

Exploring the influence of family environment and positive personality on the sense of meaning in life

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Abstract. The mission of psychology is to enable people to lead a more meaningful and happy life, which is of great relevance to exploring the meaningfulness of life. The influence of family, as the initial environment of life, and personality, as a unique and solid characteristic of individuals, on the sense of meaning in life is of great significance. Most of the current studies have explored the influence of each on the sense of meaning in life, but few studies have linked the three. This study explores the intrinsic link between the three and concludes that family is directly related to meaning in life and indirectly influences meaning in life mediated by positive personality; personality is related to a sense of meaning in life.

Keywords: Meaning in life; Family; Positive Personality; Positive psychology.

1. Introduction

Xu has proposed the concept of "hollow heart disease," which is defined as a psychological disorder caused by value deficits, one of the symptoms of which is "the belief that life is meaningless" [1]. Nowadays, more and more people are thinking and asking, "what is the meaning of my life". Human beings are the only creatures on earth that seek meaning in life. Meaning-making is a uniquely human activity that functions how the human brain is organized [2]. As a personal resource, the sense of meaning in life has been closely related to one's mental health [3]. Therefore, the discussion of the sense of meaning in life is relevant.

The sense of meaning in life stands formed in the individual's interaction with others and society. The family is the initial association environment, and the emotional connection between parents and children influences the individual's life experience and sense of meaning. It shows that family factors have an important influence on forming a sense of meaning in life. Other studies have shown that personality is the basis for the individual's experience of a sense of meaning in life [4]. Family factors directly influence the sense of meaning in life and indirectly influence the sense of meaning through the mediating role of personality.

With the advancement of psychological research, psychologists are keen to explore the concept of meaning in life [5]. So far, most relevant studies have focused on exploring the impact of life's meaning on happiness, aiming to enhance people's happiness experience in daily life. Based on this, this paper aims to explore the association between a sense of meaning, family environment, and positive personality from the perspectives of family environment and positive personality and to point out how to enhance the sense of meaning in life from the perspectives of family environment and personality influence.

2. Method

A literature search was conducted using the database of Web of Science, Wiley, and CNKI. The search selected keywords such as sense of meaning in life, family parenting style, parent-child attachment, and positive personality. Family parenting style and positive personality are used as independent variables, and family parenting style is dependent on the screening. The search and screening process focused more on the literature after 2000 or related literature with authority and representativeness, as well as English literature.

3. Literature Review

3.1 Meaning in Life

A sense of meaning in life is an important experience, and its creation and maintenance is not only one of the basic motivations of a person, but also a key factor in a person's mental health [6]. The meaning of a person's life is found in whether he has clear goals and values [7]. A positive life experience and sense of meaning is the foundation of a flourishing human society, and experiencing meaningful life is a basic human need [8]. Positive psychology sees a fulfilling life as requiring more than a happy mood; it also requires a sense of meaning and quality.

In recent years researchers have done much to explore the sense of meaning in life. Some studies have shown that a sense of meaning predicts positive well-being (mood, life satisfaction) and has little predictive properties for negative well-being (anxiety, neuroticism, depression). Whereas meaning crisis-depressed, empty life evaluations predict positive and negative well-being, the results suggest that meaningfulness is highly correlated with positive well-being. In contrast, meaning crisis is closely related to negative well-being [9]. Regarding the generation of meaning in life, Rebecca et al. [10] suggest that the "starting point" for finding meaning is the individual's self-perception and that the process is "personal and subjective" with large individual differences. The process is "personal, subjective," and highly individualized. This reflects that the degree to which individuals know themselves greatly influences their judgments about the meaningfulness of their lives [11]. Research on the factors influencing the sense of meaning in life, which is an important feeling for human beings to have a happy and good life, shows that positive affect (PA) and social relationships are important in determining the sense of meaning [12]. In addition, it suggested that an important source of meaning is the individual's perception of their core identity and that the authentic self is associated with happiness [13]. Thus, it is clear that current psychological researchers have discussed and expanded enough on the concept, sources of generation, and influencing factors of the sense of meaning in life. This paper will continue to expand on the theory and discuss other factors that may influence the sense of meaning.

3.2 Family

The family environment contains many dimensions, and there are many factors worth exploring in the field of psychological research on the impact of family on life meaning. Factors such as family parenting style and parent-child attachment will be discussed in this paper.

3.2.1 Parenting styles

Family parenting is a collection of ideas, emotions, and attitudes that parents embody in raising their children, as well as emotional communication and interaction between parents and children [14]. Studies have shown that parenting styles are influenced by parents' personalities and behavioral habits and are a combination of parenting styles and attitudes [15]. Baumrind classified family parenting styles according to two dimensions: demanding and responsive [16]. Maccoby and Martin [17] added the dimension of "support" and obtained The four parenting styles: authoritative, authoritarian, gratifying, and neglectful.

Family parenting styles can be broadly divided into positive and negative categories. The study concluded that meaning sense in life was significantly correlated with parenting styles, both in terms of fathering and mothering styles. Meaning in life was positively correlated with the father's warm understanding and significantly negatively correlated with harsh punishment, over-interference, and denial by the father; and significantly positively correlated to the mother's warm comprehension and significantly correlated negatively with the mother over-protection and denial. It suggests that parents who adopt positive parenting styles such as democratic harmony have a higher sense of meaning in their children's lives. By contrast, parents who adopt a negative parenting approach have less meaning to their children's lives [18].

Family upbringing directly or indirectly influences the meaning of children's life through the intermediary role of self-esteem and coping style. The broad definition of self-esteem is the overall self-assessment of an individual [19]. Qian et al. reported that parenting style affects the level of self-esteem of children and the level that children have in their self-worth affects their sense of meaning in life [20]. According to Zhu et al. concluded that self-esteem mediates between family style of parenting and meaning in life [21]. In addition, some studies have also discussed the mediating role of coping styles. Folkman and Lazarus defined coping styles as the efforts individuals make when they encounter situations where the demands on their internal and external environments exceed their cognitive level and resources [22]. Skinner suggested that coping styles are important for individuals' psychological well-being as a regulatory mechanism [23]. Some researchers concluded that positive coping mediates the relationship between parenting styles and meaning in life [24].

3.2.2 Attachment theory

Attachment theory suggests people need to rely on others and seek support to feel secure [25]. Individuals are constantly building attachment relationships throughout their lives, such as parent-child and peer attachment, with the primary attachment relationship, usually mother-child, having a profound impact on attachment behavior [26]. According to Marris, a sense of meaning in life does not rely on social values, but is generated through attachment-derived reflection on personal relationships with others. The attachment is divided into secure attachments and insecure attachments, and the style of attachment formed during childhood influences the meaning of an individual in life [27]. Additional studies have shown that parent-child attachment can affect meaning in life both directly and indirectly through mediating roles of temporal insight and peer attachment [28]. Parental companionship makes individuals more active in their search for meaning in life. High-quality parent-child attachment leads to better connections with others and the world. It allows individuals to gain a greater sense of self-presence in relationships, which leads to greater psychological satisfaction in the connection between self and the outside world [29].

3.3 Positive Personality

There are numerous current studies on personality, and Pervin represents the definition. He believes that personality contains structure and function, reflects the personality and upbringing of an individual, and is the functional organization of behavior, cognition, and emotion that provides direction for the individual's daily life [30]. Based on the study of personality, researchers have focused on positive mental activity and have developed exploration of a positive personality. Sheldon and Laura define positive psychology as a discipline that "reveals the virtues of human nature and develops the potential of the individual" [9]. Thus, positive personality has also moved away from the negative orientation of previous personality studies to focus on the virtues of human nature and the strength of personality.

Current research on positive personality and the meaning of life focuses on five major personalities. The different findings about the relationship between the five personalities and the meaning of life are based on different measures of meaning. It has been concluded by some researchers that agreeableness, extraversion and low neuroticism are significantly and positively related to meaning in life using questionnaire measures [31]. Steger et al. split meaning in life into two dimensions, meaning seeking and sense of meaning perception, and concluded that extraversion and agreeableness are significantly and positively related to meaning seeking; responsibility and neuroticism are negatively related to sense perception [32]. Although there are different positions and conclusions, they all show that positive aspects of personality traits are positively related to a sense of meaning of life to some extent. More research is needed to explore the direct relationship between positive individuality and a sense of meaning in life.

In addition, it is worth discussing that several studies have shown a correlation between family factors and personality. Some scholars have concluded that the "democratic-authoritarian" dimension of family parenting style has a significant positive effect on children's personality development [33]. The relationship between family parenting style and Big five personality has also been investigated,

and extroversion and responsibility have been found to have a significant positive correlation with the democratic type [34], which indicates a positive correlation between positive parenting style and positive personality. It can be inferred that personality mediates the relationship between family parenting style and a sense of meaning in life.

4. Implications

How to make life more meaningful is a question that deserves lifelong consideration. From this study, it can be inferred that family factors and personality significantly impact the sense of meaning in life, so we can start from these two factors to improve the sense of meaning in life. First, parents should adopt more positive family parenting styles when raising their children, providing warmth and understanding, and giving more support rather than authoritarianism and suppression to improve their children's self-esteem, generate more positive coping styles, and develop a more sound and positive personality. Parents should be more present, supportive, and attentive during their children's childhood and guide them to build secure attachments with their parents. A healthy, positive personality will benefit the individual for life, and parenting styles and family characteristics will fundamentally impact the early formation of an individual's personality. It can be concluded that parents should pay attention to their children's personality development in the process of parenting and cultivate their children's sense of responsibility, optimistic attitude toward the world, and empathy.

5. Conclusion

This paper discusses the influence of both on the sense of meaning in life and the correlation between them from the perspective of family and personality. It concluded that family parenting style and attachment relationship significantly correlate with the sense of meaningfulness in life. Families with positive parenting styles, such as warm and understanding, democratic and harmonious, had a stronger sense of meaning in their children's lives. In contrast, families with negative parenting styles, such as harsh punishment and excessive interference, had a lower sense of meaning in their children's lives. In parent-child attachment relationships, high-quality parent-child attachment leads to a higher sense of meaning in children's lives, and parent-child attachment also indirectly affects the sense of meaning through time insight and peer attachment. In the study on the influence of positive personality on the sense of meaning in life, it was found that the positive aspects of personality traits were positively correlated with the sense of meaning in life to some extent from the perspective of the Big Five personality. Positive family upbringing leads to more positive personality in children and positive personality mediates the effect of family factors on meaning in life. This study shows that familial factors, positive personality and meaning sense in life are also correlated. Most previous studies have dealt with the impact of family and personality on the meaning of life, but no study has explored the relationship between family and personality. With regard to the exploration of the influence of positive personality on meaning in life, most of them are discussed from the Big Five personality standpoint. The direct impact of positive personality on the meaning of life requires further study.

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