

Honoring Paul T. P. Wong's Life's Work and Legacy of Faith, Spirituality, Mature Happiness, and Meaning-Making as His Mentee

Victoria L. Bowers, Ph.D.¹

I first met Dr. Paul Wong as a Professor when I took a course at Saybrook University called “Meaning-Centered Counseling and Therapy.” Dr. Paul Wong is an established professor and clinical psychologist who is known for his research on finding meaning, positive existential psychology, and meaning therapy. The course I took with Dr. Wong offered extensive literature about Viktor Frankl’s Logotherapy and his theory that it is through searching for meaning and purpose in life that people are able to endure hardships and suffering (Frankl, 1962). The course included Dr. Wong’s work on meaning therapy and positive psychology. According to Wong (2014), “Positive psychology is about bringing out the noblest qualities of human beings in their struggle for survival and fulfillment in spite of the bleak condition of human existence.” Dr. Wong has been a mentor to me, and his work has opened the door for me to understand integrative research on meaning-making and mature happiness that has greatly contributed to my work as a scholar, practitioner, and writer.

Man is not fully conditioned and determined but rather determines himself whether he gives in to conditions or stands up to them. In other words, man is ultimately self-determining. Man does not simply exist but always decides what his existence will be, what he will become in the next moment. (Frankl, 1962, p. 154)

I have been fortunate to be able to apply the aspects of positive psychology to my clinical work. Positive psychology includes the ingredients for meaningful living (Wong & Bowers, 2018). The main components of positive psychology highlight the ability to overcome hardship. People have the inherent capacity to overcome or live with suffering and stress. The best way to achieve happiness and abundance is to gain insights from the dark side of the human experience. True happiness is characterized by a sense of acceptance, inner serenity, harmony, contentment, and being at peace with self, others, and the world. There are many human experiences that are challenging and difficult, but people can learn to find joy despite suffering. I have been able to teach my clients these components of positive psychology, and I have witnessed my clients’ improvement on how to endure and overcome their difficulties.

Dr. Wong and I wrote a publication together about mature happiness, “Mature Happiness and Global Well-Being in Difficult Times”. Working on this project with him was an amazing experience because I gained new perspectives about spirituality, meaning, and purpose. Mature happiness is based on recognizing human capacity regarding spirituality and the ability people have to cultivate meaning and purpose in spite of suffering (Wong & Bowers, 2018). The spiritual dimension of finding meaning helps people to have the courage they need to transcend their limitations in life and to embrace difficulty while pursuing joyful experiences. People are capable of transforming their weaknesses into strength and joy by employing spiritual coping, developing courage, finding meaning, and showing compassion to themselves and others.

Through my mature happiness research, I also learned the importance of thinking globally in terms of meaning-making. Life is hard for many people, especially in some parts of the world (Wong & Bowers, 2018). World events often make us wonder how people can be so cruel to each other and how those who are deeply wounded think about life. There is rising inequality in people’s beliefs, hopes, and aspirations. Happiness comes from learning how to

¹ Saybrook University

have balance, live a meaningful life, and maintain inner harmony despite difficult circumstances. Overcoming suffering is more possible when a person is able to find meaning through the hardship and view it within a larger context or to think globally.

My research for my publication with Dr. Wong was specifically about Transpersonal Psychology and mature happiness. I loved doing this research because it gave me insights into my own life and my own spiritual journey that I believe have helped me find greater strength and happiness. Striving for fulfillment through spiritual means can guide people to align with their higher power or universal energy, and help to cultivate hope, happiness, and personal well-being (Wong & Bowers, 2018). Spiritual growth is a lifelong process and continual journey. Developing higher consciousness, transcendent states, and universal connectedness are aspects of Transpersonal Psychology that bring about the human capability for limitless potential. I learned that through spiritual elements, people are able to find meaning for themselves and achieve spiritual growth that allows them to experience complete happiness. I have found greater happiness in my own life by applying the concepts I learned from my mature happiness research with Dr. Wong.

Dr. Wong's work has also contributed to the dissertation I am currently working on for my Ph.D. in clinical psychology: "The Power of Faith and Spiritual Perspectives, a 2-Day Psychoeducational Spiritual Coping Workshop for Relational Trauma Survivors: An Action Research and Program Development Study". I incorporated important aspects of Dr. Wong's work into my spiritual coping research, including his theoretical perspective of the meaning of life and what constitutes meaningful living, the Meaning-Management Model, enduring suffering, meaning-making through spirituality, Death Anxiety, and Death Acceptance. This research is very meaningful and has greatly contributed to my research on spiritual coping. I incorporated some of the components from Dr. Wong's research into my psychoeducational curriculum for my dissertation.

Wong emphasizes the importance of human connection as the part of life that provides people with comfort, joy, and happiness through positive relationships with other people (Wong & Bowers, 2018). The connections and relationships people have is how people learn to model themselves, have empathy and compassion, and give service to others in order to cultivate meaning in their life. The participants of my dissertation research study gave feedback that human connection was the most important thing for them to be able to have meaning-making experiences. They found human connectedness to be a way to cultivate spiritual connections and have spiritual joy. They found that compassion and service towards others brought them true happiness. These experiences are discussed in depth in Dr. Wong's research, and I had the opportunity to share this wonderful work with the participants in my class. Based on the feedback I was given, learning the spiritual coping perspectives I taught left a lasting, positive impact on participants that they will be able to apply throughout their lives.

I greatly admire Dr. Wong and his work in the field of psychology. He has helped me develop more skills as a clinician and writer. I have been fortunate to be able to apply some of his meaning-making models in my work with clients as an intern. Dr. Wong has helped me cultivate a passion for writing and a desire to have writing be a part of my career in the field of psychology. The success of having my first publication with the work we did together gave me more confidence with my writing. I have since done a couple of presentations and I am currently working on an article. I have specifically found most of my interests in writing to be about the spiritual aspects of humanity and cultivating meaning through hardship and suffering. I have read

numerous works by Dr. Wong and agree with his theoretical perspective and his approaches to psychology.

Through being mentored by Dr. Wong, I have experienced personal spiritual growth and professional development. I have learned how I am interconnected to the world and gained insights into transcendence, happiness, spirituality, and the human experience of meaning-making in my own life and the lives of others. “Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms to choose one’s attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one’s own way” (Frankl, 1962, p. 86). I hope to make meaningful contributions to the field of psychology and to be able to leave a meaningful legacy with my work like Dr. Wong has done with his life’s work.

References

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