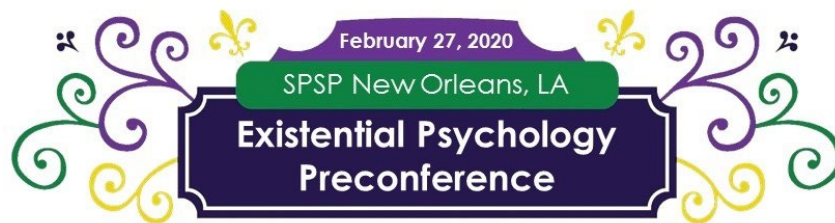
Notes:

9. Are Superheroes the New Gods? Evidence that existential concerns promote superhero fandom among those open to the supernatural

Authors: Scott, A., Sharp, M., Leota, J., & Schimel, J.

Abstract: It has been proposed that superhero fandom has begun to replace traditional mythico-religious systems in an increasingly secular western world (e.g., Koole et al., 2013). We provide evidence from three studies (N = 745) that, for those who are not having their spiritual-existential needs met, superhero fandom may serve similar existential functions to established religions.

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10. I'm Authentic and Humble, Don't You Agree? Exploring Self-Other Agreement in Ratings of Authenticity and Humility

Authors: Christy, A., Rivera, G., & Schlegel, R.

Abstract: Authenticity and humility both entail accurate self-knowledge. Both are also value-laden constructs, making self-reports difficult to interpret. In a preliminary investigation, we examined how well self-reports of authenticity and humility correspond with informant reports of these constructs. Results suggested low to moderate self-other agreement, with more for some measures than others..

Notes:

11. Loss and lastingness: Death of a close other associated with meaning in life, lower death-thought, and greater belief in an everlasting soul

Authors: Horner, D., Sielaff, A., & Greenberg, J.

Abstract: In Study 1, those who experienced the death of a close other (vs. those who have not) reported higher meaning in life and self-esteem, as well as greater "death-as-passage" representations and lower death-thought accessibility. In Study 2, these participants also reported greater belief in an everlasting soul; after controlling for belief in an afterlife, this significant difference remained.

Notes:

12. When reactance begets reactance: The reactive spiral

Authors: Rosenberg, B., & Siegel, J.

Abstract: The current study re-examined one of psychological reactance theory's original, yet untested, propositions—that being in a state of reactance exacerbates people's reactions to subsequent freedom threats. Data revealed a significant interaction: recalling a severe freedom threat compounded the deleterious effects of exposure to a high threat message, a potential reactive spiral.

Notes:

13. The politics of existential threat: The relationship between threat and ideology depends on the nature of the ideology measure and the quality of the threatening stimuli

Authors: Fiogbenu, M., & Kessler, T.

Abstract: It commonly believed that conservatives are more threat-sensitive than liberals. Using national surveys of US participants (N = 48,193) polled from 1980- 2018, we propose the TISH (threat-ideology specificity hypothesis) model to show that the relationship between political attitudes and threat-sensitivity depends on the type of political measure and the nature of the threat-stimuli..

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14. Religiosity and the search for meaning in life: Between- and within-person considerations

Authors: Newman, D.

Abstract: I examined the relationship between religiosity and searching for meaning in life at between- and within-person levels of analysis through the use of three daily diaries. Replicating previous between-person analyses, religiosity was not related to trait search. In contrast, within-persons analyses showed that daily search was positively related to daily religious activities.

Notes:

15. The Quest for Admittance to the Afterlife: Testing a New Terror Management Manipulation in Populations where Death Thought Accessibility is Harder to Reach

Authors: Harvell-Bowman, L., Corser, G., & Yocca, C.

Abstract: Three studies test and replicate a new TMT manipulation focusing on a lack of admittance to the afterlife. The new afterlife manipulation produced the highest level of death salience when compared to more traditional manipulations. This suggests that some religious groups can activate their death thought awareness, but it requires a different approach to activating those thoughts of death.

Notes:

16. What You Leave Behind in Life: Motivations for Future-Oriented Prosocial Behavior

Authors: Euh, H., & Snyder, M.

Abstract: The present study attempted to identify key motivations for future-oriented prosocial behavior, that is, a particular form of prosocial behavior aimed at benefitting future generations. Based on 5 studies (N = 1,336), we propose two distinctive motivations, legacy motivation and reputation motivation, that lead to different pathways to promote a greater good for future generations.

Notes:

17. Authentic functioning in emerging adulthood: Authenticity profiles and identity processes.

Authors: Nicolotti, M., Marieni, S., & Magrin, M. E.

Abstract: Presents results of an empirical investigation of the relation between authentic functioning, identity development and identity distress in a sample of emerging adults. Four authenticity profiles were identified through cluster analysis and their relationship with identity statuses, dimensions and distress was analyzed.
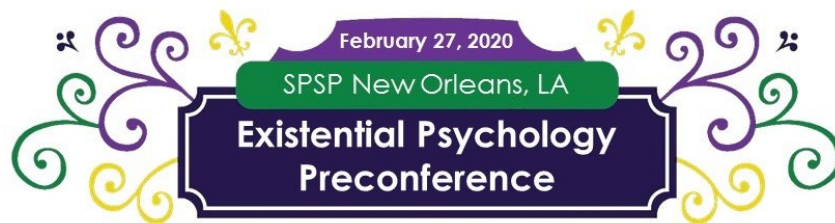
Notes:

18. Mattering in Context

Authors: Guthrie, D., Flanagan, P., & Hicks, J.

Abstract: Our aim was to assess how people evaluate existential mattering in day-to-day life. We found people cared much more about whether they matter on smaller scales (e.g. your family) than larger ones (e.g. the universe) and preferred to use small scales when given the choice. Likewise, we discovered that mattering is context-dependent, increasing as the size of the scale used to evaluate mattering decreases.

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19. To Live or Not to Live, that is the Question: Developing a Valid and Reliable Scale for Measuring the Desire for Life

Authors: Hubley, C., & Hayes, J.

Abstract: Three studies (N=1,593) show the development of a scale to measure desire for life (D4L). This includes a breakdown of the scale's items, reliability information, and evidence for validity. Emphasis is placed on D4L's relationship with indicators of mental health and well-being. Theory behind the construct of D4L is also presented, including its critical role in coping with death awareness.

Notes:

20. Qualitative Themes in Mortality Salience Essays

Authors: Oswald, S., & Pashak, T.

Abstract: One of the key features of research on death anxiety is the use of the Mortality Attitudes Personality Survey (MAPS). The MAPS is an essay prompt used in TMT research to prime mortality salience. This study aims to determine what themes surrounding one's own death and dying arise in these essays.

Notes:

21. Mortality Salience among U.S. Military Combat Veterans: A Terror Management Perspective

Authors: Umemoto, S., Denning, E., Mohr, C., Hammer, L., Boulch, P., & Rounds, T.

Abstract: This study examines distal death-anxiety defense mechanisms in 875 U.S. military service members (SMs) through the lens of terror management theory (Greenberg et al., 1986). Moderated regression analyses indicated job performance moderated the relationship between combat exposure and psychological distress, providing preliminary evidence that self-esteem shields SMs against existential anxiety.
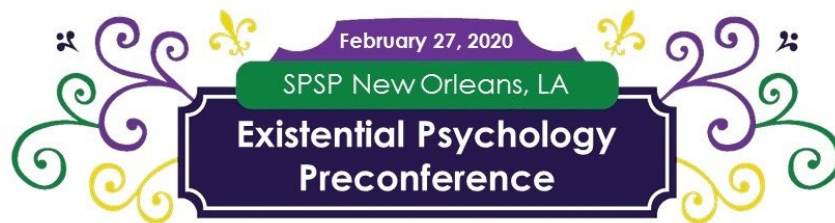
Notes:

22. A Distant Ally?: Mortality Salience Elicits Greater Defensiveness among Individuals with Stronger Parasocial Attachment

Authors: Allen, K., Keefer, L., & Brown, F.

Abstract: We tested whether parasocial attachment moderates responses to a mortality salience threat. Results indicated that mortality salience (vs. pain) elicited more negative perceptions of a creatureliness essay, but only among individuals high in parasocial attachment. Results indicate that those with strong parasocial relationships are generally more (not less) vulnerable to existential threat.

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23. When are you most likely to experience your authentic self? Emotions matter!

Authors: Zhang, Z., & Chen, K.

Abstract: When are you most likely to experience your authentic self? Our findings across 467 undergraduate student participants suggest that people in amusement are more likely to experience authenticity than those in either fear or anger. On the other hand, people in anger and fear do not differ significantly in subjective authenticity.

Notes:

24. The Effects of Caregiving Robots on Mortality Salience with the Elderly

Authors: Gruber, M.

Abstract: This study expands on MacDorman's (2005) study and investigates the effects of caregiving robots on death thought accessibility (DTA) and death anxiety in the institutionalized elderly. This study focuses on how caregiving robots affect the close relationship buffer against death anxiety, as well as looking at self-esteem and locus of control as potential covariates of DTA and death anxiety.

Notes:

25. The Effect of Optimism Manipulation on Anti-Natalist Concerns

Authors: Brown, F., & Keefer, L.

Abstract: Anti-natalism is the view that it is wrong to have children. We present a study examining the effect of optimism manipulation on anti-natalism. We compare optimism to nostalgia to see if optimism is exclusively important to reduced anti-natalism. The study results supported our hypothesis that optimism about children reduces anti-natalism. Though the role of optimism in general was uncertain.

Notes:

26. The Folk Concept of Free Will: Implications and Clarifications

Authors: Walsh, A., & Karpinski, A.

Abstract: What do individuals actually mean when they say that they believe in free will? Does an individual's experience with external constraints brought on by their race or gender affect their free will beliefs? The results of the study indicate that individuals that the concepts of choice, desires, and presence internal/external restraints are central to the folk concept of free will.
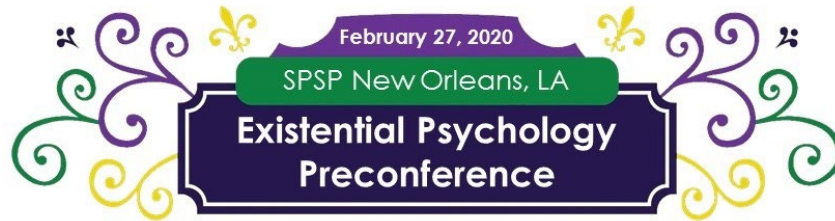
Notes:

27. Mortality Salience and Organ Donation: A Replication and Extension of Jain and Ellithorpe (2016)

Authors: Harvell-Bowman, L., & Reynolds, T.

Abstract: The current research examines the relationship between mortality salience and organ donation by conducting a conceptual replication and extension of Jain and Ellinthorpe (2016), which suggests mortality salience promotes organ donation. Implications for terror management theory and organ donation campaigns will be briefly discussed.

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28. Death, self-determination, and worldview defense.

Authors: Goad, A.

Abstract: The present study examines an intersection between terror management theory and self-determination theory to evaluate the role of autonomy in mitigating death-related concerns and defensive motivation. A pilot study found tolerance values were salient among our sampling population, and the main study found that MS indeed boosted tolerant immigration attitudes but not after an autonomy prime.

Notes:

29. Existential motivation and the expression and regulation of religious faith among believers and atheists.

Authors: Galgali, M.

Abstract: Mortality salience (MS) can lead religious and non-religious alike to implicitly activate supernatural concepts, but also suggests atheists may engage analytic thinking to cognitively over-ride those intuitions. This study tested whether atheists (vs. believers) might express that MS-induced intuition in a "safe" way (i.e., as "desire") that doesn't violate their worldview (i.e.,their "belief").
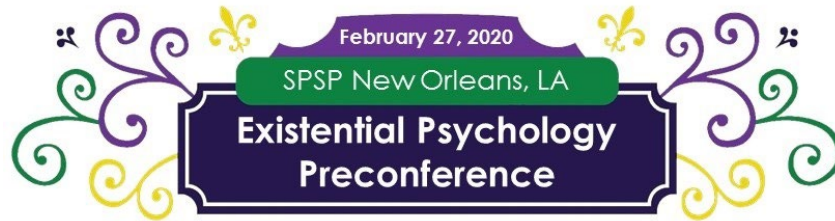
Notes:

30. You look like a new person: Incidental appearance changes prompt updates in judgments of moral character

Authors: Austin, M., Adams, G., & Converse, B.

Abstract: How do people decide whether someone deserves to be redeemed or given a second chance? We explore whether incidental changes in appearance prompt judgments that a transgressor's moral character has improved. Data from 5 studies suggest that meaningless changes in appearance - but not personality - afford more positive moral character judgments compared to judgments of unchanged transgressors.

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DATA BLITZ PRESENTATIONS (2:00-2:30pm)

1. From Freud to Androids: Understanding and measuring uncanny feelings
  Authors: Benjamin, R., & Heine, S.
  Abstract: The uncanny is without a clear definition. We posit that uncanny valley
  objects create a sense of meaninglessness. Studies 1a and 1b establish that humanoid
  androids lead people to strengthen their opinions (1a, b) and search for patterns (1b) to
  reduce uncertainty. Studies 2-3 present a new measure of uncanny feelings, and Study 4
  shows uncanniness is discriminable from fear and disgust.
  Notes:

2. Your will to heal: The role of free will beliefs in recovery from collective trauma
  Authors: Kim, J., Flanagan, P., Vess, M., & Hicks, J.
  Abstract: The current research explored the adaptive role of free will beliefs (FWB) in
  recovery from the experience of collective trauma. In a longitudinal study that examined
  college students who were exposed to a natural disaster, Hurricane Harvey, we found
  that FWB predicted significant drops in the stress levels. Furthermore, the buffering
  effect of FWB was mediated by a greater use of active coping.
  Notes:

3. The Dramaturgical Perspective: A "Pressure Valve" for Stress
  Authors: Young, I., Schmitt, H., & Sullivan, D.
  Abstract: The dramaturgical perspective—the belief that the social world is like a play
  and social behaviors are like performances—can serve a defensive function, but may
  also lead to maladjustment. Building from a new conceptual model, the dramaturgical
  perspective is shown to both (a) positively predict maladjustment and (b) diminish the
  relationship between risk factors (e.g., perfectionism) and distress.
  Notes:

4. Existential Prospection in Retirement
  Authors: Steiner, J., & Amabile, T.
  Abstract: Through a longitudinal, qualitative, and inductive study of retiring
  individuals, we investigate how individuals make meaning of (and decisions about) how
  time is spent in retirement. Our findings suggest that one particular process of meaning-
  making – which we term existential prospection – differs from other forms of meaning-
  making in important ways.
  Notes:

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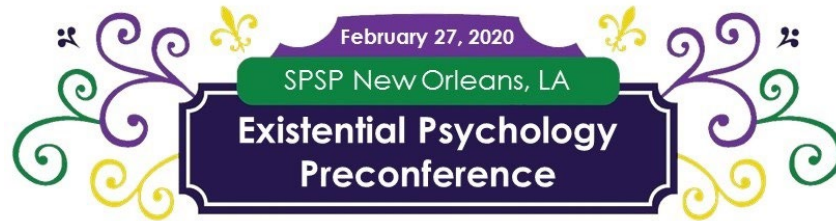
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5. Beneficence makes activities and work meaningful: Evidence from one longitudinal and three experimental studies

Authors: Martela, F., & Ryan, R. M.

Abstract: Beneficence–having a positive impact in the lives of other people–is a key secular source of transcendence. Through a 3-wave longitudinal study and 3 experimental studies, we show that beneficence increases meaningfulness of work and activities. Also, having antisocial impact leads people to compensate by emphasizing more the prosocial impact they are having, buffering against lack of meaning.
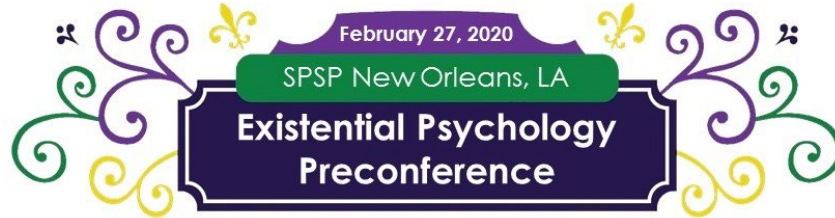
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SPONSORED AWARDS

Ernest Becker Foundation Diversity Travel Awards (ten) – $150

Naomi Fa-Kaji	Stanford University
Michael Fiagbenu	Friedrich-Schiller University
Ron Chau	University of Arizona
Candice Hubley	University of Waterloo
Madhwa Galgali	Cleveland State University
Faith Brown	Univ. of Southern Mississippi
Sheila Umemoto	Portland State University
Alexis Goad	Cleveland State University
Kara Steidl	Univ. of Southern Mississippi
Anne Walsh	Temple University

Worth Publishers/Macmillan Learning Graduate Student Travel Awards (two) – $150

Isaac Young	University of Arizona
Jeff Steiner	Harvard Business School

Cleveland State University Undergraduate Student Travel Award – $150

Mira Gruber	James Madison University

Innovation in Existential Psychology Research Award – $150

Rachele Benjamin	University of British Columbia

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