

## TIME PERSPECTIVE AS PREDICTOR OF MEANING IN LIFE

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**Abstract.** The purpose of this study was to determine whether meaning in life among Macedonian students can be predicted based on their dominant orientation toward past, present or future. Participants in the study were 252 students aged 18 to 27 years. Zimbardo Time Perspective Inventory was used for measuring five factors of time perspective, while two dimensions of meaning in life were measured with Meaning in Life Questionnaire. The results showed that students with sentimental attitude toward past (Past Positive), with the absence of traumatic past experiences (Past Negative), hedonistic orientation (Present Hedonistic) and direction to future goals and achievements (Future), report presence of meaning in life. On the other hand, students who search for meaning in life are those who have a sentimental relationship with the past and future orientation, as well as unpleasant memories of the past and the present fatalistic view determined by external factors (Present Fatalistic). Hence, significant predictors of Presence of Meaning in Life appeared to be orientation toward past positive, hedonistic present and the future, as well as avoidance of the negative past reminiscences, explaining 11.6% of the variance. The Search for Meaning in Life can be predicted from Past Positive, Past Negative and Future, thus explaining 12.9% of the variance. The findings confirmed the relevance of temporal perspective on the meaning in life in Macedonian students. Investigation revealed that most contributing sources of meaning in life among adolescents are relationships with family, partners and friends.

**Keywords:** *Time perspective, Meaning in life, Sources of meaning, Students.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Interest in conceptualisation of the meaning of life is originally rooted in philosophical contemplation about the meaning of human existence in general. On the other hand, psychology puts the focus mainly on the meaning in each individual's life. The idea that each person needs to discover meaning in his or her life was brought to psychology by Victor Frankl (1977) who claimed that determination to meaning is the ultimate human motivational force. More comprehensive way to define the meaning is proposed by Wong (2012) in his PURE model (purpose, understanding, responsibility and enjoyment). In this model, the four components of the meaning in life refer to its motivational, cognitive, social and affective aspect, respectively. Another contemporary model is focused on two of the above mentioned components: motivational and cognitive one (Steger et al., 2006). The authors proposed a two-dimensional model for meaning in life, one dimension being Presence of Meaning in Life (PML) and the second one being Search for Meaning in Life (SML). PML refers to the extent in which people comprehend, make sense of, or see significance in their lives, accompanied by the degree in which they perceive themselves to have a purpose, mission, or over-arching aim in life. On the other hand, SML refers to people's efforts to establish or augment their understanding of the meaning in their lives. Additionally, Steger (2009) suggests that sources from which people say they draw meaning could be beneficial for shedding light on the concept.

In the literature, there have been indications for strong relationship between meaning in life and temporal dimensions. As Erymaz (2011) pointed out, people need an important tool to give meaning of their lives and control it, and this tool is time. All plans and intentions

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are realized within time. It is also within time that the human being strives to satisfy the need for meaning in life and experiences that meaning. An exploration of one's relationship with time has a potential to develop fuller evaluations of one's life, through finding connections between past and present events and future aspirations. It may help to develop a sense of continuity between time perspectives and even facilitate the process of finding a deeper meaning in one's life (Bonniwell, 2005).

The time perspective concept, developed by [Zimbardo and Boyd \(1999\)](#), consists of five factors, which promote different attitudes toward temporal frames. Orientation toward past could be either positive or negative. *Past-Positive* (PP) reflects a warm, pleasurable, often sentimental and nostalgic view of one's past with maintaining relationships with family and friends. *Past-Negative* (PN) is determined by personal experiences that were aversive, traumatic or unpleasant. Orientation toward present could be hedonistic or fatalistic. *Present-Hedonistic* (PH) refers to living in the moment, in the here and now, pleasure seeking, enjoying high intensity activities, seeking thrills and new sensations and openness to adventures. *Present-Fatalistic* (PF) is associated with helplessness, hopelessness and a belief that outside forces control one's life, for e.g. spiritual or governmental forces. Finally, *Future* orientation (F) is concerned with working for future goals and rewards, often at the expense of present enjoyment, delaying gratification and avoiding time-wasting temptations.

According to [Sobol-Kwapinska \(2009\)](#) those who have hedonistic orientation toward present perceive their life as more purposeful, while those who are more fatalistic oriented have a lower sense of meaning in life. In one study [Steger et al. \(2008\)](#) found that Presence of Meaning in Life has significant positive correlation with Past-Positive and significant negative correlation with Past-Negative temporal orientation. Contrary to it, Search for Meaning in Life was found to be positively related to Past-Negative and Present-Fatalistic. Investigating the relationship between attitude toward time and the presence of meaning in life, [Przepiorka \(2012\)](#) found that the more extended the time perspective was, the higher meaning in live people experienced. Furthermore, the author concluded that the most significant predictors of the presence of meaning in life were low hostile time and high friendly time.

Time perspective and meaning in life

have been the subject of only few empirical studies in the Macedonian cultural context ([Ачковска Лешковска, Штерјовска, 2013](#); [Shterjovska and Achkovska-Leshkovska, 2013](#), [Spasovski, 2012](#)) but none of them has explored their relationship.

## 2. METHOD

The aim of the study is to examine how factors of time perspective are connected to dimensions of meaning in life, as well as which of the mentioned variables, if any, can predict the presence of meaning in life and search of meaning in life in Macedonian female students. The research also involved the objective to determine the sources of meaning in their lives.

According to the literature review of theory and researching studies on these topics ([Zimbardo and Boyd, 1999](#); [Steger et al., 2008](#); [Oles, Brygola and Sibinska, 2010](#); [Przepiorka, 2012](#)) Presence of Meaning in Life was assumed to correlate positively with Past-Positive, Present-Hedonistic and Future, while negatively with Past-Negative. Also, SML was hypothesized to be in positive correlation with Past-Negative, Present-Fatalistic and Future.

Correlation method and linear regression analysis were applied as the statistical procedure to this examination. Participants in the study were 252 undergraduate female students, aged 18 to 27 years, from the Department of Psychology and Faculty of Informatics Technology in the oldest university in the Republic of Macedonia. They were given two instruments:

Zimbardo Time Perspective Inventory (ZTPI, [Zimbardo and Boyd, 1999](#)). The 56-item scale consists of 5 subscales measuring 5 factors of time perspective: Past Positive, Past Negative, Present Hedonistic, Present Fatalistic and Future.

Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MLQ, [Steger et al., 2006](#)). This 7-point Likert scale composes of 10 items assessing 2 dimensions: Presence of Meaning in Life and Search for Meaning in Life.

Numerous studies have demonstrated high reliability for the mentioned scales in many different cultures. In the Macedonian sample, the Cronbach's alphas for ZTPI subscales range from 0.70 to 0.80 and for MLQ sub-scales were 0.72 for PML and 0.83 for SML.

Also participants were asked to name

3 sources which they mostly draw meaning from, and the obtained data were sorted into categories and percentages were calculated.

### 3. RESULTS

In Table 1. descriptive statistics, as well as inter-correlations between the factors of time perspective and dimensions of meaning in life, are represented.

**Table 1.** Means, standard deviations and correlations among Time Perspective factors and Meaning in Life dimensions (N=252)

|     | PP    | PN      | PH    | PF     | F      | PML    | SML    |
|-----|-------|---------|-------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| PP  | 1     | -.208** | .125* | .069   | .204** | .200** | .141*  |
| PN  |       | 1       | -.012 | .440** | .091   | -.160* | .249** |
| PH  |       |         | 1     | .216** | -.152* | .200** | .100   |
| PF  |       |         |       | 1      | -.066  | -.055  | .196** |
| F   |       |         |       |        | 1      | .156*  | .230** |
| PML |       |         |       |        |        | 1      | .027   |
| SML |       |         |       |        |        |        | 1      |
| M   | 3.597 | 2.826   | 3.637 | 2.928  | 3.542  | 25.837 | 24.595 |
| SD  | .480  | .657    | .475  | .551   | .537   | 6.233  | 6.736  |

The results show that Presence of Meaning in Life is in significant positive correlation with Past Positive ( $r=0.200$ ,  $p<0.01$ ), Present Hedonistic ( $r=0.200$ ,  $p<0.01$ ) and Future ( $r=0.156$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) while in significant negative correlation with Past Negative ( $r=-0.160$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). The other dimension of meaning in life, Search for Meaning in Life is positively connected with Past Positive ( $r=0.141$ ,  $p<0.05$ ), Past Negative ( $r=0.249$ ,  $p<0.01$ ), Present Fatalistic ( $r=0.196$ ,  $p<0.01$ ) and Future ( $r=0.230$ ,  $p<0.01$ ).

Tables 2 and 4 refer to the results of the multiple linear regression analysis, while tables 3 and 5 represent Coefficients of Regression Models for Presence of Meaning in Life and for Search for Meaning in Life, respectively.

**Table 2.** Multiple Regression Analyses Predicting Presence of Meaning in Life from Time Perspective Factors

| Model | R    | R <sup>2</sup> | Adj.R <sup>2</sup> | F      | Sig. F | R <sup>2</sup> Ch. | F Ch.  | p    |
|-------|------|----------------|--------------------|--------|--------|--------------------|--------|------|
| 1.    | .200 | .040           | .036               | 10.467 | .001   | .040               | 10.467 | .001 |
| 2.    | .267 | .071           | .064               | 9.547  | .000   | .031               | 8.320  | .004 |
| 3.    | .307 | .094           | .083               | 8.607  | .000   | .023               | 6.318  | .013 |
| 4.    | .340 | .116           | .101               | 8.088  | .000   | .022               | 6.012  | .015 |

Predictors: PP  
 Predictors: PP, PH  
 Predictors: PP, PH, F  
 Predictors: PP, PH, F, PN

**Table 3.** Coefficients of Regression Models for Presence of Meaning in Life

| Model | B      | SE   | $\beta$ | p    |
|-------|--------|------|---------|------|
| PP    | 2.602  | .804 | .200    | .001 |
| PP    | 2.315  | .799 | .178    | .004 |
| PH    | 2.332  | .808 | .178    | .004 |
| PP    | 1.850  | .812 | .142    | .024 |
| PH    | 2.705  | .814 | .206    | .001 |
| F     | 1.844  | .733 | .158    | .013 |
| PP    | 1.371  | .827 | .106    | .099 |
| PH    | 2.786  | .806 | .212    | .001 |
| F     | 2.103  | .734 | .180    | .005 |
| PN    | -1.438 | .587 | -.152   | .015 |

**Table 4.** Multiple Regression Analyses Predicting Search for Meaning in Life from Time Perspective Factors

| Model | R    | R <sup>2</sup> | Adj.R <sup>2</sup> | F      | Sig. F | R <sup>2</sup> Ch. | F Ch.  | p    |
|-------|------|----------------|--------------------|--------|--------|--------------------|--------|------|
| 1.    | .249 | .062           | .058               | 16.559 | .000   | .062               | 16.559 | .000 |
| 2.    | .325 | .105           | .098               | 14.655 | .000   | .043               | 12.020 | .001 |
| 3.    | .359 | .129           | .118               | 12.233 | .000   | .024               | 6.718  | .010 |

Predictors: PN  
 Predictors: PN, F  
 Predictors: PN, F, PP

**Table 5.** Coefficients of Regression Models for Search for Meaning in Life

| Model | B     | SE   | $\beta$ | p    |
|-------|-------|------|---------|------|
| PN    | 2.556 | .628 | .249    | .000 |
| PN    | 2.361 | .617 | .230    | .000 |
| F     | 2.634 | .760 | .209    | .001 |
| PN    | 2.739 | .627 | .267    | .000 |
| F     | 2.176 | .772 | .172    | .005 |
| PP    | 2.264 | .873 | .161    | .010 |

The results from the linear regression analysis show that significant predictors of Presence of Meaning in Life are orientations toward Past Positive ( $\beta=0.106$ ,  $p=0.099$ ), Present Hedonistic ( $\beta=0.212$ ,  $p=0.001$ ) and Future ( $\beta=0.180$ ,  $p=0.005$ ), as well as lack of Past Negative ( $\beta=-0.152$ ,  $p=0.015$ ), explaining 11.6% of the variance. Search for Meaning in Life can be predicted from Past Positive ( $\beta=0.161$ ,  $p=0.010$ ), Past Negative ( $\beta=0.267$ ,  $p=0.000$ ) and Future ( $\beta=0.172$ ,  $p=0.005$ ), thus explaining 12.9% of the variance.

The data for the sources of meaning in life revealed that for students, the most important are the significant others. The percentages of each source, sorted by amount, are represented as follows: family (77%), romantic love (53%), friends (44%), education (15%), work (11%), happiness (9%) and self (8%).

### 4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Meaning in life is crucial for the well-being of an individual. As Steger (2009) pointed out, the eudemonic facet of the well-being refers to the extent to which people comprehend, make sense of, or see significance in their lives, accompanied by the degree to

which they perceives themselves to have a purpose, mission, or over-arching aim in life. According to the mean scores of the Meaning in Life variables in the present study, it could be concluded that Macedonian female students have a relatively high level of Presence and Search of Meaning in Life. This tendency could be explained from the developmental perspective. College students are engaged and motivated in their efforts to find meaning in life, especially when they are close to graduating, when they tend to be more reflective of their life choices. High levels of both PML and SML suggest that respondents feel the presence of meaning in their lives, but are still open to explore the purpose of their life.

Time perspective is regarded as an expression of a person's own system of meanings that allows one to develop a coherent framework for living. The results of the presented study show that Past Positive, Past Negative and Future are significantly connected with both dimensions of meaning in life, while Present Hedonistic and Present Fatalistic are correlated with Presence of Meaning in Life and Search for Meaning in Life, respectively.

These findings are in accord with the ones reported in previous studies (Zimbardo and Boyd, 1999 Steger et. al., 2008). Having in mind that Past Positive is the time perspective that refers to pleasant memories of the past and involves warm personal interactions as a most dominant characteristic, it is understandable why it appeared to be one of the predictors of the Presence of Meaning in Life. Fruitful ground provided by pleasant memories of the past gives potential sources for meaning in life. Investigations have revealed that most contributing source of meaning in life among adolescents is their relationship with friends, partners and family (Steger, Oishi, and Ksebiri, 2011, Mulders, 2011). This conclusion is congruent with the findings regarding sources of meaning in life in our study.

Besides pleasant past experiences, meaning can be drawn from joyful moments on daily bases, especially for adolescents. Mulders, 2011 suggests that post-modernist youths meet a new challenge in a society with diverse orientations and are provided with more freedom and autonomy than generations before. As a result, young people refuse to adopt an ideological framework, thus orienting toward more mundane, hedonistic ideas about meaning in life. As the author hypothesized, almost half of the adolescents participated in his study, mentioned pleasure as provider of meaning in life.

These results are compatible with findings that refer to pleasure as provider of meaning in life. However, set on a path towards significant life decisions, adolescents also derive meaning from their future plans. In one previous study (Steger et al., 2006), it was revealed that Search for Meaning in Life is in strong positive relation with neuroticism, depression and negative emotions, which is congruent with the unpleasant psychological states of individuals with Past Negative focus. Search for Meaning in Life might exemplify an inability to let go of painful past experiences, so that is why Past Negative has appeared as its predictor. Having no stable ground for meaning in life derived from the meaningful past events, it appears that adolescents are stimulated to search for meaning in their future goals. It seems that the sense of hanging between an unhappy past and an unknown future, makes adolescents to search for meaning. With the focus on future time perspective, they make efforts to establish the significance and purpose of their lives. As they search for meaning both within themselves, as well as in the outside world, they are seeking to set themselves on a path towards happiness and a full enjoyment of life. During their transition to adulthood, adolescents are facing a wide range of difficulties, challenges and changes. In order to encourage a smooth transition it is important to find out their psychological well-being.

In conclusion, the implication of the findings of the present study might be found to be in the fields of education or consultancy. Adolescents should be open to think about different sources of meaning that have personal significance for them and to develop skills for setting and achieving goals effectively. These skills may serve for preserving meaning in life, especially in adolescence as a period which is connected with many changes in life and taking up responsibilities. Also, relying on their past experiences, adolescents should be stimulated on the process of meaning making driven not only from the pleasant past events, but also from the traumatic ones. Finally, they should learn how to balance the time perspectives having a more flexible attitude and developing switch-off ability in accordance with the external circumstances and personal needs.

### **Conflict of interests**

Authors declare no conflict of interest.

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