

THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN MEANING & PURPOSE IN LIFE,  
HOPE, AND PSYCHOSOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

A Senior Honors Thesis

by

ANNAHITA ANNA VARAHRAMI

Submitted to the Office of Honors Programs  
& Academic Scholarships  
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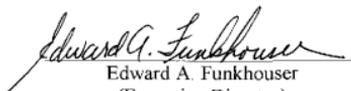
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## ABSTRACT

The Relationships Between Meaning & Purpose in Life,  
Hope, and Psychosocial Development. (April 2001)

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Existential psychology attempts to enhance psychological well-being through the awareness of meaning and purpose in life. Similarly, counseling theories based on Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial development promote mental health and successful growth. This study investigates the relationships between meaning and purpose in life, hope, and psychosocial development. Subjects were asked to complete four self-report inventories (a measure of personal meaning, a measure of psychosocial development, and two measures of hope). Correlational analyses of the gathered data reveal that there are significant correlations between high meaning, successful development, and high hope. Although comparisons of scores on all four measures generated significant correlations, the Herth Hope Scale consistently produced higher correlations with the two other measures than the

scores from the Snyder Hope Scale. These results suggest that the Herth Hope Scale, which contains a spiritual component, may relate better to constructs of meaning and purpose and successful psychosocial development which also reflects a spiritual nature.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The existential concepts of meaning and purpose in life have been scientifically studied in relation to mental and physical health (Ryff & Singer, 1998), successful aging (Wong & Watt, 1991), and time sensitivity (Doerries & Ridley, 1998). According to Viktor Frankl (1984), the developer of a system of existential therapy known as “logotherapy”, humans strive to find meaning and purpose in their lives. Frankl believes that one’s search for meaning is crucial for personal fulfillment and psychological well-being. In addition, Frankl postulated that the “existential vacuum,” a feeling of emptiness and meaninglessness, is an obstacle to achieving this sense of meaning and purpose in life. Empirical evidence suggests that as a result of the existential vacuum, one may suffer from neuroses such as depression, addiction, and aggression. Therefore, through logotherapy, the patient is reminded that there is inherent meaning in life in hopes of leading to the elimination of the existential vacuum and its adverse effects.

Everyday events and life experiences that potentially lead to the realization of meaning similarly influence psychological and social development. Erik Erikson (1982) developed a highly regarded theory of psychosocial development. Erikson maintained that within the span of a lifetime, every individual experiences eight

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This thesis follows the style and format of the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*.

developmental stages and he viewed each stage as merging with the next. These stages, as depicted in Table 1, are each characterized by a unique crisis or conflict. The extent of resolution in each stage shapes the characteristics of individual personality. An individual may adopt a favorable or unfavorable resolution attribute depending on their degree of psychosocial development. The attributes of successful resolution are characterized as trust, autonomy, initiative, industry, identity, intimacy, generativity, and integrity. Conversely, the unfavorable resolution attributes are mistrust, shame and doubt, guilt, inferiority, identity confusion, isolation, stagnation, and despair. An individual is not likely to exclusively attain the positive or negative attributes. However, there is a certain degree of resolution achieved at each stage.

Table 1

*Erikson's Stage of Psychosocial Development*

Stage	Period	Personality Attributes	Basic Virtue
1	Early Infancy	Trust vs. Mistrust	Hope (Faith)
2	Toddler	Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt	Will Power
3	Early Childhood	Initiative vs. Guilt	Purpose
4	Middle Childhood	Industry vs. Inferiority	Competence
5	Adolescence	Identity vs. Identity Confusion	Fidelity
6	Young Adulthood	Intimacy vs. Isolation	Love
7	Middle Adulthood	Generativity vs. Stagnation	Care
8	Older Adulthood	Integrity vs. Despair	Wisdom

Brammer (1984) noted that developmental counseling with older adults is shaped by Erikson's eighth and final stage of psychosocial development, integrity versus despair. He argued that positive resolution of this stage towards integrity gives meaning to all the other stages and, ultimately, meaning to life. On the other hand, the consequence of meaninglessness and emptiness is negative resolution and the development of despair. Although the literature suggests that an association exists between purpose in life and psychosocial development, there is no empirical evidence supporting this relationship.

In this study, the relationship between Frankl's theory of purpose and meaning, Erikson's theory of psychosocial development, and the construct of hope are examined. Frankl maintained that a high degree of hope is conducive to the awareness of purpose. In his book, *Man's Search for Meaning*, Frankl (1984) writes about his painful, yet meaningful, experiences in a concentration camp and outlines the development of logotherapy. Frankl conveys the importance of hope when he expresses his opinion about his fellow inmates. He writes, "They must not lose hope but should keep their courage in the certainty that the hopelessness of our struggle did not detract from its dignity and its meaning" (p. 104).

Erikson proposed that a higher degree of successful resolution in the first stage of trust versus mistrust is related to the fulfillment of hope and ultimately the development of faith (Erikson, 1982).

It is predicted that those who have a high degree of purpose and meaning in their lives will also have a greater degree of successful resolution of Erikson's eight stages of development. In other words, it is hypothesized that high scores on the Personal

Meaning Profile will be positively correlated with high scores on the Measures of Psychosocial Development. There is an additional hypothesis that subjects who have high meaning and purpose and positive psychosocial development will be more hopeful.

## CHAPTER II

### METHOD

#### Participants

The participants included 301 (144 male, 157 female) Texas A & M University undergraduate Introduction to Psychology students. They ranged in age from 17 to 42 years ( $M = 19.07$ ,  $SD = 1.68$ ).

#### Materials

Materials included first the Personal Meaning Profile, a self-report inventory used to measure people's perception of personal meaning in their lives (Wong, 1998). Second, the Measures of Psychosocial Development was used, measuring the degree of resolution in the eight stages of Eriksonian personality development (Hawley, 1988). Lastly, two measures of hope, the Herth Hope Scale (Herth, 1991) and the Snyder Hope Scale, were included (Snyder, 1994).

#### Procedure

Subjects were tested in groups of sixty. They completed the Personal Meaning Profile (PMP) followed by the Measures of Psychosocial Development (MPD), the Herth Hope Scale (HHS), and the Snyder Hope Scale (SHS). Students read standard instructions printed at the beginning of the test packet. Tests were scored according

to their respective scoring keys. Scores on the PMP reflected the participants' responses on a 7-point scale to 57 test items. The PMP is divided into seven potential sources of personal meaning. An individual score was computed for each source: achievement, relationship, religion, self-transcendence, self-acceptance, intimacy, and perceived justice. The MPD was analyzed for overall psychosocial development as well as for development in each of Erikson's eight stages. These scores were computed from the participants' completion of the 112-item questionnaire with a 5-point likert scale. The scores for hope were collected from the participants' responses to the two hope scales; both self-report inventories with a 4-point likert scale. The HHS (1991) evaluates the non-time-specific global focus of hope and includes a spiritual component. In contrast, the SHS (1994) is linked to goal orientation.

## CHAPTER III

### RESULTS

The findings are presented in two main categories. First, the correlational results for scores on the four measures are examined. Overall scores are computed for each measure, as well as subscores for the MPD and PMP. Scores on the MPD are divided into nine sections. One overall score of successful psychosocial development is achieved along with specific scores for successful psychosocial development at each of Erikson's eight stages. The PMP consists of eight scores, one score of overall perception of meaning and purpose and seven distinct scores for high meaning in each of the seven dimensions of meaning. The second set of analyses focuses on the statistical difference between the HHS and the SHS.

#### Correlational Analyses

The relationships between all four constructs are analyzed using Pearson's Correlation Coefficient. The overall scores on the PMP were highly correlated with the overall scores on the MPD ( $r = .711, p < .001$ ). Table 2 shows the correlations for overall scores on the PMP and scores of positive resolution for each of Erikson's eight stages. Scores of high purpose and meaning were significantly associated with

successful psychosocial development at each stage. These results support the hypothesis that meaning is related to psychosocial development. Although these

Table 2

*Correlations for Personal Meaning Profile and Eriksonian Development*

Stage	Virtue	Correlation to Overall Score of
		Personal Meaning
1 Trust vs. Mistrust	Hope (Faith)	.615
2 Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt	Will Power	.330
3 Initiative vs. Guilt	Purpose	.363
4 Industry vs. Inferiority	Competence	.540
5 Identity vs. Identity Confusion	Fidelity	.597
6 Intimacy vs. Isolation	Love	.503
7 Generativity vs. Stagnation	Care	.658
8 Integrity vs. Despair	Wisdom	.640

*Note.* All correlations are significant at the  $p < 0.001$  level (2-tailed).

results also verify Erikson's claim that the basic virtue gained through successful resolution of stage 3 is purpose, the higher correlations were found between purpose and stages 1, 7, and 8. Table 3 depicts the correlational results found between the HHS, the SHS, overall scores on the MPD and PMP, and specific dimensions of

both. Once again, all correlations were statistically significant. Both hope scales support our hypothesis that those with high meaning and successful development are more hopeful. However, as can be seen in Table 3, the HHS offers higher correlations in all comparisons than the SHS. These results lead to the next set of analyses.

Table 3

*Correlations for Hope Scales, Purpose in Life, and Psychosocial Development*

Variable	HHS	SHS
Overall Scores on MPD	.772	.573
Scores of Positive Resolution for Stage 1 of MPD	.660	.302
Overall Scores on PMP	.707	.494
Scores for Religion Dimension of the PMP	.454	.228

*Note. All correlations are significant at the  $p < 0.001$  level.*

### Statistical Difference Between Hope Scales

The next group of data represents testing the difference between two correlation coefficients for the Herth and Snyder Hope Scales. In all analyses, the HHS reveals a significantly higher correlation to unrelated data. Table 4 summarizes these findings. The correlation of the HHS scores with overall scores on the MPD was significantly greater than the correlation of the SHS scores and MPD ( $t(250) = 5.803, p < .001$ ). Similar results were found for all correlations and consistently showed that the HHS is associated with meaning and psychosocial development at a greater statistical level than the SHS.

Table 4

#### *Difference Between Correlations of Two Hope Scales*

Variable	HHS	SHS	t	df	significance
Overall Scores on MPD	.772	.573	5.803	250	$p < 0.001$
Positive Resolution of Stage 1 on MPD	.660	.302	9.389	282	$p < 0.001$
Overall Scores on PMP	.707	.494	5.680	265	$p < 0.001$
Scores for Religion Dimension of PMP	.454	.228	4.943	284	$p < 0.001$

## CHAPTER IV

### DISCUSSION

The primary aim of this study was to assess the relationship between three psychological constructs: meaning and purpose in life, psychosocial development, and hope. These constructs intuitively appear to be related and literature often assumes that a linkage has been scientifically established. However, this is the first empirical study analyzing these relationships. Meaning and purpose in life were operationally defined by scores on the Personal Meaning Profile (PMP). The PMP yields scores for a general sense of meaning and purpose in life and scores for meaning achieved in seven dimensions of life (achievement, relationship, religion, self-transcendence, self-acceptance, intimacy, and fair treatment or perceived justice). Wong (1993), the developer of the PMP, divided this measure of meaning into seven dimensions because of the tendency for individuals to ascribe varying amounts of meaning to different areas of life. A person may attribute their sense of meaning and purpose in life to one or just a couple of the dimensions. For that reason, it is valuable to look at the relationships between high meaning found in each dimension with our other variables.

Erik Erikson's theory of personality development is well-respected and widely valued due to his attention to the entire life span. Erikson maintained that the development of personality is dependent upon the degree and quality of resolution of

conflicts experienced by each individual during eight stages over the span of a lifetime. The eight stages of development according to Erikson are: trust vs. mistrust, autonomy vs. shame and doubt, initiative vs. guilt, industry vs. inferiority, identity vs. identity confusion, intimacy vs. isolation, generativity vs. stagnation, and integrity vs. despair. The Measures of Psychosocial Development (MPD) (Hawley, 1980) was designed to measure the extent of resolution of stage-based conflicts in Erikson's theory. In this study, the MPD is used to investigate the relationship between Eriksonian personality development, Frankl's theory of meaning and purpose in life (as measured by the PMP), and hope. In addition to being a research tool, the MPD is also used clinically, which underscores the applicability of Erikson's theory of psychosocial development. This may be due in part to the optimistic nature of Erikson's view of personality growth and development.

This optimism should result in a high sense of hope for those with successful development. In this study, hope was measured using the Herth Hope Scale (HHS) and the Snyder Hope Scale (SHS). Two hope scales were administered due to their unique characteristics. The HHS is more spiritually based and also addresses the impact of social support on hope. The SHS is more focused on measuring goal orientation and will power. All four measures (PMP, MPD, HHS, and SHS) were compared to evaluate the relationships between each measured construct.

### Overall Psychosocial Development and Purpose in Life

There is a moderate to large correlation that is statistically significant between high scores on the MPD and high scores on the PMP. This suggests that overall positive resolution of Erikson's eight stages is associated with one's perception of meaning and purpose in their lives. In other words, if someone has successfully defeated the stages of development, they are more likely to believe that life and the experiences that led to development are more meaningful.

### Hope

Both hope scales were significantly correlated with scores on the MPD and PMP. A high sense of hope is related to positive psychosocial development and a strong sense that life is meaningful. This clear relationship between scores on the hope scales and the MPD, however does not indicate that hope causes successful psychosocial development or vice versa. The same is true for the association found between hope and meaning. Both the HHS and the SHS support our hypotheses concerning high hope. Interestingly, in each comparison of hope with another variable, the HHS yielded higher correlations. These results lead to numerous questions. Is the HHS a better predictor of hope? Is the HHS's spiritual component responsible for these higher correlations? Are the correlations found with the HHS significantly higher than correlations found with the SHS?

Analyses of statistical differences between two correlations revealed that the

HHS results were significantly higher when compared to results of the SHS.

Typically, thoughts of meaning and purpose in life stimulate contemplations about religion and existential issues. This greater degree of association may be due to the spiritual nature of many of the variables in this study.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSIONS

The primary goal of this study was to empirically examine the associations between personality development with the related constructs of hope and meaning. Until this point, it was assumed that these constructs were related. The results of this study provide an empirical foundation for this association.

Significant conclusions can be drawn from the findings of this study and suggests possibilities for further research. Although the population size of the present investigation was large enough for statistical significance, it would be interesting to conduct a similar study with an other populations, such as the elderly. Most of the current participants were college-aged students. Considering that psychosocial development does not stop at young adulthood, the results of future research could indicate different levels of psychosocial development, meaning, and hope in older adults.

It would also be interesting to evaluate the relationships between the HHS and SHS with other constructs, such as self-esteem and depression. Future research could examine if the HHS is truly a better predictor of hope or if it is just more related to constructs that relate to spirituality and social support.

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## APPENDIX A

## Personal Meaning Profile (Wong, 1998)

Instructions: Please read each statement carefully and indicate to what extent it characterizes your own life. Please respond according to the following scale and circle your response on the answer sheet.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5                      6                      7  
 Not at all                      Moderately                      A great deal

1. I have a good family life.
2. I believe I can make a difference in the world.
3. I am at peace with God.
4. I have learned that setbacks and disappointments are an inevitable part of life.
5. I believe in an ultimate purpose in life.
6. I engage in creative work.
7. I am successful in achieving my aspirations.
8. I pursue worthwhile objectives.
9. I strive to achieve my goals.
10. I care about other people.
11. I have someone to share my intimate feelings with.
12. I believe in the value of my pursuits.
13. I seek to actualize my potentials.
14. I have found that there is rough justice in this world.
15. I strive to make this world a better place.
16. I am at peace with myself.
17. I have confidants to give me emotional support.
18. I relate well to others.
19. I have a sense of mission or calling.
20. I seek to do God's will.
21. I like challenges.
22. I believe that human life is governed by moral laws.
23. It is important to dedicate my life to a cause.
24. I take initiative.
25. I am able to make full use of my abilities.
26. I strive to do my best in whatever I am doing.
27. I have a number of good friends.
28. I am trusted by others.
29. I am committed to my work.
30. I have a purpose and direction in life.
31. I seek higher values – values that transcend self-interests.
32. I am highly regarded by others.
33. I seek to glorify God.
34. I am enthusiastic about what I do.
35. Life has treated me fairly.
36. I accept my limitations.
37. I have a mutually satisfying loving relationship.
38. I am at peace with my past.
39. I believe that there is coherence and continuity in my life.
40. I do not give up when I encounter setbacks or obstacles.

41. I am altruistic and helpful.
42. I am liked by others.
43. I have found someone that I love deeply.
44. I strive toward personal growth.
45. I bring happiness to others.
46. I accept what cannot be changed.
47. I am persistent and resourceful in attaining my goals.
48. I value my work.
49. I make a significant contribution to society.
50. I contribute to the well-being of others.
51. I believe in afterlife.
52. I believe that one can have a personal relationship with God.
53. I attempt to leave behind a good and lasting legacy.
54. I believe that there is order and purpose in the universe.
55. I am treated fairly by others.
56. I have received my fair share of opportunities and rewards.
57. I have learned to live with suffering and make the best of it

## APPENDIX B

## Measures of Psychosocial Development (Hawley, 1988)

Instructions: This section contains statements or phrases which people often use to describe themselves, their lives and their experiences. For each statement, circle the number on the answer sheet which best represents your opinion.

Choose 1 if the statement is *not at all like you*.

Choose 2 if the statement is *not much like you*.

Choose 3 if the statement is *somewhat like you*.

Choose 4 if the statement is *like you*.

Choose 5 of the statement is *very much like you*.

1. Calm, relaxed, easy going
2. Stick to the tried and tested
3. Have worked out my basic beliefs about such matters as occupation, sex, family, politics, religion, etc.
4. Bored
5. Self-sufficient; stand on my own two feet
6. Easily distracted, can't concentrate
7. Warm and understanding
8. Life has passed me by
9. Good things never last
10. Seek out new projects and undertakings
11. Not sure of my basic convictions
12. Like taking care of people and things
13. Easily embarrassed
14. Eager to learn and develop my skills
15. Prefer doing most things alone
16. Believe in the basic dignity of all people
17. Generally trust people
18. Can't seem to get going
19. Clear vision of what I want out of life
20. Younger generation is going to the dogs
21. Make my own decisions
22. Give up easily
23. Share my most private thoughts and feelings with those close to me
24. Full of regret
25. It's a cold, cruel world
26. Insist on setting goals and planning in advance
27. A bundle of contradictions
28. Involved in service to others
29. Can't be myself
30. Industrious, hardworking
31. Keep my feelings to myself
32. Believe in the overall wholeness of life
33. Optimistic, hopeful
34. Tend to delay or avoid action

35. Stand up for what I believe, even in the face of adversity
36. Not getting anywhere or accomplishing anything
37. Do things my own way, though others may disagree
38. Feel inferior to others in most respects
39. Others share their most private thoughts and feelings with me
40. Wish I'd lived my life differently
41. Others let me down
42. Like to get things started
43. Wide gap between the person I am and the person I want to be
44. Absorbed in the creative aspects of life
45. Stubborn, obstinate
46. Competent, capable worker
47. No one seems to understand me
48. Life is what it should have been
49. Good things are worth waiting for
50. Cruel, self-condemning conscience
51. Found my place in the world
52. Self-absorbed, self-indulgent
53. Independent, do what I want
54. Do only what is necessary
55. Comfortable in close relationships
56. A "has been"
57. Generally mistrust others
58. Like to experiment and try new things
59. Uncertain about what I'm going to do with my life
60. Deep interest in guiding the next generation
61. Very self-conscious
62. Proud of my skills and abilities
63. Emotionally distant
64. Life has meaning
65. Generous
66. Inhibited; restrained
67. Others see me pretty much as I see myself
68. Uninvolved in life
69. Neither control, nor am controlled by others
70. Can't do anything well
71. Willing to give and take in my relationships
72. Life is a thousand little disgusts
73. Pessimistic; little hope
74. A real "go-getter"
75. Haven't found my place in life
76. Doing my part to build a better world
77. Uptight; can't let go
78. Stick to a job until it is done
79. Avoid commitment to others
80. Feel akin to all humankind-past, present, and future
81. Trustworthy; others trust me
82. Passive, not aggressive
83. Appreciate my own uniqueness and individuality
84. Stagnating
85. Control my own life

86. Lack ambition
87. Others understand me
88. No hope for solutions to the world's problems
89. People take advantage of me
90. Adventurousome
91. A mystery – even to myself
92. Trying to contribute something worthwhile
93. Uncertain; doubting
94. Take pride in my work
95. Many acquaintances; no real friends
96. Would not change my life if I could live it over
97. Trust my basic instincts
98. Overwhelmed with guilt
99. Content to be who I am
100. Vegetating, merely existing
101. Feel free to be myself
102. Without my work, I'm lost
103. There when my friends need me
104. Humankind is hopeless
105. On guard lest I get strung
106. Aggression helps me get ahead
107. In search of my identity
108. Finding new avenues of self-fulfillment
109. Easily swayed
110. Productive; accomplish much
111. Wary of close relationships
112. Satisfied with my life, work, and accomplishments

## APPENDIX C

## Herth Hope Scale (Herth, 1991)

Instructions: Read each statement and decide whether it applies to you personally. There are no right or wrong answers. Using the scale below, choose the number that best describes how often the statement applies to you in the past week or two. Please circle the numbers on the answer sheet.

1 = Never applies to me

2 = Seldom applies to me

3 = Sometimes applies to me

4 = Often applies to me

1. I am looking forward to the future.
2. I sense the presence of loved ones.
3. I have deep inner strength.
4. I have plans for the future.
5. I have inner positive energy.
6. I feel scared about my future.
7. I keep going even when I hurt.
8. I have faith that gives me comfort.
9. I believe that good is always possible.
10. I feel at a loss, nowhere to turn.
11. I feel time heals.
12. I have support from those close to me.
13. I feel overwhelmed and trapped.
14. I can recall happy times.
15. I just know there is hope.
16. I can seek and receive help.
17. I am immobilized by fears and doubts.
18. I know my life has meaning and purpose.
19. I see the positive in most situations.
20. I have goals for the next 3 to 6 months.
21. I am committed to finding my way.
22. I feel all alone.
23. I have coped well in the past.
24. I feel loved and needed.
25. I believe that each day has potential.
26. I can't bring about positive change.
27. I can see a light even in a tunnel.
28. I have hope even when plans go astray.
29. I believe my outlook affects my life.
30. I have plans for today and next week.

## APPENDIX D

## Snyder Hope Scale (Snyder, 1994)

Instructions: Read each item carefully. Using the scale below, please select the number that best describes YOU and circle that number on your answer sheet.

1 = Definitely False

2 = Mostly False

3 = Mostly True

4 = Definitely True

1. I can think of many ways to get out of a jam.
2. I energetically pursue my goals.
3. I feel tired most of the time.
4. There are lots of ways around any problem.
5. I am easily downed in an argument.
6. I can think of many ways to get the things in life that are most important to me.
7. I worry about my health.
8. Even when others get discouraged, I know I can find a way to solve the problem.
9. My past experiences have prepared me well for my future.
10. I've been pretty successful in life.
11. I usually find myself worrying about something.
12. I meet the goals that I set for myself.

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