

Attitudes of College Students Towards Purpose in Life and Self-Esteem

Shannon Hodges and Stephen Denig
Niagara University, NY

Allison Crowe
East Carolina University, Greenville, NC

Abstract

The Purpose in Life Test and the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale were utilized to assess the importance of purpose in life and self-esteem of students at two private universities in the northeast United States. One private institution was composed entirely of graduate students and is secular while the other is religiously affiliated and has both undergraduate and graduate programs. While undergraduates scored significantly higher on the items of self-esteem, they scored significantly lower on purpose in life. Both undergraduates and graduate students, however, rated purpose in life as very important in their lives. The results of this study have implications for college and university counselors regarding the importance of promoting life meaning in counseling relationships.

Since the 1990's, numerous articles addressing the pressing needs of 21st century college students have appeared in the literature on higher education. More recent studies have focused on critical aspects of college students' attitudes, particularly the construct of developing a meaningful philosophy of life (Astin, Astin, & Lindholm, 2010; Gorsuch & Miller, 1999). Numerous constructs related to life meaning have also been studied, such as spirituality and religious orientation (Astin et al., 2010). While a meaningful philosophy of life can be related both to religiosity and spirituality, it may also be separate from spiritual practices. Nevertheless, psychotherapists such as Frankl (1969; 1997), and researchers such as (Astin et al., 2010; Schulenberg, Baczwaski, & Buchanan (2013), and Wong (2012b) among others, have written extensively on the important value of meaning and purpose in a healthy life, from both a secular, developmental model (Chickering & Reeser, 1993) and a spiritual perspective (Frankl, 1969; 1997; Kwee, 2012).

Frankl (1967; 1997) theorized that having a purpose in life was needed to achieve meaningful life goals and live a fulfilling and worthwhile life. Absence of a clear purpose in life humans may seek to fill the emptiness in their lives with distractions and peripheral concerns, contributing to poor psychological health. A client's inability to develop purpose in life may lead to what Frankl (1969) termed the *existential vacuum*, which can result in depression, anxiety, and addiction. According to Frankl (1969; 1997), developing a strong purpose in life should be the primary goal in counseling. Frankl called his approach Logotherapy or therapy through meaning. Frankl stated that "...in the final analysis there is no situation that does not contain within it the seed of meaning" (Frankl, 1997, p. 53). Frankl furthermore stated that all of his clients who progressed in therapy had found or rediscovered a strong sense of meaning and purpose in their lives (Frankl, 1969). Thus, to Frankl, assessing and instilling purpose in life in clients is a critical function for any counselor in any counseling encounter.

Although the issue of over diagnoses of mental disorders (Much & Swenson, 2010) is still hotly debated, recent research on college students has suggested incident rates of depression, anxiety, and substance abuse are high (Gallagher, 2011; Kay & Schwartz, 2011; Levine & Dean, 2012). Purpose in life and meaning in life have been found to be the mediating factors against depression and suicide (Harlow, Newcomb, & Bentler, 1986; Lightsey & Boyraz, 2011; Schulenberg, Baczwaski, Buchanan, 2013). Purpose in life and meaning in life have also been linked to greater academic success (Chickering & Reeser, 1993; Dalton, & Crosby, 2010; Greenway, 2005) and with overall satisfaction of the college experience (Chickering & Reeser, 1993; Schluckbier, 2013).

Self-Esteem

Like purpose in life, the study of self-esteem is also essential in counseling research because healthy self-esteem has been positively correlated with lower depression, decreased stress levels (Beck, Brown, Steer, Kuyken, & Grisham, 2001; Heisel & Flett, 2004; Rosenberg, 1965; 1989) as well as a decrease in suicidal thoughts (Beck et al., 2001; Granello &

Granello, 2007). Self-esteem is defined as an individual's set of thoughts and feelings about her or his own worth and importance and a global positive or negative attitude towards oneself (Beck et al., 2001; Rosenberg, 1965). Self-esteem is significantly correlated with lower depression and higher personal satisfaction (Beck et al., 2001; Rosenberg, 1965) and greater purpose in life (Crumbaugh & Maholick, 1964; 1967). Thus, self-esteem is also an important attribute to assess and reinforce with counseling college students, adults, and any other population. Naturally, unrealistic self-esteem has also been shown to have detrimental effects (Twenge, Campbell, & Gentile, 2012; Szymanska, 2010) and such caution should be noted in any study. Our study focused on the more traditional, previously mentioned positive attributes of self-esteem that provide a buffer against depression, anxiety, and the *existential vacuum*.

Purpose in Life

Frankl (1969; 1997) theorized the search for meaning was the primary motivational force in human existence, but according to Yalom (1980) life may not have a specific purpose in and of itself. Rather, purpose in life is subjective and may depend on the particular individual, personal circumstances, and life experiences (Frankl, 1969). More recently, Morgan and Farsides (2009) asserted that meaning in life might be more important and more complex than indicated in previous studies. Purpose in life may be influenced through discovering creativity within oneself, helping others, political activity, spirituality, science, creative artistry, etc. Inability to find meaning in life may lead to an *existential vacuum* experienced through boredom, indifference, and anxiety that are likely to inhibit personal fulfillment. Detachment from meaning may also result in the pursuit of illicit pleasures (e.g., drug abuse, risky sexual behavior, or problem gambling) in order to manufacture some sense of excitement to escape from boredom (Crumbaugh & Maholick, 1964; 1967; Heisel & Flett, 2004).

Meaning in life has been defined as "coherence and purpose in one's existence, and the pursuit and attainment of worthwhile goals" (Reker & Wong, 1988; p. 221). Further, purpose in life has also been highly correlated with meaning in life (Crumbaugh & Maholick, 1964). Meaning in life has been correlated with emotional well-being (Lightsey & Boyraz, 2011; Schulenberg, et al., 2013) and a concept of critical importance to the human condition (Wong, 2012a b). Crumbaugh and Maholick (1964) developed the Purpose in Life (PIL) test in the mid 1960's as an attitude scale based on Frankl's concept of the *existential vacuum*. In the present study, we used Crumbaugh and Maholick's PIL test to assess undergraduate and graduate student's responses to purpose in life. Various studies have used this measure to investigate connections between substance abuse and purpose in life, quite consistently showing significantly lower levels of purpose in life among substance abusers when compared to normative control groups (Crumbaugh & Maholick, 1964).

The Current Study

Given that numerous researchers have demonstrated the importance of constructs such as self-esteem (Beck et al., 2001; Rosenberg, 1965; 1989), life meaning (Frankl, 1997), and purpose in life (Crumbaugh, 1968), as positive attributes that aid in human resiliency, we decided to study how these positive attributes might be manifest in a sample college population. Research on college students suggests incident rates of depression, anxiety, and substance abuse are high (Gallagher, 2011; Kay & Schwartz, 2011; Levine & Dean, 2012). Furthermore, students who attempt suicide score also high in areas of depression, anxiety, and abuse of substances (Gallagher, 2011; Kay & Schwartz, 2010).

One of the largest annual studies of incoming college freshmen has for more than two decades posed a question on "Developing a meaningful philosophy of life" (Astin et al., 2011). Roughly twenty-thousand students each year fill out this survey. Astin and colleagues have been researching meaning in life among college students for over 20 years and increasingly students have cited life meaning as important. A 2010 study published in the *Journal of the American College Health Association* reported optimism, health values and religiousness were positively correlated with greater psychological health, well-being, and less distress (Burris, Brechting, Salsman, & Carlson, 2009). Given the importance of meaning and purpose among college students with respect to their well-being, this is the main focus of our present research.

In addition, we recruited both undergraduate and graduate level students, so that a comparison between these two groups could be made. We also looked at demographic variables (i.e., age, ethnicity, marital status, and religiosity) of participants across the constructs. Our hypotheses was that purpose in life, as measured by the PIL test, would be very important to students in our survey and that graduate students who are generally older and more experienced would evidence higher scores on both purpose in life and self-esteem. For the purposes of this research, the RSES was paired with the Purpose in Life test in order to compare self-esteem to PIL within the college populations being surveyed. Given the

established importance of developing purpose in life as a countermeasure against depression, anxiety, and substance abuse, this research study has as a primary goal the assessing current college students' purpose in life and the related construct of self-esteem. We hypothesized that purpose in life was important to college students and that PIL is related to self-esteem.

Method

Participants

The total sample for this study included 497 participants from the two institutions in the Northeastern part of the United States, one a private, secular all graduate university and the second, a Catholic affiliated institution composed both of undergraduate and graduate students. These particular institutions were selected as the authors work at both. The survey was sent out via Survey Monkey through the two institution's listservs to students in the College of Education at the Catholic university and the entire student population at the secular university. Though using the listserv is efficient, a response rate cannot be determined. Approximations, based on number of students on the listserves, are 1500 sent surveys, for an estimated response rate of just above 30%.

Participant demographics are as follows: 77.7% ($n = 386$) female and 20.5 % ($n = 102$) male, with the majority of respondents describing themselves as Caucasian (87.7%, $n = 436$) and the other participants identifying as African American (1.8%, $n = 9$), Asian American (1.8%, $n = 9$), Hispanic (1.6%, $n = 8$), Multi-ethnic (3.2%, $n = 16$), and American Indian (0.6%, $n = 3$). Respondents ranged in age from 18 years to 46 years, with the majority of participants between 18 – 21 years (47.1%, $n = 231$), followed by those over the age of 25 (31.2%, $n = 153$), and 22 - 25 years (21.6%, $n = 106$). The sample included both currently enrolled undergraduate college students ($n = 287$) and graduate students ($n = 210$). Of the undergraduate students, 61 were freshman, 55 were sophomores, 80 were juniors, and 81 were seniors.

A demographic questionnaire provided the researchers with personal information about their participants such as participant's marital status, religious, and spiritual practices. Of the sample, most identified as single (73.6%, $n = 366$), followed by married (20.9%, $n = 104$), and divorced (3.4%, $n = 17$). When asked about religious practice, participants were evenly split between those who did identify as religious (40.2%, $n = 200$) and those who were not religious (40.4%, $n = 201$). Sixteen and one-half percent ($n = 82$) indicated that they were not sure whether they identified as religious. A little over half of participants (52.9%, $n = 263$) had a spiritual practice (defined as meditation, prayer, or contemplation), while 37% ($n = 184$) did not, and 8.2% ($n = 41$) reported they were not sure.

Instruments

The Purpose in Life Test. The Purpose in Life (PIL) (Crumbaugh & Maholick, 1968) test was developed to assess Frankl's theory (1969) that the primary aspiration of people is to develop a purpose in life. The authors selected the PIL for the study because the test directly assesses purpose in life. The instrument is designed to measure the extent by which respondents evaluate themselves as having a purpose in life. The PIL consists of 20 open-ended statements, each having 7 graded possible answers in a Likert scale format measuring the extent of one's meaning and purpose in life (Crumbaugh, 1968). Higher scores indicate a stronger degree of purpose in life. Split-half reliability for the PIL was found to be high (0.90), and test-retest coefficients were found to be sufficient (0.83 by Meier and Edwards (1974) and 0.79 by Reker and Cousins (1979). PIL has convergent validity with several questionnaires (e.g., $r = 0.68$ with Frankl's questionnaire, $r = 0.33$ with the Kuder preference scale, $r = 0.32$ with Rotter's internal-external locus of control scale; reported in Crumbaugh & Maholick, 1981).

Self-Esteem. Another construct related to purpose in life and psychological health is that of self-esteem. The study of self-esteem is important in counseling research because it has been associated with psychological well-being and is inversely correlated with depression (Beck et al., 2001; Rosenberg, 1989; Sanchez & Baron, 2003). One of the most extensively used instruments to assess self-esteem is the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES; Rosenberg, 1965; 1989). Self-esteem is defined as an individual's set of thoughts and feelings about her or his own worth and importance (Rosenberg, 1965). The RSES is a one-dimensional instrument derived from a phenomenological conception of self-esteem that captures subjects' global perception of their own worth by means of a 10-item scale, 5 positively worded items and 5 negatively worded items. The RSES was designed as a Guttman Scale, though is almost exclusively scored as a Likert-type scale. The 10 items are answered on a four point scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree (Rosenberg, 1989). The original sample for which the scale was developed consisted of 5,024 high school juniors and seniors from randomly selected schools in New York State. Although younger than the authors' study of college students, purpose in life appears very important to both populations (Crumbaugh & Maholick, 1964; Rosenberg, 1989), and many of the undergraduates in

the authors' study would be close in age to high school juniors and seniors. The RSES generally reports high reliability, test-retest scores typically in the range of .82 - .88 and Cronbach's alpha for various samples are in the range of .77 to .88 (Rosenberg, 1989).

Procedure

After approval from both institutions' Institutional Review Board, potential participants were invited to respond to the survey via electronic mail. The email had a link to the survey, which was housed at a commercial online site for electronic survey research. To collect the sample, students were contacted via departmental list serves, and permission to use list serves was granted from departmental chairpersons.

Results

The primary purpose of this study was to explore the how purpose in life and self-esteem were manifested in the lives of undergraduate and graduate students in two Private, northeastern universities, one secular and the other religiously affiliated. The results on the RSES and PIL confirmed our hypothesis that purpose in life and self-esteem would be established as significant by the collegiate population studied.

The hypothesis that purpose in life would be strongly correlated with self-esteem was also confirmed ($p < .001$). There was a significant ($p < .001$) negative correlation ($F = -.537$) between purpose in life and self-esteem due to reverse scoring on the PIL instrument. Interestingly, there was a significant difference reported between undergraduates and graduate students on the variables self-esteem and purpose in life. An independent samples *t*-test ($t = 2.97$) found a significant ($p < .01$) difference between graduate ($M = 15.98$, $SD = 4.27$) and undergraduate students ($M = 17.37$, $SD = 5.53$) on self-esteem. Undergraduates reported higher self-esteem. For purpose in life, an independent samples *t*-test ($t = 4.16$) revealed a significant difference ($p < .001$) between graduate and undergraduate students. Graduate students ($M = 101.3$, $SD = 21.61$) had higher scores on purpose in life than undergraduates ($M = 90.84$, $SD = 31.41$).

Self-esteem and purpose in life also were examined as they related to age of participants. The sub groups by age who completed the self-esteem inventory included ages 18 - 21 ($n = 225$), ages 22 - 25 ($n = 101$) and over 25 ($n = 149$) for a total of 475. The sub groups for purpose in life consisted of ages 18 - 21 ($n = 231$), ages 22 - 25 ($n = 106$) and over 25 ($n = 153$) for a total of 490. ANOVA tests indicated that there was a significant difference ($p < .01$) among the ages for both self-esteem ($F = 5.80$) and Purpose in Life ($F = 5.64$). A post hoc Scheffe test indicated that for self-esteem there was a significant ($p < .01$) difference between groups ages 18 to 21 and the group ages 22 to 25, but no significant difference between the groups ages 18 to 21 and those over 25. Also, there was no significant difference between ages 22 to 25 and those over 25. A post hoc Scheffe test indicated that for purpose in life there was a significant ($p < .01$) difference between ages 18 to 21 and ages 22 to 25, and a significant difference ($p < .01$) between ages 18 to 21 and over 25. There was no significant difference between ages 22 to 25 and those over 25.

In order to compare factors across the two types of institutions, secular and religiously affiliated, a number of tests were used. To examine the self-esteem and purpose in life of the participants, according to institution, an independent sample *t*-test was used. Because Levine's Test ($F = 7.59$, $p < .001$) indicated that the variances between the two groups were significantly unequal, the results of the *t*-test assuming inequality of variance was used.

There was a significant difference in the mean score for purpose in life between students at the two institutions. The mean score of graduate, non-religiously affiliated students on purpose in life was 100.69, compared to 94.48 of the mean of students at the religiously affiliated institution students (see Table 1). Independent samples *t*-test ($t = 2.642$, $df = 359$) was found to be significant ($p < .01$) with an assumption of unequal variances (see Table 2).

Age

There was no significant difference ($p > .05$) between the two institutions on the variable self-esteem, according to age. However, an ANOVA found a significant difference ($p < .05$) among the ages on the PIL, but a Scheffe was inconclusive in determining whether the difference was due to a small sample size for some of the age groups. This finding lends support to the possibility that the difference is perhaps due to undergraduate versus graduate students.

Ethnicity

With regard to self-esteem there was no significant ($p > .05$) difference among ethnic groups. However, with regard to purpose in life, there was a significant difference ($p < .001$) among the ethnic groups among students at the two institutions. A post hoc Scheffé test revealed that the only significant difference was between those who failed to identify their ethnicity.

Marital Status

There was no significant difference based on marital status for self-esteem, however there was a significant ($p < .001$) difference on purpose in life. Subsequent post hoc Scheffé test revealed that the difference was between those who failed to identify their marital status and those who did not.

Religion

Again, there was no significant difference for self-esteem, but a difference ($p < .001$) for purpose in life. A Scheffé test revealed that the difference was between those who answered the demographic question on religion and those who did not.

Discussion and Implications for Counselors

The survey results indicated that purpose in life was important to the undergraduate and graduate students in this study. The results also suggested a strong correlation between purpose in life and self-esteem, and thus the research hypothesis was supported and the null hypothesis is rejected. The survey results provided some support to Astin, Astin, and Lindholm's (2011) findings that meaning in life is very important to college students.

In view of the above, our recommendation is for college and university counselors to promote purpose in life among the students they counsel. Purpose in life could be promoted through journaling, home work exercises, service projects, bibliotherapy, and simply discussing the topic in counseling sessions (e.g., "How is purpose/meaning present in your life?" or "How could you begin to develop stronger purpose/meaning in your life?").

Until recently there has been very little reported in the college counseling literature regarding purpose in life. It is our opinion that counselors serving the collegiate population should address existential issues such as purpose in life as frequently as depression, anxiety, or career concerns. A further recommendation we might glean from this and other studies (Astin & Astin, 2009; Frankl, 1969; Troutman, Nies & Bently, 2011) is to include a question on purpose in life in clinical intakes so as to gauge the relative presence or absence of the construct in students' lives.

Self-esteem has long been a significant factor in optimal mental health and positive self-esteem serves as a countermeasure against depression (Rosenberg, 1965; 1989) and it is the opinion of these researchers that college counselors would be wise to assess it. Undergraduate students scored significantly higher on self-esteem but report significantly lower scores on purpose in life than graduate students surveyed. These confounding results may be explained in that undergraduate students may have unrealistically high self-esteem given less life experience than their graduate student colleagues. Graduate students' lower self-esteem may be mitigated by higher expectations and tougher competitions in Graduate studies. They also reported a higher sense of purpose in life than undergraduates, because they might have a better idea regarding their future career than undergraduates.

Counselors working with undergraduate and graduate college students might use this information to inform their practice, and ask these groups about factors such as self esteem and purpose in life at intake, or throughout the counseling relationship. Once assessed, counselors could assign homework such as journaling, cognitive restructuring regarding life purpose, or simply asking students, "What brings meaning to your life?" Further, results from this study indicated some differences in self esteem between particular age groups. Students aged 18-25 and 22-25 were significantly different, and counselors might consider this when working with these particular aged college students.

The cautionary note of unrealistic self-esteem in college students as researched by Twenge, Campbell, and Gentile (2012) and Szymanska (2010) warrant more attention. Because undergraduates in our study scored higher in self-esteem than the graduate student population, yet were lower in purpose in life, questions should be raised regarding the "negative" construct of self-esteem. Although self-esteem usually has been associated with positive mental health (Beck, et al., 2001; Rosenberg, 1989; 1965), unrealistic self-esteem associated with less life experience or based on topical issues popularity, appearance (e.g., weight, dress, etc.) and the like may be counter to optimal mental health (Szymanska, 2010; Twenge,

Campbell, & Gentile, 2012). College and university counselors should address what self-esteem in their student clients is based upon (e.g., own personal values vs. what peers think).

Finally, because spirituality and religious values also have a strong relationship to purpose and meaning in life (Astin et al., 2010; Frankl, 1969), college and university counselors should engage students who identify as religious or spiritual in a discussion on the importance of the client's spiritual practice and how that practice enhances their personal life and helps them manage depression, anxiety and personal disappointment. The issue is not for the counselor to play a spiritual role, but rather to help the client explore how their personal beliefs and spiritual values can enhance their sense of life purpose, provide a buffer against depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation and make for a more meaningful collegiate experience.

Limitations and Future Research

Because the sample size for this study was limited to two small, private universities in the Northeast United States, a limitation of the study is the degree to which these results may be generalized to the general population. In addition, undergraduate and graduate students may differ on self-esteem and purpose in life particularly if there is a wide age gap between such groups. Further research is needed to confirm the results beyond small, private college students. Additionally, the research relied on data that was self-reported, which is susceptible to social desirability response bias. The research was cross sectional in design, and future research using longitudinal designs might explore more deeply how the constructs of self-esteem and purpose in life change after several sessions of counseling. Further, qualitative study into the essence behind self esteem and purpose in life with college students might help capture the experience of this sample and lead researchers to a more in depth understanding of these notions, and thus providing information for mental health and college counselors. Despite the study's shortcomings, the present research offers important information for counselors working in colleges across the United States.

Conclusion

This study on purpose in life and self-esteem has highlighted the importance of these constructs in a sample of college students. The survey also illustrates a strong positive relationship between purpose in life and self-esteem in a sample of college students. Previous research has established purpose in life serves an important buffer against depression (Beck et al., 2001; Crumbaugh & Maholick, 1967; 1968) and college and university counselors should assist college students in exploring purpose in life as a means for pursuing optimal mental health, while promoting realistic self-esteem for similar reasons. As this study was limited to two private institutions in the Northeast United States, further study of broader collegiate populations is warranted.

References

- Astin, A. W., Astin, H. S. (2009). *Beyond 2020:Envisioning the Future of Universities in America*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc.
- Astin, A. W., Astin, H. S., & Lindholm, J. A. (2010). *Cultivating the spirit: How College can enhance students' inner lives*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Beck, A. T., Brown, G. K., Steer, R. A., Kuyken, W., & Grisham, J. (2001). Psychometric properties of the beck self-esteem scale. *Behaviour Research and Therapy*, 39(1), 115-124.
- Burris, J. L., Brechting, E. H., Salsman, J., & Carlson, C. R. (2009). Factors associated With the psychological well-being and distress of university students. *Journal of American College Health*, 57(5), 536-544. doi: 10.320/JACH.57.5.536-544.
- Chickering, A. W., & Reeser, L. (2nd Ed.) (1993). *Education and identity*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Crumbaugh, J. C. (1968). Cross-validation of the purpose in life test based on Frankl's concepts. *Journal of Individual Psychology*, 24, 74-81.
- Crumbaugh, J. C., & Maholick, L. T. (1964). An experimental study in existentialism: The psychometric approach of Frankl's concept of noogenic neurosis. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 20, 200-207.

- Crumbaugh, J. C., & Maholick, L. T. (1967). An experimental study in existentialism: The psychometric approach to Frankl's concept of noogenic neurosis. In V. E. Frankl (Ed.), *Psychotherapy and existentialism*, pp. 183-197. New York: Washington Square Press.
- Crumbaugh, J. C., & Maholick, L. T. (1981). *Manual of instructions for the Purpose-in-Life-Test*. Murfreesboro, TN: Psychometric Affiliates.
- Dalton, J. C., & Crosby, P. C. (2010). When faith fails: Why nurturing purpose and Meaning are so critical to student learning and development in college. *Journal of College & Character*, 11(3), 1-6.
- DeWitz, S. J., Woolsey, M. L., & Walsh, W. M. (2009). College student retention: An Exploration of the relationship between self-efficacy beliefs and purpose-in-life among college students. *Journal of College Student Development*, 37(3), 424-450.
- Frankl, V. E. (1967). *Psychotherapy and existentialism: Selected papers on logotherapy*. New York: Washington Square Press/Pocket Books.
- Frankl, V. E. (1969). *The will to meaning: Foundations and applications of logotherapy*. New York: Plume.
- Frankl, V. E. (1997). *Man's search for ultimate meaning*. New York: Plume.
- Greenway, K. A. (2006). The Role of Spirituality in Purpose in Life and Academic Engagement. *Journal of College and Character*, 7(6), 1-5.
- Gallagher, R. P. (2011). *National survey of counseling center directors*. Alexandria, VA: The International Association of Counseling Services, Inc.
- Gorsuch, R. L., & Miller, W. R. (1999). *Assessing spirituality*. In W.R. Miller (Ed.), *Integrating spirituality into treatment* (pp 47-64). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Granello, D. H., & Granello, P. F. (2007). *Suicide: An essential guide for helping professionals and educators*. Boston: Pearson.
- Harlow, L. L., Newcomb, M. D., & Bentler, P. M. (1986). Depression, self-derogation, Substance use, and suicidal ideation: Lack of purpose-in-life as a mediational factor. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 42(1), 5-21.
- Heisel, M. J., & Flett, G. L. (2004). Purpose in life, satisfaction with life, and suicidal ideation in a clinical sample. *Journal of Psychopathology and Behavioral Assessment*, 26, 127-135.
- Kay, J., & Schwartz, V. (2010). *Mental health care in the college community*. West Sussex, United Kingdom: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Kwee, G. T. M. (2012). Relational Buddhism: A psychological quest for meaning and Sustainable happiness. In P. T. P. Wong (2nd Ed.), *The human quest for meaning: Theories, research, and applications*. New York: Routledge: Taylor & Francis.
- Levine, A. E., & Dean, D. R. (2012). *Generation on a tightrope: A portrait of today's college student*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Lightsey, O. R., & Boyraz, G. (2011). Do positive thinking and meaning mediate the Positive effect of life satisfaction? *Canadian Journal of Behavioural Science*, 43(3), 203-213.
- Meier, A., & Edwards, H. (1974). Purpose in life test: Age and sex differences. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 30, 384-386.
- Morgan, J., & Farsides, T. (2009). Measuring meaning in life. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 10(2), 197-214.
- Much, K., & Swanson, A. L. (2010). Are college students really getting sicker? *Journal of College Student Development*, 24(2), 86-97.
- Reker, G., & Cousins, J. (1979). Factor structure, construct validity, and reliability of the Seeking of Noetic Goals (SONG) and Purpose in Life (PIL) tests. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 35, 85-91.
- Reker, G. T. & Wong, P. T. (1988). Aging an individual process: Toward a theory of personal meaning. In J. E. Bitten & V. L. Bengston (Eds.), *Emergent theories of aging*, pp 216-249. New York: Springer.
- Rosenberg, M. (1965). *Society and the adolescent self-image*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Rosenberg, M. (Rev. Ed.). (1989). *Society and adolescent self-image*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press.
- Sanchez, E., & Barron, A. (2003). Social psychology of mental health: The social structure and personality perspective. *The Spanish Journal of Psychology*, 6, 3-11.
- Scannell, E. D., Allen, F. C. L., & Burton, J. (2002). Meaning in life and positive and negative well-being. *North American Journal of Psychology*, 4(1), 93-112.
- Schluckebier, M. E. (2013). *Dreams worth pursuing: How college students develop and Articulate their purpose in life*. (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from <http://ir.uiowa.edu/etd/2625>.

- Schulenberg, S. E., Baczwaski, B. J., & Buchanan, E. M. (2013). Measuring search for meaning: A factor-analytic evaluation of the seeking of noetic goals test (SONG). *Journal of Happiness Studies*. doi: 10.1007/s10902-013-9446-7.
- Szymanska, K. (2010). Unlocking psychological health: Unconditional self-acceptance. *The Coaching Psychologist*, 6(2), 122-123.
- Troutman, M., Nies, M. A., & Bently, M. (2011). Measuring successful aging in southern black older adults. *Educational Gerontology*, 37, 38-50.
- Twenge, J., Campbell, W. K., & Gentile, B. (2012). Generational increases in agentic self-evaluations among American college students, 1966-2009. *Self and Identity*, 11(4), 409-427. doi: 10.1080/15298868.2011.576820.
- Wong, P. T. P. (2012b). The meaning mindset: Measurement and implications. *International Journal of Existential Psychology and Psychotherapy*, 4, 1-3.
- Yalom, I. D. (1980). *Existential psychotherapy*. New York: Basic Book

Table 1. Purpose in life of religiously affiliated and non-religiously affiliated graduate and undergraduate students

<i>Purpose in Life</i>				
<i>School</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>SEM</i>
GradNon	149	100.7	21.85	1.79
GradUnderRel	340	94.5	28.13	1.53

Note. GradNon = graduate, non-religiously affiliated institution. GradUnderRel = graduate and undergraduate, religiously affiliated institution

Table 2. Purpose in life of religiously affiliated and non-religiously affiliated graduate and undergraduate students

<i>Independent Samples t test</i>			
	<i>F</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>DF</i>
EqualVar	7.59	2.39	487
NonEqualVar		2.64*	359

Note. * = (p < .01). EqualVar = equal variance assumed. NonEqualVar = non equal variance assumed.