



# EXISTENTIAL PSYCHOLOGY

Wednesday, Feb. 16 | 8:30 AM – 7:00 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	<b>Keynote Address: Laura King</b>	Integrating existential and well-being approaches to meaning: Confronting the fullness of meaning
10:00-11:00am	<b>Poster session</b>	Live poster presentations
11:00-11:15am	Coffee break	
11:15-11:45pm	Recognition	Awards ceremony
11:45-12:15pm	<b>Daryl Van Tongeren</b>	Suffering, spiritual struggles, and growth: The role of existential humility
12:15-12:45pm	<b>Eranda Jayawickreme</b>	Clarifying our understanding of post-traumatic growth
12:45-1:45pm	Lunch	
1:45-2:45pm	<b>Special Address: Dan McAdams</b>	Existentialism and me (and a few of my close friends: Kierkegaard, Sartre, Becker, and Camus)
2:45-3:15 pm	<b>Data blitz session</b>	5 data blitz presentations
3:15-3:30pm	Coffee break	
3:30-4:00pm	<b>Jamie Goldenberg</b>	The implications of existential threat for behavioral health decisions
4:00-4:30pm	<b>Rachel Menzies</b>	Death anxiety: The worm at the core of mental illness
4:30-5:00pm	<b>Jaime Kurtz</b>	Now or never: When scarcity encourages savoring
5:00pm	Closing remarks	
5:00-7:00pm	Virtual happy hour	Virtual happy hour <i>Sponsored by Ernest Becker Foundation.</i>

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





## EXISTENTIAL PSYCHOLOGY

### RESEARCH TALKS

9:00-10:00am **Keynote Address: Laura King**

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**Integrating existential and well-being approaches to meaning: Confronting the fullness of meaning.**

**Abstract:** Meaning in life is a feature of eudaimonic well-being. In existential psychology, the need for meaning can lead to negative behaviors and experiences but the role of meaning is rarely measured directly. Integrating these approaches promises to enhance our understanding of all the things that make life meaningful.

11:45-12:15pm **Daryl Van Tongeren**

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**Suffering, spiritual struggles, and growth: The role of existential humility.**

**Abstract:** Suffering is an inherent part of life, and many people experience religious and spiritual struggles in the midst of adversity, whereas others experience growth and maturation. When people face existential challenges, who fights, who flees, and who flourishes? This talk explores the role of existential humility in addressing existential concerns.

12:15-12:45pm **Eranda Jayawickreme**

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**Clarifying our understanding of post-traumatic growth**

**Abstract:** Many people have the intuition that we can grow in the face of adversity and trauma. However, what does current psychology research say about this question? Can we trust it? If not, why? How can the insights of social/personality psychology and the current credibility revolution help improve the quality of this research?

1:45-2:45pm **Special Address: Dan McAdams**

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**Existentialism and me (and a few of my close friends: Kierkegaard, Sartre, Becker, and Camus).**

**Abstract:** I will highlight prominent themes in my research on narrative identity, generativity, and redemptive life stories by describing the profound effects four existentialist thinkers have had on my thinking: Soren Kierkegaard, Jean Paul Sartre, Ernest Becker, and Albert Camus. Of special relevance today, Camus's 1947 novel, *The Plague*, holds deep insights into how we might think about life stories and the meaning of life in the time of Covid.

3:30-4:00pm **Jamie Goldenberg**

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**The implications of existential threat for behavioral health decisions.**

**Abstract:** In 2008, my colleague and I developed the terror management health model (Goldenberg & Arndt, *Psychological Review*) to consider how people manage psychological concerns about mortality and the body. Here, I'll present an overview of this model, key research testing it, and applications to behavioral health decisions during the pandemic.





## EXISTENTIAL PSYCHOLOGY

4:00-4:30pm

**Rachel Menzies**

**Death anxiety: The worm at the core of mental illness.**

**Abstract:** Death anxiety has been proposed to underpin a range of mental illnesses. This presentation will outline theoretical and empirical evidence suggesting that death anxiety may be central to numerous mental health conditions. Recent evidence concerning the treatment efficacy for alleviating death anxiety will be discussed.

4:30-5:00pm

**Jaime Kurtz**

**Now or never: When scarcity encourages savoring.**

**Abstract:** According to the scarcity principle (Cialdini, 1988), scarce resources tend to be more highly valued, and therefore more likely to be savored. The present research illustrates that when an experience is brief or rare, it is more likely to be attended to as a source of pleasure and appreciation.





## EXISTENTIAL PSYCHOLOGY

### DATA BLITZ PRESENTATIONS (2:45-3:15pm)

#### **1. Internalized negative attitudes about identity, (in)authenticity, and well-being among members of marginalized groups**

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**Authors:** Womick, J., Booker, J., & King, L. A.

**Abstract:** In five Studies, internalized negative attitudes about identity among Black Americans ( $n = 68$ ), women ( $n = 672$ ), Asian Americans ( $n = 80$ ), and gay men and lesbian women ( $n = 89$ ) were negatively related to well-being. (In)authenticity fully mediated these relationships. The same patterns did not emerge among members of privileged groups ( $n = 770$ ) experiencing White guilt.

**Notes:**

#### **2. We should follow our true self, but do we? Cultural differences in pursuit of true self**

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**Authors:** Jyung, M., Kim, J., Jun, Y., & Choi, I.

**Abstract:** The present research explores cultural/individual differences in pursuit of the true self and its underlying mechanisms. Ten studies show that North Americans are more willing than South Koreans to leave their current job for work that aligns better with their true self, and this is mediated by their strong belief that following one's true self is a surefire way to meet other important work goals.

**Notes:**

#### **3. On faith and future generations: A five-year longitudinal study of the relation between religiosity and generativity**

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**Authors:** Perlin, J. D., Baldwin, M., & McAdams, D.

**Abstract:** Does religiosity increase generativity or are generative people just more likely to be religious? We test a full cross-lag panel model using data from McAdams's Foley Longitudinal Study of Adulthood ( $n = 163$ ) to examine if religiosity leads to greater self-reported generativity over time. We hypothesize that religiosity will lead to greater generativity over time but not vice versa.

**Notes:**

#### **4. Awe and existential isolation: Awe both connects and disconnects us from others and the world**

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

**Abstract:** This work examines awe's existential implications. Three studies demonstrate awe's competing effects on existential isolation (EI). While awe increases a sense of small self, we highlight the nuances of the small self which has the potential to predict both connecting (via vastness) and disconnecting (via smaller self-size) to others and the world, thereby further increasing and decreasing EI.

**Notes:**





## EXISTENTIAL PSYCHOLOGY

### 5. Death-related cognition and mental health among medical professionals during the COVID-19 pandemic

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**Authors:** Lockett, M., Ferguson, B., Pyszczynski, T., & Greenberg, J.

**Abstract:** In this cross-sectional survey of resident physicians, analyses indicate that higher levels of workplace exposure to COVID-19, COVID-19 anxiety, death anxiety, and death thought accessibility all contribute to COVID-19-related psychological symptoms including posttraumatic stress symptoms, COVID-related functional impairment, and burnout.

**Notes:**







## EXISTENTIAL PSYCHOLOGY

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

#### **1. A unified model of autonomy: Integrating self-determination, self-control, well-being**

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**Authors:** Willigen, T., & Kushlev, K.

**Abstract:** This paper develops an ontological approach to autonomy, whereby autonomy exists independently of the experience of it. It shows that (ontological) autonomy is closely related to well-being and provides a bridge from self-determination theory to the literature on self-control. The model can be used to analyze how external circumstances (e.g., technology) and individual traits affect autonomy.

**Notes:**

#### **2. Is significance an independent and empirically distinct facet of meaning? Separating significance from purpose, coherence, and mattering**

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**Authors:** Martela, F., & Steger, M.

**Abstract:** We developed scales to measure coherence, purpose, and significance (Studies 1-3), invited participants to read vignettes of a person's life in three conditions (Study 4), and focused on the difference between significance and mattering (Study 5), to demonstrate that significance is a highly correlated yet independent facet of meaning in life, separate from coherence, purpose, and mattering.

**Notes:**

#### **3. Autonomy and transcendence: Self-determination supports well-being by promoting perceptions of symbolic immortality**

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**Authors:** Horner, D., & Greenberg, J.

**Abstract:** Data showed that (a) extent of belief in symbolic immortality mediated the relationship between autonomy and meaning in life, (b) reading about an autonomous (vs. controlled) life increased perceived symbolic immortality of the target individual, which in turn predicted perceptions of the target's satisfaction with life, and (c) autonomy uniquely predicted symbolic immortality beyond self-esteem.

**Notes:**

#### **4. Disentangling the effects of impact-oriented versus reputation-focused legacy motives on intergenerational concern and action**

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**Authors:** Syropoulos, S., Watkins, H., Goodwin, G., & Markowitz, E.

**Abstract:** We investigate whether legacy motives can be understood as composed of two related but distinct latent dimensions: "impact" and "reputation" motives. We find support for this two-factor model. Impact motives predicted higher environmental movement attitudes and behaviors relative to reputation motives, which are contingent on the perceived visibility of a pro-environmental behavior.

**Notes:**





## EXISTENTIAL PSYCHOLOGY

### 5. Longitudinal patterns of religious doubt predict subsequent disaffiliation: A latent class growth modeling approach

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**Authors:** Watanabe, S., & Todd, N.

**Abstract:** Using the National Study of Youth and Religion (NSYR) (Waves 1-3), we identified 5 latent classes of religious doubt: “Never”—stable low doubt (60%), “Always”—stable high doubt (4%), “Early-Drop”—high initial doubt decreasing and staying low (10%), “Late-Rise”—moderate initial doubt increasing over time (11%), and “Rise & Drop”—low initial doubt increasing and returning to low (15%). The latent classes predicted disaffiliation at Wave 4.

**Notes:**

### 6. Examining culturally specific ways of coping among black women

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**Authors:** McGhee-Dinvaut, A., Oliphant, V., Clement, D., & Wingate, L.

**Abstract:** Research surrounding Black women’s suicide is very limited despite the fact they experience high levels of depression and suicidal ideation. This project aims to examine the impact of culturally specific coping and racial identity of college-aged Black women. Ultimately, this study seeks to continue humanizing Black women’s lived experiences of adversity and personal growth through mental health.

**Notes:**

### 7. Unfulfillment of socio-existential needs predicts greater conspiracy ideation

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**Authors:** Galgali, M., Helm, P., & Arndt, J.

**Abstract:** Three studies ( $N = 1,755$ ) compare the associations between three different forms of isolation: loneliness, existential isolation (EI), and alienation on conspiracy ideation (CI). Results indicate that EI and alienation, but not loneliness, independently predict higher CI. We discuss implications for understanding how socio-existential needs might make conspiratorial thinking more attractive.

**Notes:**

### 8. The moderating role of mystical-type experiences on the relationship between existential isolation and meaning in life

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

**Abstract:** Existential Isolation is typically thought to share a negative relationship with Meaning in Life, but the present research suggests that this negative relationship is not present for people who have experienced a mystical-type experience at some point in their life.

**Notes:**





## EXISTENTIAL PSYCHOLOGY

### **9. America shut down: The impact of endless mortality salience, social media use, and political ideology on health perceptions at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic**

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**Authors:** Ferrell, K., Solomon, L., Montwill, P., & Harvell-Bowman, L.

**Abstract:** This paper investigates the interplay between mortality salience, political ideology, social media, and health perceptions with a national sample at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. Results show that the same people not wanting to wear masks were also the same ones that had less concern over being at risk for COVID-19, setting up a challenge for bipartisan solutions for the virus.

**Notes:**

### **10. Racism and the human-animal divide: (Dis)Belief in human evolution and racist attitudes across different cultures**

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**Authors:** Syropoulos, S., Lifshin, U., Greenberg, J., & Leidner, B.

**Abstract:** Recent research in social psychology has focused on the role of attitudes towards animals in human-to-human prejudice. One individual-difference variable that remains unexplored is (dis)belief in the notion that humans evolved from animals. Using nationally representative samples across 45 countries (total  $N = 60,703$ ), we find evidence that low belief in evolution predicts increased prejudicial attitudes.

**Notes:**

### **11. Terror management as a framework to understand suicide protective factors among active-duty soldiers during COVID-19**

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**Authors:** Umemoto, S., Mohr, C., Denning, E., & Hammer, L.

**Abstract:** This study examined death anxiety (DA) due to COVID among active-duty service members (SM;  $N=2137$ ) with SEM. DA predicts decreased alcohol misuse, ( $\beta^* = -.020$ , 95%CI [-.036,-.005]), increased belonging, ( $\beta^* = .014$ , 95%CI [.003, .025]), and decreased loneliness, ( $\beta^* = -.017$ , 95%CI [-.028,-.005]), when mediated by death thoughts, suggesting DA may protect against SM suicide risk and substance use.

**Notes:**

### **12. Self-compassion predicts less boredom: The role of meaning in life**

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**Authors:** O'Dea, M., Igou, E. R., Tilburg, W., & Kinsella, E. L.

**Abstract:** Boredom is an unpleasant experience characterized by a perceived lack of meaning, whereas self-compassion increases perceptions of meaning. In three empirical studies, we found evidence to suggest that self-compassion predicts less boredom through a greater presence of meaning. Importantly, self-compassion predicts less boredom via meaning on both the state and trait level.

**Notes:**







## EXISTENTIAL PSYCHOLOGY

### 13. From others and from world: Expanding the current model of existential isolation

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

**Abstract:** The general purpose of the current study was to initiate a line of research that explores the experience of the apparent ontological gap between the mind and the outside world. The results of this study provide preliminary evidence that suggests meaning violations and dissociative experiences provoke an unsettling feeling of the separation between mental and physical realities.

**Notes:**

### 14. Do different ways of relating to god predict emotions toward god in response to suffering? exploring the roles of theodicies, divine struggles, and causal attributions

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**Authors:** Wilt, J., & Exline, J.

**Abstract:** In a sample of undergraduate believers in God ( $N = 171$ ), we tested whether theodicies, divine struggles, and causal attributions to God predicted emotional responses to a negative event. Benevolent theodicies and attributions to God predicted more positive emotions toward God, whereas non-benevolent theodicies, divine struggles, and attributions to God predicted more negative emotions toward God.

**Notes:**

### 15. Are superheroes the new gods? Religious doubt, death, and superhero fandom

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**Authors:** Scott, A., Schimel, J., Sharp, M., Leota, J., Nash, K., & Zatto, B. R. L.

**Abstract:** Across 6 studies we found that death concerns predict and promote superhero fandom among those who have begun to question their religious beliefs. We conclude that superheroes may be providing auxiliary existential comfort in a time beset with spiritual doubt.

**Notes:**

### 16. Finding meaning in the greater good: A short existential intervention to boost work satisfaction

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**Authors:** Cantarero, K., Tilburg, W., & Smoktunowicz, E.

**Abstract:** We employed a novel approach to examine how meaning-making processes can enhance psychological functioning in the workplace. In two online studies ( $N = 481$ ), we found that a short, online meaning intervention boosted momentary work engagement through changes in perceived work meaningfulness.

**Notes:**





## EXISTENTIAL PSYCHOLOGY

### 17. Political Consequences of COVID-19: Examining how mortality salience affects presidential support and affect during a pandemic

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**Authors:** Montwill, P., Klein, A., Harvell-Bowman, L., & Merle, P.

**Abstract:** This experiment, administered at different points throughout the pandemic with Americans in diverse geographical locations, investigated the recommendations from President Trump and President Biden regarding COVID-19. Results indicate that the desire to live may have negated the desire for information from a trusted source in an attempt to save lives.

**Notes:**

### 18. Medicine for the soul: Religious identity, coping, and health during the COVID-19 pandemic

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**Authors:** Peneycad, C., Tippins, E., & Ysseldyk, R.

**Abstract:** This study investigated relations among religiosity, appraisal-coping processes, mental, and physical health during the COVID-19 pandemic in a Canadian community sample ( $N = 280$ ). Numerous differences were observed across five (ir)religious groups (Atheists, Agnostics, Spirituals, Christians, and “Minorities”) as well as the mediating role of coping in the relations between religiosity and health.

**Notes:**

### 19. Terror management and health: A meta-analysis of terror management health model

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**Author:** Ponton, S.

**Abstract:** People make choices that can extend or shorten their lifespan. According to Terror Management Health Model (TMHM), in the face of mortal danger, people engage in either health-promoting or health-preventing behaviors depending on whether it bolsters their self-esteem. We introduce a meta-analysis of TMHM that explores if distal reminders of death can elicit both healthy and unhealthy behaviors.

**Notes:**

### 20. I-sharing across ideologies

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**Authors:** Fuchs, N., Benjamin, S., & Pinel, E.

**Abstract:** Can I-sharing help heal the US political divide? We examined whether moments of existential connection can facilitate productive dialogue between Biden and Trump supporters prior to the 2020 Presidential Election. Results indicate I-sharing increased liking between partners irrespective of political preference and Biden supporters respected the opinions Trump supporters more after I-Sharing.

**Notes:**





# EXISTENTIAL PSYCHOLOGY

## CONFERENCE AWARDS

### ISSEP Innovation in Existential Psychology Research Award – \$250

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INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR THE SCIENCE OF  
EXISTENTIAL PSYCHOLOGY

Megan Edwards

University of Missouri

### ISSEP Student Registration Awards

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INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR THE SCIENCE OF  
EXISTENTIAL PSYCHOLOGY

Mina Jyung  
Kara Ferrell  
McKenzie Lockett  
Roger Young

Seoul National University  
James Madison University  
Univ. of Col. at Col. Springs  
University of South Florida

### Worth Publishers/Macmillan Learning Registration Awards

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worth publishers  
Macmillan Learning

Dylan Horner  
Frank Martela  
Josh Perlin  
Alex Sielaff  
Stylios Syropoulos  
Sheila Umamoto

University of Arizona  
Aalto University  
University of Florida  
University of Arizona  
University of Mass. Amherst  
Portland State University

### Cleveland State University Registration Awards

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Muireann O’Dea  
Shoko Watanabe  
Tessa v.d. Willigen

University of Limerick  
Univ. of Ill. Urbana-Champaign  
Georgetown University





## EXISTENTIAL PSYCHOLOGY

### ANNUAL AWARDS

#### **Distinguished Career Contributions Award – \$1000 each**

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Jeff Greenberg	University of Arizona
Tom Pyszczynski	University of Colorado at Colorado Springs
Sheldon Solomon	Skidmore College

#### **Early Career Contributions Award – \$1000**

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Daryl Van Tongeren	Hope College
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#### **Best Paper Award – \$500**

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Joshua D. Perlin	Duke University
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Perlin, J. D., & Li, L. (2020). Why does awe have prosocial effects? New perspectives on awe and the small self. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 15, 291-308.  
DOI: [10.1177/1745691619886006](https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691619886006)

#### **Outstanding Student Award – \$500**

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P. F. Jonah Li	Indiana University
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### RESEARCH GRANTS

#### **Research projects funded – up to \$3000 each**

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- Experiencing meaning in life with dementia: Unraveling the role of spontaneous cognition by means of experience sampling. *PI: Laura Dewitte. KU Leuven.*
- Black Lives Matter: A quest for meaning. *PI: Perla R. Henderson. University of Houston.*
- Sites of meaning-making. *PI: Ashley Krause. University of Florida.*
- “Life’s too short to be small”: An experimental investigation of the impact of death anxiety on symptoms of muscle dysmorphic disorder in men. *PI: Rachel Menzies. University of Sydney.*
- From others and from world: Expanding the current model of existential isolation. *PI: Roger Young. University of South Florida.*

