

Types of Meaningfulness of Life and Values of Future Teachers

Nailia R. Salikhova^a

^aKazan (Volga region) Federal University, Kazan, RUSSIA

ABSTRACT

The leading role of meaning of life in regulation of human's activity of all types provides the relevance of the research. The goal of the paper is to identify and describe types of meaningfulness of life in future teachers, and to reveal the specificity of values hierarchy indicative of each type. The leading approach applied in the research was the combination of qualitative methods aimed to identify types of meaning of life on the basis of essays analysis with quantitative comparison of types revealed according to the structure of values hierarchy. The paper describes types of meaning of life set by criteria of awareness of meaning of life and satisfaction with life. There were found 6 types of meaningfulness of life: unconscious satisfaction, unconscious dissatisfaction, unconscious avoiding, conscious satisfaction, conscious dissatisfaction and conscious denial. Comparative analysis of their valuable specifics was carried out. Materials from the paper are of practical importance for psychological support of future teachers' training.

KEYWORDS

Education, value, meaning of life, types of meaningfulness of life, future teacher

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 01 April 2016

Revised 9 May 2016

Accepted 24 May 2016

Introduction

Urgency of the Problem

The meaning of life is a necessary basis for human life (Frankl, 1963). Its role is especially important at the beginning of adulthood, formation of any experts, teachers as well (Vogler & Ebersole, 1980). It is known that the content of educational process is realized through teachers' personality. Only the teacher who possesses a strong life-purpose basis is capable to focus learners on

CORRESPONDENCE Nailia R. Salikhova ✉ Nailya.Salikhova@kpfu.ru

© 2016 Salikhova. Open Access terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>) apply. The license permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, on the condition that users give exact credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license, and indicate if they made any changes.

searching meaning of life while working with them. Therefore, it is important to pay attention to this side of personality development in training teachers; that demands scientifically-based guidelines.

V. Frankl (1963) understands meaning of life as a life purpose and a life task. This is the idea that has become the value of a very high order for a human; it sets the basic orientation of his or her life and assumes a certain way of experiencing life itself (Leontiev, 2003). The meaning of life is based on the structural hierarchy of major and minor meanings (Chudnovsky, 1999).

In psychology, meaning of life is investigated in different aspects. Content aspects of meaning of life are revealed in works where sources of meaning of life (Debates, Drost & Hansen 1995; Debates, 1999) and value hierarchy setting a general direction of human life (Cieciuch & Schwartz, 2012; Cieciuch, Davidov, Vecchione & Schwartz, 2014) are studied. It was shown the significance of self-knowledge to identify what makes life meaningful (Shin, Steger & Henry, 2016). Interaction of religiousness with self-reported levels of meaning in life (Davis & Hicks, 2015; Valiullina, 2015), correlation of meaning in life with the psychological time (Hicks et al., 2012; Salikhova, 2014), with the hope and the priorities for the future (Kasler et al., 2012), with the free will and the counterfactual reflection (Seto, et al. 2015), cross-cultural differentials in the meaning of life (Salikhova, 2015), the relationship between conscientiousness and meaning in life (Lightsey et al., 2014) have already been explored. Influence of meaning of life on human's wellbeing is investigated. Consequences of loss of meaning of life are reflected in concepts of noogenic neurosis (Frankl, 1963), existential neurosis or existential frustration (Maddi, 1967).

The concept of *meaning of life* is used along with the concept of *meaningfulness of life*; the first implies its energy characteristic that reflects a quantity measure and stability of human life orientation to some meaning (Leontiev, 2003).

The dilemma of existential (or subjective, accepted by a human) and ontological (objective, corresponding to the real direction of life) meanings and their correlation takes a specific place in the analysis of issues concerning the meaning of life. It poses a question about compliance of meaning of life and its awareness as phenomena which do not necessarily coincide between themselves. In this course a differential approach to studying meaningfulness of life has arisen.

Three options of life meaningfulness based on the correlation of objective and subjective meaning of life have been singled out (Leontiev, 2003). In the first option they correspond to each other, in the second one the objective meaning is forced out of consciousness leaving experience of vacuum, and in the third it is forced out of consciousness being replaced with subjective meaning which does not correspond to the objective one.

Another understanding relies on three theoretical constructs: subjective perceived image of life goal, objective orientation of life (it is out of consciousness and available to an external observer), experience of meaningfulness of life as the feeling of inclusiveness in life. Hence the typology of meaningfulness of life was created (Leontiev, 2003) and included the next 5 types:

- *unconscious satisfaction* as life flowing smoothly, without reflection and bringing the feeling of satisfaction, without inducing to thoughts about its meaning;

- *unconscious dissatisfaction* when the human experiences frustration, emptiness, without realizing their reasons;

- *conscious dissatisfaction* when the human has the feeling of absence of meaning and is actively, consciously and purposefully is looking for it;

- *conscious satisfaction*, the person is able to realize the meaning of own life; this awareness does not differ from a real orientation of life causing positive emotions;

- *replacement of meaning of life* when adequate understanding of an objective orientation of life bears in itself threat for self-respect.

It is based on various options of correlation between *awareness of meaning of life* and *satisfaction with life*.

These types are singled out only theoretically; their verification and specific-psychological filling demands empirical research.

The goal of the empirical research was, firstly, to identify types of meaning in life of future teachers and their content disclosure; secondly, to verify the hypothesis about the specificity of values hierarchy due to the type of meaning of life.

Methodological Framework

Data were analyzed both qualitatively and quantitatively. The following methods were applied for obtaining the empirical evidences.

The essay "My Meaning of Life". The expert assessment of the essay "My Meaning of Life" according to Leontyev's criteria (2003) was used to define the *type of meaningful life*. Detailed reflection on the meaning of life revealing internal aspiration to its perception was the test marker *awareness of meaning of life*. *Satisfaction with life* was determined by emotional estimations of one's life. Experts individually assessed each essay according to these parameters. Then they compared the results and carried out the repeated joint analysis in cases where their individual assessments did not coincide, after that they made their common decision. Teachers (5 psychologists and 2 philologists) made the group of experts.

The M. Rokeach (1973) technique as modified by E.B. Fantalova (2001). In pairs subjects compared twelve terminal values by criteria of their importance and attainability. The list included the following values: active life, health (both physical and mental), interesting job, the beauty of nature and art, love (both sensual and spiritual closeness to a partner), wealth (absence of financial constraints), close friendship, self-confidence (absence of inner conflicts and doubts), cognition (including ability to extend knowledge and get new experience), freedom (independence of mind and action), happy family life, creativity. The number of cases when the value was chosen as a more important one in a couple were had defined in each experimental group.

The data were processed applying the descriptive statistics procedures, independent two-sample Student t-test.

150 students (63 young men and 87 girls) aged between 20 and 27 made the sample of the research. They are students of pedagogical university gaining different pedagogical specialties. The research was conducted during students' academic activity (at seminars).

Results

In compliance with the type of meaningfulness of life all students are divided into 6 groups (tab. 1). The table presents characteristic of meaningfulness of life: types and frequency of their occurrence.

Table 1. The characteristic of essays content and frequency of occurrence (%) in different types of meaningfulness of life

	Name of the type (frequency %)	The characteristic of essays content in different types of meaningfulness of life
Unconscious types	Unconscious satisfaction (US) 17 %	The content of life purposes and meanings is presented in the form of social patterns (to plant a tree, to build a house, and to grow up a child); they are accepted without conscious work on them. Unwillingness to argue on meaning of life in combination with perception of life as the program which cannot be changed. At the same time general reaction to life is positive.
	Unconscious dissatisfaction (UD) 30 %	Reflections on meaning of life, life purposes and temporary prospects are absent. The dominating mood - boredom, emptiness and dullness. Dissatisfaction with life when the reasons of this state are not understood. Life tasks are perceived as insurmountable difficulties
	Unconscious avoiding (UA) 13 %	The issue of meaningfulness in life is avoided - essays consist of several words that express unwillingness to reflect and write on this subject
Conscious types	Conscious satisfaction (CS) 13 %	Feeling of completeness of own life and satisfaction with life. Depth and breadth of penetration into the subject of meaning of life, understanding of mission and vision of means to achieve life goals. Future is perceived as a natural result of own activity.
	Conscious dissatisfaction (CDS) 19 %	Active and purposeful search of meaning of life, dissatisfaction with life in general due to a wrong life choice or obstacles that prevent from changing life to the best. Description of emptiness and absence of joy in life is often accompanied with aggressive tendencies
	Conscious denial (CD) 8 %	Conscious and philosophically reasoned denial of meaningful life as a result of long reflections on this subject; understanding that worthy meaning of life in the present is absent. Similar confessional reflections are presented against deep dissatisfaction with life

The comparative analysis of hierarchy of values in groups with different types of meaningfulness of life is presented in the Table 2.

Table 2. The importance of values (\bar{a}) in groups with different types of meaningfulness of life

Values	Name of the type	Unconscious types			Conscious types		
		UA	UD	US	CDS	CS	CD
Active life		2,37	2,61	7,46	3,00	2,75	2,25
Health		7,79	7,73	7,81	8,38	6,80	6,58
Interesting job		4,68	4,70	4,62	4,72	4,15	5,00
The beauty of nature and art		4,84	6,50	2,69	2,79	1,55	1,25
Love		3,68	2,95	5,96	7,03	6,30	8,33
Wealth		5,21	6,61	2,77	6,00	6,40	6,75
Close friendship		7,79	7,77	6,12	7,07	8,00	8,25
Self-confidence		6,05	5,73	7,23	6,17	6,05	5,75
Cognition		4,68	3,75	2,62	3,52	4,60	3,42
Freedom		5,05	5,66	4,46	5,55	6,30	5,83
Happy family life		8,21	9,45	8,58	9,03	9,90	9,67
Creativity		4,05	2,70	2,96	2,90	3,30	2,92

Legend: \bar{a} - an average value. High or low scores of indicators in bold specify the values hierarchy in each group and authentically differ from others.

Discussions

The group of essays which was initially referred to the type "*replacement of meaning of life*" (Leontiev, 2003) was non-uniform: in one case the person *avoided* to contact with this theme (UD), in another a realized and reasoned *denial* of meaning of life (CD) was observed. As a result, six types were recorded (tab. 1).

Essays in groups with different type of meaningfulness of life differ according to the description of meaning of life sources. Study, work, love, friends, public life, family are singled out as sources of meaningful life both when satisfaction with life (US and CS) and CDS are expressed.

The value of self-development is always mentioned in groups with high awareness of meaning of life (CS and CDS). In case of UD type the circle of values is narrowed to material welfare and family, study and friends. Absence of belief in future, loneliness and love are dominating subjects in groups with UA and CD types.

Essays in groups differ according to the description of emotional states and general mood concerning important spheres of life. In case of UD type disappointment (38 %), pain (31 %), grief (19 %), dissatisfaction (19 %), suffering (19 %) and fear (19 %) are mentioned. Similar states are singled out in case of CD with depression (25 %), senselessness (17 %), indifference (8 %) and surprise (8 %) in addition. Satisfaction with life (US and CS) implies interest (58 %, 35 %), joy (50 %), satisfaction (62 %), happiness (15 %). States in CDS group are various and sometimes contradictory: from grief (10 %), uncertainty (13 %), disappointment (38 %), suffering (10 %) and fatigue to love (23 %) and interest (10 %). States of closeness (56 %), indifference (11 %) and indignation (5 %) were mentioned in group UA.

It should be noted that the parameter of satisfaction-dissatisfaction with life is more important for the mental state than the awareness. It complements data on the relationship of consciousness, reflexivity with the mental state (Prokhorov & Chernov 2014; Prokhorov & Chernov, 2015).

The analysis of values hierarchy (tab. 2) showed that compared groups have essential differences besides common features. Choice of value *happy family life* is common for them as the most important value; other authors have obtained the same results. It can be connected with youth age problems. Groups UA and UD are most similar according to the hierarchy of values (only the value of *wealth* is more important in UD group), and both of them differ from other groups in higher importance of value of *the beauty of nature and art* and very low value of *love*. Specificity in hierarchy of values is observed in US group: as for nearly a half of values it differs from the majority of other groups. The value *close friendship* is among the least important; values of *self-confidence* and *active life* are among the most important.

The specificity in hierarchy of values in CD group in comparison with others consists in much bigger significance of the value *love*. This is the only thing that distinguishes it from CS group. It is amazing, but groups which are characterized by the most conscious position about meaning of life and polar in all other parameters are the most similar in the structure of values hierarchy. CD group differs in hierarchy of values from US and CDS groups most of all; first of all it differs due to a higher importance of *health* value.

Among those who are satisfied with life but differ in the criterion the awareness of its meaning, i.e. between CS and US groups very essential distinctions of value hierarchy (7 reliable distinctions out of 12 possible) were found, and the number of distinctions is the same as between UD and US groups divided according to the criterion of satisfaction. Therefore, distinctions in value hierarchy among satisfied groups correspond to awareness of meaning of life; among those who are not inclined to think about meaning of life it is correlated with satisfaction.

Conclusion

The following regularities were determined in the research of meaning in life of future teachers:

1. Types of meaningfulness of meaning of life in future teachers are revealed and described due to combinations of parameters of *awareness of meaning of life* and *satisfaction with life*. There were found 6 types of meaningfulness of life: unconscious satisfaction, unconscious dissatisfaction, unconscious avoiding, conscious satisfaction, conscious dissatisfaction and conscious denial.
2. Students' value hierarchy is specific due to the type of meaningfulness of life. Distinctions in value hierarchy between groups satisfied with life depend on awareness of meaning of life, and among those who are not inclined to realize the meaning of life they are defined by satisfaction with life.
3. Descriptions of meaningfulness of life sources, general emotional state and attitude to important spheres of life differ due to the type of meaningfulness of life.

Recommendations

The materials of this paper may be interesting to psychologists working in education, teachers and students of psychological specialties. The obtained typology is very perspective from the point of view of practical tasks. It gives the chance to define main directions of psychological work with students – future teachers and to reveal those for whom it is necessary and its main targets and supports as well.

Acknowledgements

This work was funded by the subsidy allocated to Kazan Federal University for the state assignment in the sphere of scientific activities.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Notes on contributors

Nailia R. Salikhova is a professor in psychology in the General Psychology Department, Institute of Psychology and Education, Kazan (Volga region) Federal University, Kazan, Russia.

References

- Chudnovsky, V. E. (1999). Revisiting the issue of the meaning of life's adequacy. *World of Psychology, 2*, 74-80.
- Cieciuch, J., Davidov, E., Vecchione, M. & Schwartz, S. H. (2014). A hierarchical structure of basic human values in a third-order confirmatory factor analysis. *Swiss Journal of Psychology, 73*, (3), 177-182.
- Cieciuch, J. & Schwartz, S. H. (2012). The number of distinct basic values and their structure assessed by PVQ-40. *Journal of Personality Assessment, 94*, (3), 321-328.
- Davis, W. E. & Hicks, J. A. (2015). Judgments of Meaning in Life, Religious Beliefs, and the Experience of Cognitive Fluency. *Journal of Personality, 1*, 52-55.
- Debate, D. L. (1999). Sources of meaning: an investigation of significant commitments in life. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology, 39*, (4), 30-58.
- Debate, D. L., Drost, J. & Hansen, P. (1995). Experiences of meaning in life: A combined qualitative and quantitative approach. *British Journal of Psychology, 86*, 359-375.
- Fantalova, E. B. (2001). *Diagnostics and psychotherapy of inner conflict*. Samara: BAHRAH, 334 p.
- Frankl, V. (1963). *Man's search for meaning: An introduction to logotherapy*. New York: Washington Square Press, 120 p.
- Hicks, J. A., Trent, J., Davis, W. E., King, L. A. (2012). Positive effect, meaning in life, and future time perspective: An application of socioemotional selectivity theory. *Psychology and Aging, 27*, (1), 181-189.
- Kasler, J., Izenberg, P., Elias, M. J. & White, G. (2012). *Meaning in life, hope, and priorities for the future*. New York: Nova Science Publishers, 178 p.
- Leontiev, D. A. (2003). *Psychology of meaning: Essence, structure and dynamics of meaningful reality*. Moscow: Smysl, 452 p.
- Lightsey, O. R., Boyraz, G., Ervin, A., Rarey, E. B., Gharghani, G. G. & Maxwell, D. (2014). Generalized self-efficacy, positive cognitions, and negative cognitions as mediators of the relationship between conscientiousness and meaning in life. *Canadian Journal of Behavioural Science, 46*, (3), 436-445.
- Maddi, S. R. (1967). The existential neurosis. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology, 72*, 311-325.
- Prokhorov, A. O. & Chernov A. V. (2014). The influence of reflection on mental states of students during the educational activity. *Experimental Psychology (Russia), 7*, (2), 82-93.

- Prokhorov, A. O. & Chernov A. V. (2015). Self-Reflection Control of Mental States During Academic Activity. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, 6(3), 277-281.
- Rokeach, M. (1973). *The Nature of Human Values*. New York: Free Press, 304 p.
- Salikhova, N. R. (2014). Correlation of Meaningfulness of Life to Psychological Time in Personality. *Asian Social Science*, 10(19), 291-295.
- Salikhova, N.R. (2015). The comparison of substantial and dynamic parameters personal value-meaning systems of American and Russian university students. *Review of European Studies*. 7, (4), 117-123.
- Seto, E., Hicks, J. A., Davis, W. E. & Smallman, R. (2015). Free Will, Counterfactual Reflection, and the Meaningfulness of Life Events. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, 6 (3), 243-250.
- Shin, J. Y., Steger, M. F. & Henry, K. L. (2016). Self-concept clarity's role in meaning in life among American college students: A latent growth approach. *Self and Identity*, 15 (2), 206-223.
- Valiullina, M. E. (2015). Dependence of the Social and Psychological Adaptability of Religiosity among First-Year Students. *Review of European Studies*, 7(4), 153-160.
- Vogler, De., K. & Ebersole, P. (1980). Categorization of college students' meaning of life. *Psychological Reports*, 46, 387-390.