


SPSP **2024**
Annual Convention
FEB 7 — SAN DIEGO, CA
EXISTENTIAL PSYCHOLOGY

Wednesday, Feb. 7 | 8:30 AM – 6:30 PM (PST)

PROGRAM OF EVENTS (at-a-glance*)

All times are in USA Pacific Standard Time (PST)

8:30-9:00am	Opening remarks	Welcome; Orientation.
9:00-10:00am	Special Address: Lewis R. Gordon	Black existentialism’s decolonial perspective on culture, self, and identity
10:00-11:00am	Poster session	Live poster presentations
11:00-11:15am	Coffee break	
11:15-11:45am	Daphna Oyserman	Identity-based motivation and inferences about self and goal pursuit when life gets difficult
11:45-12:15pm	Katherine Du	Workplace advice to “Just be yourself” repels stigmatized employees
12:15-12:30pm	Coffee break	
12:30-1:00pm	Recognition	Award ceremony
1:00-2:00pm	Keynote Address: Steven Heine	The cultural pursuit of meaning
2:00-2:30pm	Data blitz session	5 data blitz presentations
2:30-2:45pm	Coffee break	
2:45-3:15pm	Toni Schmader	The SAFE model: State authenticity as fit to the environment
3:15-3:45pm	Kate McLean	Challenges to the notion of self-authorship: A structural-psychological approach to narrative identity
3:45-4:15pm	Shigehiro Oishi	Cultural dynamics of meaning
4:15-4:30pm	Closing remarks	
4:30-6:30pm	Virtual happy hour	Existential Psychology happy hour!

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



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INVITED TALKS

9:00-10:00am **Lewis R. Gordon: Special Address**

Black existentialism’s decolonial perspective on culture, self, and identity

Abstract: This special address will introduce the specificity of Black existentialism and its relational conceptions of culture, self, and identity through themes such as agency, ethical and political responsibility, forms of double consciousness, freedom, love, and the pursuit of meaningful life as livable life. The idea is to offer some useful concepts from this approach upon which members of the audience could build in their own research, therapeutic practices, and pedagogy.

11:15-11:45am **Daphna Oyserman**

Identity-based motivation and inferences about self and goal pursuit when life gets difficult

Abstract: Drawing on identity-based motivation theory research, I show that people infer that life’s hardships provide opportunities to become a better person. In cross cultural comparisons and diary studies, when people think about difficulty, the endorsement of difficulty-as-improvement inferences is associated with variation in daily well-being as well as preference for more effortful as opposed to less effortful means of goal attainment.

11:45-12:15pm **Katherine Du**

Workplace advice to “Just be yourself” repels stigmatized employees

Abstract: Authenticity advice—the advice to “be yourself”—is pervasive in professional settings, perhaps to signal support for identities that are traditionally stigmatized. Across six studies, we find that heightened stigma in professional settings predicts a greater tendency to view organizational authenticity advice as risky, which repels rather than attracts stigmatized people. Importantly, we show that not all organizations are penalized for espousing such advice, identifying a boundary condition: inclusivity as an identity-safety cue.



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1:00-2:00pm **Steven Heine: Keynote Address**

The cultural pursuit of meaning

Abstract: Humans live in an ecology of meaning, where all of their pursuits occur in culturally-defined ways. We experience greater well-being when our selves are aligned with the cultural meanings. Cultures vary somewhat in what predicts a meaningful life, but some kinds of connections are important across cultures. For example, a variety of kinds of transcendent connections predict meaningful lives. Cultures also vary in people's freedom to make choices to guide their own lives, with important consequences.

2:45-3:15pm **Toni Schmader**

The SAFE model: State authenticity as fit to the environment

Abstract: People feel authentic in situations that signal their fit to the environment. I will summarize evidence supporting the SAFE model, which proposes that fit can take three different forms: activating a default sense self (self-concept fit), affording valued goals (goal fit), or providing social validation (social fit). Furthermore, in situations where people feel marginalized, each of these types of fit can be reduced with possible implications for feelings of authenticity and other outcomes.

3:15-3:45pm **Kate McLean**

Challenges to the notion of self-authorship: A structural-psychological approach to narrative identity research

Abstract: I define a structural-psychological approach, and how it reveals limitations to common approaches to personality development. I draw particular attention to the field of narrative identity and how the dominant notion of agentic self-authorship limits the visibility of systems of oppression. In contrast, a master narrative approach—which examines the culturally shared stories that guide thoughts, beliefs, values, and behaviors—brings attention to the structural constraints on identity development.

3:45-4:15pm **Shigehiro Oishi**

Cultural dynamics of meaning

Abstract: Meaning in life is a central existential question. Yet, most empirical research has been conducted in Western Educated Industrial Rich Democratic (WEIRD) countries. The present talk highlights some notable findings from non-WEIRD countries and explores how culture might play a role in searching and finding meaning in life.



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

1. How Much Should We Pursue the Realization of Potential?

Authors: Kim, Y., & Yang, F.

Abstract: Realizing one's potential is a desirable need. But how much should we pursue potential-realization compared to other needs? Six preregistered studies examined this question. U.S. adults value pursuing potential-realization more than other important needs, such as social belonging and status (Study 1). Imagined life conditions moderate people's valuation. In abundant conditions, people value pursuing potential-realization as highly as material resources; both pursuits are valued above social belonging, status, and happiness. In deprived conditions, people value pursuing material resources above potential-realization but still value potential-realization more than other needs (Studies 2–3). Why do people value potential-realization? People view pursuing potential-realization as more relevant for cultivating a thriving sense of self compared to other needs (Studies 1–3). People also recognize its value for obtaining material resources and helping others, depending on life conditions (Studies 4–5). Our results also generally replicate among adults from mainland China (Study 6). Our work suggests the pursuit of potential-realization is highly valued across life conditions and cultures.

Notes:

2. Choice Overload as an Existential Problem

Authors: Cheek, N.

Abstract: Choice overload is typically understood as a result of the cognitive burden of processing a large array of options. Adopting an existential perspective, I suggest that choice overload also emerges because having more options causes choosers to feel their choices are more self-expressive, and this increased identity-relevance raises the stakes of choice and demands that choosers maximize. A preregistered lab experiment ($n = 350$) and a longitudinal daily diary study in the U.S. ($n = 374$) provide evidence that larger choice sets increase perceived self-expression and maximizing, which then makes choice feel more important, difficult, and overwhelming. Then, a cross-cultural study including data from six countries ($n = 7,436$) shows that people in the U.S. experience more negative consequences from abundant choice than do people from societies where choices are less inherently connected to choosers' personal identities and preferences (e.g., China), a pattern that is hard to explain from a purely cognitive account of choice overload. In sum, choice overload poses a problem at least in part because it lies at the intersection of existential concerns related to freedom and identity.

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3. Cross-cultural Predictors of Meaning in Life

Authors: Mask, M., & Heine, S.

Abstract: The subjective experience of meaning in life (MIL) predicts improved psychological well-being outcomes cross-culturally. However, despite recent evidence showing cross-cultural variability in predictors of MIL, the vast majority of MIL research has been conducted on so-called WEIRD (Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich and Democratic) populations, leaving many cultures under-explored. The present research sought to address this gap in the literature by conducting a cross-sectional, cross-cultural study ($N = 1000$), which explored similarities and differences in predictors of MIL in four countries: the United States, India, Japan and Poland. Data collection is ongoing with examples of variables collected including: the tripartite meaning model (coherence, purpose, mattering), self-construal (independent, interdependent and metapersonal), the experience of traumatic life events, self-transcendent experiences, nostalgia proneness, dispositional awe, as well as low- and high-arousal positive emotions. This research has implications for governmental and non-governmental agencies seeking to improve the well-being of their populations.

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4. Awe in Everyday Life: People Underestimate How Much Savoring Unlocks Awe in the Mundane

Authors: White, M., Kim, Y., & Akinola, M.

Abstract: Extraordinary stimuli, such as solar eclipses and panoramic views of nature elicit awe, an emotion characterized by perceived vastness and mental accommodation. To what extent might awe be elicited from mundane experiences in everyday life? In the present research (total $N = 700$), we examine whether everyday experiences can evoke awe and the degree people underestimate their power to do so. In Study 1, people expected mundane experiences (e.g., a walk around the neighborhood) to elicit less awe than extraordinary experiences (e.g., a walk around a state park), $p < .001$, $d = 1.155$. However, mundane experiences were judged as more accessible, $p < .001$, $d = 2.078$. Study finds that people assigned to savor an everyday experience (i.e., listening to a song) felt more awe than predictors expected, $p = .008$, $d = 0.382$. In Study 3 (field study), NYC subway commuters assigned to savor their commute felt more awe than commuters who completed their commute as usual, $p < .001$, $d = 0.552$. Yet, as in Study 2, Predictors did not accurately forecast this, $p = .756$. These findings broaden our understanding of what elicits awe and suggest people overlook opportunities to feel awe in everyday life.

Notes:

5. Playful Everyday Conversation Predicts Shared Reality Between Close Partners

Authors: Miller, E., Rossignac-Milon, M., Pinelli, F., & Higgins, E. T.

Abstract: What kinds of conversations promote the experience of shared reality between close partners? In this study, we use a daily diary method to compare the effects of different everyday conversation topics on partners' sense of generalized shared reality (SR-G), defined as the



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perception of sharing thoughts and feelings about the world at large. Over five nights, 150 participants (total of 654 observations) rated their daily individual experiences, their sense of SR-G with a close partner, and the extent to which they discussed certain topics together (e.g., practical matters, future plans, abstract ideas, other people). Using within-subject multi-level modeling, we show that individuals experience greater shared reality with their close partners on days when their conversations include more humorous play than usual (i.e., making jokes and laughing together). These findings support the notion that everyday moments of playful conversation with close partners can strengthen our sense of sharing co-constructed interpretations of reality more generally.

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POSTER PRESENTATIONS (10:00-11:00am)

1. Existential isolation and well-being among persons in residential treatment.

Authors: Owens, R., Sease, T., Cox, C., & Espinosa, M.

Abstract: This study explored the association between existential isolation (EI), or feeling alone in one's experience, and therapeutic engagement and well-being for individuals in residential treatment. Studies have shown people scoring high on EI report lower need satisfaction, purpose in life, and meaningfulness. There is also a positive correlation between EI and anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation. Given higher rates of substance use, mental health difficulties, and trauma, justice-related populations are particularly susceptible to compromised health. Existential isolation may impede therapeutic interventions as more isolated individuals may feel disjointed from their counselors and peers, thereby decreasing treatment engagement and participation. The results from 127 participants (60 men, 67 women) in a residential treatment facility in the southwest U.S. demonstrated that higher levels of EI were associated with reduced treatment participation, counselor rapport, meaning in life, and positive affect. Additionally, greater EI was correlated with increased anxiety, depression, and trauma-related symptomatology. The implications of this work will be discussed.

Notes:

2. Modeling loneliness as a multidimensional construct: Existential, emotional, and social dimensions over the lifespan.

Authors: McKenna-Plumley, P., Turner, R., Yang, K., & Groarke, J.

Abstract: Loneliness is an aversive experience which is prevalent across the lifespan and can be conceptualised as comprising existential, emotional, and social dimensions. Indeed, various researchers and organisations describe loneliness as including these three aspects. However, there is a lack of research examining these dimensions together across the lifespan. This study aimed to evaluate whether loneliness has this multidimensional structure and to assess levels of these dimensions in three age groups. Data from 714 adults in the UK and Ireland (17–84 years old; 60% women and 93% White) were analysed through structural equation modelling and one-way ANOVAs. The three-dimensional model of loneliness provided a good fit to the data and we observed different patterns of these dimensions over the lifespan: existential and emotional loneliness peaked in early adulthood, while social loneliness was highest in middle age. An accurate conceptualisation of loneliness is vital to assess risk factors and target interventions, and this research supports this aim by modeling existential, emotional, and social loneliness and indicating life stages when they may be particularly prevalent.

Notes:

3. Existing in Time, with Company: Exploring the social and temporal variables that lead to existential well-being.

Authors: Tran, B. H., & Fetterman, A.



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Abstract: Social psychology research on belonging primarily focuses on the impact of how one belongs here with others but not so much ‘now’. Evidence suggests that the sense of social belonging is closely tied to one’s perception of time. Prior studies have supported the idea that social exclusion correlates with a distorted experience of time flow, fixation on the present, feelings of lethargy, and avoidance of self-awareness. More recent findings have indicated that one’s sense of belonging within their current timeline, or temporal rootedness, significantly predicts mental well-being. To investigate this further, the current study tests the link between social and temporal belonging and well-being. Participants (N = 236) reported their sense of social belonging, time perspectives, temporal rootedness, and well-being. The results not only validated the positive association between a sense of temporal rootedness and well-being but also established positive relationships between social and temporal belongingness, well-being, and positive time perspectives. This study uncovers the intricate connection between social and temporal belonging, highlighting their roles in shaping one’s well-being.

Notes:

4. A Quantitative Investigation of Relational Cognitive Distortions Among The Suicidal Using Traditional Terror Management Measures.

Authors: Harvell-Bowman, L. Critchfield, K., Stucker-Rozovsky, E., Montwill, P., Davis, T., & Bates, S.

Abstract: Individuals experiencing suicidal ideation (SI) often lack belief that he/she has close attachments. Terror Management Theory (TMT) and Interpersonal Reconstructive Therapy (IRT) intersect to explore attachment-based mechanisms that may allow for exceptions to the perceived meaning of death. Because suicide has been seen as maladaptive problem solving, our original conceptualization as a distortion of relational cognition is driven by the processes of attachment, something that is problematic when healthy close relationships buffer death anxiety. Extending previous clinical research investigating relational cognitive distortions among the suicidal as a defense against the awareness of death, this research quantitatively examined this defense with traditional TMT measures. A 3 (Prime: Death, Attachment, Control) x 2 (Suicidal Ideation: High, Low) experiment was conducted (N = 972). Results show that the relational cognitive distortion is replicated as a defense against the awareness of death with the traditional TMT measures, providing a valuable extension to TMT. Additionally, more nuance is provided regarding the existential and clinical implications of this replication.

Notes:

5. The effect of existential threat on the appeal of, and belief in, religious concepts among Christians and atheists.

Authors: Galgali, M., Vail, K. E., & Arndt., J.

Abstract: The present study integrates terror management theory and insights from the cognitive science of Religion to inform how religion helps people to manage awareness of death. It was hypothesized that (a) mortality salience (MS) should increase the intuitive appeal of religious concepts among both Christians and atheists; but also (b) the effect of MS on reflective belief should be influenced by participants’ worldviews, leading Christians to embrace religious belief but atheists to reject it. To test this, N = 858 (426 Christians; 432 atheists) participants were



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recruited. Results revealed that, regardless of participants' Christian or atheist identity, following MS (vs. control), participants showed higher implicit activation of religious concepts and reported a greater desire for religious concepts to be true. However, following MS (vs. control), only Christians reported increased religious belief; no such pattern emerged for atheists. Results suggest that the effects of existential motivation on religious faith are more dynamic than previously hypothesized; whether or not MS motivates people toward religious belief is dependent on their cognitive process and prior worldviews.

Notes:

6. Hope in the Face of Death.

Authors: Edwards, M., Helm, P., & Arndt., J.

Abstract: Does hope enable people to deal with their mortality? Hope is a positive emotion that provides meaning in times of distress (Edwards, in prep). Past research has found that when mortality is salient, those low, but not high, in self-esteem, report lower hope (Wiseman & Heflick, 2015). However, other work on meaning-making emotions (e.g., nostalgia) suggests that when mortality is salient, people turn to nostalgia, particularly among those high, but not low, in nostalgia proneness (Juhl et al., 2010). The present research examines when hope may be an existential resource. Study 1 (N = 200) found that mortality salience (vs. a control) led to greater hope, among those low, and not high, in past orientation. Study 2 (N = 326) found that mortality salience (vs. a control) led to greater hope, in personally relevant domains. Study 3 (N = 650; data collection underway), aims to extend Studies 1 and 2 with additional moderators (past orientation, basic needs satisfaction, religiosity). Overall, these studies examine hope as a resource for meaning under the threat of death and will discuss present and past works on hope and mortality.

Notes:

7. A Life Remembered: The Role of Ego Integrity in Terror Management Defenses in Older Adults.

Authors: Sundby, J., Pyszczynski, T., & Wagoner, J.

Abstract: Despite being temporally closer to their mortality, research indicates that older adults have less death anxiety and do not engage in the same defenses against death as younger adults. Previous investigations into this paradox have revealed that older adults do respond to mortality salience, but through different means, such as increased generativity (Maxfield et al., 2014a). In this study, I explore whether the Eriksonian concept of ego-integrity is a moderating factor in how older adults respond to thoughts of death. To research this question, I will recruit 300 participants, 150 older adults and 150 younger adults, from an online crowdsourcing platform and assess levels of ego integrity. I will then randomly assign them to a mortality salience or neutral prime. After a delay, I will ask participants to complete worldview defense and generativity measures. I hypothesize that higher ego integrity will moderate the effects of mortality salience in older adults, such that those with higher levels of ego integrity will engage in less worldview defensiveness and more generativity after being reminded of death.

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8. Silent Suffering: Exploring the Gap in Sharing Experiences of Loss at Work.

Authors: Boland, K., & Akinola, M.

Abstract: Individuals experiencing suicidal ideation (SI) often lack belief that he/she has close attachments. Terror Management Theory (TMT) and Interpersonal Reconstructive Therapy (IRT) intersect to explore attachment-based mechanisms that may allow for exceptions to the perceived meaning of death. Because suicide has been seen as maladaptive problem solving, our original conceptualization as a distortion of relational cognition is driven by the processes of attachment, something that is problematic when healthy close relationships buffer death anxiety. Extending previous clinical research investigating relational cognitive distortions among the suicidal as a defense against the awareness of death, this research quantitatively examined this defense with traditional TMT measures. A 3 (Prime: Death, Attachment, Control) x 2 (Suicidal Ideation: High, Low) experiment was conducted (N = 972). Results show that the relational cognitive distortion is replicated as a defense against the awareness of death with the traditional TMT measures, providing a valuable extension to TMT. Additionally, more nuance is provided regarding the existential and clinical implications of this replication.

Notes:

9. High Sharing: Existential Connection with a Substance Use Partner.

Authors: Courtney, E., & Young, R.

Abstract: The use of both marijuana and alcohol has increased steadily over the past decade (NIH, 2023). Limited research suggests that substance use may be negatively related to existential isolation (Oleskiewicz et al., 2023). We propose that the social use of mind-altering substances forges existential connections between users through shared, simultaneously-induced subjective states (i.e., high-sharing). We predict that habitually high-sharing partners co-construct induced shared realities that feel isolated from the experiences of non-users, and that are facilitated and maintained by chronic shared substance use. To explore this possibility, we are administering an online survey to self-identified marijuana, alcohol, and nicotine users. Participants identify a person with whom they often use their preferred substances before answering questions pertaining to shared reality; existential isolation; and substance use beliefs, behaviors, and future use intentions. Although this research is exploratory, we preregistered a predicted indirect positive relationship between high-sharing and intentions to continue substance use mediated by existential isolation from non-users.

Notes:

10. True Self and Narrative Analysis.

Authors: Ward, R., Jeffers, A., Needy, L., & Schlegel, R.

Abstract: The true self is an elusive concept that research suggests is a wellspring of meaning in many people's lives. However, the research in this area has only relied on self-report quantitative methods. The current research aim is to utilize narrative methods to gain new insights into this concept using a more bottom-up and inductive approach. We asked participants to write a narrative about their college major and then coded these narratives for the presence of true self themes. Preliminary results revealed that coders were able to reliably detect "true self as guide" (TSAG) themes in these narratives (on a 0-3 scale, M = 1.08, SD = .93, $\alpha = 0.78$). These TSAG scores were positively correlated with other themes including: making reference to internal causes, mentions of self-discovery, and a number of indicators of psychological essentialism (e.g., immutability and



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consistency). Further, TSAG scores predicted how satisfied people were with their college major and how certain they were that they made the right choice. Since the stories that people tell are important for meaning-making, these results suggest that true self themes might make for satisfying and meaningful narratives.

Notes:

11. Thoughts of Human Extinction under Mortality Salience Reduce Worldview Defense but Increase Death Thought Accessibility.

Authors: Rihs, M., Brodewolf, F., & Mast, F.

Abstract: Threats like climate change, tensions between nuclear-weapon states, or pandemics potentially increase thoughts about human extinction. These thoughts imply mortality salience (MS) while threatening the cultural anxiety buffer and simultaneously limiting symbolic immortality. Thus, thoughts of human extinction might interfere with typical responses to MS like worldview defense. To investigate how thoughts of human extinction affect terror management, participants were presented with either an apocalyptic, destructive, or neutral video in combination with a manipulation of MS. Participants reported higher death-thought accessibility but lower worldview defense when watching an apocalyptic video under MS. This dissociation did not occur when a destructive video was combined with MS, suggesting that these effects are limited to thoughts about human extinction.

Notes:

12. What Do People Talk About When They Talk About Death? Topics in Mortality Salience.

Authors: Gillespie, N., Hart, J., & Cox, G.

Abstract: According to the mortality salience (MS) hypothesis of terror management theory, reminders of mortality increase the desire to bolster psychological structures that assuage anxiety about death. MS is typically manipulated by asking participants to write about: 1) the emotions aroused when they think about death, and 2) what they think will happen to them as they die and once they are dead. Decades of research have shown that this manipulation affects various outcome measures. Despite this long history, it remains unclear whether these effects depend on the contents of people's responses to MS prompts. We conducted a mega-analysis in which we applied topic modeling to a sample of 3713 written responses to MS collected over 15 years. Cross validation showed that 40 topics were sufficient to characterize people's responses. Principal components analysis of the resulting topic distributions found that topics clustered into four distinct themes: Afterlife, Emotionality, Decomposition, and Loss of Consciousness. Individual differences in the relative prominence of these topics might explain some contradictory empirical findings in the terror management literature.

Notes:

13. Caught between Worlds: Feelings of existential isolation of the first- and second-generation immigrants.

Authors: Hong, J., Young, R., & Bosson, J.

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Abstract: When immigrants struggle to harmonize their bicultural identities, they often describe feeling “alone between the worlds” of their native and host country’s cultures (Glasford & Dovidio, 2011; Lorick-Wilmot, 2014). Limited research suggests that immigrants may feel more existentially isolated than native-born citizens (Pinel et al., 2021). We propose that self-other existential isolation experiences cause conflicts of dual identity among immigrants (i.e., the “between worlds” phenomenon), which then cause feelings of disconnection from the world. To test this possibility, we recruited 274 first- and second-generation immigrants to participate in an online survey. A mediation analysis conducted using PROCESS macro for SPSS 29 (2022) specifying self-other EI as a predictor, dual-identity harmony as a mediator, and self-world EI as an outcome detected a significant indirect relationship ($\beta = 0.07$, BootSE = 0.03, 95% Boot CI [0.02, 0.12]). We believe this research sheds light on a common and psychologically potent but largely unexplored dimension of the immigrant experience through a uniquely existential lens.

Notes:

14. Reinvestigating the Interaction of Search and Presence of Meaning in Life on Depressive and Anxiety Symptoms with Tripartite Model of Meaning.

Authors: Jiang, W., & Liu, X.

Abstract: Meaning in life is linked to individuals' well-being. Existing research has generated mixed findings, suggesting that people who search for meaning in life (high search) and have a limited sense of meaning (low presence) tend to experience higher depressive and anxiety symptoms. Recently, there has been a rise in the popularity of the tripartite model of meaning in life, encompassing purpose, comprehension, and mattering as the three subcomponents of meaning. The current study aims to investigate the effect of interaction between the search for meaning and the presence of meaning on depressive and anxiety symptoms using this tripartite framework. Additionally, this study explores whether philosophical meaning in life and the reported behavior of meaning searching are associated with those emotional symptoms. About 120 participants will complete measures of meaning in life (MLQ, MEMS, LRI-framework), depressive symptoms (BDI-II), and anxiety symptoms (BAI) and report their meaning-searching behavior. Data collection is scheduled to be complete by the end of December 2023, followed by analyses using multiple regression models and qualitative analyses.

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15. Exploring Meaning of Life in Suicide Awareness Campaigns: A Qualitative study on the Campaign Against Living Miserably’s “The Last Photo.”

Authors: Bates, S.

Abstract: This study analyzes the effectiveness of the emotional strategies utilized by "The Last Photo" video series, a suicide prevention and awareness campaign created by the Campaign Against Miserable Living (CALM) in 2022. Two focus groups were conducted with college students as participants to analyze their thoughts and reactions to the content and imagery presented in the campaign videos. Results show that an analysis of college students' perceptions of "The Last Photo" video series may provide new insights that will help understand how suicide prevention and awareness campaigns can influence people to seek help for their mental health concerns and reach out to friends and loved ones who they suspect are experiencing depression and suicidal thoughts. The findings suggest a path forward for an investigation of how



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campaigns can help bring meaning to and preserve life.

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16. The Effect of Walkability on Residents' Sense of Place: Unpacking the Mediation Role of Psychological Richness.

Authors: Jeong, O., Lee, H., Cha, Y., & Euh, H.

Abstract: Where we live and what we experience is directly connected with the definition of ourselves and, furthermore, the sense of the living places and the world. Previous research has shown that walkable neighborhoods enhance residents' sense of place, though the underlying psychological mechanism is not fully understood. In this study, we propose that psychological richness (Oishi & Westgate, 2021) plays a central mediating role in the effect of walkability on the sense of place: walkable neighborhoods promote psychologically richer lives filled with diverse and perspective-changing experiences, leading to stronger attachment and secure identification with their neighborhoods. Drawing on a socio-ecological approach, we integrated an objectively calculated walkability score with geocoded individual-level survey responses from 290 Americans. Our findings revealed that the experience of psychological richness in one's town significantly mediated the link between neighborhood walkability and a sense of place, surpassing other types of well-being measures (happiness and meaning). We discuss the pivotal role of psychological richness in shaping residents' sense of place.

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17. The Moderating Effect of Demographic Variables on Self-Transcendent Variables and Generosity.

Authors: Chance, M., & Bounds, E.

Abstract: Generosity is a form of prosocial behavior that is motivated by self-transcendence and involves giving something of value to another individual to enrich their wellbeing, thus contributing to the wellbeing of a society as a whole. The present study examines the associations between self-transcendent variables and generosity, and whether these associations are moderated by demographic factors. Participants (N = 414) completed an online survey, assessing three different measures of meaning in life (meaning in life, beyond-the-self orientation, and goal orientation), one measure of indebtedness to God, and a behavioral measure of generosity. Multiple regression analyses revealed that indebtedness to God and beyond-the-self orientation were significant predictors of generosity. Moderation analyses revealed that indebtedness to God and beyond-the-self orientation also have significant interactions with gender, such that the association between these self-transcendent variables and generosity were stronger for males. Future directions for research on existential variables are provided.

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18. Self-Belief and Reality: How Culture Shapes the Correlation Between Self-Efficacy and Actual Performance.

Authors: Yang, Z., Li, X., Hu, D., Yang, Y., & Yao, Y.

Abstract: In the U.S., approximately 28.3% of students under 18 are from households without college-educated parents, marking a clear divide with continuing-generation students, not just socio-economically but culturally. This raises questions about how first-generation students shape their self-identities. Self-efficacy, a belief in one's ability to succeed, is linked to better



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performance. Data from N eleven-year-olds in a crucial math course revealed a strong correlation between self-efficacy and performance for continuing-generation students ($r=0.20$, $P=0.003$). However, this correlation was absent for first-generation students ($r=-0.15$, $P=0.100$), with a significant difference between the two groups ($z= -3.35$, $p<0.001$). This raises questions about the role of self-perception and reality in the context of self-narrative theories, authenticity, and the search for meaning.

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19. God Representations, Compensatory Control, and Responses to Climate Change Threats.

Authors: Rajaeian, A., & Johnson, K.

Abstract: Climate change poses a substantial threat to humanity. Yet many religious people still do not view it as a serious concern. This may transcend mere political boundaries, as religious people often give faith-based reasons for their lack of concern (e.g., God is in control of the climate). We hypothesize that belief in a controlling God may mitigate the perceived risk of threats posed by climate change as it helps maintain a sense of predictability and control over these threats. This builds on previous research showing that people have a need to view the world as ordered, and when they perceive disorder in their environment that they cannot control, they will outsource control to external sources such as God, the government, or even a powerful enemy. Whereas perceiving threats as controllable may motivate action against them, outsourcing complete control to external sources may suppress the need to act. We predict that certain order-affirming religious beliefs such as belief in an authoritative and controlling God will negatively predict perceptions of climate change risk and belief in anthropogenic climate change which will, in turn, predict decreased sustainability behaviors.

Notes:

20. Thine, agentic, own self: The role of agency in the evaluation of one's true self.

Authors: Nam, K.

Abstract: Research suggests that the true self is inherently moral and positive. The present studies investigated agency as another fundamental aspect of the true self. Specifically, we conducted three studies ($N = 1,100$) to examine the importance of agency in the evaluation of one's true self, particularly when compared with morality (Study 1) and positivity (Studies 2 and 3). Using previous research (Strohming & Nichols, 2014), Study 1 examined whether people would perceive a change in someone's identity when they lost a sense of agency after an accident, compared to losing morality or desire. However, agency was not rated as essential as morality or desire. Studies 2 and 3 examined whether people would judge one has discovered their true self if an action is autonomously made even when its outcome is negative (vs. non-autonomous action with a positive outcome). Although Study 2 did not show the importance of agency where the action involved a trivial choice (i.e., field trip), Study 3 found supporting evidence where the action involved a life decision (i.e., career choice). The current research offers valuable insight into understanding the place of agency in the true self.

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21. A Systematic Concept Mapping Review of Collective Trauma.

Authors: Rosa-Sullivan, J., Sullivan, D., Palitsky, R., Sedivy, L.

Abstract: As defined in a recent concept analysis, collective trauma is a chronic mental condition caused by large-scale, disruptive events that result in neurophysiological, psychosocial, and sociocultural imbalance. Though trauma research often investigates individual experiences, collective trauma has the unique nature of shaping social identities and constructing community memories. A systematic review of the term is needed to distinguish familiar yet functionally different phenomena so that collective trauma may be acutely treated in clinical and social scientific settings. Moreover, the antecedents, contexts, and consequences of collective trauma await integration into one or more models of collective trauma expression. At this point in the systematic review process, the Cultural Existential Psychology Lab of the University of Arizona has screened over 5,000 studies at the title, abstract, and full-text review stages. The team is in the process of training for the data extraction phase, where preliminary results such as operational definitions, sources of trauma, and shared symptoms will be available by the preconference date.

Notes:

22. From Other and From World: A Self-World Dimension of Existential Isolation.

Authors: Young, R.

Abstract: Yalom (1980) defines existential isolation as the fundamental gulf between oneself and others and, “even more fundamental,” the gulf between oneself and the world. Researchers have explored the self-other dimension of EI (SOEI). The current research is the first to study the self-world dimension (SWEI). Study 1 identified themes in participants’ self-generated examples of SWEI experiences (e.g., cognitive errors, mind-wandering, dissociation) and found that such experiences elicit a profile of negative emotion we call “EI affect” (afraid, isolated, lonely, detached, disconnected). Study 2 found that recalling SWEI experiences caused more EI affect than recalling dental pain, daily routine, and SOEI experiences. Study 3 found that participants randomly assigned to an implicit SWEI manipulation felt more EI affect than participants assigned to a control task. Study 4 explored SWEI as an individual difference, validating a measure (e.g., “I feel like I live in my own bubble”) that was positively associated with SOEI and self-doubt and negatively associated with autonomy and competence. We argue this research elucidates a novel construct of significant theoretical and clinical value.

Notes:

23. Meaning in Life and the Socioecology of Religion: A Field Experiment.

Authors: LePine, S. E., & Perlin, J.

Abstract: Religion is a potent source of existential meaning for many. The religious life is not only characterized by personal religiosity, religious beliefs, and sentiments, but also by collective, embodied rituals embedded in intentionally-constructed environments. These rituals and environments—the “socioecological” features of religion—have been largely neglected in psychology. These features structure the religious experiences and meaning-making of individuals. In this field experiment, we employ a common distinction in Christianity—“high church” versus “low church”—to investigate how church socioecologies differentially affect meaning in life. Low church contexts emphasize contemporary forms, whereas high church contexts place greater emphasis on ritual and traditional forms. We hypothesize that low church contexts –



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given their emphasis on the inner religious experience— will lead to greater global meaning in life (MIL), as well as the MIL subscales of mattering and purpose, than high church contexts. We argue that advancing existential psychology will require the use of novel and challenging methodologies which capture the complexity of embodied and embedded lives.

Notes:

24. When Aliens Visit: Worldview Disruptions and Meaning Violation.

Authors: Gause, C., & Hicks, J.

Abstract: With recent news reinvigorating discussion of the possibility of alien life visiting Earth, we conducted a study looking at the influence of believing aliens have visited earth on judgments of general meaning in life. In the visitation condition, general meaning in life was lower than the no-visitation, control condition. When religiosity was entered as a moderator, people high in religiosity reported higher meaning violations and epistemic emotions (e.g., confusion, enjoyment) in the visitation conditions, whereas people low in religiosity reported higher meaning violations and epistemic emotions in the no-visitation condition. We interpret these results to suggest the potential presence of alien life on Earth threatens meaning-making and worldview frameworks as a function of religious beliefs. We consider these results within the larger literature of meaning-making and meaning violation.

Notes:

25. The Role of Unpredictability on Intellectual Humility.

Authors: Dutta, T., & Maner, J.

Abstract: Adversity is a ubiquitous part of life that can profoundly impact how we understand our world. Prior work suggests that adversity can foster intellectual humility, but this claim has proven controversial. Our project aimed to advance research on adversity and intellectual humility by examining a less severe but more pervasive form of adversity: unpredictability. Unpredictability can threaten people's sense of certainty and control, and they may cope by adopting an entrenched set of beliefs that are resistant to change. However, unpredictability has also been related to more cognitive flexibility. Thus, we wanted to understand the relationship between proximal (childhood) and distal (ecological) cues of environmental unpredictability and intellectual humility. Across three studies (N=848), using self-rated questionnaires and behavioral measures of intellectual humility, we found that perceived childhood unpredictability was associated with low intellectual humility. However, when we analyzed data from several cross-national surveys (138 countries; N=44,843), we found that countries that score high on unpredictability also score high on different markers of intellectual humility.

Notes:

26. Adverse Childhood Experiences, Hope, and Meaning in Life: Facet Level Analysis.

Authors: Rose, H., Edwards, M., Wang, I., & King, L. A.

Abstract: Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) predict lower well-being (Elroy & Hevey, 2014) and are associated with lower meaning in life (MIL) in people with psychological disorders (Weibel et al., 2017). MIL involves feeling that one's life is significant, coherent, and purposeful. Two experiments probed the relationship between ACEs and MIL, focusing on these facets. Study



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1 (N = 383) participants reported their ACEs and then wrote about a positive and negative childhood experience, in counterbalanced order, and rated the facets of meaning following each. Reminders of negative childhood experiences led to lower coherence and significance, but greater purpose as ACEs increased. Study 2 (N = 666) sought to examine if hope serves as a meaning-making emotion among those high in ACEs. Participants reported their ACEs and were assigned to read a fabricated article regarding hopeful (vs. hopeless) outcomes for climate change and rate their MIL. Hope (vs. hopelessness) increased purpose, only among those high in ACEs. For people high in ACEs, purpose may emerge as a key pathway to maintaining a sense of meaning in life, with hope serving as a fundamental emotion in this process.

Notes:

27. Non-Native Conceptions of Native American Identity as Symbolic Eradication.

Authors: Goad, A., & Sullivan, D.

Abstract: The U.S. is a settler colonial nation, and the success of settler colonialism entails the elimination of the Indigenous population. While originally occurring through physical genocide, we argue that the eradication of Native Americans (NAs) continues symbolically in U.S. settler perceptions of the group. The present research sought empirical support for the long-positing hypothesis that NAs are less visible and more othered than other marginalized groups in the U.S., and this serves as a tool for the ongoing settler colonial endeavor of symbolic eradication. Measures of visibility and othering were created and examined across two studies: Study 1 (N=309) found support across a national sample of non-Native people that Natives are less visible and more othered than comparable groups; study 2 (N=201) found that the rates of visibility and othering vary depending on the participant's state in which they live (Indiana, Arizona, or Oklahoma). We argue that state differences relate to past and present sociopolitical relationships with Native communities per state and federal regulations of the reservation system, which were exacted as settler colonial removal and erasure mechanisms.

Notes:



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ISSEP Innovation in Existential Psychology Research Award – \$250



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ISSEP Student Registration Awards



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Trisha Dutta
Arian Rajaeian
Michael White
Bao Han Tran

Florida State University
Arizona State University
Columbia University
University of Houston

Worth Publishers/Macmillan Learning Registration Awards



worth publishers
Macmillan Learning

Kyungmin Nam
Michael Mask
Emma Miller
Yena Kim

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Columbia University
University of Chicago,
Booth School of Business

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Samantha Heintzelman Rutgers University

Best Paper Award – \$500

Mengdi Huang University of Chicago
Fan Yang University of Chicago

Huang, M., & Yang, F. (2023). Self-transcendence or self-enhancement: People's perceptions of meaning and happiness in relation to the self. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*, 152, 590-610. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1037/xge0001297>

Outstanding Student Award – \$500

Megan Edwards University of Missouri

RESEARCH GRANTS

Research projects funded – up to \$3000 each

- Finding purpose in the U.S. immigrant experience. *PI: Patrick Hill. Washington Univ.*
- Meaning depletion: An existential model of self-control exertion. *PI: Nicholas Kelley. University of Southampton.*
- Exploring how repetition impacts felt authenticity in (re)telling personal narratives. *PI: Joseph Maffly-Kipp. Ohio State University Medical Center.*
- Self-transcendent positive emotions in “high” and “low” Christian church ritual. *PI: Joshua Perlin. University of Florida.*
- Exploring how awe impacts schema malleability. *PI: Carley Vornlocher. Arizona State University.*

