

Chapter 2

The Meaning of Life

“Man is equally incapable of seeing the nothingness from which he emerges and the infinity in which he is engulfed.”

Blaise Pascal (1623-1662)

French Mathematician and Physicist

Meaning in life has been defined as “the cognisance of order, coherence, and purpose in one’s existence, the pursuit and attainment of worthwhile goals, and an accompanying sense of fulfilment” (Reker, Peacock & Wong, 1987, p.221). Leider (1997) argues that each person has a natural reason for being. He says that the question of meaning comes to the fore periodically, during major life transitions such as divorce, loss of a loved one, graduating high school or university. Many researchers have investigated meaning in life (for example Battista & Almond, 1973; Harlow & Newcomb, 1990; Maddi, 1967; Reker, Peacock & Wong, 1987; Taylor & Ebersole, 1993; Yalom, 1980; Zika & Chamberlain, 1992). It has however been argued that since Frankl (1946), a forerunner in research on meaning, first developed logotherapy to explore the construct of meaning, little has been accomplished in terms of the advancement of understanding the nature of meaning in life (Leath, 1999), and particularly what constitutes meaning under adverse or difficult circumstances.

This chapter explores the various conceptualisations of the meaning of life, in particular that of the Viennese psychiatrist and author Viktor Emil Frankl (1905-1997), who survived various concentration camps and as a result went on to develop a

psychological intervention strategy known as logotherapy. Frankl (1992) argues that individuals are able to find meaning even, and perhaps especially, in times of suffering and adversity.

Meaning in life ought to be explored and studied in order to ascertain how people may become motivated to achieve all that they can achieve at school, university, work and also in day to day life experiences. This is especially salient for young people, as more and more adolescents and young adults are experiencing life as hopeless and meaningless (Santrock, 2003). This section will explore Frankl's (1946; 1992) philosophy and ideas on meaning, as well as the constructs of logotherapy. Another related issue will also be explored, namely the phenomenon of existentialism and the implications of existentialism for meaning. Contemporary approaches to research on *meaning in life* and understanding issues around the question of meaning will be investigated by looking at the literature on these topics. Finally, a critique of some of Frankl's (1992) constructs will be explored before concluding.

The first section of this chapter will focus on the biographical details of Viktor Frankl (1992) and on the philosophy of logotherapy.

2.1. Viktor Emil Frankl (1905 – 1997) and Logotherapy

Viktor Frankl, after he was freed from a German concentration camp, documented his story based on his experiences as well as the experiences of other prisoners in these camps in the 1930's and wrote these up in his book entitled *Man's search for meaning: an introduction to logotherapy* (1946; 1992). Frankl, a Viennese

psychiatrist, was one of the first people to emphasise health as opposed to illness (Fabry, 1993). Frankl has published 33 books and 700 scientific journal articles (Coetzer, 2003). He has also received honorary doctorates from 28 different universities, including one from the University of South Africa and one from the University of Pretoria in South Africa (Coetzer, 2003).

Section 2.1.1 focuses on the philosophy of Frankl (1992), and in section 2.1.2, the theory developed by Frankl (1992) known as logotherapy will be explored in detail. Firstly, Frankl's (1992) philosophy regarding meaning in life will be investigated.

2.1.1. The Philosophy of Viktor Emil Frankl (1905-1997)

Frankl's (1946; 1962a; 1992) philosophy contends that in order to have a positive view of life, one has to be aware that life has meaning under all circumstances, and that all people have the capacity and ability to find meaning in their lives. He claims that people can face any situation and overcome illness if they see meaning in their existence. Frankl (1946) refers to his experiences at Auschwitz and other concentration camps, where he saw people bearing suffering in different ways. The way in which certain individuals experienced suffering and death was proof for Frankl (1962a) that inner freedom cannot be lost, and it is this inner spiritual freedom, which makes our lives meaningful. Furthermore, meaning in life arises as a result of an individual's reaction to his or her own existence, which is mostly controlled by external forces. If meaning in life exists at all then there must be meaning in suffering, according to Frankl (1962b), because suffering is an inevitable and inescapable aspect of life.

Frankl (1992) utilises the illustration of two men in Auschwitz who wished to commit suicide. Both men argued that they could no longer expect anything from life, but Frankl (1992) argued with them by saying that it is not what we expect from life but rather what life expects from us. One of the men had a child waiting for him at home in a foreign country and the other man was a scientist who had authored a number of books and who still needed to complete some books and other projects. Frankl (1992) argued with them that the books could not be completed by anyone else and the child could not replace her father with anyone else. Frankl (1992, p80) thus claims that “this uniqueness and singleness which distinguishes each individual and gives meaning to his existence has a bearing on creative work as much as it does on human love. When the impossibility of replacing a person is realised, it allows the responsibility which a man has for his existence and its continuance to appear in all its magnitude”. In response to the philosopher Nietzsche’s (1844-1900) statement that “he who has a why to live can bear with almost any how”, Frankl (1992, p28) claims that the men above needed to be reminded of the “why” for their existence so that they could bear the “how”.

Frankl (1962b) argues that individuals are constantly confronted by fate, and thus by the opportunity to achieve something through their own suffering. For Frankl (1992, p77), “life ultimately means taking the responsibility to find the right answer to its problems and to fulfil the tasks which it constantly sets for each individual”.

In order to further understand Frankl’s (1946; 1992) conceptualisation of the meaning of life, it is useful to explore the particular type of therapy, namely logotherapy, which he established and utilised as a way to encourage and assist individuals who were

searching for meaning in life. The concept of logotherapy, which enables one to find the hidden *logos* of one's existence or to discover meaning in life, will now be explored in further detail.

2.1.2. Logotherapy

An American doctor once visited Frankl (1992) in Vienna and asked him to describe in one sentence what logotherapy is, and how logotherapy is different to psychoanalysis. Frankl (1992) asked the doctor to describe the essence of psychoanalysis in one sentence, and the doctor responded by saying, "During psychoanalysis, the patient must lie down on a couch and tell you things which sometimes are very disagreeable to tell". Frankl responded with the following, "Now, in logotherapy the patient may remain sitting erect but he must hear things which sometimes are very disagreeable to hear" (1992, p82).

Logotherapy is a term coined by Frankl (1946) and the literal translation of the word is *health through meaning* (Fabry, 1993, p23). Logotherapy helps people to identify meaning in life despite where the suffering in their life comes from; illness, guilt, loss, employment difficulties, problematic interpersonal relationships, or other problems or issues people face throughout their lives. Logotherapy enables people to find meaning in seemingly meaningless situations. Frankl (1966a) argues that each individual is unique and that all individuals face a series of unique situations and events throughout their lives. Furthermore, he argues that each of these unique life events offers the individual a chance to behave in a meaningful way and to make meaningful decisions. In responding to life events and situations and thus to moments where meaning can be found, people ought to follow their conscience. In

logotherapy, the conscience is a personal tool which enables one to find meaning in life situations and in fact, it gives one the freedom to choose to respond in a meaningful way, even if this means rejecting societal values (Fabry, 1993). Logotherapy helps people to find their healthy core, and the main resource of this core according to Frankl (1966b), is the human spirit.

Frankl (1946) distinguishes between inaccessible ultimate meaning which refers to the order of the universe, the divine, nature, the cosmos, faith and personal experience and so forth, and the *meaning of the moment* which refers to a level of meaning that is accessible and that individuals must strive toward in order to live a meaningful existence (Fabry, 1993). Individuals find meaning through the human spirit, a dimension that humans do not share with other animals. He says that people have bodies that may become ill and a psyche driven by emotions and instincts that can become disturbed, but the *spirit* is what gives individuals freedom as well as responsibility. Furthermore, in order to lead a fulfilled life, individuals must be aware of the human spirit and the resources within it.

Schulenberg (2004, p.477) describes logotherapy in the following way:

Logotherapy's basic principles... include the following: (a) human life involves meaning (the Meaning of Life tenet); (b) the primary motivation is a pull toward finding meaning (the Will to Meaning tenet), to live a life that is worthwhile and filled with purpose; and (c) meaning may be found under all circumstances (the Freedom of Will tenet), including those that involve unavoidable suffering. Logotherapy's principles assert that a lack of meaning results in a feeling of emptiness (existential vacuum) which can either result in motivation to discover meaning or can open the door to existential neuroses (particularly aggression, addiction, and depression).

Logotherapy is neither introspective nor retrospective, but rather focuses on the future, specifically on an individual's meaning to be fulfilled in the future (Frankl, 1966b). This section focuses on logotherapy and its related concepts in more detail, and the first construct that will be discussed is noögenic neuroses.

2.1.2.1. Noögenic Neuroses

Noögenic neuroses do not emerge as a result of conflicts between drives and instincts as Freud (1953-1974) suggests, but rather from moral conflicts between various values, and similarly existential frustration may foster the development of neuroses (Frankl, 1992). When noögenic neuroses occur, Frankl (1962a) argues that logotherapy is a more appropriate therapy than psychotherapy, because logotherapy targets and is able to access the spiritual dimension in human existence, which is contrasted with the instinctual dimension. Frankl (1962a) does however acknowledge that some conflict is healthy and requires no psychotherapy or logotherapy. He clarifies this by arguing that man's search for meaning for his existence, and even his doubting it, does not necessarily arise from or result in pathology (Frankl, 1966b). Maddi (1967) puts forward a similar theory with his construct of a condition he calls "existential neurosis" which refers to a state of being where individuals hold the belief that life is meaningless, and they experience apathy and boredom and a general feeling of alienation from themselves and from society.

This motivational force characterised by the ever-continuing search for meaning is referred to by Frankl (1992) as the Will to Meaning, and this construct needs to be explored in further detail.

2.1.2.2. *Will to Meaning*

The first and most important resource of the human spirit is the Will to Meaning which is the strongest motivation for behaviour and living, according to Frankl (1962a). Humans are constantly searching for meaning, and becoming aware of meaning in life enables individuals to develop their strengths and endure suffering, and, argues Frankl (1992), meaning is considered to be the ultimate end-goal, not merely a means to an end. Meaning in itself is a motivational force. Will to Meaning is the premise upon which Frankl (1946) bases his conceptualisation of human nature; he argues that human behaviour is not motivated by the will to pleasure as Freud (1953-1974) and the psychoanalysts claimed, nor by the will to power as Adler (1870-1937) suggested, but rather individuals are motivated by the search for meaning (Shek, 2003). Each person's sense of meaning is unique to the individual and meaningful fulfilment can only be ascertained by him/herself in order to achieve Will to Meaning (Frankl, 1962a). People are capable of living for and even dying for their values. Authenticity is achieved when one strives for a life that is meaningful (Frankl, 1962a). The important thing is that meaning in life is unique and specific to the individual whose task it is to fulfil it, thereby satisfying his/her will to meaning. *Logos* implies emerging from, but also confronting, the question of one's own existence (Frankl, 1966a).

An individual may be able to find meaning in his/her existence by committing to tasks that fill his/her life and provide a sense of meaning.

2.1.2.3. Task Orientation

Frankl (1992) argues that both short and long-term goals and tasks are imperative in leading a fulfilling life. These tasks should be chosen by individuals themselves and commitment to fulfilling these tasks helps enable people to stay healthy and avoid neuroses and depression (Fabry, 1993). When individuals become bored, it indicates the presence of existential frustration which leads to an individual experiencing an existential vacuum in his/her life (Coetzer, 2003). In industrial societies individuals may become bored easily, as people pursue money, power and status. Individuals seek out pleasures, especially sexual pleasure as a way to ward off feelings of emptiness, which may lead to psychological illness (Coetzer, 2003). Boredom can lead to inappropriate ways of coping with emptiness, such as drug addiction and violence, and this is especially the case for young people (Santrock, 2003). It seems as though young people may benefit from receiving some assistance when making decisions that require meaningful action.



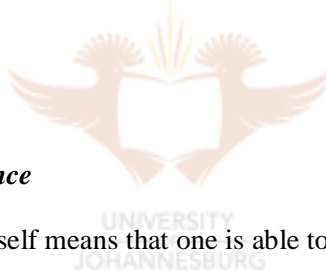
One tool that people can use to enable themselves to discover meaning in life is through the conscience.

2.1.2.4. Conscience

Conscience is the tool utilized by individuals to choose to act meaningfully or to find meaning in life situations, including circumstances where they may be suffering or when societal rules have to be ignored (Frankl, 1966a). Conscience is that moral guide which originates within an individual and cannot be taught through education or by any other means. One's conscience enables a person to distinguish between right and wrong, and individuals ought to be guided by moral nature or moral sense when it comes to making ethical decisions and taking correct actions (Coetzer, 2003). Moral

conduct requires that one apply one's moral knowledge and understanding and be guided by the intuitive sense of right and wrong, which originates within the human conscience. The conscience, according to Frankl (1962a), can either lead people astray or guide individuals to find meaning; conscience is the means through which meaning may be discovered. Through self-reflection, logotherapy can enable individuals to listen to the conscience, and make decisions and choices honestly and responsibly, knowing that one must be able to answer for the decisions and choices one makes (Coetzer, 2003).

Part of acknowledging one's conscience is learning to respond to what it may be saying. Morality occurs when individuals are able to transcend the self and act for the sake of God or other people.



2.1.2.5. Self-transcendence

The ability to transcend the self means that one is able to reach out to other people. In logotherapy, individuals who have found meaning through suffering in a particular circumstance are able to help other individuals who are experiencing the same things (Fabry, 1993). The nature of being human requires people to be constantly relating to other people. Self-transcendence means that one is able to forget about oneself and reach out to God or others, to realise an ideal or complete a task (Coetzer, 2003). Self-transcendence is a logotherapeutic technique utilised to overcome feelings of meaninglessness by taking the focus off oneself (Frankl, 1966b).

Another way to detach from oneself is through self-distancing.

2.1.2.6. Self-distancing

Frankl (1992) postulates that individuals possess the human spirit, which is powerful and which enables them to distinguish between the physical self and the spiritual self. Whilst failure and other negative attributes remain part of the physical realm, individuals can distance themselves from the self by stepping away in the spiritual realm (Fabry, 1993). Through self-distancing or self-detachment, individuals are able to laugh about their fears and anxieties, thus re-aligning their attitude toward adversity (Coetzer, 2003).

This strategy of utilising humour may enable individuals to ridicule their fears and thus face various anxieties and difficulties with a new attitude and sense of self-detachment.



2.1.2.7. Humour

Frankl (1962a) claims that humour is an important part of logotherapy as it is a practical way to exercise self-distancing. It is essential to be able to laugh at your own behaviour (Fabry, 1993). Frankl (1992) also claims that the role of humour can be described as a tool utilised by the soul to foster self-preservation, and is a skill that can be learned. He says that he trained a friend of his who worked next to him on their building site at a concentration camp to develop a sense of humour. He says, “I suggested to him that we would promise each other to invent at least one amusing story daily, about some incident that could happen one day after our liberation” (Frankl, 1992 p.54). In order to master the art of living, one must develop a sense of humour and he uses the analogy of gas being pumped into a chamber to illustrate this; if gas is pumped into an empty chamber, it will be distributed evenly. Similarly,

suffering can fill the human soul and conscious mind, but this is also true of humour and small joys. In this way, humour is seen as one of the most important constructs of logotherapy.

2.1.3. Summary of Logotherapy

To sum up, one of the main tenets of logotherapy is that life has meaning under all circumstances; meaning can be found in what individuals do, such as work, hobbies and so on. Meaning can be found in our experiences of life such as in nature, art or interpersonal relationships, and meaning can also be accomplished through our attitude to difficulties and situations where suffering is unavoidable (Coetzer, 2003).

Other important aspects of logotherapy are that individuals are primarily motivated by the will to meaning, and that although individuals are influenced by physiology, instincts, drives and the environment, people are free to choose and must necessarily choose a particular attitude in order to handle these limitations (Coetzer, 2003).

Individuals always have the option to make appropriate choices as people are born with “the defiant power of the human spirit” (Coetzer, 2003, p. 7). People have the power to choose; all people are able to choose their attitude to suffering and adversity. Individuals are psychological, biological, and spiritual; the spiritual dimension is what is specific to human beings. This spiritual dimension, the spirit or *noös*, is the core or essence of the human being, and it cannot become ill, it can only be blocked by psychological or spiritual difficulties, and individuals can thus face adversity whilst still maintaining human dignity, and it is in fact a challenge to be faced with such difficulties (Frankl, 1992). Man has the capacity to self-transcend, the ability to reach out to God and others and to be encouraged by beliefs and ideals. Also, people are

capable of self-distancing by utilising humour. An individual's life is determined by what he/she wants to be and how he/she wants to act. Because people are unique, each person will find him/herself to be indispensable in certain situations, for example being a mother or father to a child, and it is these instances that enable people to find meaning in their existence (Frankl, 1962a).

When people are unable to find meaning in their existence, Frankl (1966a) refers to this as the existential vacuum.

2.1.4. The Existential Vacuum

The existential vacuum is the absence of meaning in life (Frankl, 1966a). When individuals do not find meaning in life and a state of vacuum of perceived meaning in personal existence or an existential vacuum is present, feelings of frustration and boredom may be prevalent (Shek, 2003). The presence of an existential vacuum does not necessarily result in noögenic neuroses, however the existential vacuum may be implicated in psychopathology, and Shek (2003) describes this phenomenon as mental problems that come to fill the vacuum. It is important to note that existential frustration is neither pathological nor pathogenic, and in fact spiritual conflicts may be the catalyst for an individual's quest to begin the search for meaning in life (Frankl, 1962b).

Frankl (1966a) argues that the existential vacuum has become a common phenomenon in modern society where animal instincts have been replaced with the need to make choices in the face of insecurity. The main contributor to the existential vacuum is

boredom, and a frustrated existential vacuum can lead to a Will to Power, the Will to Pleasure and a Will to Money replacing one's Will to Meaning (Coetzer, 2003).

The existential vacuum as described by Frankl (1966a) is derived from existential philosophy, and an exploration of the concept of existentialism will be the focus of the following section.

2.2. Existentialism

Existentialism came to the fore in the 20th century as a philosophical position situated between rationalistic idealism and objective materialism (Reber & Reber, 2001). The main tenet of this philosophy holds that individuals have to make personal decisions and be responsible for those decisions even although they exist in a world without reason or purpose (Honderich, 1995).

Instead of focusing on the role of society in human decision-making and behaviour, existentialism emphasizes subjectivity, free will and individuality. Similarly, existential psychotherapy which has developed as a result of this philosophical movement emphasizes free will and the choices, actions and responsibilities of individuals (Reber & Reber, 2001).

The philosopher Kierkegaard (1957) claimed that the subjective, personal dimension of human life could not be reduced, hence the *existing individual*; the term *existentialism* was derived from this conceptualisation known as *Existenz* (Honderich, 1995). Kierkegaard (1957) was reacting to the idea of the philosopher Hegel (1770-

1831) that all peoples' various interests will eventually be satisfied through an objective understanding of the universe. Kierkegaard (1957) argued that in order to understand ethical questions concerning ourselves, we cannot adopt an entirely objective, impersonal understanding of our unique situations (Honderich, 1995). Thus, according to Kierkegaard (1957), to become an *individual*, one cannot simply do so by gaining knowledge of the world. Instead, people have to consciously engage the will by making choices and commitments and these long-term commitments provide life with a moral and ethical framework (Honderich, 1995). In this way says Kierkegaard (1957), people develop identities and become *existing individuals* and he notes that "it is impossible to exist without passion" (Honderich, 1995, p259). This freedom and sense of responsibility often leads to dread and anxiety referred to as 'angst'. *The good life* results when a person simply lives their life as an individual (Honderich, 1995).

Heidegger's (1962) concept of *Dasein* is similar to Kierkegaard's (1957) concept of *Existenz* as both of these terms describe *being* in humans. Furthermore, both theorists agree that coming to terms with our existence is something that human beings struggle to do; this can produce *angst* or anxiety about life. Heidegger (1962) argues that the way each of us as human beings faces up to this existence is what will determine the nature of our existence as individuals (Honderich, 1995). Heidegger (1962) does not advocate religious faith as Kierkegaard (1957) does. Instead, Heidegger (1962) argues that to become a true 'authentic' individual, one must take action and this idea is sometimes referred to as 'existential pragmatism'. If people can live according to their conception of their existence, they can be said to be living authentically (Honderich, 1995). Individuals start life inauthentically but through the experience of

angst about the world and about the uncertainty of goals and values within it; people learn to become more authentic. *Angst* is linked to how people experience impending mortality. Through *angst*, one is able to recognize and appreciate freedom. By understanding death, one is able to really understand the structure and nature of existence, and only then does one begin to live an authentic life so that individuals are leading authentic lives in “an impassioned freedom towards death” (Honderich, 1995, p260).

Sartre (1948) also offers some insight into existential philosophy. He recognizes the paradoxical nature of an individual’s freedom and refers to this as the *absurdity* of existentialist freedom. Sartre (1948) offers a version of existentialism based on ethics and morals in that he argues that the freedom exercised by individuals must not infringe on the freedom of other people (Honderich, 1995).

Investigating finding meaning in existence has been the theme of much research and some of this research will be investigated in the following section.

2.3. Contemporary Approaches to Understanding and Researching Meaning

In the preceding section, various ideas on meaning based on the work of Frankl (1946; 1962a; 1962b; 1966a; 1966b; 1992) were discussed. The humanistic focus of psychology in the 1970’s saw many theorists beginning to take an interest in meaning, and much research has been conducted on the topic (for example Carstens & Spangenberg, 1997; Crumbaugh & Maholick, 1964; 1981; Hablas & Hutzell, 1982;

Schulenberg, 2004). These and other theorists who focus on understanding and researching meaning will be the focus of this section.

2.3.1. Meaning in Life and Psychopathology

Searching for and finding meaning may be based on certain beliefs or life schemes, and thus when someone has found meaning in life, it can be said that beliefs and personal accounts of experience are present. However, Shek (2003) argues that the mere presence of these beliefs and life schemes from which individuals can create meaning does not guarantee existential fullness. It is possible for individuals to feel that life is not very meaningful if meaningful beliefs and goals are not validated by personal life experiences (Shek, 2003). Shek (2003) used the Chinese version of the Purpose in Life test (PIL) on a sample (N=2,150) of Chinese secondary school students to assess psychiatric symptoms and positive mental health. Shek (2003) disagrees with Crumbaugh (1977a; 1977b) that the Purpose in Life test (Crumbaugh & Maholick, 1981) does not measure any conventional mental illness. Shek (2003) found that while meaning in life and its related dimensions are indeed linked to symptoms of psychopathology such as general psychiatric symptoms, somatic problems, state and trait anxiety and depressive symptoms, links with positive mental health measures such as self-image and ego strength were also found. However this study was conducted on Chinese participants, and cannot be generalised to the South African population. Furthermore the sample was comprised of school children and it can be argued that these participants are not yet fully developed in terms of meaning in life.

In one study which does address an older group of participants, Geiger and Weinstein (2004) used the Purpose in Life test (Crumbaugh & Maholick, 1981) to study the differences in meaning in life in students (N=258) in terms of the effect of non-traditional status, region of country and choice of major subject. Non-traditional students were classified as those over 25, and results indicated that this group had higher Purpose in Life test (Crumbaugh & Maholick, 1981) scores than the under 25 group. Southwestern United States students had higher test scores than students in the upper Midwest area (Geiger & Weinstein, 2004). The major subjects chosen by students did not seem to affect test scores, but research according to choice of majors in different populations may yield different results and requires further examination. Furthermore, these results suggest that meaning in life may be affected by age, and further research of meaning in life among individuals of similar educational level where age is the main variable should be conducted (Geiger & Weinstein, 2004).

2.3.2. Meaning in Life and Spirituality

Research was conducted on undergraduate students (N=152) to determine the relationship of spirituality as measured by the Human Spirituality Scale (Wheat, 1991) to cognitive development as measured by the How Is Your Logic? Questionnaire (Gray, 1973), moral development as measured by the Defining Issues Test (Rest, 1990) and meaning in life as measured by the Purpose in Life Test (Crumbaugh & Maholick, 1981). The study revealed that although no relationship between spirituality and cognitive development exists, spirituality was found to be positively related to both moral development and meaning in life (Young, Cashwell & Woolington, 1998). While the strongest correlation in the study was between meaning in life and spirituality, the participants who volunteered for the study reported high

levels of religiosity and thus spirituality may be confounded with religiosity. The study indicates that spirituality may provide more than personal support. Spirituality may in fact be related to other important aspects of the individual that contribute to developing meaning in life (Young et al., 1998). Research is needed to establish further how spirituality influences, and is influenced by, meaning in life. Clearly, spirituality is potentially available to all and existential meaning and morality are closely related to personal spirituality (Young et al., 1998). Meaning in life and spirituality are central aspects of an individual's ability to cope, and further research investigating these relationships is needed.

2.3.3. Meaning in Life, Stress and Well-Being

One study, conducted in Hong Kong, surveyed mental health professionals (N=132) including mental health counsellors, clinical psychologists, psychiatrists, psychiatric nurses, and social workers about existential correlates of burnout (Yiu-kee & Tang, 1995). The Purpose in Life test (Crumbaugh & Maholick, 1981) was among the measures utilised in the study, and results indicate that meaning in life and motivation are existential correlates of burnout. The components of personal sources of burnout are similar in many ways to Frankl's (1992) description of existential neurosis related to meaning (Yiu-kee & Tang, 1995). This study supports Frankl's (1992) proposal which states that individuals are motivated by the search for meaning in life which in turn facilitates mental health and serves as a buffer against stress (Yiu-kee & Tang, 1995). This seems to suggest a possible relationship between meaning in life and the sense of coherence (Antonovsky, 1987) construct (see section 3.3.3).

Many studies (for example Shek, 2003; Zika & Chamberlain, 1992) allude to possible relationships between meaning in life, stress and well-being. For example, Zika and Chamberlain (1992) investigated the relationship between meaning in life and psychological well-being. They defined meaning in life according to the scores on the Purpose in Life (PIL) Test (Crumbaugh & Maholick, 1981), the Life Regard Index (LRI), and the Orientation to Life Scale (Antonovsky, 1987); well-being was defined as psychological functioning, affect and life-satisfaction. In two different samples, mothers (N=194) and elderly people (N=150), Zika and Chamberlain (1992) found that there was a strong association between meaning in life and well-being. They also found that meaning in life has a stronger association with positive well-being than negative well-being (Zika & Chamberlain, 1992). Thus it is suggested that there is significant value in adopting a salutogenic approach, indicating that further research needs to be conducted utilising the meaning in life construct and the salutogenic approach. An evaluation of Zika and Chamberlain's (1992) study reveals that both samples consisted only of Caucasian participants, and therefore cross-cultural data is needed. Furthermore in both samples participants were established in the life stages of middle to late adulthood, and thus research is needed in order to explore the relationship between meaning in life and salutogenic constructs in young adult populations. Zika and Chamberlain (1992) point out that their findings raise the question of whether the construct of meaning really has discriminant validity. They argue that meaning in life is concerned with purposeful existence and striving toward goals, and say that these aspects of meaning in life are clearly distinct from the ideas associated with well-being. Logotherapy supports the idea that lack of meaning in life is associated with mental health problems and stress, that there is a strong association between meaning in life and well-being, and that people with more life direction are

more responsible, goal-directed, better adjusted and relationship-oriented (Schulenberg, 2004).

Shek (2003) argues that the absence of psychiatric symptoms is a necessary but not sufficient condition for well-being, and further that a person in good mental health ought to exhibit a number of positive mental health qualities such as being able to actively adapt to new environments and unity of personality. An observation of the effect of life meaning on psychological well-being requires the inclusion of factors beyond psychopathology alone. There may be no difference, or there may be a significant difference between individuals with little life meaning compared with individuals with much life meaning. Thus, psychological well-being may be fuller understood in future if studies focussed on the intensity of life meaning instead of the mere presence or absence thereof (Shek, 2003).

In the study mentioned in section 2.3.1, Shek (2003) investigated the relationship between meaning in life and psychological well-being using the Chinese version of the Purpose in Life test (Crumbaugh & Maholick, 1981). Questions related to the quality of existence, as opposed to the purpose of existence were more predictive of psychological well-being (Shek, 2003). Research on meaning in life and psychological well-being among adolescents is necessary, as very little research has been conducted using these variables; Shek (2003) quotes Frankl (1992) in this regard who states that the quest for meaning of life has an overwhelming urgency particularly for young people, due to the many decisions and life stressors with which they are constantly faced.

Based on the theory of humanistic psychology, researchers have developed other formulations of well-being. Ryff and Keyes (1995) argue that previous theorists have conceptualised psychological well-being as difficult to conceptualise theoretically. They also argue that these conceptualisations focus more on affect and the absence of psychological dysfunction than on formulating what positive psychological functioning might be. Ryff's (Ryff & Keyes, 1995) model of psychological well-being comprises six factors, namely self-acceptance, positive relations with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth. Ryff (Ryff & Keyes, 1995) found support for this model in the works of Maslow, Rogers, Allport, Erikson, Buhler, Neugarten, and Jahoda (Ryff & Keyes, 1995).

Moomal (1999) looked at the relationship between meaning in life and mental well-being in a sample of university students (N=92) and found that meaning in life is positively associated with mental well-being. This study originates out of the existential paradigm on psychopathology and psychotherapy, which states that an overall sense of meaning in life is an essential element in providing an individual with coherence in terms of their worldview and mental well-being (Moomal, 1999). In this study Frankl's (1946) original hypothesis, which states that an absence of meaning in life is associated with only a specific type of pathology, namely noögenic neurosis, is challenged (Moomal, 1999). Research done on a sample of South African students supports the idea that meaning in life is in fact associated with a wide range of typically conventionally associated psychopathology categories (Moomal, 1999).

In order to illustrate the connection between meaning in life and well-being, Frankl (1992) recalls the story of a young man in a concentration camp who had a dream

where he heard a voice telling him that their camp would be liberated and their suffering would end on a specific date, namely the 30th of March. This young man was full of hope, but as the date drew nearer, it seemed that there was little chance of liberation. On the 29th March, this man suddenly developed a high fever and became quite ill, and on the 30th of March, he became delirious, lost consciousness and died the following day. He was declared dead from typhus, but Frankl (1992, p75) notes the following as an explanation: “Those who know how close the connection is between the state of mind of a man – his courage and hope, or lack of them – and the state of immunity of his body will understand that the sudden loss of hope and courage can have a deadly effect”.

Clearly, some theorists find it difficult to distinguish between well-being and meaning in life and there may also be difficulty in defining exactly what either of these concepts are (Leath, 1999). Leath (1999) claims that people may focus on different aspects of well-being at different life stages and in different situations. For example, the question of well-being is particularly salient at the life stage of late adolescence/early adulthood where the situation is characterised by the presence of transitions and stressors (Santrock, 2003). Ryff's (Ryff & Keyes, 1995) model suggests that meaning in life is an aspect of well-being; however, it may simply be an individual's focus area at a particular point in time. Leath (1999) suggests that well-being is a continuous process of staying healthy as opposed to an end-state as Ryff's (Ryff & Keyes, 1995) model implies. Thus Leath (1999) concludes that well-being involves “perceiving future opportunities for rewarding emotional experience” and “frequently experiencing rewarding emotional experience in the present” (p16).

Meaning in life, he argues, involves looking forward to future events, but does not require an enjoyment of the present emotions or circumstances.

This section focused on research regarding various aspects of meaning. It is apparent that meaning in life is inextricably linked to many psychological constructs, and that investigating meaning in life and well-being appears to be a valuable approach to understanding stress. Many of these studies investigate the strong points of Frankl's (1992) work, but there is room for critique in certain areas.

2.4. Critique

Although Frankl (1992) maintains that the search for meaning in life is a basic human motive, he never expresses whether life meaning ought to be seen as a unidimensional concept or whether it is multifaceted (Shek, 2003). Frankl's (1966a) framework does not adequately address the relationship between meaning in life or the existential vacuum and positive mental health such as happiness and positive self-concept (Shek, 2003). Frankl (1966a) also does not adequately address the relationship between meaning in life and psychological well-being; he focuses on the presence or absence of meaning in life without acknowledging the importance of the amount of meaning experienced (Shek, 2003). Shek (2003) argues that it may be useful for future research to examine the intensity of meaning in life and not merely the presence or absence of meaning. Crumbaugh and Maholick (1981) indicate that because of the ability of the Purpose in Life test to differentiate between psychiatric and normal groups, Frankl's (1992) formulations in logotherapy could be reliably followed.

2.5. Chapter Summary

To sum up, it can be argued that life always has the potential for meaning, and that furthermore the meaning of life is unique for each individual. This chapter focused on one of the founding theorists who attempted to describe and explain meaning in life, namely psychiatrist Viktor Frankl (1905-1997) who based much of his work on meaning on his experiences at concentration camps in the 1930's and 1940's. His argument that meaning in life can be found even, or perhaps especially, during suffering and adversity, is central to logotherapy, and has been described in detail. Existentialism and the implications of existentialism for meaning were explored. Furthermore, it was established that although theorists are unsure as to the exact causal relationship between meaning in life and well-being, clearly a relationship between the variables does exist. This section highlights the fact that research on meaning in life ought to be conducted in order to ascertain how people may become motivated to achieve at school, university, work and in daily life experiences. This is very important for young people in modern society as an increasing number of young people are experiencing life as hopeless and meaningless (Santrock, 2003). Finally, Frankl's (1992) constructs were evaluated.

Clearly, meaning in life is a relevant and important construct. Frankl's (1992) theory of logotherapy or *health through meaning* is a useful theory for understanding meaning under conditions of stress. Leath (1999) notes that of all the correlations between meaning in life and other constructs, further investigation regarding the relationship between meaning in life and well-being is required. One theorist who has pioneered much work in the realm of understanding well-being through coping with stressors is Aaron Antonovsky (1979; 1987), who has explored how some people stay

well and find meaning, while others become ill under stressful conditions. His theory of salutogenesis and sense of coherence will be explored in the following chapter.

