

# Literature Review on the Relationship between Identity Formation and Meaning in Life Among Emerging Adults

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**Abstract:** The present research on the relationship between meaning in life and identity orientation is examined in this literature review. Existing literature defines meaning in life as a variety of things that makes one's life meaningful, such as a sense of direction, order, purpose, coherence, or goal pursuit. Identity is a well-studied construct in psychological study that refers to a person's understanding of themselves as a distinct and unique entity. Although developing one's identity is seen as one path to finding meaning in life, the relationship between identity orientation and meaning in life is not well studied in the current literature. Several research in this review demonstrates the relationship between identity orientation and life meaning. This review of the literature demonstrates that such a relationship is possible because identity orientation can help a person make sense of the world (comprehension), clarify one's future goals (purpose), and see the value and significance of one's life (mattering), all of which are dimensions of the meaning in life construct. The researches referenced also examined various meaning in life outcomes, especially for emerging adults. Implications of the findings from reviewed studies and future directions are also discussed.

**Keywords:** meaning in life, identity orientation, emerging adults

## I. INTRODUCTION

Being able to realize meaning in life is perhaps one of the tasks a person desires to achieve during the course of one's life. It is evident that having a sense that one's life is meaningful strongly contributes to positive mental health outcomes and one's well-being (Steger, Oishi, & Kashdan, 2009) while a lack of meaning may result in an existential crisis (Frankl, 1992 in Feldman & Snyder, 2005).

Meaning in life may sometimes be confused with meaning of life. Martela and Steger (2016) suggest that meaning of life asks what the point of life is whereas meaning in life is concerned with what makes people experience meaningfulness in life. Thus, when asked about the meaning of life, one is asked to evaluate what one thinks about life in general. On the other hand, when asked about the meaning in life, one needs to look into the things that make one's life meaningful.

Existing literature on the meaning in life measure often looks into two aspects: presence of meaning and search for meaning (Steger, et al., 2006). Presence of meaning refers

to the degree to which one feels that his or her life has meaning whereas, search for meaning refers to the degree to which one is engaged and motivated to find meaning in one's life. Recently, George and Park (2016a) expanded on this conceptualization and defined meaning in life as consisting of three dimensions namely; comprehension (the extent to which one's life is experienced as making sense), purpose (the sense that life is being directed by valued goals), and mattering (the sense the one's existence matters in the world). They argued that one's sense of whether life has meaning or not reflects these three dimensions of meaning (George & Park, 2016a).

Studies on meaning often point to the older years as the time when people report more importance on having meaning in their lives (Awasthi, Chauhan & Verma, 2015) however, meaning in life has also been found to play a significant role for college students (Shin & Steger, 2016; Hodges, Denig, & Crowe, 2014). For instance, Trevisan, Bass, Powell, and Eckerd (2017) suggest that the changes and transitions that a student experiences during college may encourage him or her to seek out purpose and meaning in life. Hodges, Denig and Crowe (2014) further point out that life meaning, which aids in human resiliency, especially for those who are at risk for depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and suicide, is crucial for the well-being of college students.

Moreover, it has also been found that a high sense of meaning enables students to persevere and complete their studies (Makola, 2014) and can significantly predict academic performance among college students (Mason, 2017; Makola, 2007). These existing literature suggests that meaning in life is beneficial to youth development (Navarez, 2017), and it is the salience of having meaning in life among college students that paved the way for empirical studies to examine what might contribute to having this sense of meaning.

Erik Erikson (1968) suggests that identity formation may provide an individual with a sense of meaning and direction (as cited in Shin & Steger, 2014) and that a sense of meaning in life may emerge following a healthy resolution of the identity crisis (Kiang & Fuligni, 2010). Identity refers to the traits, characteristics, social relations, roles, and social group membership that define a person (Oyserman, Elmore & Smith, 2012). Early studies on identity development were

pioneered by Erikson and were eventually extended by several scholars such as James Marcia (1996) through his identity status paradigm and Michael Berzonsky (1989) in his identity style model, among many others. Majority of previous approaches to identity were predominantly based on the model of the private self, separated from social roles and relations, and defined through dispositions, qualities, capabilities, and goals (Pilarska, 2014). However, this may not be the case for collectivist cultures where identity development is more framed around clearly prescribed social roles and responsibilities unlike in individualistic cultures where it may be based on individually chosen goals, values, and beliefs (Schwartz, Donnellan, Ravert, Luyckx, & Zamboanga, 2012).

Thus, identity development may be seen from the perspective of one's identity orientations. Identity orientation refers to the relative importance that individuals place on various identity attributes or characteristics when constructing their self-definitions (Cheek, N., Cheek, J., Grimes, & Tropp, 2002). Kashima and Hardie (2000) identified three identity orientations namely, the individual, relational, and collective orientations.

The individual orientation refers to the private and idiosyncratic self and that which considers one's unique traits and characteristics as a source of the self-concept. The relational orientation reflects self-definitions from significant others and relationships. In this identity orientation, the self-concept is rooted in aspects shared with significant others and the roles one takes on within these relationships. The collective orientation, on the other hand, emphasizes one's social groups where one's self-concept is rooted in this membership (Du, King, & Chi, 2017). Individuals may differ as to which of the three orientations is most defining of his or her self. Nevertheless, each identity orientation may have a unique impact on a person's behaviors and characteristics (Triandis, 1989, as cited in Kashima & Hardie, 2000).

Although defining one's identity is viewed as one path to finding meaning in life (Kiang & Fuligni, 2010; Erikson, 1968, as quoted in Shin & Steger, 2014), the relationship between identity orientation and meaning in life is not well studied in the current research. This review of literature attempts to show that such a relationship is possible since identity orientation may help a person make sense of the world (comprehension), may help make clear one's goals for the future (purpose), and can make one see the value and significance of one's life (mattering), which are dimensions of the meaning in life construct.

This literature review presents existing studies on meaning in life and identity orientation with the goal of providing theoretical and empirical support on how identity orientation may contribute to having meaning in life, especially among emerging adults. Studies on meaning in life among emerging adults will be presented first, followed by studies on meaning in life and its outcomes, studies on

identity orientation, and lastly, studies that support the link between identity orientation and meaning in life.

## II. MEANING IN LIFE AMONG EMERGING ADULTS

Existing literature defines meaning in life as a lot of things such as a sense of direction, order, purpose, coherence, or goal pursuit that one experiences in life (Lambert, et al., 2010; Steger, et al., 2006; Steger, 2012). One of the widely used conceptualizations was that of Steger and his colleagues (2006) who defined meaning in life as the sense made of, and significance felt regarding, the nature of one's being and existence. A tripartite conceptualization of meaning in life (George & Park, 2016a) emerged recently, defining meaning in life as the sense that one's life is making sense, is motivated by valued goals, and is of significance in the world, thus consisting of three constructs namely, comprehension, purpose, and mattering. It can be found that these constructs are also the common definitions used for meaning in life across literature and studies.

Studies on meaning are often contextualized in different age groups. To address this, Awasthi, Chauhan, and Verma (2015) conducted a review of existing studies about the relationship of meaning in life with health and well-being ranging from 2009 to 2014. Studies reviewed included qualitative, quantitative, and longitudinal studies involving samples belonging from the adolescent to the old age group. They found that adolescents are more involved in searching for meaning in their lives while elderly people reported more importance on the presence of meaning in their lives. Given the findings from their review of studies, they suggest that longitudinal studies be conducted to better examine the direction of influence of meaning in life across different developmental stages. Also, they suggested that cultural factors be included in the construction and maintenance of one's sense of meaning in life.

Other studies suggest that finding meaning in life becomes important during early adulthood (McAdams, 2001 as cited in Wilt, Bleidorn, Revelle, 2016; Arnett, 2000) and appear to be significant especially for college students (Shin & Steger, 2016; Hodges, Denig, & Crowe, 2014).

Arnett (2000) introduced the developmental stage of emerging adulthood as the period of life which offers the most opportunity for exploring one's identity. Emerging adulthood covers the period from one's late teens to early adulthood, or the ages 18 – 25. It is during this stage that an individual attends to several things, including establishing one's sense of identity (Schwartz, et al., 2012). Such self-development is coupled with freedom and independence which may have been limited during adolescence. In the Philippine setting, the ages 18 – 25 encompass the college years, which is considered a period of major identity development (Adams, 2012, as cited in Trevisan, et al., 2017).

Hodges, Denig, and Crowe (2014) investigated the attitudes of college students (both undergraduate and graduate) towards purpose in life and self-esteem. They

pointed out that life meaning and purpose in life are crucial for the well-being of college students and are positive attributes that aid in human resiliency, especially for those college students who are at risk for depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and even suicide. Given such importance, they aimed to find out whether college students indeed consider purpose in life and self-esteem as important to them. Results of their study confirmed their hypothesis that purpose in life and self-esteem were considered significant by college students. They also found a strong correlation between purpose in life and self-esteem. Furthermore, they found a significant difference in purpose in life between graduate and undergraduate students in that graduate students reported higher scores in purpose in life compared with undergraduate students. Results of their study support the notion that meaning in life is indeed important for college students (Hodges, Denig, & Crowe, 2014).

Such finding is also supported by Shin and Steger (2016) in their study on having a supportive college environment for the meaning searching and meaning in life among college students. As pointed out by many empirical studies, meaning in life is important for the psychological, spiritual, academic, vocational, and physical well-being of college students. Although this may be the case, Shin and Steger (2016) noticed that there have been only a few empirical studies regarding how to promote college students' search for meaning. Thus, they investigated whether having a supportive college environment can facilitate this development task. Results of their study found that college students who perceived a stronger college environmental support for meaning searching also reported higher levels of meaning in life. It has also been found that students who reported higher search for meaning experienced low levels of meaning in life however, those who felt that they were supported in their search for meaning reported higher levels of meaning in life. This again supports the idea that the school plays an important role in realizing meaning in life by providing support and encouragement to students.

In a similar study by Santos, Magrano, Oguan, Paat, and Barnachea (2012) on the meaning in life and subjective well-being of Filipino college students, it has been found that there is a significant relationship between meaning in life and subjective well-being and that the former significantly predicts the latter. In general, it has been found that the college students in their study already reported a high sense of meaning but were still open to new experiences that can broaden their perspective. Results also showed that males showed higher levels of presence of meaning compared to females but females reported a higher search for meaning than males. They suggest that such results may mean that males are more certain of what they want to do in their lives compared to the female respondents. It has also been found that those who are older reported a higher search and presence of meaning compared to the younger respondents. Santos et al. (2012) pointed out that the results of their study showed that even at the age of their respondents (15 – 21 years old and

above), they have already acknowledged meaning in their lives which also fostered their sense of well-being. The increase in both the presence and search for meaning for the older respondents may be attributed to the life transition they were about to experience as they near college graduation.

Likewise, Navarez (2017) examined the association between meaning in life and subjective well-being among Filipino college students. A total of 147 college students participated in the study and were asked to complete the Meaning in Life Questionnaire (Steger, et al., 2006), the Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener, et al., 1985), and the Positive-Negative Affect Scale (Watson, Tellegen, & Clark, 1988). Subjective well-being, in the study, was computed by adding the Satisfaction with Life and Positive Affect scores and subtracting from it the Negative Affect scores. Results showed that the college students who participated in the study reported high mean scores for both presence and search for meaning. This may suggest that even at that point in their lives, the college students already felt that their lives have meaning and are constantly trying to find meaning in their lives. Further, results indicate that participants can be generally described as happy, satisfied, and fulfilled, as indicated by their high scores on the subjective well-being measures. Looking into the relationship among the variables, it was found that meaning in life correlates positively with happiness, life satisfaction, and positive affect, but negatively correlates with negative affect. This implies that the college student's sense of meaning in life contributes to life satisfaction, and the frequency of positive and negative emotions. Thus, the study shows that both the presence and search for meaning in life are significantly related to subjective well-being and that meaning in life can be considered a component of subjective well-being.

Findings from these studies imply that having meaning in life is salient for emerging adults in college. Given their developmental context, studies suggest that they tend to report high presence and search for meaning in life.

Findings from these studies imply that having meaning in life positively contributes to one's well-being among college students and that having a supportive environment at home and in the school or university is important in helping an individual establish meaning in life.

### III. MEANING IN LIFE OUTCOMES

Regardless of the varied definition, meaning in life has often been considered an important construct that leads to a host of positive outcomes such as life satisfaction, happiness, and psychological well-being (Zika & Chamberlain, 1992; Kiang & Fuligni, 2010) and is one of the core features of mental health (Lambert, et al., 2010).

The study of Zika and Chamberlain (1992), for instance, attempted to explore the relationship between meaning in life and psychological well-being. In their study, psychological well-being encompassed three dimensions namely, life satisfaction, positive affect, and negative affect.

Also, they explored how meaning in life correlates with other meaning measures. Their study focused on mothers at home who were caring for their children and elderly people. They chose these samples because accordingly, they were more likely to have a lowered sense of well-being given that they are likely to be isolated, are not financially secured, and are dependent on others. Such means also allowed them to look into meaning in life in two different age groups. They utilized the Purpose in Life (PIL) Scale (Crumbaugh & Maholick, 1964) to measure meaning in life and correlated it with two other meaning measures – the Life Regard Index (LRI; Battista & Almond, 1973) and Sense of Coherence Scale (Antonovsky, 1983, 1985, 1987). Although the PIL Scale is designed to measure one's sense of meaning and purpose, some researchers have questioned the validity of the instrument.

The LRI, on the other hand, measures the degree to which one has a set of life goals (framework) and the degree to which these goals are fulfilled (fulfillment), while the SOC Scale measures the degree to which one perceives life to be predictable and to work out as one expects it to be. Although strictly not a meaning in life measure, it includes three dimensions namely, comprehensibility, manageability, and meaningfulness, which overlaps with other meaning measures. According to Zika and Chamberlain (1992), both the LRI and SOC Scale have not been extensively used in other studies. Although this may be the case, results of their study showed that the three meaning measures used had moderate to high correlations with each other for both age groups, thus suggesting that indeed, they measure the same construct. Moreover, they found that meaning in life had moderate to high correlations with life satisfaction, psychological well-being, and positive affect. At the same time, meaning in life showed an inverse correlation with psychological distress and negative affect. Such results were consistent for both age groups. Although their study simply established a correlation between meaning in life and measures of well-being and could not outright prove causation, their study still suggests that meaning in life is a crucial factor not just in safeguarding against psychopathology but also in promoting mental health.

In another study, Bhattacharya (2011) conducted a qualitative inquiry regarding meaning in life among young adults in India. The study aimed to examine the relationship of meaning in life and subjective well-being in ten young adults who were launching their careers. They utilized both a semi-structured interview to assess meaning in life and subjective well-being and also used the Life Regard Index (Battista & Almond, 1973) to measure meaning. The basis for the semi-structured interview were questions found in researches regarding meaning in life, happiness, and satisfaction. Both quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed in the study. Results of their study showed several themes young adults use as basis for the meaning in life construct. These themes include a sense of worth and self-efficacy, fulfillment of aims and goals, self-growth, past happenings, belief in the Indian

philosophy, self-independence, life having an inherent meaning, attainment of peace, hope as a source of meaning, meaning as an individual choice, and meaning as coming even from small things in life. Moreover, respondents reported that the ups and downs in life, uncertainty of the future, and loss of relationships contribute to a sense of meaningless in life. Looking at the themes that came up stressed the impact of one's culture in constructing meaning in life. Bhattacharya (2011) also noted that although having goals and aims for the future contribute to a sense of meaning in life, the current life situation of the respondent also matters. For example, the study focused on young adults aged 23 – 28 years old who were still starting their careers thus it can be said that their sense of meaning may still waver when faced with uncertainty regarding the fulfillment of their goals. Thus, it is suggested that a feeling of satisfaction arising from a sense of contentment and fulfillment is an important factor in one's sense of meaning in life and happiness. Results of the study also showed a positive relationship between meaning in life, happiness, and satisfaction in that those who had a clearer meaning and purpose in life were found to be happier than those who experienced a lesser sense of meaning.

Aside from a significant relationship with well-being, meaning in life has also been found to predict academic outcomes. For instance, Mason (2017) examined the sense of meaning and academic performance among 210 first-year university students in South Africa. For the study, he utilized the Purpose in Life Test (Crumbaugh & Maholick, 1981) to assess students' sense of meaning and the mean scores of their end-of-semester marks in five academic subjects to measure academic performance. Results of the study found a correlation between meaning and academic performance. Further regression analysis showed that meaning significantly predicted academic performance, although it only accounted for 4% of the variance in the students' academic performance. He also compared the academic marks of the students with high reported meaning versus those with low meaning scores and found that those with a high sense of meaning got significantly better marks than students with low meaning. Given that the study showed that a sense of meaning is important to students' academic achievement, he suggested that the importance of meaning as a useful component in academic advising should be emphasized in the higher education.

Likewise, Makola (2007) considered meaning in life as a non-cognitive factor that helps students tolerate life stressors more effectively, thus improving adjustment to life demands, including academic demands. In his study, he investigated whether the life stressors and resources that students experience, their meaning in life, and Grade 12 marks can predict the academic performance of 101 students in South Africa during their first year in university. The life stressors identified in the study were physical health, home and money, parents, friends, and negative life events while resources included parents, friends, and positive life events. Meaning in life in the study was measured using the Purpose



in Life test and academic performance was obtained using the mean percentage mark accumulated by the student for that year. It was found that meaning in life, Grade 12 marks, and parents as a resource correlated significantly with one's academic performance. Among these three factors, meaning in life was found to significantly contribute to academic performance. Such a relationship may be because it has also been found that participants with higher Purpose in Life scores employed more effective coping strategies in dealing with their stressors than those who achieved low Purpose in Life scores. Moreover, a significant link between purpose in life and parents as a resource has also been found.

Makola (2014) continued the previous study by examining whether students who have a higher sense of meaning are more likely to persevere and continue with their studies compared with those who have lower sense of meaning. Participants were composed of two groups (20 students with a high Purpose in Life score and 20 students with a low Purpose in Life score) randomly selected from the 101 students who participated in the previous study. A significant correlation between purpose in life and meaning was found and results of the study showed that when students have a high sense of meaning in their first year of study, they are able to persevere and complete their studies. Such persistence may be because a sense of meaning helps students tolerate life stressors more effectively, use more effective coping strategies (Edwards & Holden, 2001, as cited in Makola, 2014), and is significantly predictive of a student's level of engagement (Greenway, 2005, as cited in Makola, 2014). The findings of Makola's two studies suggest that a high sense of meaning among students in their first year in university does not only result to academic achievement for that year, but can also benefit them for the rest of their academic years.

On the other hand, a different result came out from the study of Batres (2011) on the relationship of grit, subjective happiness, and meaning in life with the GPA and attendance of alternative education students. The research aimed to examine whether grit, subjective happiness and meaning in life positively correlates with one's GPA and negatively correlates with days missed from school. They surveyed a total of 104 high school students, aged between 15-18 years old, who were selected through convenience sampling. The study hypothesized that grit, subjective happiness and meaning in life are positively correlated with GPA however, these hypotheses were not supported. It was also hypothesized that grit, subjective happiness, and meaning in life are negatively correlated with days missed from school, but results of the study only showed grit and meaning to have significant negative correlations. This means that those who have high grit and meaning scores had few absences in school. Although meaning in life in the study did not seem to significantly correlate with GPA, the finding that it is negatively correlated with one's absences suggests that the school may serve as a source of meaning for those who are actively searching for meaning in their lives. Batres (2011),

however, considers a possible methodological flaw in the study given that GPA and days of attendance were taken as categorical variables instead of continuous variables. Participants were asked to choose from a set of responses what their expected GPA would be instead of asking them of their current GPA. The sample size of the study can also be considered a limitation.

The aforementioned studies underscore the importance of meaning in life in promoting one's well-being and positive academic outcomes.

#### IV. IDENTITY ORIENTATION

Identity is a widely studied construct in psychological research which pertains to an individual's comprehension of the self as a distinct and unique entity (Tsang, Hui, & Law, 2011). However, social psychological theories suggest that identity is not a singular experience and that people may hold multiple aspects of the self, which means that a person may define his or her self as independent agents in the society, as an interdependent part of intimate relationships, or as acknowledged members of a large group. Such multiple aspects are defined as identity orientation which refers to the relative importance that individuals place on various identity attributes or characteristics when constructing their self-definitions (Cheek et al., 2002). Identity orientation should not be confused with the concepts of 'aspects of the self' and 'identity dimensions' used in other literatures, which mean the same thing.

Kashima and Hardie (2000) identified three different identity orientations namely, individual, relational, and collective. The individual identity orientation reflects the uniqueness of the person and highlights the characteristics of the individual which allows him or her to stand out from the rest. The relational identity orientation, on the other hand, reflects interpersonal relationships with others and emphasizes the roles one takes on within that relationship. Lastly, the collective identity orientation reflects membership and identification with one's social group and highlights characteristics one may share with the other members of the group.

Although each identity orientation is important for the development of a coherent and unified sense of identity, each identity orientation may not be equally important or meaningful for a person (Gaertner, et al., 2012). Studies have shown cultural differences on the strengths of the identity orientations. For instance, comparing respondents from Western and Eastern cultures, those coming from Eastern cultures have comparable individual identity orientations but have stronger relational and collective identity orientations than those coming from Western cultures (Hardie, et al., 2006 and Kashima, et al., 2005, as cited in Hardie, Critchley, and Swann, 2007).

In a study by Karakitapoglu-Aygün (2004), the self-description, identity orientation, and emotional well-being of Turkish university students were explored. In general, it was

found that emotional well-being was positively associated with all types of identity orientations and with the independent and relational-interdependent self-descriptions. Thus, it can be said that one's sense of individuality, one's relationships, and one's group memberships, are important indicators of emotional well-being. However, for the 205 students belonging in the urban middle-upper socio-economic status who were respondents for the study, results showed that the independent and relational identity orientations were more descriptive for them than the collective orientation.

In addition, women were more likely to have interdependent or relational construals of the self than men, which may be a result of gendered socialization and gender-specific social roles attached to women. Taking into account that both the independent and relational orientations appeared to be important for the respondents, the study suggests that an independent and interdependent view about the self may co-exist in an individual and that the emergence of individualism in today's generation does not necessarily denote a reduction of relatedness and interdependence.

Peña-Alampay (2003) also investigated the relationship of one's self-complexity and self-construal with negative emotions among Filipino adolescents aged 12-21 years old. Self-complexity refers to the number of self-aspects one use as a basis for defining the self and the degree to which these self-aspects are differentiated from each other. This means that one has great self-complexity if he or she uses numerous aspects to define one's self and that the feelings or cognitions attached with one self-aspect does not necessarily affect the other self-aspects. Self-construal, on the other hand, refers to how one sees the self in relation with others, which may be independent, as when one sees the self as a unique and separate entity; or interdependent, when one considers the self as connected with others.

The study aimed to examine the Filipino adolescents' construct of the self in terms of complexity and self-construal, and at the same time, look into the relationship of the said variables with the negative emotions (identity/self confusion, emotional lability and extremity, self-anxiety, and self-devaluation) usually experienced during this life period. Analysis of the data gathered in the study revealed five categories used as basis for the respondents' self-aspects. These categories include social roles, relational roles, situations, superordinate categories, and a category that had no contextual reference. Of these categories, relational roles (e.g. anak, kaibigan) had more frequency followed by situations (e.g. sa bahay, pag may problema), social roles (e.g. estudyante), superordinate (e.g. ang gusto kong baguhin, palaging ugali), and no contextual reference categories (e.g. ako, bilang tao), respectively.

For the self-construal, results showed that respondents scored high for both individual and interdependent self-construals but paired samples t-test showed that respondents were more interdependent than independent.

The study suggests that Filipino adolescents define themselves based on multidimensional aspects involving social roles, relationships, situations, and even other personal attributes. Results on the interdependent self-construal of the adolescents support majority of hypothesis in existing literatures which suggest that collectivist cultures tend to place emphasis on interpersonal relationships, collective goals and values. However, it should be noted that despite that, adolescents in the study still reported an independent self-construal to a moderate extent. It has been suggested that perhaps, considering today's globalization and more exposure with other cultures, people tend to possess qualities of both self-construals.

Existing studies on identity orientations suggest that an individual may hold multiple aspects of the self, with differing degrees of importance attributed to each self-aspect, as may be influenced by one's culture. Although there may be studies on the self-construal and self-complexity especially within the Filipino context, studies explicitly examining the three identity orientations (individual, relational, and collective) seem to be scarce.

#### *Identity and Meaning in Life*

Realizing meaning in life is said to be related with the development of a sense of identity, which may begin in adolescence and continue throughout life (Steger, et al., 2009). Several studies have explored the relationship between identity with life meaning and other similar constructs.

For instance, Schwartz and his colleagues (2010) examined the relationship of one's identity status and psychosocial functioning among emerging adults in the United States. Four identity statuses were identified: achievement, which means that a person has committed to an identity after a period of exploration; moratorium, wherein a person is still in the process of exploring possible identities and have not made a commitment yet; foreclosure, which happens when one has committed to an identity without making explorations; and lastly, diffusion, wherein one has not committed to an identity nor is in the process of exploration. Psychosocial functioning, in the study, was included both positive and negative indices. Positive indices include self-esteem, internal locus of control, meaning in life, life satisfaction, psychological well-being (which involves behavioral indicators of positive functioning like being able to maintain satisfying relationships), and eudaimonic well-being (conceptualized as being guided by a desire to live in accordance with one's innermost talents and potentials); whereas negative indices include internalizing, externalizing, and physical symptoms. Results showed that individuals who are in an achieved identity status scored highest in all the positive psychosocial measures. Although achieved and foreclosed individuals scored high in terms of general well-being, those who are in an achieved identity status scored significantly higher in terms of meaning in life and eudaimonic well-being. This implies that individuals who were able to explore before making a commitment regarding

their identity are most likely to attribute meaning in their lives. Also, achievement and foreclosure appeared to have the lowest levels of association with the negative indices of psychosocial functioning.

Also, in a study by Rahiminezhad, Kazemi, Farahani, and Aghamohamadi (2011) involving 585 people aged 15-28 years old, the relationship between purpose in life and both identity commitment and exploration with maladaptive indices were examined. The maladaptive indices identified included depression and anxiety. Results of their study showed that there is a positive correlation between purpose in life and identity commitment and exploration while there is a negative correlation between purpose in life and the indices of depression and anxiety. In addition, they also tried to test whether identity commitment and exploration can mediate between purpose in life and the maladaptive indices. They found that it is only identity commitment that can mediate between purpose in life and the maladaptive indices while the path using identity exploration as the mediator did not prove to be significant. Accordingly, this may be because once a person has already realized one's purpose in life, he or she may no longer continue exploring one's identity. Although this study investigated purpose in life, it is to be noted that purpose is often considered in literature as a dimension of meaning in life and appeared to be correlated with each other.

Kiang and Fuligni (2010) also investigated the role of meaning in life in the lives of 579 adolescents from Latin, Asian, and European American backgrounds. Their study aimed to explore how meaning in life and ethnic identity relate with each other and whether this sense of meaning can mediate the relationship between ethnic identity and measures of well-being. It has been found in their study that there is an association between ethnic identity and meaning in life in that those who strongly identified with their ethnicity and those who are still in the process of exploring their ethnic identity reported a high sense of meaning in life. Their mediation analysis also revealed that ethnic identity can explain 25-64% of the effect of ethnic identity to several measures of well-being such as self-esteem, academic utility and value, intrinsic motivation, daily happiness, and low levels of daily distress. This means that one's ethnic identity contributes to making life meaningful for the person, which in turn, leads to the said positive outcomes. They argue that identifying with one's group or ethnicity can provide a means by which adolescents can have a deeper understanding of their life's meaning. The study of Kiang and Fuligni (2010) also supports the contention that having a sense of meaning in life can lead to positive outcomes which has also been found in other studies. For instance, they found that those who reported their lives to be meaningful also have higher levels of self-esteem, positive academic attitudes, intrinsic motivation, happiness, emotional stability, and lower levels of daily distress. This implies that indeed, meaning in life is positively associated with various measures that indicate well-being.

The importance of identifying with one's group or ethnicity may be supported by the social identity theory, popularized by Tajfel and Turner (1986, as cited in Kiang & Fuligni, 2010). Social identity theory suggests that people may define their selves in terms of group membership. The theory explains that group membership breeds a sense of connectedness and belonging between the person and the group. This affiliation, in turn, may help the person realize that he/she belongs to something or someone within the larger society, motivating the individual to pursue goals that support the group and thus making clear one's purpose and meaning in their lives. Thus, it can be said that one's social relationships can allow a person to establish a sense of meaning in their lives.

The role of family relationships in developing one's meaning in life was investigated by Lambert and his colleagues (2010) in their study involving undergraduate students aged 18-27 years old. Their study aimed to investigate whether the family will be considered a source of meaning for the students. Data was gathered by asking students to write one thing which for them brings the most meaning in their lives (open-ended format) and by letting students rank the importance of family together with 12 other possible sources of meaning (forced-choice format). For the first method, they found that 68% of the students identified the family (or a specific member of the family) to be an important source of meaning in their lives. This was followed by friends, God, education, and success, respectively. Similar results were obtained in the second method, with family ranking as the top contributor to meaning, followed by happiness, friends, self-acceptance, personal goals, self-worth, personal growth, helping others, achievements, religious faith, intimacy, and justice/fairness, respectively. Their study suggests that the family is indeed an important source of meaning for young adults in their study. They argued that when an adult at this age feels overwhelmed with the independence in exploration they have during this stage, they may turn back to their families for meaning and guidance. Thus, they contend that the family provides an individual with a sense of belongingness which, in turn, is important in establishing meaning in life. They further suggest that social roles may provide an individual with a framework that guides the formation of their values, purpose, and expectations towards the future, and these social roles are able to bring meaning to people's lives (McCall and Simmons, 1996, as cited in Lambert, et al., 2010).

The same finding can also be attested in the study of Noble-Carr, Barker, and McArthur (2013) which examined the role of identity and meaning in life among vulnerable young people. These vulnerable young people refer to individuals who are at a risk of not realizing their potential due to their difficult life circumstances. Using a phenomenological approach, they interviewed 24 vulnerable young people aged 15-25 years old and who were referred or accessed through different youth services in Australia. In general, they found that both identity and meaning are central



to one's life. The study found that crucial to developing one's identity and sense of meaning in life are one's life experiences and relationships. For instance, it is through their unique life experiences that they were able to build an understanding of themselves and the world they are living in. Moreover, a solid family foundation can help one make better sense of their experiences and thus help an individual develop a positive sense of identity and meaning. For example, since these vulnerable young people did not receive much family support, they struggled to give meaning to their life experiences. They had no choice but to make sense of their life and their identity on their own. However, this life task can be very challenging and when one fails to succeed, he/she may end up feeling frustrated and disappointed with one's self, which may serve as a hindrance for the person to interact and reach out to others.

Steger, Oishi & Kashdan (2009) likewise suggest that meaning in life may be related with the development of one's sense of identity, which may start during adolescence and continue throughout the course of life. They investigated the structure, levels, and correlates of the presence of meaning in life and the search for meaning in life among emerging adults, young adults, middle-aged adults, and older adults. Results of their study found that those at later life stages reported a higher presence of meaning in life while those at earlier life stages reported higher levels of search for meaning. Moreover, it has been found that the more they felt that their lives have meaning, the greater was their well-being. Their results, however, were different from other studies which showed that meaning in life tends to decline with age. They argued that such different result may be due to the measure they used, their chosen samples, and their meta-analysis of data.

Lastly, Du, King, and Chi (2017) investigated on the roles of personal, relational, and collective self-esteem with subjective well-being among 179 college students in Macau, China. These three types of self-esteem were based on the personal and social self aspects of the person. In the study, measures on life satisfaction, positive affect, and meaning in life were used as indicators for subjective well-being. It has been found that both personal and relational self-esteem were positively associated with meaning in life whereas collective self-esteem was only marginally associated with meaning in life. Such result strengthen findings from existing literatures which suggest that the relational self seems to have more primacy over the collective self especially among collectivist cultures that value family and intimate relationships. They also suggest that the self-evaluation which will affect one's well-being the most is the evaluation which is anchored on the primary identity orientation of the individual. This means that if the relational identity orientation is the most important for the person, then it follows that one's relational self-esteem will be strongly related with his or her well-being. Although indirectly, the study of Du, King, and Chi (2017) shows a strong link between identity orientation and meaning in life.

These studies emphasize that having meaning in one's life can be attributed to different sources such as one's goals and aims for the future, family and friends, religious faith, culture and beliefs, personal achievements and successes, and a sense of self-worth and efficacy, among others, all of which are related to one's identity orientation.

## V. CONCLUSION

Results of the aforementioned literature and empirical studies underscore the contention that meaning in life leads to a host of positive outcomes. There had been several studies that examined possible sources of meaning in life and literature suggests that achieving meaning in life is likely to unfold together with other developmental processes such as establishing one's identity. Identity has also been extensively studied in relation to meaning in life, however, research on whether one's identity orientation can contribute meaning in life appears to be scarce.

This literature review provided support on how identity orientation can contribute to meaning in life. Identity orientation may predict such sense of meaning since it can be considered as a meaning framework that provides an individual with a sense of comprehension, purpose, and mattering. One's identity orientation can be a source of comprehension since it may serve as a framework that a person can use to explain relationships between himself or herself and the external world. For example, an identity based on an individual orientation highlights the belief that he or she is an autonomous being and may display personal agency in social situations while a relational identity orientation may put emphasis on the importance of one's relationship with significant others and may exhibit interdependence in social situations. Identity orientation may also be thought of as a meaning framework that can provide an individual with a sense of purpose. Included in the formation of one's identity are the roles one takes on in life (Oyserman, Elmore & Smith, 2012). Whether these roles may highlight an individual, relational, or collective orientation, it still provides a framework that a person may use to set goals for the future as in the case when a person looks into his or her role in the family to have a sense of purpose in life. Also, identity orientation can be considered as a meaning framework because it may provide an individual with a sense that his or her life matters. Being certain of his or herself as a unique being or as being part of a larger group makes one feel that his or her life matters not just for one's self but for other people as well. Thus, one's identity orientation provides a consistent framework that an individual may use to make sense of the world, to feel a sense of purpose and significance, and to have an overall evaluation that life has meaning.

Considering this finding, having a supportive home and school environment for emerging adults that could help facilitate the development of their identity and search for meaning in life is suggested. This literature review may also provide a basis for further studies in this direction especially



since there is a dearth of studies on identity orientation and its connection with meaning in life.

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