

## ULTIMATE, PROVISIONAL, AND PERSONAL MEANING OF LIFE: DIFFERENCES AND COMMON GROUND<sup>1</sup>

ANN ELISABETH AUHAGEN AND FRANZISKA HOLUB

*Free University of Berlin*

*Summary.*—Building on Viktor Frankl's clinical approach of Logotherapy and the works of subsequent theoreticians, three types of meaning of life were theoretically derived and empirically investigated, Ultimate, Provisional, and Personal meaning. These types were characterized, first, by the amount of agreement of subjects, second, by sources of Life Meaning, which were assessed by content analyses, third, by correlations, and fourth by prediction with ratings of important life concepts from the domains of Well-being, Religiosity, and Prosocial Behavior. 192 German adults, 45 men and 147 women, whose *M* age was 31.6 yr. (*SD*=11.9), participated. Analysis indicated different sources for the Ultimate meaning compared with the other meaning types, which seem to display more similarities with each other. Other important life concepts, such as Belief, Harmony, Happiness, and Human Goodness were related to the investigated types of meaning of life. Some implications for clinical applications, research perspectives, and Positive Psychology are discussed.

Historically, psychology has treated the question of the meaning of life mainly from three different but interwoven perspectives. First, there is a clinical perspective on meaning of life. Frankl (1979/1995) emphasized its importance when he realized that feelings of meaninglessness can lead to illness and even death in the worst instance (Edwards & Holden, 2003). The lack of meaning in life can result in existential frustration or Noögenic neurosis, and Frankl was convinced that humans have a will to meaning and that they need meaning in life. As a consequence, Frankl (1987) developed his Logotherapy, an intervention which assists clients in finding meaning in life. However, Logotherapy is not completely limited to the clinical perspective as is shown, for example, by Logoanalysis, a further development that can also be applied in nonclinical situations (Hutzell, 1983; Crumbaugh & Henrion, 2001). Recently, Meaning-centered Counseling has been designed as another form of intervention to help people to find meaning in their lives (Wong, 1998b).

Second, meaning of life can be viewed from an empirical research perspective. Such research (summarized by Baumeister, 1991; Wong & Fry, 1998; Auhagen, 2000) has studied diverse aspects of meaning of life and their effects. Here, for example, questions are raised, such as "Which different aspects are involved in the concept of meaning in life?" or "How can purpose

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<sup>1</sup>Address correspondence to Dr. Ann Elisabeth Auhagen, Department of Psychology, Free University of Berlin, Habelschwerdter Allee 45, D-14195 Berlin, Germany.

in life be measured?” or “Which sources of meaning are important to people?”

Third, the meaning of life has become an important topic in Positive Psychology (Seligman, 1998<sup>2</sup>; Snyder & Lopez, 2002; Auhagen, 2004b). This area concentrates on how peoples' lives can become good, healthy, and positive. Thus, by emphasizing the positive aspects of people and their lives, such as strengths and resources, and how these can be enhanced, Positive Psychology supplements the clinical approach that focuses on a pathological view and the empirical research approach that tries to see things from a neutral viewpoint. Seeing meaning in one's life can be classified as a resource, which helps one cope with many kinds of problems in life (Korotkov, 1998).

#### *Definition of Meaning of Life*

Although much theoretical and empirical work has been done so far (Wong & Fry, 1998), clear-cut definitions are rare. Reker and Wong (1988; Wong, 1998a) considered the meaning of life to be a personal construction that includes a cognitive, a motivational, and an affective component. Auhagen (2000) suggested the following definition: “*Meaning of life is a theoretical concept which denotes reflections on, and/or ways of experiencing, contexts of meanings in relation to human life in general, to one's own individual life, or to parts of the latter*” (p. 38, original in italics).

#### *Features of Meaning of Life*

Meaning of life can be viewed as multiform. According to the literature, three central features of meaning of life can be identified.

The first points out that meaning of life may deal with higher ordered reflections and experiences. Frankl (see Farran & Kuhn, 1998) called this Ultimate meaning. Ultimate meaning seems to be associated with deeper life experiences which can also be accompanied by spiritual experiences. Similarly, Yalom (1980) referred to Cosmic meaning which is oriented toward a superordinate view of the world.

Second, there seems to be a worldlier feature of meaning of life. For Yalom (1980) this is Worldly, Personal meaning, and he believes that it is based on individual life content and life goals. Frankl emphasized a similar type of meaning (see Farran & Kuhn, 1998). He called it Provisional meaning and stated that it can be discovered through smaller, daily experiences. According to Frankl (1979/1995), meaning often concerns concrete situations in everyday life, even in every hour. In this connection the term Meaning of the moment is also used, and it is particularly important to Logotherapy and Logoanalysis (Wawrytko, 1989; Fabry, 1998).

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<sup>2</sup><http://apa.org/monitor/apr98/pres.html>.

The third central feature of meaning of life concerns its personal character. According to Frankl (1979/1995) each human being is a unique individual with a unique life and consequently has an individual Personal meaning. Frankl (1979/1995) preferred the notion Meaning in life to Meaning of life because meaning should be something individual in the life of each person. According to Wawrytko (1989) meaning may "become *my* meaning" (p. 119, italics in the original). In a series of studies Wong (1998a) researched the implicit theories that people have about an ideal meaningful life. This resulted in a Personal meaning profile. It included among other things achievement, relationships, and religion.

There are some interrelations among the three features of meaning of life. First, Ultimate and Provisional meaning do not exclude each other: a person may perceive both Ultimate and Provisional meaning, or either one of the two meaning types (or no meaning at all). Second, Ultimate and Provisional meaning can be seen from a detached impersonal perspective, as generally part of human life or not. In contrast, Personal meaning always implies an individual life perspective and cannot be viewed generally. Personal meaning can also include Ultimate and or Provisional meaning. A distinction between a general perspective and a personal one has been shown for other constructs, for example, the Belief in a just world (Dalbert, 1999). Third, some authors, for example, Yalom (1980), tend to equate Worldly and Personal meaning, while others do not, for example Wong (1998a). In the following text the three central features of meaning of life are referred to as types of meaning. They are called the Ultimate, the Provisional, and the Personal meaning types.

#### *Sources of Meaning of Life*

Discovering the sources of meaning in peoples' lives is of special interest both from a clinical and a nonclinical perspective. To assess sources of meaning (i.e., which circumstances, things, and relationships provide meaning in peoples' lives), questionnaires or free narratives are usually used (Auhagen, 2000). The work of Ebersole and coworkers has to be mentioned here in particular (De Vogler & Ebersole, 1981, 1983; Ebersole & de Paola, 1987; Ebersole, 1998). In these studies people were asked to write down the three main sources of meaning in their lives, to rank them, and give examples of each. These descriptions were content analyzed with the help of a category system. Ebersole (1998) summarized the sources of life meaning in the following eight dimensions: Relationships (interpersonal orientation), Service (helping, giving orientation), Belief (religious, political, or social), Obtaining (pure materialistic preference), Growth (self-improvement, understanding), Health (physical and mental health), Life work (occupation, schooling), and Pleasure (happiness, contentment). In contrast, O'Connor and Chamberlain

(1996) classified sources of life meaning in just six categories following structured interviews and a qualitative analysis. The categories were Relationship with people, Relationship with nature, Social and political beliefs, Religious and spiritual beliefs, Creativity, and Personal development.

### *Correlates of Meaning of Life*

Besides definition, features, and sources of meaning of life, research has addressed the question whether other concepts are related to meaning of life. This question also seems to be of practical relevance in clinical or non-clinical contexts. If, for example, one knows that good acts toward others would increase the meaning of life, then someone may change behaviors and gain the feeling of greater meaning. Meaning of life was correlated with social attitudes, values, and personality measures (Chamberlain & Zika, 1988). In particular, the experience of meaning of life seems to be positively related to concepts in the domains of subjective well-being, of religiosity, and of prosocial behavior (Auhagen, 2000). In contrast, meaninglessness seems to be related to not understanding external or internal events, losses and disappointments (Tausch, 2004).

### *Hypotheses*

This empirical study investigated the different types of meaning of life derived from the literature: the Ultimate, the Provisional, and the Personal meaning types. All meaning types in this study were characterized by sources of meaning and were also studied in relation to other constructs that could be relevant in the context of meaning of life.

As indicated above, the different meaning types can be agreed with to different extents. For example, a person, who believes generally in a Provisional meaning of peoples' lives, does not necessarily feel his own life has meaning. Or, someone who has a strong conviction of the Personal meaningfulness of life may not necessarily believe in an Ultimate meaning.

*Hypothesis 1.*—There will be different amounts of agreement to the existence of the Ultimate, the Provisional, and the Personal meaning types. However, because all meaning types were derived from the construct of meaning of life, some relatedness between the meaning types was expected. Because the Provisional and the Personal meaning types are sometimes equated in the literature, these two types are expected to be particularly related.

*Hypothesis 2.*—The Ultimate, the Provisional, and the Personal meaning types will be related. The Provisional and Personal meaning types are expected to be more closely related to each other than to the Ultimate meaning type. Recent research showed the possibility and the usefulness of characterizing meaning of life by sources of meaning.

*Hypothesis 3.*—The Ultimate, the Provisional, and the Personal meaning

types may be characterized by the following sources: Personal Relationships, Positive Social behavior, Activities, Obtaining, Goals, Personal Growth, Well-being, Life By Itself, Evolution, and Transcendancy. Because the meaning types constitute different features of meaning of life, they should have different characteristics.

*Hypothesis 4.*—The Ultimate, the Provisional, and the Personal meaning types will differ concerning the amount and pattern of meaning sources. The meaning types may be further studied by their relations to other important concepts in life.

*Hypothesis 5.*—The Ultimate, the Provisional, and the Personal meaning types will be related to important life concepts concerning the domains of Well-being, Religiosity, and Prosocial behavior. Because each type of meaning is supposed to have special features, each type may be further described by a different model.

*Hypothesis 6.*—It will be possible to predict each type of meaning based on a significant model using important life concepts concerning the domains of Well-being, Religiosity, and Prosocial behavior.

## METHOD

### *Participants*

Participants were 192 Caucasian German adults, 45 men and 147 women, living in a large German city. They ranged from 18 to 69 years of age. The mean age was 31.6 yr., the *SD* 11.9. Of the subjects 48.6% came from different professions, e.g., academics, craftsmen, artists, people from the service industries, merchants, while 51.4% were students. Subjects were recruited by written advertisements and by the sociological snowball method. Participation was voluntary, and the data were collected individually.

### *Questionnaire*

The data presented here are based on the sections of a questionnaire relevant to the formulated hypotheses. The questionnaire was entitled “Questions in Life” and designed by Auhagen (2004a) to assess different important life aspects such as Human Goodness, Belief, Happiness, or Meaning. The questionnaire contained a total of 40 items with either open or closed response format. The latter included a 4-point scale using anchors of 1: No Agreement and 4: Complete Agreement. All items were derived from a theoretical background, for example, because Belief and Health have been discovered to be important life concepts and important to meaning of life (Wong & Fry, 1998; Auhagen, 2000), these concepts were represented by the items, “I believe in God” and “I am generally healthy.” Other items are presented in the results section. The questionnaire was pilot tested. Validity was conceptualized as face validity. Because One Item Measures were used,

split-half reliabilities were assessed by the Split Ballot Technique. This technique uses chi square tests to compare for each item a randomly selected 50% of all cases with the other 50% of the cases. These tests showed no differences, indicating that the compared samples (numbers of respondents) resemble each other in central tendencies and dispersions. Thus, this is probably true for other samples as well.

### *Assessment of Meaning*

Meaning was assessed in a first step by three items, which represent the three types of meaning. First, Ultimate meaning was assessed by "The life of mankind has a higher meaning" (in the following abbreviated as Higher Meaning of Life"). Second, Provisional meaning was assessed by "The everyday life of people has meaning in itself" (Everyday Life Meaning). Third, Personal meaning was assessed by "My own life has meaning" (Own Life Meaning). The extent of agreement was measured by the above mentioned 4-point scale with anchors of 1: I do not agree, 2: I hardly agree, 3: I somewhat agree, and 4: I agree completely.

In case of agreement (somewhat agree, agree completely) participants were then, in a second step, asked in an open response format to give their three main sources of meaning for each of the three types of meaning: "If this is true for you, which meaning is true for you? Please write up to three of your most important sources of meaning." This method was somewhat similar to the one used by Ebersole (1998). The resulting answers were content analyzed.

### *Content Analysis*

Ten categories were developed for coding the sources of meaning. These categories were derived both deductively from categorical systems used in other research (De Vogler & Ebersole, 1981, 1983; Ebersole & de Paola, 1987) as well as inductively stimulated by the topics emphasized in the free responses. To gain a better representation of the contents of the written comments eight of the categories corresponded only approximately, but not fully, to the ones suggested by Ebersole (1998); in addition, two completely new categories, Life by itself and Evolution, were developed because they quite often occurred in the written comments.

The ten categories for the coding of the sources of meaning of life were (1) Personal Relationships (Coding concerned all kinds of Personal Relationships such as, family, friendships, and love relationships); (2) Positive Social Behavior (This category was coded for all comments implying all kinds of positive social behaviors, such as social support, responsibility, altruism); (3) Activities, e.g., leisure activities, occupation; (4) Obtaining, implying material or external aspects of life such as money, looks, goods; (5) Goals (This category was applied to all comments concerning any kind of goal in life, e.g.,

personal goals, achievements, tasks, success); (6) Personal Growth (Here comments were coded that described any kind of personal growth, e.g., development, learning); (7) Well-being (This category included all kinds of well-being such as, health, happiness, satisfaction); (8) Life By Itself (This category was applied to all comments that see life in general as a source of meaning, e.g., meaning in a special situation, life course as meaningful); (9) Evolution (Here coding concerned all comments in relation to any aspect of evolution, e.g., maintaining human life, passing on one's genes); and (10) Transcendancy (This category encompassed all comments dealing with any kind of transcendancy, such as belief, spirituality, fate).

Before coding, the freely written material had to be prepared—in some cases respondents wrote down less or more than three sources of meaning—to extract a maximum of three single source units per participant per meaning type (as above, Higher Meaning of Life, Own Life Meaning, Everyday Life Meaning). Decisions were achieved by thorough discussion between two coders.

The two coders were trained in content and use of the ten categories. They then independently coded the responses of the first 80 participants. Each meaning source was classified into one of the ten categories. The interrater agreement  $z$  was estimated through the formula proposed by Fröh (1981)  $z = 2U/C1 + C2$  ( $U$  = agreement in total of the two codes,  $C1$  = codings in total of coder one,  $C2$  = codings in total of coder two). The coefficients were .78 for the sources of Higher Meaning in Life, .83 for the sources of Everyday Life Meaning, and .83 for the sources of Own Life Meaning. Because these coefficients indicated satisfactory interrater agreements, all the material was coded in the described way. After this procedure had been finished for all the material, the data of the two coders were compared. In the rare case when the two sets of data differed, the coders discussed it thoroughly and made a common decision about which category to apply, as suggested in the literature (Mayring, 2002).

#### *Data Analysis*

For all statistical analyses, SPSS was used. As the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test indicated the variables did not follow normal distribution, nonparametric tests were performed.

### RESULTS

Hypothesis 1: There will be different amounts of agreement to the existence of the Ultimate, the Provisional, and the Personal meaning types.

Table 1 shows agreement with the three items Higher meaning of life (representing Ultimate meaning), Everyday life meaning (Provisional meaning), and Own life meaning (Personal meaning). Participants agreed most on their own life having meaning. They also agreed, but less often, on the gen-

TABLE 1  
PERCENT AGREEMENT FOR THREE TYPES OF MEANING OF LIFE

Agreement	Higher Meaning of Life (Ultimate Meaning)	Everyday Life Meaning (Provisional Meaning)	Own Life Meaning (Personal Meaning)
Not agree	18.5	2.7	0.5
Hardly agree	25.9	12.9	9.5
Somewhat agree	33.3	45.2	28.4
Agree completely	22.2	39.2	62.1

*Note.*—Differences between types ( $p < .001$ ).

eral existence of Provisional meaning. However, participants displayed much less conviction on the general existence of an Ultimate meaning. These rating differences are significant (Wilcoxon test; Higher meaning of life/Own life meaning,  $p < .001$ ; Higher meaning of life/Everyday life meaning,  $p < .001$ ; Everyday life meaning/Own life meaning,  $p < .001$ ). Thus hypothesis 1 was supported.

Hypothesis 2: The Ultimate, the Provisional, and the Personal meaning types will be related. The Provisional and Personal meaning types were expected to be more closely related to each other than to the Ultimate meaning type.

Correlations were calculated to test this hypothesis. The highest correlation (.59,  $p < .001$ ; Spearman  $\rho$ ) emerged for Everyday life meaning (Provisional meaning) with Own life meaning (Personal meaning), followed by Higher meaning of life (Ultimate meaning) with Own life meaning (.24,  $p < .001$ ), and Higher meaning of life with Everyday life meaning (.21,  $p < .004$ ). Thus Hypothesis 2 was supported. The results indicate, on the one hand, that participants tended either to agree or not to agree on meaning of life, independent of the meaning type. On the other hand, results indicated that participants, who tended to agree in general Provisional meaning tended also to agree in their Personal meaning and vice versa.

Hypothesis 3: The Ultimate, the Provisional, and the Personal meaning types may be characterized by the following sources: Personal Relationships, Positive Social Behavior, Activities, Obtaining, Goals, Personal Growth, Well-being, Life By Itself, Evolution, and Transcendancy.

Table 2 shows the percentage of respondents by content analysis of the freely written responses concerning the sources associated with each type of meaning. Overall, most sources (380) from most participants (157) were named for the Own life meaning. Next, 129 participants named 288 sources for the Everyday life meaning, and last, 105 participants named 196 sources for the Higher meaning of life. Responses to all ten categories were thus important for the characterization of the meaning types by sources of meaning of life. Thus Hypothesis 3 was supported.



TABLE 2  
SOURCES OF MEANING AND RELATION TO THREE TYPES OF MEANING OF LIFE: PERCENT

Source	Higher Meaning of Life (Ultimate Meaning) <i>n</i> = 105, 196 sources	Everyday Life Meaning (Provisional Meaning) <i>n</i> = 129, 288 sources	Own Life Meaning (Personal Meaning) <i>n</i> = 157, 380 sources
Personal Relationships	7.1	14.2	17.6
Positive Social Behavior	21.9	20.1	20.0
Activities	1.0	5.9	6.1
Obtaining	0.0	1.4	0.0
Goals	1.0	5.9	5.5
Personal Growth	21.9	16.0	16.6
Well-being	6.1	9.0	12.4
Life by Itself	5.1	14.6	7.6
Evolution	11.7	6.3	5.0
Transcendancy	24.0	6.6	9.0

*Note.*—Only differences between Higher Meaning of Life and Everyday Life Meaning as well as Own Life Meaning are significant ( $p < .001$ ).

Hypothesis 4: The Ultimate, the Provisional, and the Personal meaning types will differ concerning the amount and pattern of sources of meaning of life.

The special patterns of sources of meaning of life (Table 2) suggest some more insights about the different nature of the meaning types. For the Higher meaning of life (Ultimate meaning), with the exception of Obtaining, which was not mentioned at all, each of the categories occurred in the comments. However, only three kinds of sources clearly predominated, namely, Transcendancy, Personal Growth, and Positive Social Behavior. The other categories were also mentioned several times, particularly Evolution and Personal Relationships, but in comparison they seem to be less important in the context of Higher life meaning. The case is quite different with the pattern of the Everyday life meaning (Provisional meaning). Here, the sources seem to be more equally distributed than the ones in Higher life meaning. Ranked in the first several positions are the categories Positive social behavior, Personal Relationships, Personal Growth, Life By Itself, Well-being, and Transcendancy. The Own life meaning (Personal meaning) shows a somewhat similar pattern of meaning sources to that of the Everyday life meaning (Provisional meaning). Positive Social Behavior is again ranked first, followed by Personal Relationships and Personal Growth. However, in this case the next important sources are Well-being and Transcendancy. Three chi square tests were performed to examine Hypothesis 4. Both the chi square test on the sources of meaning between Ultimate meaning and Provisional meaning, and the one on the sources of meaning between Ultimate meaning and Personal meaning were significant. Different patterns were indicated for the sources of the former and the latter meaning types ( $\chi^2 = 73.04$ ,  $p < .001$ ;  $\chi^2 = 52.88$ ,

$p < .001$ ). However, the difference between the patterns of meaning sources of the Provisional and the Personal meaning types were not significant. Thus Hypothesis 4 was supported in the case of Ultimate meaning in comparison to Provisional and Personal meaning and rejected in the comparison of Provisional and Personal meaning.

Hypothesis 5: The Ultimate, the Provisional, and the Personal meaning types will be related to important life concepts concerning the domains of Well-being, Religiosity, and Prosocial behavior.

Significant positive correlations (Spearman  $\rho$ ) were found between Higher meaning of life (Ultimate meaning) and the following items: "I believe in God" ( $r = .54, p < .001$ , representing the concept of Belief, domain Religiosity); "I regard my own life at the moment as harmonious" ( $r = .26, p < .001$ , Perceived Life Harmony, Well-being); "I regard my own life at the moment as happy" ( $r = .15, p < .04$ , Perceived Life Happiness, Well-being); "How often do you perform good acts towards others in your everyday behavior?" ( $r = .18, p < .02$ , Perceived Quantity of Own Human Goodness, Prosocial behavior); "Everyone gets what they fairly deserve in life" ( $r = .17, p < .02$ , Belief in a just world, Prosocial behavior). A negative correlation was found between Higher life meaning and the item, "The main aim in life is to have as much fun as possible" ( $r = -.20, p < .006$ , Hedonism, Well-being).

Everyday life meaning (Provisional meaning) correlated positively with "I believe in God" ( $r = .16, p < .03$ ), "I regard my own life at the moment as harmonious" ( $r = .20, p < .006$ ), and "I regard my own life at the moment as happy" ( $r = .27, p < .001$ ).

Own life meaning (Personal meaning) correlated positively with "I believe in God" ( $r = .20, p < .007$ ), "I regard my own life at the moment as harmonious" ( $r = .34, p < .001$ ), "I regard my own life at the moment as happy" ( $r = .41, p < .001$ ), "I am generally healthy" ( $r = .24, p < .001$ , representing the concept of Health in the domain Well-being), and "How often do you perform good acts towards others in your everyday behavior?" ( $r = .20, p < .005$ ) representing the domain of Prosocial behavior. These results support Hypothesis 5.

Hypothesis 6: It will be possible to predict each type of meaning based on a significant model using important life concepts concerning the domains of Well-being, Religiosity, and Prosocial behavior.

A regression for categorical data, Optimal Scaling, was used with the meaning types as the criteria and the items representing the life concepts as the predictors. A significant model was obtained for each meaning type, thus Hypothesis 6 was supported. Higher meaning of life (Ultimate meaning) was best predicted by "I believe in God" ( $\beta = .51, p < .001$ ) and "I regard my own life at the moment as harmonious" ( $\beta = .16, p < .001$ ). This model accounted for 57% of the variance ( $r = .57$ ). Everyday life meaning (Provi-

sional meaning) was best predicted by "I believe in God" ( $\beta = .21, p < .004$ ), and "I regard my own life at the moment as happy" ( $\beta = .23, p < .001$ ). This model accounted for 35% of the variance ( $r = .35$ ). Own life meaning (Personal meaning) was best predicted by "I believe in God" ( $\beta = .19, p < .001$ ), "How often do you perform good acts towards others in your everyday behavior?" ( $\beta = .18, p < .001$ ), "I regard my own life at the moment as happy" ( $\beta = .40, p < .001$ ), and "I am generally healthy" ( $\beta = .12, p < .039$ ). This model accounted for 56% of the variance ( $r = .56$ ).

#### DISCUSSION

Three theoretically derived types of meaning of life, Ultimate, Provisional, and Personal meaning, were empirically investigated concerning agreement, sources, correlates, and prediction.

As expected (Hypothesis 1), the three types of meaning differed in agreement because respondents differentiated among the different features of meaning considered here. For example, a person may experience much Personal meaning and at the same time deny an Ultimate meaning. However, according to Hypothesis 2, the three types of meaning are related. In particular, the close relation between Provisional and Personal meaning in agreement provides some support for approaches which tend to equate these meaning types (Yalom, 1980). Also, and contradictory to Hypothesis 4, no significant difference could be found between the Provisional and the Personal meaning type concerning the patterns of sources of meaning of life. This indicates that the participants see similarities between the sources of their Personal meaning and those of a general Provisional meaning: sources for Personal meaning thus came mostly from worldly aspects of everyday life. This may be interpreted as support of Frankl's thesis of the Meaning of the moment (1979/1995). In addition, the pattern of sources between Ultimate and Personal meaning differed significantly, which indicates that the participants rarely equate the sources of their Personal meaning with sources of Ultimate meaning.

According to Hypothesis 3, the ten sources of meaning of life provided a good characterization of the meaning types. In the case of Ultimate meaning, the four most important sources were Positive Social Behavior, Personal Growth, Transcendancy, and Evolution. The importance of Positive Social Behavior as a source of meaning of life corresponds to the view of Adler (1931/1992), who regarded living as a social being as one of human kind's main duties. Personal Growth has been identified empirically as a source of meaning in all age groups (De Vogler & Ebersole, 1981, 1983; Ebersole & de Paola, 1987; Taylor & Ebersole, 1993) and has been discussed as a core component of mental health (Ryff & Singer, 1998) and of volunteering in prosocial activities (D'Braunstein & Ebersole, 1992). Transcendancy has

been identified before as a source of meaning, particularly for the elderly (Wong, 1998c). Evolution also reflects parts of the Adlerian position, because he pointed to a further duty in continuing one's personal life on earth and safeguarding the future of humankind (1931/1992). The top rankings in the patterns of sources for Provisional and Personal meaning were similar and include Positive Social Behavior, Personal Growth, Personal relationships, Well-being, and Life By Itself. Here, the category of Personal Relationships was expected to be essential to meaning because these have been shown as the most important source in comparable studies (O'Connor & Chamberlain, 1996; Ebersole, 1998). The category Well-being is in harmony with former observations that health and well-being contribute to feelings about the meaning in life (Auhagen, 2000). Life By Itself may be seen as supporting Frankls' thesis of the Meaning of the moment (1979/1995) because this source emphasizes life situations as causes for meaning.

A rough comparison of results related to Hypothesis 3 in former studies of sources of meaning (De Vogler & Ebersole, 1981; Ebersole & de Paola, 1987; Taylor & Ebersole, 1993; O'Connor & Chamberlain, 1996), specifies two general differences. First, in contrast to the mentioned studies, Personal Relationships as a source of meaning did not rank in first position. This was particularly true for the Ultimate meaning type, indicating once more that it is quite different from the other meaning types. One reason for this result could well be the significance of another source, namely, Positive Social Behavior, that has not been included in previous studies. According to Adler (1931/1992), this should be a source for meaning, because it reflects the community feeling. Second, there was a higher number of sources emphasizing Transcendental issues while sources concerning material aspects, such as Obtaining, were of less significance. This may be related to the investigated sample, which features more white-collar than blue-collar subjects, or to Cultural differences (Schulenberg, 2003). In addition, this finding may reflect a societal development toward a more spiritual orientation in Germany over the last 25 years (Utsch, 2004).

Ultimate meaning is related positively (Hypothesis 5) to Belief (Wong, 1998c; Tausch, 2004), Perceived Life Happiness (Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999), Belief in a Just World (Dalbert, 1996), and Health (Ryff & Singer, 1998) which all seem to be well-established in the literature as correlates of meaning of life. In contrast, Perceived Quantity of Own Human Goodness and Perceived Life Harmony have been less investigated in that context. The former refers to Human Goodness, a newly developed and empirically observed psychological concept by Auhagen (2004a) as a principle of prosocial behavior, which is characterized by cognitions, emotions, and acts, all based on autonomy, unselfishness, and compassion. The latter, Harmony, has been emphasized as a theoretical principle for human progress

and meaning of life (Brauers, 1998), as well as an empirical dimension showing an orientation toward cooperative social goals as represented by international cooperation, social reform, equality, rule by the people, human dignity, environmental preservation, peace, and beauty (Blamey & Braithwaite, 1997). Ultimate meaning was negatively related to the view that the most important aspect in life is to have fun. This coincides with Wong's findings (1998a) and shows in particular the profound, pleasant, coherent, and unsuperficial character of this meaning type.

Correlates for the Provisional meaning type indicated a relation to Belief, Perceived Life Harmony, and Perceived Life Happiness, which may be seen as support for the Sense of Coherence, a global orientation toward an overall feeling of trust in life (Korotkov, 1998).

Personal meaning was the only type, which was, in addition to the other mentioned concepts, related to Perceived health. That may be interpreted in the sense of a Positive Spiral (Ryff & Singer, 1998, p. 223), which emphasizes a positive dynamic reciprocation of mind and body.

The fact that it was possible to predict each type of meaning by a different significant model (Hypothesis 6) provides support for the suggested differentiation among three types of meaning. If it had not been possible to calculate any significant models, then the differentiation into three types would have been questionable. Belief contributes to all types, indicating again its general importance to meaning of life.

In sum, data indicate the usefulness of differentiating three types of meaning of life because they are characterized by individual features. In particular, the Ultimate meaning type, which is less emphasized in other studies, shows much distinction. Taking some of the results, namely, those concerning similarities in the sources of meaning, it might be argued that the Provisional and the Personal meaning type are identical. However, other parts of the results, namely, the different amounts of agreement, the correlates, and the prediction, show significant differences and thus speak for these differentiations. Here, the latter position is preferred because, if one equates Provisional and Personal meaning, one tends to prescribe sources and content of Personal meaning toward provisional aspects while neglecting the transcendental aspects. Rather, the similarities of these two meaning types here are interpreted as a consequence of Western education and culture that nowadays lay little emphasis on spirituality and belief, although there could well be a positive development towards these life themes. Wong (1998a) showed that an ideal Meaning Profile includes a strong emphasis toward spirituality and belief. Thus, it is conceivable that the Personal meaning type could develop a greater resemblance with the Ultimate meaning type than at the current time.

Some limitations of the study should be mentioned. The sample was so-

ciologically nonrepresentative because it included a majority of white-collar participants. However, a larger number of subjects were investigated than in comparable studies. Because the sample was also predominantly female, statistical analyses were performed to identify possible sex differences, but none were found. Thus, with all caution, results may be interpreted as being valid for both sexes. The sample was comprised solely of German participants which limits its statements at most to a Middle European viewpoint. However, to the best of the authors' knowledge, it is the first study that provides results for a comparison with studies conducted in English-speaking countries. Another of the study's limitations may be seen in its cross-sectional nature. Further research could well include longitudinal methods, for example, diaries, to assess the meaning types and their possible contributions within everyday life.

Concerning the clinical perspective on meaning of life, the presented data seem to encourage work with clients on the transcendental aspects of life because they were of great significance in all meaning types. Also, it may be useful to assess clients' agreement with the different types of meaning at the beginning of a therapy to specify some clues to their central life themes.

Concerning the research perspective, the three suggested types of meaning are still open to different spheres of investigation. For instance, their extent and their influence in concrete individual life situations could be assessed. Concerning the perspective of Positive Psychology, the presented data are indicative of the valuable contribution of Positive Social Behavior and Human Goodness in perceived meaning. Thus, if one could help people, for example, by means of training (Auhagen, submitted), to increase acting beneficially towards others, this probably would also lead to stronger feelings of Personal meaning.

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