

Psych 612. Seminar in Advanced Social Psychology: Empirical Approaches to the Meaning of Life

Wednesdays, 9am-11:50am; Leavey 3B

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Office Hours: Tuesdays noon-2pm

Course Description:

This course covers empirical studies of the meaning(s) of life – sources of meaning, correlates of meaning, and consequences of meaning. Rather than try to cover the entirety of philosophy, religion, and social science, the class will focus on getting to know the current state of the science: ongoing debates and unanswered questions. We will explore scientific operationalizations and measures of meaning, studies of meaning as feeling, coherence, and compensation, and intersections of meaning with religion, time, the self, and the collective. The primary goal of the course is for students to develop research programs that bridge their existing interests with the methods and theories learned in the course readings.

Course Assignments:

- (1) Discussion Questions: Each week students will submit a discussion question or critique on the week's readings (10 total), to be submitted to session organizer (via Blackboard) by Monday at midnight. These should be between 300 and 600 words. These questions, plus class participation, make up 30% of the total grade.
- (2) Leading Discussion: Each student in the class will be session organizer for one or two weeks. Session organizers will compile the week's discussion questions, organize the questions to promote class discussion, and lead off class discussion. A word document with the organized questions should be sent out to the class by 3pm Tuesday. This task is worth 10% of the total grade.
- (3) Research proposal and presentation: The research proposal should raise a question/problem inspired by the class content and propose an empirical study to address that question or problem. The paper should be presented as an empirical report in APA format, and be 15 pages or less (double-spaced; 1" margins; 11-12 point font). In addition to the introduction and methods, a brief results section should report the expected result (hypothetical data), and a discussion should present the implications of the expected finding. Proposals will be presented in class Weeks 12-15. Each student will give a 20-30-minute powerpoint presentation of the idea, methods, expected results, and implications, followed by feedback from the class. Feedback should be incorporated into the paper, which will be due at midnight December 12. The paper will count for 40% of the total grade, and the presentation will count for 20% of the total grade.

Course Schedule:

*Note: Readings not linked below (or linked with restricted access) will be available on Blackboard.

Week 1 (8/27): Introduction to Course and Researchers.

No readings.

Week 2 (9/3): Circumscribing the Question, Measuring the Construct.

Baumeister, R. (1991). *Meanings of Life*. Preface, Chapter 1, Chapter 2.

Haidt, J. (2006). *The Happiness Hypothesis*. Chapter 10.

Proulx, T. Markman, K. D., & Lindberg, M. J. (2013). Introduction: The new science of meaning. In K. Markman, T. Proulx, & M. Lindberg (Eds.), *The Psychology of Meaning*. Washington, DC, US: American Psychological Association.

Heintzelman, S. J., & King, L.A. (in press). [Life is Pretty Meaningful](#). *American Psychologist*.

Week 3 (9/10): Meaning vs. Happiness.

King, L. A., Hicks, J. A., & Krull, J., & Del Gaiso, A. K.. (2006). [Positive affect and the experience of meaning in life](#). *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 90, 179-196.

Machell, K. A., Kashdan, T. B., Short, J. L., & Nezlek, J. B. (2014). [Relationships Between Meaning in Life, Social and Achievement Events, and Positive and Negative Affect in Daily Life](#). *Journal of Personality*.

Oishi, S., & Diener, E. (2014). [Residents of poor nations have a greater sense of meaning in life than residents of wealthy nations](#). *Psychological Science*, 25, 422-430.

Baumeister, R. F., Vohs, K. D., Aaker, J. L., & Garbinsky, E. N. (2013). [Some key differences between a happy life and a meaningful life](#). *Journal of Positive Psychology*, 8, 505-516.

Week 4 (9/17): The Feeling of Meaning.

Reber, R., Winkielman, P. & Schwarz, N. (1998). [Effects of perceptual fluency on affective judgments](#). *Psychological Science*, 9, 45-48.

Hicks, J. A., Cicero, D. C., Trent, J., Burton, C. M., & King, L. A. (2010). [Positive Affect, Intuition, and Feelings of Meaning](#). *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 98, 967-979.

Clore, G.L. (2011). [Thrilling thoughts: How changing your mind intensifies your emotions](#). In R.M. Arkin (Ed.) *Most Underappreciated: 50 Prominent Social Psychologists Talk About*

Hidden Gems. (pp. 67-71). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Heintzelman, S.J., & King, (2014). [\(The Feeling of\) Meaning-as-Information](#). *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 18, 153-167.

Week 5 (9/24): Meaning as Coherence.

Landau, M. J., Greenberg, J., Solomon, S., Pyszczynski, T. & Martens, A. (2006). [Windows into nothingness: Terror management, meaninglessness, and negative reactions to modern art](#). *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 90, 879-892.

Oyserman, D. (2011). [Culture as situated cognition: Cultural mindsets, cultural fluency, and meaning making](#). *European Review of Social Psychology*, 22, 164-214.

Waytz, A. (2013). Making meaning by seeing human. In K. Markman, T. Proulx, & M. Lindberg (Eds.), *The Psychology of Meaning* (pp. 135-146). Washington, DC, US: American Psychological Association.

Heintzelman, S.J., Trent, J., & King, L.A. (2013). [Encounters with objective coherence and the experience of meaning in life](#). *Psychological Science*, 24, 991-998.

Week 6 (10/1): Meaning as Compensation.

Proulx, T., & Heine, S. J. (2009). [Connections from Kafka: Exposure to meaning violations improves implicit learning of artificial grammar](#). *Psychological Science*, 20, 1125 – 1131.

Proulx, T., & Heine, S. J. (2010). [The frog in Kierkegaard's beer: Finding meaning in the violation-compensation literature](#). *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, 4, 889-905.

Proulx, T., & Inzlicht, M. (2012). [The five 'A's of meaning maintenance: Making sense of the theories of sense-making](#). *Psychological Inquiry*, 23, 317-335.

Randles, D., Heine, S. J., & Santos, N. (2013). [The common pain of surrealism and death: Acetaminophen reduces compensatory affirmation following meaning threats](#). *Psychological Science*, 24, 966-973.

Week 7 (10/8): The Meaning of Death.

King, L. A., Hicks, J.A., Abdelkhalik, J. (2009). [Death, life, scarcity, and value: An alternative approach to the meaning of death](#). *Psychological Science*, 20, 1459-1462.

Vess, M., Routledge, C., Landau, M. J., & Arndt, J. (2009). [The dynamics of death and meaning: The effects of death-relevant cognitions and personal need for structure on perceptions of](#)

[meaning in life](#). *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 97, 728-744.

Routledge, C., & Juhl, J. (2010). [When death thoughts lead to death fears: Mortality salience increases death thought anxiety for individuals who lack meaning in life](#). *Cognition and Emotion*, 24, 848-854.

Arndt, J., Landau, M. J., Vail, K. E., Vess, M. (2013). An edifice for enduring personal value: A terror management perspective on the human quest for multilevel meaning. In K. D. Markman, T. Proulx, & M. J. Lindberg (Eds.), *The Psychology of Meaning* (pp. 49-69). New York: APA books.

Week 8 (10/15): Holy Meaning.

Baumeister, R. (1991). *Meanings in Life*. Chapter 8: Religion.

Graham, J., & Haidt, J. (2010). [Beyond beliefs: Religions bind individuals into moral communities](#). *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 14, 140-150.

Hicks, J. A., & King, L. A. (2008). [Religious commitment and positive mood as information about meaning in life](#). *Journal of Research in Personality*, 42, 43-57.

Newton, T., & McIntosh, D. N. (2013). Unique Contributions of Religion to Meaning. In J. A. Hicks & C. Routledge (eds.), *The Experience of Meaning in Life*. Springer Netherlands, pp. 257–269

Week 9 (10/22): Meaning and Time.

Steger, M.F., Oishi, S., & Kashdan, T.B. (2009). [Meaning in life across the life span: Levels and correlates of meaning in life from adolescence to older adulthood](#). *Journal of Positive Psychology*, 4, 43-52.

Kray, L. J., George, L., Liljenquist, K. A., Galinsky, A., Tetlock, P., & Roese, N. (2010). [From what might have been to what must have been: Counterfactual thinking creates meaning](#). *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 98, 106-118.

Routledge C., Arndt, J., Wildschut, T., Sedikides, C., Hart, C., Juhl, J., Vingerhoets, A. J., & Scholtz, W. (2011). [The past makes the present meaningful: Nostalgia as an existential resource](#). *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 101, 638-652.

Kim, J., Kang, P., & Choi, I. (2014). [Pleasure now, meaning later: Temporal dynamics between pleasure and meaning](#). *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 55, 262-270.

Week 10 (10/29): Navel-Gazing: Meaning and the Self.

Schlegel, R., Hicks, J. A., Arndt, J., & King, L. A. (2009). [Thine Own Self: True Self Accessibility and Meaning in Life](#). *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 96, 473-490.

Schlegel, R. Hicks, J. A., King, L. A. & Arndt, J. (2011). [Feeling like you know who you are: Perceived true self-knowledge and meaning in life](#). *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 37, 745-756.

McAdams, D. P. (2013). How actors, agents, and authors find meaning in life. In K. Markman et al. (Eds.), *The Psychology of Meaning*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association Press.

Sedkides, C., Hart, C., Cisek, S., & Routledge, C. (2013) Finding meaning in the mirror: The existential pursuits of narcissists. In Hicks, J. A. & Routledge C. (Eds.), *The experience of meaning in life: Emerging themes and controversies (pp 189 – 200)*. New York: Springer Press.

Week 11 (11/5): Collective Meaning.

Stillman, T. F., Baumeister, R. F., Lambert, N. M., Crescioni, A. W., DeWall, C. N., & Fincham, F. D. (2009). [Alone and without purpose: Life loses meaning following social exclusion](#). *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 45, 686-694.

Hicks, J. A., Schlegel, R.J., & King, L. A. (2010). [Social threats, happiness, and the dynamics of meaning in life judgments](#). *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 36, 1305-1317.

Sullivan, D.*, Landau, M. J., Kay, A. C., & Rothschild, Z. K.* (2012). [Collectivism and the meaning of suffering](#). *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 103, 1023-1039.

Graham, J., & Haidt, J. (2012). [Sacred values and evil adversaries: A moral foundations approach](#). In P. Shaver & M. Mikulincer (Eds.), *The Social Psychology of Morality: Exploring the Causes of Good and Evil*. New York: APA Books.

Lambert, N. M., Stillman, T. F., Hicks, J. A., Baumeister, R. F., Gamble, S., & Fincham, F. D. (2013). [To belong is to matter: Sense of belonging enhances meaning in life](#). *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*.

Week 12 (11/12): Research Project Presentations.

Week 13 (11/19): Research Project Presentations.

Week 14 (11/26): NO CLASS – HAPPY THANKSGIVING!

Week 15 (12/3): Research Project Presentations.