

Finding More Meaning in Meaning-Making: Development and Validation of the Ways of Meaning Scale

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Ralph L. Piedmont¹ , Jesse Fox² ,
Evan Copello^{2,3} , and Jon R. Webb⁴ 

Abstract

Meaning-making is an essential quality of human flourishing. Since Frankl, scholars in psychology have investigated over many decades the connection meaning-making has to a several metrics of well-being. This study introduces a novel approach to measuring meaning, called the Logoplex, which identifies the underlying processes that create meaning. In this model, meaning-making is a function of three interlocking processes (a) self vs other; material vs transpersonal, and psychological time perspective. Using this model, we created a measure called the *Ways of Meaning Scale*, which includes four facets of meaning: (a) solipsism, (b) secular humanism, (c) aesthetic, and (d) transformative. We found strong evidence for the reliability, construct validity, convergent, and discriminant validity of the measure. We also conducted a profile analysis of the four meaning facets and found they were predictive of the central theoretical tenants of the Logoplex, supporting its utility for identifying different types of meaning people create.

¹Center for Professional Studies, Timonium, MD, USA

²Stetson University, DeLand, FL, USA

³Baylor University, Waco, TX, USA

⁴Texas Tech University, Lubbock, USA

Corresponding Author:

Ralph L. Piedmont, Center for Professional Studies, Timonium, MD 21094, USA.

Email: dralph@thecfps.com

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Introduction

Meaning is an essential dimension of human flourishing, and the capacity to generate meaning is a distinguishing feature of mental life which all humans share (VanderWeele et al., 2025). The psychology of meaning has a long history. In the western approach to psychology, the value of meaning-making for flourishing was pioneered by the psychiatrist and Nazi death camp survivor Frankl (1997) which he famously documented in his work *Man's Search for Ultimate Meaning*. His basic thesis made the claim that if humans can find meaning, even in the most extreme circumstances that threaten their very existence, they can become resilient to the turmoil beset by life's greatest challenges. Frankl (1997) went on to the claim that western society broadly suffered from a "cry for meaning" which he identified symptomatically through the proliferation of depression, violence, and addiction in society. Over time, it became apparent to many observers that this cry for meaning escalated into a "crisis of meaning." The 2023 public health advisory issued by the Surgeon General of the United States identified for the first time that the top public health need is a lack of social meaning: The Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation (Office of the Surgeon General, 2023). Other health organizations have found that the "diseases of despair," are on the rise—and have been for several decades—including anxiety, depression, addiction, and suicide (Brody & Hughes, 2025; Garnett & Curtin, 2024; Garnett & Miniño, 2024). Breakdown in meaning is understood to be a contributing factor to societal threats to flourishing, but why meaning has degraded so swiftly is another matter. Potential underlying causes include a lack of trust in social and civic institutions, religious disaffiliation, ongoing racial conflicts, globalization, political polarization, climate change, and technological advancements like artificial intelligence that render humans obsolete (Office of the Surgeon General, 2023). Underlying this turmoil is a challenge to construct meaning that can endure such seismic shifts which appear to shake the very foundations of society.

Indeed, Frankl (1992) described the human capacity for and the development of an *existential vacuum*, or "the feeling of the total and ultimate meaninglessness of [our] lives" (p. 110). Similarly, Webb (2021) and Webb et al. (2015) described the notion of *existangst*, or negative emotions when imbued with existential and teleological angst; for example, psychache (Shneidman, 1995), or psychological pain akin to an aching soul (Holden et al., 2001). To

a significant degree, human flourishing depends upon our coming to grips with what meaning is, psychologically speaking, and what the underlying processes are which create a kind of meaning that can withstand the modern conditions that threaten its vitality.

It should come, then, as no surprise that meaning since the time of Frankl has attracted much attention from the psychological fields. The sheer volume of meaning-making measures, for instance, highlights the depth of interest in this topic. However, such a proliferation of instrumentation to measure meaning raises fundamental questions about the underlying personological nature of all these constructs (e.g., Waters et al., 2012). Many of the newer measures contain multiple facet scales covering a wide array of content areas where meaning is made as well as examining how actively individuals may be engaged in finding meaning. However, this proliferation of interest may come at a cost. Using different names for meaning is in no way a guarantee that these scales all capture unique aspects of meaning-making (i.e., the jangle fallacy; Kelley, 1927). Further, the use of so many different terms such as “meaning reconstruction” (Hibberd, 2013), “sense making” (Weick, 1979), “benefit finding” (Cassidy et al., 2014), and “narrative identity” (McAdams, 2018) are often used interchangeably, leading to conceptual ambiguity. This lack of clarity hampers cross-study comparisons and limits the field’s coherence.

Challenges to Measuring Meaning

We contend that there are at least four measurement issues that need to be addressed at present. First, what is the underlying nature of meaning-making; is it a multidimensional construct or a unidimensional, multifaceted domain? Either way, what are the intrinsic elements to meaning-making? Second, merely intercorrelating multiple measures of these scales with each other is a nonproductive way of understanding these scales. Meehl (1978) referred to this as “stepwise low validation,” an empirically vacuous approach that tries to find insight and meaning by correlating two unknown scales with each other and finding a relationship. More taxonomic work needs to be done to determine the extent of overlap and uniqueness already captured by extant measures of meaning.

A third significant issue relates to understanding meaning itself. Frankl (1997) asserted that having meaning was more important for psychological health, well-being, and resilience than not having meaning. Having a sense of purpose and feeling that one’s life makes sense helps individuals to organize and focus their self-motivations in ways that can promote goal attainment and help manage the many stressors and distractors that life throws at them.

However, one concept never fully explained in the literature centers on the diverse types of psychological value meaning-making may have. In other words, not all meaning-making results in the same psychological outcomes. For example, there are certainly diverse types of religious or spiritual meaning-making, and not all of them have similar outcomes. For some, religious and spiritual meaning involves a commitment to the service of others and giving generously of their own personal gifts so that communities can grow, thrive, and prosper, even at great cost to their own well-being or survival. Then, there are those whose religious or spiritual meaning compels them to act out violently, killing others for sacred or transcendent causes. Both types have a powerful sense of personal meaning, enabling them all to commit their lives, even if it means laying down their mortal existence for a higher purpose, to their ultimate goals. However, the directions of these different senses of meaning lead to starkly different outcomes. As such, it is important that a more developed model of meaning-making be created that can speak to the underlying psychological qualities that are involved in how individuals orient themselves to making personal meaning and detailing the psychological sequelae of these meaning-making typologies.

Finally, the current research appears to have missed the most important aspect of meaning itself. For Frankl, meaning-making is a distinctive human motivation that exists independently of other psychological processes already known. Referred to as the “noölogical dimension” (Frankl, 1997, p. 67) which is “beyond the *psyche*, beyond the psychological dimension (*italics in original*).” Ultimate meaning-making represents the highest echelons of our psychic system as a species and captures the most important, core aspects of our own personhood. What this dynamic is can be considered self-transcendence, ultimate meaning, or meta-perspective. As Frankl noted, the noölogical dimension is beyond us as individuals, and it holds who we are and our sense of self, even though this structure is created by us unconsciously. Yet to research this is a tall order and requires the identification and validation of a non-redundant aspect of human functioning, independent of already existing personality/motivational models. It must explicitly define existential functioning and capture those unique qualities while also being independent of already existing models.

The Numinous as the Motivational Source for Meaning-Making

Working from the perspective of the Five-Factor Model (FFM) of personality, a new, empirically independent dimension of personality has been identified and developed, termed *the Numinous*. The word “numinous” derives

from the Latin noun *nūmen*, which first appeared in the English language in 1495 and referred to God or divinity, but also expanded in its usage over time to include a local or presiding power or spirit (Oxford English Dictionary, n.d.a). The word *numinous* first appeared in English later in 1647 as a noun or adjective “revealing or indicating the presence of a divinity; divine, spiritual” particular as a universal quality yet also developed overtime in extended use to refer to “giving rise to a sense of the spiritually transcendent; (esp. of things in art or the natural world) evoking a heightened sense of the mystical or sublime; awe-inspiring” (Oxford English Dictionary, n.d.b.) As the term continued to evolve, during the 20th century, the psychological fields began defining it based on its phenomenology, as in “the experience of the divine as awesome or terrifying; designating that which governs the subject outside his or her own will.” It was the religious scholar Otto (1958) in his classic text *The Idea of the Holy* who used it in this sense as “a category of value and of a definitely ‘numinous’ state of mind.” Piedmont (2026) has hypothesized that it is this construct, or state of mind which contains those psychological dynamics that lay at the core of our existential self and are always driving us to find a sense of ultimate meaning.

As an individual-differences construct, people will vary in terms of their “ontological inquisitiveness” (Y. Cseh, Personal Communication, April, 2025), which results in the distinct types of meaning-making people create, the different psychological qualities they represent, and the personal outcomes they predict. The key value of the FFM is that it provides an empirical platform for investigating potentially new personality dimensions (provided that they meet the necessary empirical criteria [see Piedmont & Wilkins, 2020]) that have the potential to open new insights into the uniqueness of meaning-making. Over the past 2 decades, the FFM has emerged as *the* dominant model of personality (McCrae, 2020; McCrae & Costa, 1997, 2008). This empirically developed taxonomic model organizes all those individual-differences constructs that the field has historically seen as being descriptive of personality. The value of this model is that it organizes a plethora of constructs into a meaningful array that promotes interpretive clarity and predictive breadth to work in this area. Underlying the value of this model are the findings that these dimensions are universal (Allik & McCrae, 2004) and that these qualities are genetically linked (Vukasović & Bratko, 2015). A less recognized quality of the FFM, but equally important, is that it is not a static model. The empirical nature of the model holds open the possibility of identifying new personality dimensions, provided that they meet specific empirical criteria which include being independent of the FFM dimensions, evidencing significant incremental predictive validity over the FFM,

generalizable across languages and cultures, among others (see Piedmont & Wilkins, 2020 for a thorough discussion and list of these criteria).

Beyond the Big 5

Researchers testing for the presence of other personality dimensions have uncovered a number of qualities. One dimension that appeared useful concerned religious and spiritual qualities (Ashton et al., 2004). While a unified dimension containing these qualities was found consistently across samples, these authors believed that this quality was less a personality domain than a learned set of values or beliefs. However, Piedmont (1999, 2001; Piedmont et al., 2009) was able to more fully develop a dimension of spirituality, termed *Spiritual Transcendence* (ST), that appeared to meet the empirical criteria for being a sixth dimension of personality. Moving forward, Piedmont and colleagues worked to develop this construct both empirically and conceptually (e.g., Piedmont, 2017; Piedmont et al., 2009; Piedmont & Fox, 2023). Drawing from existential writers (e.g., Frankl, 1997; Tillich, 2000), the concept of ST developed beyond its spiritual foundation to become a broader, secular construct that appeared to underlie not only spiritual motivations but also was a significant predictor of meaning-making, mental health, and well-being (Fox & Piedmont, 2020; Piedmont, 2009; Piedmont et al., 2013). Termed *the Numinous*, this new construct represented a universal motivation that was relevant for all people regardless of their religious/spiritual status. The ontological model underlying the Numinous (Piedmont, 2026) explains how the construct brings together a number of different psychological qualities (e.g., meaning-making, self-actualization, existential crisis) under a common concept. The Numinous is also viewed as a unique quality that psychologically defines our species.

Psychologically Defining the Numinous

Picking up from the etymology of the *numinous* covered above, as a psychological construct, we define the Numinous through two qualities: ultimate existential motivation and psychological time perspective (PTP). Psychologically, existentialism, according to May (1961, p. 16) “means centering upon the existing person; it is the emphasis on the human being as he [sic] is emerging, becoming. The word ‘existence’ comes from the root *ex-sistere*, meaning literally ‘to stand out, emerge’.” Existentialism is concerned with the immediacy of lived experience as people actually experience it in the here and now. It is about how all individuals struggle with core ontological issues about being, meaning, and personal value. These issues are essential

features of our species and reflect our highly developed intellectual capacities to think creatively and uniquely combined with an imaginative ability to anticipate over long periods of time. Tillich (2000) brought these issues into focus by enumerating the three major existential questions all people grapple with in their lives: (1) is death the end? (2) Does life carry an intrinsic meaning? and (3) does my life matter and have worth? These three issues serve as the core dimensions of the Numinous: (1) *Infinitude*, examines the extent to which individuals understand their lives as being one step in an infinite ontological journey or not; (2) *Meaning*, the extent to which individuals can identify patterns and logical processes in life; and (3) *Worthiness*, the ability to understand that despite our weaknesses and flaws, fundamentally our lives make an important and useful contribution to the world.

The second dimension to the Numinous is PTP. While time is objectively encountered from a linear perspective, psychological time is a more fluid construct that operates within our self-system. Lewin (1951, p. 75) provided a foundational understanding of PTP, defining it as, “the totality of the individual’s views of his psychological future and psychological past existing at a given time.” Our interpretation of events is evaluated within a personally meaningful time context that assigns psychological value, personal significance, and determines expected social/behavioral/affective contingencies to those events. PTP is an individual differences construct that reflects preferences for evaluating existential issues within particular time frames. Zimbardo and Boyd (1999) developed the Zimbardo Time Perspective Inventory (ZTPI) to capture five, time orientations: Past Negative, Past Positive, Present-Hedonistic, Present-Fatalistic, and Future. Those participants with a Future time orientation were found to be more organized, dependable, and focused; they had higher levels of success and accomplishment relative to their peers. The Future perspective helped people find greater focus and direction to their lives. Those with this perspective evidenced better life outcomes. Nuttin (1985) has asserted that the future time perspective is our primary motivational space, with past and present occupying more supporting/secondary roles.

The value of a Future time perspective raised other questions about how to view the future. Boyd and Zimbardo (2006) leveraged their previous work on PTP to include an extension of the future perspective into “pre-death” (considering life in terms of the present until the death of the body) and “post-death” (considering that life continues after death until infinity) categories. It is this latter concept that formed the basis of their Transcendental-Future Time Perspective Scale (TFTPS). What psychological value does having a belief in one’s immortality have for living a successful life over and above having just a “pre-death” future orientation? Their research indicated that

individuals with a “post-death” future orientation were willing to sacrifice themselves for others, were more resilient in dealing with conflicts and struggles, and allowed for persistence in and tolerance for adverse circumstances. Scoring high on this dimension appeared to afford individuals an ability to totally commit to values as well as an opportunity for personal transformation and renewal. As Boyd and Zimbardo (2006, p. 123) noted, “the development of goals in the transcendental-future may elicit a potent source of motivation and allow the ‘transcendental’ conversion of what were ‘incorrigible’ or hopeless humans into productive citizens. Such individuals may be made both more productive and happier.”

Scores from the TFTP were found to be independent of the FFM personality domains, unlike scores on the ZTPI. It is also not surprising that scores on the TFTP were related to religious and spiritual activities (Stewart-Sicking & Piedmont, 2022). Thus, it is argued that those high on the Numinous are individuals who take a transcendental time perspective in managing their core existential issues. Understanding ones’ life within an eternal time frame creates a freeing psychological reality that enables individuals to go “all in” with life; to freely commit their lives to values that are personally and socially transforming. In contrast, it is argued that those who score low on the Numinous negotiate their existential issues within a more temporally defining context; life is finite, and one needs to be protective of personal assets and active in acquiring security and safety to maintain life for as long as possible. This orientation towards life is what Hart (2019, p. 20) referred to as *hyparxolatry* (hī – PARKS – ē – oh – la – trē), “the worship of subsistence in and of itself, or the sort that misers and thieves and those who would never give their lives for others.” It reflects a psychological grasping and clinging onto what one considers “me” or “mine” as an ultimate end. Such individuals are not necessarily materialistic or narcissistic, rather they value their lives as of ultimate importance and as such are not willing to risk harming or losing it under any circumstances. Cheng et al. (2025) showed in a Chinese sample that a multidimensional measure of meaning-making was very much related to the Meaning scale of the Numinous Motivation Inventory (NMI; Piedmont, 2017). Given our earlier literature review, it is not surprising that measures of meaning-making would be related to the Numinous: both constructs represent unique psychological phenomena that is not contained by the domains of the FFM. Piedmont and Wilkins (2020) provided a useful ontological overview of the Numinous model and its basic empirical and conceptual assumptions.

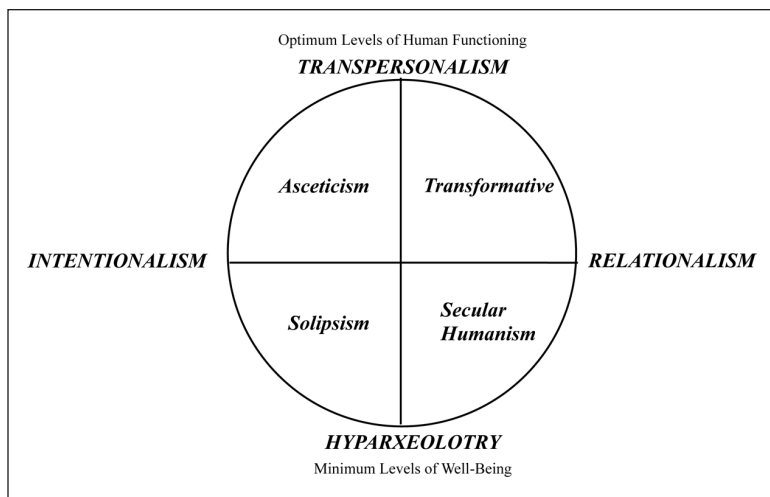


Figure 1. Logoplex model.

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The Logoplex: Finding More Meaning in Meaning-Making

The Numinous Model provides a deeper analysis of how individuals construct meaning. Unlike current measures of meaning-making, which focus primarily on the contents of the meaning (e.g., purpose, comprehension, maturing), the Numinous instead identifies the psychological dynamics that are involved in the creation of meaning. There are three basic dimensions of meaning-making: self- versus other; material versus transpersonal, and PTP. These factors constitute *the Logoplex* (in honor of Frankl's work; Piedmont, 2004; Piedmont & Fox, 2023), which is a circumplex model holding these elements, and is presented in Figure 1. The horizontal dimension represents the focus of the self, from being set on itself to growing to include social communities. The vertical dimension focuses on the content of the self, from embracing the physical/material that has personal value to a self-system that ultimately embraces all things. These two dimensions form the four quadrants of the Logoplex, each with their own psychological sequelae. Finally, PTP which consists of a past, present, future, and eternal time orientations that people can take, infuses each of the quadrants and directs the quality of the resulting meaning.

The Four Typologies of Meaning

The *Solipsism* (SO) quadrant of the Logoplex represents a very self-focused, materialistic approach to life. The concern for one's physical integrity and needs is paramount to individuals at this level. The focus is on obtaining immediate gratification for physical needs surrounding safety, satiation, comfort, and security. This represents the narrowest type of meaning-making (example item, "I take care of my needs first"). The *Secular Humanism* (HU) quadrant similarly contains individuals with a materialistic orientation, but these individuals have a broader social sense about them. They recognize the value of social organizations, groups, and in situations and their ability to provide for the greater good for not only individuals but for communities as well (example item, "My compassion includes everybody"). The *Asceticism* (AE) quadrant represents a level of meaning-making that is qualitatively different from the previous two levels. Here, individuals have a more transpersonal view of the universe. Though relatively focused on the self, they see themselves as part of a very large community that transcends physical boundaries, even one's mortality; they live at the intersection of physical and transcendent understandings. They understand that their greatest fulfillment is found in their relationship with some transcendent reality (example item, "Nothing gets in the way of my sense of a higher calling"). Finally, the *Transformative* (TR) quadrant represents the broadest level of meaning-making. These are individuals who have an expansive sense of transcendent meaning and, notably, express this understanding within a defined community. These individuals are able to go all in for life; fully and unreservedly giving of themselves for the betterment of all. The goal of this involvement is to call others to higher standards; they become moral standards set on becoming agents of social transformation (example item, "I am committed to those ideals that promote community, justice, and peace").

Meaning and Well-Being

The bottom half of the circumplex is what we consider to be the "minimum levels of well-being." This is what we view as the current status of the broad field of psychology, including Positive Psychology from a western perspective. The aim of interventions or treatments is to reduce psychological distress and to help an individual live a more personally fulfilling, prosocial lifestyle that facilitates individuals' ability to love, work, and play. This is a limited approach because it only helps individuals to better manage adaptive tasks associated with their day-to-day lives. The upper half of the circumplex is what we term "optimum levels of human functioning" and concerns itself

with the ultimate goals and longest ranged intentions of the person in an infinite universe. Ultimately, where do people want to go with their lives? What is it that people want to accomplish with their lives? The perspective from the transpersonal is to create a lifestyle that is maximally inclusive for the person (i.e., involves not just the individual, but a consideration of the individual within the entire fabric of life). Its aim is to create a sense of meaning that is resilient, hopeful, and leads to a greater personal involvement in all aspects of the life sphere, and importantly, beyond the individual self to others and the transpersonal. The treatment goal here is not just symptom reduction, but a transformative experience that puts individuals on a trajectory of personal growth and self-actualization.

In sum, the lower half of the Logoplex Model is associated with Western psychology, including *hedonistic* positive psychology; whereas, the upper half is associated with progressively moving beyond the self and embracing what can then be described as qualities consistent with *transcendent* positive psychology. In this regard, the Logoplex Model may serve to address the shortfalls encountered when considering the association of positive psychology with Eastern versus Western spiritual belief systems (see Webb et al., 2026).

We believe that this approach provides a deeper insight into the form and function of meaning-making. It captures the lifestyles that emerge as a product of individuals' engagement with their existential issues. Much of this process, as Frankl has already noted, occurs unconsciously or at least outside of immediate awareness. We all struggle to find purpose, direction, and understanding for the life we are leading, but the quality of outcomes varies from person to person. Individuals may select similar life directions but can do so for very different existential reasons. Cataloging the Numinous qualities underlying meaning can be useful for understanding what the important reinforcers are in people's lives, the quality of their inner sense of personhood, the kinds of existential threats they actively work to protect themselves from, and their capacity to experience an inner sense of personal strength. Ultimately, the Logoplex can be useful for guiding individuals to develop styles of meaning that lead to the creation of an ongoing lifestyle of emotional resilience that is stable in the face of the many trials and tribulations of life. In short, the Numinous model provides a very deep and intimate examination of the meaning-making process that manifests the core of our individual characters.

Development of the Ways of Meaning Scale

While the Logoplex model has significant heuristic value for conceptualizing the meaning-making process, ultimately being able to assess these qualities

enables the applications of these insights into real-world contexts. The rest of this paper will overview the development and initial validation of the *Ways of Meaning Scale* (WOMS). Having such a scale would be important for three reasons. First, the scale would provide a different perspective on meaning-making than what is currently addressed in the literature. The Numinous model provides more ontological depth into the psychological foundations to meaning-making that can facilitate deeper insights into personality functioning. Second, this conceptual foundation allows for better discrimination among the different types of meaning-making that people create. As we have already noted, having meaning is always better than not having meaning, but not all meaning-making is the same. Some meaning styles create more personal engagement and actualization, while other types may serve to isolate and marginalize individuals from life. Finally, finding quantitative support for this model will help to take the field to a new level of understanding that will facilitate both clinical work and applications in business, health, and personal development.

Item Construction

The development of the WOMS followed a multi-step, iterative process. Sets of items were developed by the first two authors (RLP and JF) to capture each of the qualities represented by the four meaning-making quadrants of the Logoplex. The original 85 items were then shared with colleagues for their comments on suitability, relevance, and appropriateness as exemplars of each quadrant. Items were empirically tested in successive subject groups where each item had to meet specific criteria, which included: (a) having content independent of the FFM domains; (b) evidencing significant correlations with the Meaning facet scale of the NMI; and (c) in a factor analysis the item would uniquely load on that factor containing similarly identified items. Subjects for each study were recruited through Amazon's Mturk worker group in order to obtain large, representative samples (Burnham et al., 2018). To participate, an individual was over 18 years of age and English was their first language. Respondents did receive financial compensation for completing our survey. After each of the six iterations, items that did not meet the above empirical criteria were removed and replaced by new items. The results of each set of analyses helped us to better understand the psychological qualities that appeared to reflect the meaning-making dimensions, enabling us to construct more precise statements. Items were responded to on a 1 *Strongly Disagree* to 5 *Strongly Agree* Likert-type scale. The results of the sixth analysis left a set of 78 items that had met our inclusion criteria. These items were then given to a new, Mturk-based, adult sample of 103 men and 79 women

Table 1. Pattern Loadings and Alpha Reliabilities for the Ways of Meaning Scale, 7th Version.

Item	TR	AE	HU	SO
TR_1	.81	-.07	-.15	.02
TR_2	.80	-.12	-.01	.02
TR_3	.75	.21	.06	-.15
TR_4	.74	.26	.14	-.13
TR_5	.62	.35	.32	.08
AE_1	-.07	.93	-.06	-.06
AE_2	.00	.91	-.06	-.03
AE_3	.01	.82	.12	.02
AE_4	.09	.81	-.04	-.04
AE_5	.01	.74	.18	.18
HU_1	.00	.02	.88	-.03
HU_2	.17	-.08	.80	-.08
HU_3	.03	-.15	.67	.04
HU_4	.21	.10	.59	.06
HU_5	.01	.24	.62	.11
SO_1	-.09	-.01	-.07	.78
SO_2	-.06	-.10	-.03	.62
SO_3	.01	.11	.32	.62
SO_4	.09	.01	-.30	.60
SO_5	.16	.06	.06	.58
Alpha	.84	.91	.85	.66

Note. Loadings above .50 are in bold. SO = Solipsism; HU = Humanism; AE = Asceticism; TR = Transformative. $N = 184$.

(23–76 years of age, $M = 44.78$) in an effort to identify a subset of items that would clearly provide evidence of the four-factor structure underlying the model. The goal of this process was to create a relatively brief measure with an equal number of items for each dimension.

The results of the principal components analysis (PCA), using oblique rotations, found a set of 20 items that exhibited clear simple structure. The Appendix lists those items, and Table 1 presents the results of the PCA. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy was .85 and indicated that the data were factorable and Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant, χ^2 ($df = 190$; $N = 182$) = 1,910.93, $p < .001$. Four factors emerged with eigenvalues greater than 1 and both the screen test and a parallel analysis supported extracting only four factors. These factors were obliquely rotated. Significant cross-loadings were defined as any item that loaded $\pm .30$ on a second factor, and significant loadings onto their factor were defined as $\pm .50$. As can be seen in

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics by Gender for Scores on the WOMS 7th Version.

WOMS scale	Men (<i>n</i> = 103)		Women (<i>n</i> = 79)		<i>t</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
Solipsism	17.60	3.40	16.29	3.46	-2.56*
Humanism	18.35	4.75	19.10	4.20	1.11
Asceticism	15.16	5.89	17.54	5.32	2.83**
Transformative	20.53	3.46	20.92	2.99	.80

Note. WOMS = Ways of Meaning Scale.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. two-tailed.

Table 1, the 20 items clearly present a four-factor structure to the data, with items appropriately defining each of the four domains of the Logoplex. Alpha reliabilities for all scales are adequate, although the Solipsism scale is noticeably lower than the other three. Descriptive statistics by gender are presented in Table 2. Scores can range from a low of 5 to a high of 25. Mean scores are mostly in the middle of this range, although the Transformative scale appears slightly higher. Significant gender differences were found for two scales: Men scored significantly higher on Solipsism ($t[180] = -2.56, p < .05$) while women scored significantly higher on the Asceticism scale ($t[180] = 2.83, p < .01$). These findings suggest that men are more materially oriented in their meaning orientation while women are more focused on creating a personal relationship with a transcendent reality. Interestingly, no gender differences appeared on the two scales that reflect social engagement with communities.

The Current Study and Hypotheses

These findings present preliminary support for a 20-item scale that putatively captures the four dimensions outlined by the Logoplex. Next, we sought to replicate these structural findings in a new sample and to more fully examine the construct validity of these scales. We posed the following hypotheses: (a) The putative four-factor structure will be recovered in the new sample and factor congruence coefficients will indicate the new and original factors are identical; (b) The observed gender differences will also be recovered in the new sample; (c) alpha reliabilities will be comparable to the original values found in Table 1; (d) scores on the WOMS will be independent of the domains of the FFM (discriminant validity) and will be significantly related to the scales of the NMI (convergent validity), with the strongest associations found on the Meaning scale of the NMI as well as having multiple correlations with the Multidimensional Existential Meaning Scale (MEMS); and finally, (e) in a profile analysis, a significant group by

score interaction would indicate that the four meaning groups (solipsism, secular humanistic, aesthetic, transformative) had different profile scores on the FFM, the NMI, and the MEMS.

Method

Participants

Participants ($N=494$) consisted of 421 women and 72 men (1 missing value) between the ages of 18 and 72 ($M=27.46$, $SD=7.48$). Educationally, 89% had some college, a 2- or 4-year college degree, and the modal income level was less than \$20K. Concerning work status, 39% indicated that they were full-time students with no work, while 51% indicated either full or part-time work. The rest were unemployed.

Measures

Numinous Motivation Inventory. Developed by Piedmont (2017), this 22-item scale captures one's Numinous orientation, which represents the need to address ultimate existential issues centering around three questions: (1) is death the end? (2) Does life carry any meaning? and (3) Am I a worthy individual? The NMI contains three facet scales that address each of these issues: *Infinitude* (e.g., "I believe that this life is only one stage in a larger, eternal process"); *Meaning* ("I am guided by my personal philosophy and/or faith"); and *Worthiness* ("I value myself"). Items are responded to on a 1 *strongly disagree* to 5 *strongly agree* Likert-type scale. Items are counterbalanced to control for acquiescence effects. The NMI has normative data that controls for age and gender. The NMI has been found to be a significant, unique predictor of psychological distress and characterological impairment in both theists and atheists (Piedmont et al., 2020), coping levels among physicians (Williamson et al., 2024), and existential growth among college business majors (Piedmont et al., 2023). Reliability of responses to the NMI scales is found in Table 3.

International Personality Item Pool Big 5. Developed by Goldberg (1992) the International Personality Item Pool Big 5 (IPIP-50) is a 50-item inventory of the FFM of personality. The scale measures each dimension of the FFM using 10 items, including (a) Emotional Stability (ES), (b) Extraversion, (E), (c) Openness (O), (d) Agreeableness (A), and (e) Conscientiousness (C). Participants read each statement and respond by indicating how it describes them from very inaccurate (1) to very accurate (5). The IPIP-50 is in the public domain and responses have demonstrated comparable psychometric qualities to commercial inventories of the FFM (Goldberg et al., 2006; Mlačić &

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics and Alpha Reliabilities for Study Variables.

Scale	Statistical information		
	Mean	SD	α
IPIP Personality Scales ^{a,b}			
Emotional Stability	46.06	9.88	.80
Extraversion	46.13	11.42	.87
Openness	50.62	11.43	.78
Agreeableness	47.09	10.79	.80
Conscientiousness	49.52	10.26	.77
NMI Scales ^{c,d}			
Infinitude	53.48	7.70	.85
Meaning	51.09	8.73	.83
Worthiness	53.49	9.52	.92
MEMS Scales ^e			
Comprehension	4.84	1.16	.91
Purpose	5.59	1.02	.91
Mattering	4.85	1.14	.80

Note. IPIP=International Personality Item Pool; NMI=Numinous Motivation Inventory; MEMS=Multidimensional Existential Meaning Scale.

^aScores presented as *T*-scores with a Mean=50 and SD=10 based on data from Robertson et al. (2017).

^b*N*=352.

^cScores are presented as *T*-scores with a Mean of 50 and SD of 10 based on normative data (Piedmont, 2017).

^d*N*=424.

^e*N*=362.

Goldberg, 2007). Robertson et al. (2017) collected normative data on the IPIP-50 from a US sample and demonstrated the robustness of these norms and factor structure cross-culturally. Alpha reliabilities for scores on this scale are presented in Table 3.

Multidimensional Existential Meaning Scale. Developed by George and Park (2017), this 15-item scale is designed to capture multiple aspects of meaning, including *Comprehension*, the extent to which individuals experience a sense of coherence and understanding regarding their lives; *Purpose*, reflects the degree to which individuals experience their lives as being directed and motivated by valued life goals; and, *Mattering*, which reflects the extent to which individuals feel that their existence is of significance, importance, and value in the world. Items are responded to on a (1) *strongly disagree* to (5) *strongly agree* Likert-type scale. George and Park (2017) demonstrated that responses

to the scale have structural validity and that scores on the scales are sufficiently independent of each other to warrant their separate interpretations. Alpha reliabilities for scores on these scales are found in Table 3.

Demographic Form. Developed for the purposes of this study, this form queried participants about their age, gender, income level, educational background, area of residence (i.e., urban, suburban, rural), and ethnicity.

Procedure

The data for this cross-sectional study were collected from a sample of undergraduate students enrolled in a large public university in West Texas. Respondents were recruited through a university-based participant pool and received extra credit for voluntary participation. Participation consisted of completing a set of self-report questionnaires through a secure online third-party system; that is, Sona Systems (<https://www.sona-systems.com/>) interfacing with Qualtrics (<https://www.qualtrics.com/>). After completion of the informed consent process, participants engaged in an anonymous and confidential manner with the set of questionnaires, which included periodic attention checks. Respondents were free to skip any questions and/or withdraw from the study without consequence. Prior to data collection, the study received approval from said university's Institutional Review Board (protocol number: IRB2024-361).

Data Availability Statement

Data supporting the findings of this study are available, upon reasonable request, from the Center for Professional Studies (<https://centerforprofessionalstudies.com/contact-us/>). Restrictions apply to the availability of these data, which were used under license for this study. Data are available from RLP with permission from the Center for Professional Studies.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Table 3 presents the descriptive statistics and alpha reliability coefficients for the study outcome variables. Scores on the IPIP-50 and the NMI are presented as T-scores having a mean of 50 and *SD* of 10 based on normative data. Scores between 45 and 55 are considered average. As can be seen, mean level scores on these two scales are all within normative range, indicating that

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics by Gender for Scores on the WOMS and Alpha Reliabilities.

WOMS scale	Men (<i>n</i> = 72)		Women (<i>n</i> = 421)		<i>t</i>	α
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
Solipsism	16.49	3.83	16.79	3.25	.70	.65
Humanism	18.47	3.85	18.06	3.62	-.88	.78
Asceticism	18.11	4.81	17.62	4.47	-.56	.84
Transformative	20.46	4.16	20.46	3.27	.01	.86

Note. WOMS = Ways of Meaning Scale.

the current sample can be considered representative. SDs are within the 8 to 12 range, indicating that there is adequate diversity of scores on these two scales. Alpha reliabilities are all quite adequate. Table 4 presents similar information for the WOMS scales. As can be seen, mean and SD values are similar to those presented in Table 2. However, the gender differences noted earlier were not found in this current sample. Alpha reliability estimates for scores on the WOMS are also quite consistent with the previous sample.

Correlations with demographic variables were explored. Correlations with age found two effects: with Solipsism $r(438) = -.18$, $p < .001$, and with Transformative $r(438) = .09$, $p < .05$. Younger participants appeared to be more self-focused and concerned about their own needs while the older participants seemed more engaged with communities and concerned about their ultimate health.

To determine whether type of residence (urban, suburban, and rural) was linked to scores on the four WOMS scales, a mixed-model Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) was performed where type of residence was the between groups variable and scores on the four WOMS scales were the repeated measures. A nonsignificant scale by residence interaction effect was found (Wilks Lambda = .99, *multivariate F* (6, 974) = .82, $p = n.s.$

Concerning income, another mixed-methods MANOVA was performed where the nine categories of income were the between subjects variable and scores on the four WOMS scales were the repeated measure. A significant group by measure interaction was found: Wilks Lambda = .93, *multivariate F* (24, 1375.35) = 1.55, $p < .05$. A post hoc Least Significance Difference (LSD) test on the interaction effects indicated a few scattered findings. On the Humanism Scale (HU), those in the 160K and above income group scored lower on HU than those in the 20 to 24K and 100 to 120K groups. With

regards to Asceticism (AE), those in the 140 to 160K income group scored higher than those in the 20 to 40K, 60 to 80K, and 80 to 100K income groups. We suggest caution in interpreting this finding. Given that nine income categories were being compared against each other (36 comparisons) across the four WOMS scales (creating a total of 144 comparisons) we would expect seven significant effects just by chance. That we only found five effects suggests that these differences represent Type I errors.

Structural Analyses

A structural equation model analysis was performed (LISREL version 12.5.1) that fitted four correlated factors each defined by their respective five items. The results indicated good fit for the model (Chi Square [$df=155$]=448.77, $p<.001$; Chi Square/ $df=2.90$; RMSEA=.06. SRMR=.05, Comparative Fit Index=.93, Incremental Fit Index=.93). Each item loaded significantly on its intended factor.

In order to determine the extent to which this factor structure replicated the original structure presented in Table 1, scores on the WOMS were submitted to a principal components analysis. The KMO index was .87, indicating that the data were appropriate for factoring and the Bartlett test of sphericity was significant, χ^2 ($df=190$; $N=494$)=4192.49, $p<.001$. Five factors emerged with eigenvalues greater than 1, but both the scree plot and a parallel analysis indicated that only four factors were needed. Four factors were extracted and obliquely rotated; results are presented in Table 5. As can be seen, the putative four-factor structure of the WOMS scale was clearly recovered. To determine whether this factor solution replicated the original found in Table 1, congruence coefficients (CCs: Gorsuch, 1983) were calculated to assess match. As can be seen in Table 5, all the CCs were significant, indicating that the current solution can be seen as being identical to that found originally.

Construct Validity

To examine the independence of the WOMS scales from the Big 5 personality domains, we conducted a joint principal components analysis of the WOMS scales with the IPIP domains. To make this analysis efficient and empirically robust, instead of using the 50 IPIP items (which would create too many items for this sample size), the 10 items for each of the five domains were sorted into three packets, or subscales, consisting of three, three, and four items, respectively, creating 15 scales. The value of this approach is twofold. First, it creates small groups of items whose scores are more reliable

Table 5. Pattern Loadings and Congruence Coefficients for the Ways of Meaning Scale.

Item	TR	AE	HU	SO
TR_1	.73	.04	.08	-.01
TR_2	.86	-.08	.00	.01
TR_3	.77	.12	.04	-.03
TR_4	.81	.05	.01	.03
TR_5	.57	.08	.23	.02
AE_1	.03	.87	-.08	-.05
AE_2	-.03	.87	-.06	.03
AE_3	.16	.67	.13	-.16
AE_4	.22	.55	.04	-.03
AE_5	-.01	.70	.08	.16
HU_1	-.03	-.14	.87	.00
HU_2	.11	-.14	.78	.02
HU_3	.15	.28	.53	-.06
HU_4	.17	.12	.62	-.08
HU_5	-.07	.25	.48	.17
SO_1	-.02	-.09	-.03	.73
SO_2	-.14	.15	.01	.73
SO_3	.05	.17	.15	.54
SO_4	.10	-.22	.03	.60
SO_5	.41	.08	-.12	.49
FCC	.88***	.92***	.94***	.96***

Note. Loadings above .50 are in bold. SO = solipsism; HU = humanism; AE = asceticism; TR = transformative; FCC = factor congruence coefficient. *N* = 494.

***Factor congruence coefficient greater than 99.9% of rotations from random data.

than the items they are based on. Second, the use of three packets per factor ensures that each domain has enough elements to constitute a statistically robust factor (see Kishton & Widaman, 1994). These elements were then subjected to a principal components analysis followed by an oblique rotation (which would provide a direct evaluation of any substantive overlap among the factors). The results of this analysis are presented in Table 6.

As can be seen, six factors emerged from the analysis (the scree plot clearly indicated a six-factor solution, first eight eigenvalues: 4.68, 2.74, 2.14, 1.58, 1.40, 1.24, .72, .60). Each of the personality domains is defined by their own factor, as is the set of WOMS scales, supporting the hypothesis that the WOMS scales are independent of the Big 5 personality domains. One area of overlap is found between Agreeableness and the SO scale. The SO

Table 6. Pattern Coefficients from the Joint Principal Components Analysis of the IPIP-50 Item Packets and the WOMS Scales.

Scale	Factor					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
WOMS-SO	.51				-.71	
WOMS-HU	.85					
WOMS-AE	.71					
WOMS-TR	.81					
IPIP-ES1		.77				
IPIP-ES2		.74				
IPIP-ES3		.81				
IPIP-E1			.87			
IPIP-E2			.86			
IPIP-E3			.88			
IPIP-O1				.93		
IPIP-O2				.78		
IPIP-O3				.77		
IPIP-A1					.67	
IPIP-A2					.66	
IPIP-A3					.46	
IPIP-C1						.87
IPIP-C2						.80
IPIP-C3						.76

Note. ES=emotional stability; E=extraversion; O=openness; A=agreeableness; C=conscientiousness; WOMS=Ways of Meaning Scale; IPIP=International Personality Item Pool. Loadings with absolute values of .45 or less are deleted. $N=353$.

scale has its primary loading on the factor defined by Agreeableness ($-.71$), but it also has a secondary loading on its intended factor as well (.51). Clearly, the selfishness, miserly orientation characteristic of solipsism spans across both Numinous and Agreeableness domains. However, the correlation between these two factors is only .13, suggesting that while Agreeableness qualities are present, the SO scale does have a substantive amount of variance associated with the Numinous that is independent of the Big 5. An inspection of the inter-factor correlation matrix indicated that all six factors were orthogonal to each other ($Mean\ r=.11$, $SD=.11$, $range=-.08$ to $.30$).

WOMS scores were correlated with measures of the Numinous, and existential meaning-making, and the results are presented in Table 7. NMI scales have numerous associations, particularly for the Transformative, Humanistic,

Table 7. Correlations Between the WOMS Scales and NMI Scales and MEMS Scales.

Criteria	Ways of Meaning Scale			
	TR	AE	HU	SO
Numinous Motivation Inventory				
Infinitude	.37***	.61***	.25***	-.07
Meaning	.20***	.65***	.23***	-.05
Worthiness	.31***	.34***	.18***	.04
Multidimensional Existential Meaning Scale				
Comprehension	.26***	.41***	.29***	.21***
Purpose	.51***	.42***	.35***	.18***
Mattering	.33***	.50***	.24***	.09

Note. $N = 314$. SO = solipsism; HU = humanism; AE = asceticism; TR = transformative; NMI = Numinous Motivation Inventory; MEMS = Multidimensional Existential Meaning Scale; WOMS = Ways of Meaning Scale.

*** $p < .001$, two-tailed.

and Asceticism scales. The Solipsistic scores appear independent of all aspects of existential engagement captured by the NMI. Finally, the MEMS scales are associated with all aspects of the WOMS scales except for the relationship between Mattering and Solipsism. The strong overlap between the MEMS and WOMS scales provides strong convergent validity to the WOMS as being a measure of meaning-making. Although the WOMS scales reflect diverse types of meaning-making, they all share the same meaning functions captured by the MEMS. Moreover, consistent with the underlying theory of the Logoplex in which the transpersonal and social ends of the quadrants represent the broadest and most robust sense of well-being, correlations to the MEMS are higher for the Transformative and Asceticism quadrants than for the Secular Humanist and Solipsistic typologies.

Profile Analysis

Scores on each of the WOMS scales were converted to z -scores and then each person was assigned to a single meaning quadrant based on their highest WOMS z -score across the four scales. The breakdown of participants across the four categories was: SO = 181, HU = 104, AE = 136, and TR = 73. To test the hypothesis that group membership was randomly distributed, a one-sample chi-square test was conducted and a significant effect was found ($\chi^2 [df = 3; N = 494] = 51.77, p < .001$). With an expected frequency of 123.5, there were more Solipsists and fewer Transformative individuals than was

Table 8. Profile Analysis of Meaning Style Group Means Across Personality, the Numinous, and Existential Meaning.

	WOMS meaning group				
Scale	SO	HU	AE	TR	<i>F</i>
Personality ^a					
Emotional stability	45.92 ^A	46.74 ^A	48.23 ^A	41.28 ^B	5.93***
Extraversion	46.28	44.04 ^A	49.02 ^B	42.65 ^A	4.36**
Openness	48.93 ^A	50.73	50.96	54.10 ^B	2.59*
Agreeableness	42.11 ^A	50.01 ^B	50.12 ^B	49.81 ^B	16.64***
Conscientiousness	49.24	49.35	50.79	48.01	.91
The numinous ^b					
Infinitude	50.13 ^A	54.01 ^B	57.25 ^C	54.03 ^B	21.69***
Worthiness	48.58 ^A	51.47 ^B	53.65 ^B	52.00 ^B	8.11***
Meaning	50.82 ^A	52.50 ^A	59.37 ^B	50.90 ^A	23.74***
Existential meaning ^c					
Comprehension	4.84	4.74	5.04	4.52	2.52
Purpose	5.46	5.64	5.67	5.68	1.12
Mattering	4.66 ^A	4.78 ^A	5.16 ^B	4.84	4.04**

Note. Means with different superscripts are significantly different. SO = solipsism; HU = humanism; AE = asceticism; TR = transformative; WOMS = Ways of Meaning Scale.

^adf = 3,348.

^bdf = 3,420.

^cdf = 3,358.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

expected by chance. Overall, there were more individuals on the Intentional side of the Logoplex than on the Relational side.

Three mixed model MANOVAs were conducted, systematically using the IPIP-50, NMI, and MEMS scales as the profile scores. Significant group by profile interactions was found for the IPIP-50 (Wilks Lambda = .82, *multivariate* $F[12, 913.08] = 5.94, p < .001$), the NMI (Wilks Lambda = .93, *multivariate* $F[6, 838] = 4.82, p < .001$), and MEMS (Wilks Lambda = .93, *multivariate* $F[6, 714] = 4.40, p < .001$) scales. These findings indicate that each meaning group had a separate set of scores on each of the three instruments. To understand these interactions, one-way ANOVAs were conducted examining mean level scores across the four meaning groups for each of the 11 scales. Post hoc LSD tests were performed to show where the mean differences in profiles were found. These results are presented in Table 8.

As can be seen, there are profile differences in scores across the different meaning groups. Regarding personality, the Transformative group scored significantly lower in ES than the other groups and significantly higher on O than

the Solipsistic group, which scored significantly lower on A than all other groups. The Asceticism group scored significantly higher on E than the other groups. No pattern emerged here for the Secular Humanist group. Concerning the Numinous, the Solipsistic group scored significantly lower than the other groups on NMI Infinitude and Worthiness, supporting the Logoplex assumption that this group, being in the bottom half of the circumplex, would have lower intrinsic levels of existential engagement than those that are located on the upper half of the model. The Asceticism group scored significantly higher on both Infinitude and Meaning. Finally, on the MEMS, the only profile effect was found for Mattering, where that need was highest for the Asceticism group and lowest for the Solipsist and Secular Humanist groups.

Discussion

The pattern of findings of the current study provided robust support for the construct validity of the WOMS scales. The factor structure of the scale was recovered in two independent samples, and scores on the four subscales were found to have appropriate associations with external variables. Specifically, the WOMS scales were found to be mostly independent of the domains of the Big 5, supporting the hypothesis that meaning represents a facet of the sixth dimension of personality, the Numinous. Correlations with the NMI indicated that the WOMS scales do indeed capture aspects of ultimate existential engagement while associations with the MEMS demonstrated that the WOMS scales are convergent measures of meaning-making. Most importantly, the profile analyses indicated that each WOMS scale represented a different motivational style. These profile patterns were consistent with the meaning styles associated with their respective Logoplex quadrant. The empirical utility of these scales also adds support for the model upon which these scales were developed. Understanding meaning-making within the context of the Numinous offers greater depth of understanding for how meaning is constructed psychologically and the impact it has on behavior. We believe that these conceptual foundations represent an important advancement for the field.

Implications for Future Research

Making More Meaning Around Meaning-Making

The idea of the Numinous in general and the Logoplex in particular provides new insights into the role of meaning-making and its role in the psychic system. As Frankl pointed out, meaning represents something vastly different from the other known psychological dynamics. The data here support viewing meaning as a subordinate quality of the Numinous, which is itself

independent of the domains of the FFM of personality. But meaning is not an isolated psychological quality. Instead, it operates in tandem with the other existential dynamics of Infinitude and Worthiness. Thus, to understand the role and value of meaning, one needs to understand all of these psychological qualities (e.g., existential engagement and PTP), because together they define meaning and how it is expressed. As these data indicated, diverse ways of creating meaning are associated with different psychological styles.

These findings open-up pathways for deeper exploration for how these different psychological styles could confer to individuals different types of strengths and weaknesses, opportunities as well as challenges. For example, for the Solipsist, the strength of their meaning-making is found in the focus they have toward obtaining specific goals. Given that these goals are hypothesized to be materialistically focused, factors that interrupt the acquisition of these ends may easily result in the experience of psychological distress (e.g., frustration, anger, and anxiety) not to mention their clear limits of endurance to the inevitability of life always in flux. For the Secular Humanist, the strength of this approach to meaning-making is its socially generative function. Supporting and enhancing groups and the goals they serve contributes to healthy communities. The downside to this orientation is that one may become cynical of his/her involvement with groups, wondering whether the community beneficiaries of the group are worthy of ones' investments of personal time, talent, and treasure. The strength associated with the Ascetic is the development of wisdom and insight into those latent dynamics that are thought to underlie one's experiences of reality. The weakness of this approach is the potential for a "crisis of meaning" to arise if one finds that their understanding of the ultimate causes of life do not bear themselves out in personal experience. Finally, for the Transformative person, the strength of this approach is the vision they hold of a community's potential and they have the personal capacity to transform those communities into more inclusive, just, and affirming places. The weakness is a "crisis of relevancy" which arises when the person doubts their ability to effect change in their social context. The vision is broad and challenging but the transformationalist questions whether they possess the ability to inspire change. Thus, meaning ought not be seen as a monolithic, unidimensional quality. Not all meaning-making is the same.

The Content of Meaning Versus the Underlying Processes of Meaning-Making

It may be useful to understand meaning from two perspectives: content versus process. The former represents many of the currently existing measures of meaning. They focus on whether or not someone has a meaning orientation, or

the focus of that meaning (e.g., finding purpose, understanding, social support, personal challenges). The process approach attempts to articulate the psychological dynamics underlying the generation of meaning. This is a more fundamental approach to understanding meaning because it sets the parameters that define how meaning is created in any content area. For example, looking for purpose in life is one key element identified in meaning-making, but what that purpose is and the role it serves will vary depending on one's existential style. Purpose can range from being very self-focused on attaining personal gratification to a more inclusive, socially-oriented perspective that empowers both self and others. A process approach adds a more fine-grained understanding of how meaning is formed and the motivations that are being actualized.

Frankl's Concept of Meaning Within the Context of the Numinous

Placing meaning, especially how it is defined by Frankl, within the context of the Numinous seems to be a natural fit. According to Frankl, meaning is a uniquely human quality that distinguishes us from other species. Similarly, the Numinous is hypothesized to be that quality which psychologically defines our species (Albright & Ashbrook, 2001; Piedmont & Wilkins, 2020). Frankl theorized about how meaning-making has at its core a spiritual, self-transcendent quality, which is what makes humans right and good (Wong, 2014). This spiritual nature is what creates the basic drive to meaning, provides coherence and order to perceptions of life, and calls us to find meaning in all situations. Over 20 years of sustained, replicated research also suggests that the Numinous is that secular motivation that underlies religious and spiritual strivings (Piedmont, 1999; 2026; Piedmont & Wilkins, 2020). The Numinous represents our ultimate existential engagement with life that addresses the same key issues of mortality, meaning, and personal worth on which all religious/spiritual models provide compelling reasons. The Numinous contains the best potential for each person. What the Numinous adds is the recognition that while meaning-making is an essential adaptive task for everyone, the qualities, goals, and psychological dynamics defining meaning are quite varied. The Logoplex provides an empirically compelling understanding of the process of meaning-making, its implications for action, and a way to test such claims quantitatively.

Interpreting Findings from Meaning-Making Research

Understanding meaning as part of a larger psychological domain provides greater interpretive latitude for understanding its processes. The data from this study offer an interesting hypothesis about the nature of distress that

arises when meaning is not found. Frankl introduced the concept of “noölogical distress” as the result of a breakdown in meaning-making, or when cherished meaning systems are found without value. It is interesting to note in this study negative affect had only one association with the meaning-making process: the Transformative group scored significantly lower on ES than the other groups. This is especially interesting because this group is seen as having higher levels of resilience and well-being. The Solipsistic quadrant, which is seen as having the most fragile meaning structure because efforts at self-gratification and support can be easily upset by the vagaries and finitude of life (e.g., a paycheck is delayed or a job is lost), scored higher on this domain. Interestingly, the facet of the Numinous termed Worthiness has shown itself to be a predictor of psychological distress and characterological impairment that is independent of the personality dimension of Neuroticism (Piedmont et al., 2020). Yet, lower scores predict emotional dysphoria about as well as Neuroticism. Here, the Transformative group scored significantly higher than the Solipsists. Clearly, the relationship between meaning-making and emotional dysphoria is complex. While the Transformative group may experience anxieties and distress, perhaps surrounding social issues in their environments, existentially, they possess a strong sense that their lives matter and have value. Worthiness may help the Transformative group maintain a better sense of emotional balance in life.

Nonetheless, we hypothesize that any emotional crisis associated with meaning is *not* so much a disturbance in a person’s meaning process, but rather an issue surrounding the person’s sense of Worthiness. Our meaning systems are always being modified, adjusted, or reworked based on our personal experiences. However, sometimes when a meaning system breaks down and leaves a person feeling emotionally exposed, a perception that one is existentially inadequate may emerge that creates feelings of helplessness and complete personal inadequacy (cf. *existential vacuum* and *existangst*); feelings that can be hard to overcome. Thus, a crisis in meaning is not so much an issue with our meaning system per se but rather occurs when the discovered inadequacy of a meaning network exposes the individual to feelings of personal existential inadequacy and a lack of personal worth. Meaning, therefore, occurs within a larger existential system of multiple constructs. The Numinous model provides a broader context for understanding the interplay among these different existential elements; all of which work collaboratively to create a personal sense of direction, depth, and durability for one’s life.

Study Strengths and Limitations

This study represents the first efforts to empirically measure meaning-making using the theoretical framework called the Logoplex and therefore

needs further research to develop its evidentiary base. Though the study possesses several strengths, including the iterative process of item refinement, establishing a statistically robust factor structure to the WOMS, evidence of internal consistency (coefficient alpha), evidence of discriminant and convergent validity, and establishing a norm sample to compare future scores, there are still important factors this study did not explore in relation to the WOMS. For example, one key construct hypothesized to be related to the Numinous as well as the WOMS is PTP. This study did not address questions of convergent validity to PTP. This study also did not establish a connection between the different types of meaning and how they function in concert with various values humans hold, nor important decisions they may make that are directly related to life purpose or goals (e.g., what work to pursue or family planning) that are purported to be in alignment with the meaning people create. It will also be important to determine whether these meaning-based dynamics do indeed find expression in people's behavior, thus the need for observer ratings to determine the consensual validity to these constructs. Another limitation is the low number of men in the main data sample. This may be due to the use of a college student sample, which usually contains an overrepresentation of women. Fortunately, the MTurk samples employed for the initial seven rounds of data collection did provide a more gender balanced sample, which is characteristic of this worker group (Burnham et al., 2018). Future research will need to be more mindful in recruiting men. Finally, research will need to determine the cross-cultural generalizability of this model to cultures that are less individualistic and that do not share similar religious and cultural values. Does the Logoplex provide a useful heuristic for capturing the meaning-making process in a similarly useful way?

Conclusion

This report takes the concept of meaning-making in an entirely new direction. By placing meaning within the context of an empirically well-defined existential space, the construct acquires much needed ontological depth and specification. The Numinous model fleshes out more fully the existential space occupied by meaning and meaning-making by including the dimensions of Infinitude and Worthiness as co-actors in its expression. Rather than seeing meaning as a monolithic construct, the Numinous-based Logoplex model articulates the basic psychological elements that constitute meaning-making and the resulting psychological qualities that are associated with the expressed meaning. While all meaning can provide people with purpose and

direction in life, these resulting meaning-based lifestyles can have very different implications for well-being, resilience, and ultimate psychological health (see Griffith's, 2010 concept of the "Nazi Test" for meaning making). We hope that the Logoplex will serve as a meaningful prism through which to view the complex interplay of psychological dynamics that go into how people create, shape, and direct their sense of personhood in a way that addresses their fundamental human needs to find durability, direction, and personal value for the lives they are leading.

ORCID iDs

Ralph L. Piedmont  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0482-6761>

Jesse Fox  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8022-4594>

Evan Copello  <https://orcid.org/0009-0006-8946-2851>

Jon R. Webb  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1143-1319>

Ethical Considerations

The Texas Tech University Ethics Review Committee approved our study (approval: IRB2024-361) on June, 2024. Respondents gave written consent for review and signature before starting the study.

Author Contributions

RLP Project Development, data analysis, write-up; JF: Project development, data analysis, write-up; EC data management, write-up; and JW project development, data source, write-up.

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Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declared the following potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: Ralph L. Piedmont receives royalties on the sale of the Numinous Motivation Inventory.

Data Availability Statement

The NMI is a copyright protected, proprietary instrument of the Center for Professional Studies. Any study containing data from the scale is considered private

and proprietary. The Center will accept appropriate requests for access to this data set on a case-by-case basis. All requests can be sent to: info@thecfps.com.

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Author Biographies



Ralph L. Piedmont, PhD, is the Managing Director of the Center for Professional Studies and Adjunct Professor of Counseling at Johns Hopkins University. His research interests are in the Big 5 Personality Model as well as a focus on the Numinous, which is a sixth dimension in this model.



Jesse Fox, PhD, is an Associate Professor and former Chair in the Department of Counselor Education at Stetson University. He also serves as the Director of the Center for Optimal Health across the Lifespan at Stetson, an interdisciplinary research center, and as the Executive Director of the Episcopal Counseling Center in DeLand, Florida.



Evan Copello, MS, is a PhD Candidate in Social Work at Baylor University and an adjunct lecturer in the university's Diana R. Garland School of Social Work. He holds master's degrees in Psychological Science and Counselor Education, bringing a strong interdisciplinary background to his teaching and research.



Jon R. Webb, PhD, is a licensed clinical psychologist and tenured Associate Professor in the Addictive Disorders and Recovery Studies Program of the Department of Community, Family, and Addiction Sciences at Texas Tech University. His professional interests are focused on the area of spirituality and health. With Routledge, he has published a sole-authored book entitled, *Understanding Forgiveness and Addiction: Theory, Research, and Clinical Application* (2021) and a sole-edited book entitled, *Handbook of Spirituality, Health, and Well-Being: A Psychological Perspective* (2026).

Appendix

Ways of Meaning Scale

Ralph L. Piedmont, PhD and Jesse Fox, PhD

1. "I will help others if they are willing to help me" is a key element of my personal philosophy of life (SO1)
2. I believe that everyone who has ever lived deserves justice (HU1)
3. I meditate and/or pray so that I can grow as a person (AE1)
4. I hope that tomorrow will be a better world for all of us (TR1)
5. I take care of my needs first (SO2)
6. All of the world, including past and future generations, deserves justice (HU2)
7. I pray and/or meditate so that I feel close to a larger sense of reality (AE2)
8. Future generations depend upon the good decision we make today (TR2)
9. I stay focused on what I need in the moment (SO3)
10. All people are of greatest importance and value (HU3)
11. I believe that there is an ultimate plan for all humanity (AE3)
12. We build a better tomorrow by inspiring people today (TR3)
13. Being financially independent is the only way to be truly free (SO4)
14. My compassion includes everybody (HU4)
15. I believe that there is a larger, transcendent reality of which we are a part (AE4)
16. I support causes that call people to act for the greater good (TR4)
17. I am willing to do what it takes to move ahead in life (SO5)
18. Only the type of love that includes everyone is worth my time (HU5)
19. Nothing gets in the way of my sense of a higher calling (AE5)

20. I am committed to those ideals that promote community, justice, and peace (TR5)

Items are responded to on a 1 “*strongly disagree*” to 5 “*strongly agree*” Likert-type scale.

Instructions: All of us create a system of values and personal priorities that we use to help focus us on what we consider to be of most importance. These values and priorities form the core sense of meaning that guides us through life and orients us towards those goals that we see as most important. The following list of items reflects a variety of perspectives, values, and personal priorities that individuals use for creating personal meaning. Please read each of these statements and rate how important they are to you. While many of these statements may reflect values and priorities that appeal to you, we would like you to rate each statement in terms of how well it defines your highest set of values and meanings. In other words, when you think over the course of your life: past, present, and future; rate the following list of items in terms of their importance to you over the entirety of your life span.