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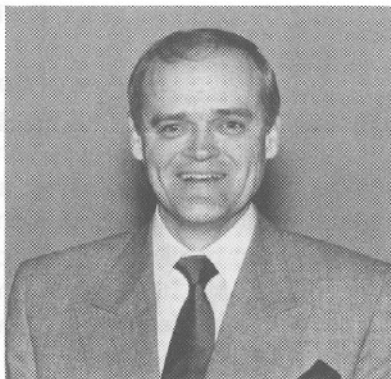
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Logotherapy and logotherapy: Challenges, opportunities, and some empirical findings

Gary T. Reker

(ABSTRACT) This paper points to empirical ways through which some of the challenges and opportunities facing logotherapy and logotherapists can be met. A number of studies are reviewed which demonstrate that meaning contributes to the physical, mental, and psychological well-being of the individual. Other studies are reviewed which show that meaning buffers the impact of stress on physical health and enhances levels of psychological well-being and self-esteem. Implications of the findings for theory, research, and practice by logotherapists are discussed.

In 1977 I was told by my empirically oriented colleagues that the topic of meaning was a concern for philosophers, historians, and humanists, but not psychologists. I was told that meaning was something that was not amenable to measurement. I challenged that position. For the next decade, inspired by the writings of Viktor Frankl, I set out to operationalize the construct of personal meaning.



I developed the Life Attitude Profile-Revised (LAP-R), a 48-item, 7-point measure of meaning and purpose in life and the search for meaning.^{2,7,8} The LAP-R consists of six factorially derived dimensions: purpose, coherence, life control, death acceptance, existential vacuum, and goal seeking. The combined subscales of purpose and coherence operationalize personal meaning. Purpose refers to having life goals and having a mission in life and having a sense of direction from the past, in the present, and toward the future. Implicit in purpose is the notion of worthwhileness and what is of central importance in a person's life. Coherence refers to having a logically

integrated and consistent analytical and intuitive understanding of self, others, and life in general. Implicit in coherence is a sense of order and reason for existence, a clear sense of personal identity, and greater social consciousness. Thus, personal meaning is a dual-component construct.

I developed a companion scale of sources of meaning called the Sources of Meaning Profile (SOMP). The SOMP is a 16 item, 7-point scale of how meaningful respondents find a number of sources of meaning to be in their life (e.g., personal relationships, traditions and culture, personal achievement, financial security, etc.). Through factor analysis, the 16 sources were further grouped into four categories: self-transcendence (sources that transcend the self--e.g., altruism), collectivism (sources that focus on the societal good--e.g., cultural ties), individualism (sources that focus on enhancement of the individual--e.g., personal growth), and self-preoccupation (sources that focus on self-interests or that are self-serving--e.g., material possessions).

Both scales, available on request from the author, have been used in a number of studies to test hypotheses derived from Frankl's logotherapy;^{3,5} to examine the link between meaning and health outcomes;^{9,10,12} and to identify the mechanism by which meaning promotes health.^{6,11} What follows are summary descriptions of the findings of these studies.

Review of Some Empirical Findings

Evaluation of Basic Hypotheses

Frankl's principal proposition and the associated corollaries lead to a number of testable hypotheses: a) given that the will to meaning is a primary and universal human motive, it should remain relatively high for individuals at all age levels; b) given that the discovery of meaning and purpose requires time and maturity, they should increase with advancing age; c) given that a deeper sense of meaning can only be discovered when an individual moves toward a self-transcendent state, those individuals who derive meaning from several self-transcendent sources should experience a greater degree of ultimate meaning.

In a test of the first two hypotheses, we assessed the life attitudes of 300 men and women at five developmental stages from young adulthood to old age (16 to 93 years).⁸ As predicted, no significant age differences were found for the Will to Meaning subscale of the original Life Attitude Profile (LAP); the scores remained uniformly high at every developmental stage. Life purpose showed the predicted linear increase with advancing age. The elderly reported higher levels of life purpose compared to middle-aged and younger respondents.

The third hypothesis was tested in a study exploring the depth, breadth, and thematic content of sources of meaning (Purpose + Coherence = Personal Meaning) across the life span.⁵ A total of 360 young, middle-aged, and older adults completed both the LAP-R and the SOMP. The SOMP sources of meaning were categorized into four "depth" levels of increasing comprehensiveness. While all four SOMP levels were significantly correlated with purpose, coherence, and personal meaning, self-transcendence was the strongest predictor (see Table 1). Comparisons of SOMP levels with each other showed that the correlations of SOMP levels with the components of meaning increased significantly and in direct proportion to commitment to more comprehensive levels of sources of meaning. In other words, individuals who find meaning from sources transcending self-interests experience a greater degree of purpose, coherence, and ultimate meaning in life, supporting Frankl's theoretical view.

Table 1

Correlation of SOMP levels with measures of purpose, coherence, and personal meaning

SOMP Levels	Purpose	Coherence	Personal Meaning
Self-transcendence (ST)	.31***	.53***	.49***
Collectivism (C)	.23***	.38***	.35***
Individualism (I)	.12*	.15**	.16**
Self-preoccupation (SP)	.11*	.11*	.12*

*** $p < .001$

** $p < .01$

* $p < .05$ (two-tailed)

Meaning and Health

According to Frankl, positive affective states such as happiness are by-products of having fulfilled one's meaning. Happiness cannot be pursued for its own sake; it must ensue. It follows that individuals who experience a deeper and broader sense of meaning and purpose enjoy better health as expressed through greater life satisfaction, higher levels of psychological and physical well-being, and positive mental health.

In the life-span study of 300 men and women cited above, life-purpose was significantly correlated with psychological and physical well-being for young (16-29 years), early middle-age (30-49 years), late middle-age (50-64 years), young-old (65-74 years), and old-old (75-93 years). Psychological

well-being is a measure of the presence of positive emotions (e.g., happiness, joy, peace of mind) and the absence of negative emotions (e.g., fear, anxiety, and depression). Physical well-being is a measure of self-rated physical health and vitality coupled with perceived absence of physical discomfort.⁸

In a second life-span study of young (N=120), middle-aged (N=120), and older (N=120) males and females, the impact of breadth of meaning on personal meaning, psychological well-being, and physical well-being was examined.⁵ Breadth of meaning was operationally defined as the number of sources on the SOMP measure rated as either "very" or "extremely" meaningful. Scores on the breadth distribution were split at the median to form two groups: low breadth and high breadth. Figure 1 shows the results for personal meaning as a function of breadth of meaning and age group. Results for psychological and physical well-being are presented in Figure 2. The findings show that breadth of meaning culminates in heightened feelings of ultimate meaning and psychological well-being for all age groups. Breadth of meaning had no impact on the physical well-being of young and middle-aged adults, but older adults high on breadth enjoyed greater perceived physical health compared to those low on breadth of meaning.

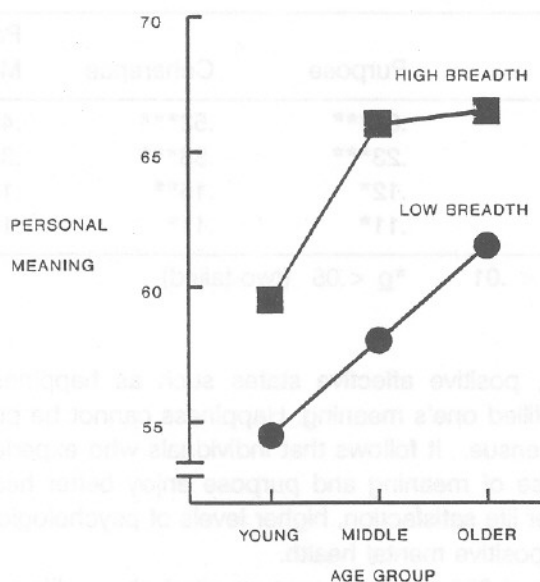


Figure 1. Personal meaning as a function of breadth and age.

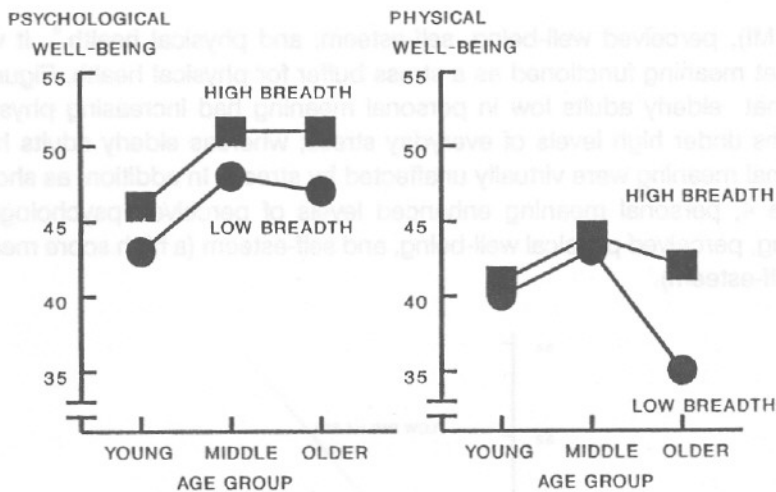


Figure 2. Perceived well-being as a function of breadth and age.

In a another study of the profile and processes of successful aging, 186 community residing and institutionalized elderly completed a battery of measures, including the LAP.¹² The successful agers were defined as those who enjoyed a relatively high level of physical health, psychological well-being, and competence in adapting to the changes that generally accompany growing old. Personal meaning was found to be significantly higher in the successful elderly compared to their unsuccessful counterparts. Furthermore, personal meaning was found to be a potent predictor of positive health indicators such as happiness (Beta = .36, $p < .001$) and perceived well-being (Beta = .27, $p < .001$), and the absence of negative indicators such as depression (Beta = -.47, $p < .001$) and psychopathology (Beta = -.34, $p < .001$).

Meaning in Health Promotion

In the previous studies, meaning was identified as a powerful personal resource that is importantly linked to a variety of health indicators. A related question is the nature of the mechanism through which meaning promotes health. Meaning may operate to reduce the impact of stress on an individual, leading to better health. Meaning may function as a stress moderator (buffer), a stress mediator (damper), a generalized health-enhancer, or some combination of these.

In a study addressing these issues, 103 community adults, ranging from 60 to 90 years, completed measures of everyday stress, personal meaning

index (PMI), perceived well-being, self-esteem, and physical health.⁶ It was found that meaning functioned as a stress buffer for physical health. Figure 3 shows that elderly adults low in personal meaning had increasing physical symptoms under high levels of everyday stress; whereas elderly adults high in personal meaning were virtually unaffected by stress. In addition, as shown in Figure 4, personal meaning enhanced levels of perceived psychological well-being, perceived physical well-being, and self-esteem (a high score means lower self-esteem).

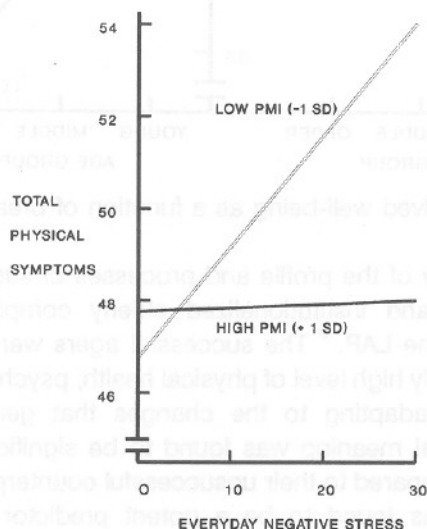


Figure 3. Moderating effect of personal meaning on the physical health of older adults.

In a related study of physically healthy California elderly, evidence for stress buffering was found using a life events inventory (e.g., death of a spouse). In this study, personal meaning was a buffer for perceived psychological well-being, but not for physical health.

Finally, in a study of relatively healthy older adults, Underhill failed to find evidence for stress buffering.¹¹ She did, however, find that personal meaning enhanced the levels of psychological well-being and physical health for both daily hassles and life event stress.

Taken together, the research findings demonstrate that personal meaning plays a "dual" health-protecting and health-enhancing role. A high level of

personal meaning not only shields one from the negative impact of stress, but also enhances ones level of wellness.

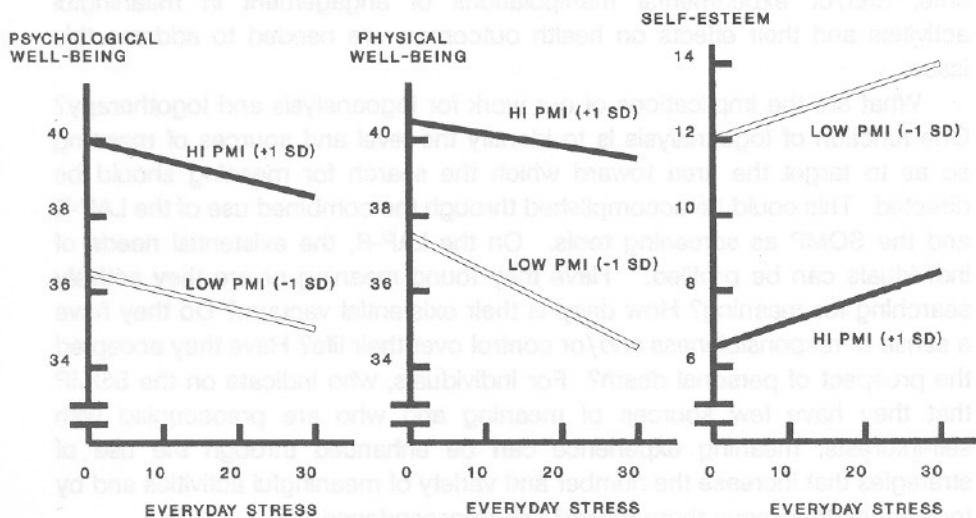


Figure 4. The health -enhancing effects of personal meaning.

Implications for Theory, Research, and Practice

To date the specific mechanisms underlying the stress/meaning/health relationship have not been clarified. The mediating link may well be what I call creative coping,⁴ one aspect of which is the process of cognitive restructuring. Cognitive restructuring refers to attempts to restructure, redefine, or reevaluate stressful situations in order to reduce their negative impact on health. It is a process of finding positive meaning in the situation; modification of attitudes, in logotherapy terms. Ways of finding positive meaning include seeing the side benefits of negative experiences, comparing oneself with others who are not doing as well, imagining a worse alternative and feeling "lucky," adopting an attitude of acceptance, or constructing a better match between expectations and what is realistically possible. Thus, cognitive restructuring increases the individual's discovery of meaning. Individuals high in personal meaning may actively engage in any one or more of the above restructuring processes. Future research is needed to test this hypothesis.

An important question not addressed in our cross-sectional studies is the direction of the meaning/health outcome relationship. Does a strong sense of meaning and purpose lead to a higher level of health, or does a high level

of health influence one's sense of meaning and purpose in life? Prospective panel studies, in which the same individuals are assessed at several points in time, and/or experimental manipulations of engagement in meaningful activities and their effects on health outcomes, are needed to address this issue.

What are the implications of our work for logotherapy and logotherapy? One function of logotherapy is to identify the level and sources of meaning so as to target the area toward which the search for meaning should be directed. This could be accomplished through the combined use of the LAP-R and the SOMP as screening tools. On the LAP-R, the existential needs of individuals can be profiled. Have they found meaning or are they actively searching for meaning? How deep is their existential vacuum? Do they have a sense of responsibility and/or control over their life? Have they accepted the prospect of personal death? For individuals, who indicate on the SOMP that they have few sources of meaning and who are preoccupied with self-interests, meaning experience can be enhanced through the use of strategies that increase the number and variety of meaningful activities and by techniques that move them toward self-transcendence.

The goal of logotherapy is to stimulate the will to meaning. The highest goal of most traditional therapies is the achievement of a fully integrated person, but they do little in moving the individual to a higher level of awareness. Logotherapy focuses on conscious experiences, accesses higher levels of consciousness, and is holistic by awakening the analytic and the creative sides of the brain. According to Eisenberg, logotherapy "restores health and hope by making people aware of the formidable power inherent in them, to stop feeling victimized, and take over control of their lives."^{1, p.67} Whether or not logotherapy has these effects can and should be tested empirically, using pre/post designs, the LAP-R, the SOMP, measures of health, and measures of hope or optimism.

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This paper is dedicated to his good friend, Dr. Arthur Underwood, who at the time of his writing, was engaged in a courageous battle with cancer. May he find meaning in his suffering and a sense of optimism to cope with his illness.

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