




## The Process of Meaning Formation in Adolescents: A Grounded Theory

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## 1. Round 1

### 1.1. Reviewer 1

Reviewer:

The discussion of developmental theories, particularly Erikson's and Marcia's models, is appropriate but feels somewhat underdeveloped. It would be beneficial to explore in more detail how Erikson's stage of identity vs. role confusion, which is pivotal in adolescence, interacts with the search for meaning. Additionally, integrating more recent research on how adolescents negotiate identity and meaning (e.g., emerging perspectives from neurodevelopmental psychology or research on adolescent coping mechanisms) could modernize the framework.

This paragraph references adolescence as a critical period for personality development, which is a strong point. However, the citation of studies (Pavai et al., 2021; Pirhadi Tavandashti et al., 2024) is not accompanied by a detailed explanation of how the search for meaning specifically aids in resolving identity crises. Adding more detail on how adolescents' sense of meaning and purpose directly influences their psychological adjustment during periods of change could help clarify this point.

The use of grounded theory is appropriate given the exploratory nature of the study. However, the explanation of why grounded theory was specifically chosen over other qualitative methods (e.g., phenomenology or narrative analysis) would benefit from a deeper rationale. Consider elaborating on how grounded theory's inductive approach best aligns with your research objectives—particularly in understanding the complex, emergent process of meaning-making in adolescents.

In the fourth stage, you discuss "exploration, expansion, and deepening," which seems central to the concept of meaning-making. However, the distinction between "processing" and "exploration" could be more explicitly defined. Are these two processes interchangeable, or do they refer to different psychological mechanisms? Additionally, the term "insight into unmet needs" requires clarification—what types of unmet needs are typically involved in this stage, and how do they relate to adolescent developmental needs (e.g., belonging, self-esteem)?

The fifth stage, "emergence of resolution," includes the concepts of self-repair and agency, which are promising. However, it would be beneficial to provide more detail on how these processes manifest in adolescents. How do these processes relate to Erikson's stages of identity development? Moreover, the idea of "creating experience" is somewhat vague—does this refer to adolescents actively constructing new life narratives, or is it more about adapting existing experiences to fit a new worldview?

Response: Revised and uploaded the manuscript.

## 1.2. Reviewer 2

Reviewer:

The opening paragraph touches on profound questions regarding human existence, but the transition to discussing the meaning of life is somewhat abrupt. It would benefit from a more explicit framing of how these existential questions directly lead into the scholarly exploration of meaning in life. Perhaps you could clarify how the search for meaning is not only a personal journey but also a central focus in psychological and philosophical literature (e.g., Frankl's work on existential vacuum).

The reference to Frankl's work is insightful, but a deeper analysis of his specific contributions to the theory of meaning would enrich this discussion. For instance, you mention Frankl's view on the search process, yet his emphasis on the will to meaning and its distinction from the will to power (as discussed in his seminal work *Man's Search for Meaning*) could be highlighted to better contextualize his approach. Consider adding a brief explanation of how Frankl's existential analysis contrasts with other psychological theories of meaning.

The reference to Steger et al. (2009) is crucial to understanding dimensions of meaning, but the distinction between "presence of meaning" and "search for meaning" could be more clearly elaborated. These dimensions are central to the current research in meaning-making, so discussing them with greater specificity—perhaps by integrating recent studies on how these dimensions evolve over time or in different contexts—would provide additional clarity. You may also want to briefly touch on the implications of these dimensions for adolescents, as this will help ground the discussion in the paper's focus.

This distinction between global and situational meaning is well-made, but the connection to adolescent development could be explored in more detail. Adolescence is a time of identity formation, and situational meaning may play a more significant role during this period as adolescents encounter various stressors. Providing more direct evidence from research that links situational meaning with developmental transitions in adolescence could strengthen the argument and enhance relevance to your study population.

The inclusion criteria based on a score of above 24 on the Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MLQ) is a solid approach, but further justification for this cut-off score would be valuable. Does existing literature support this threshold as being appropriate for adolescents? Additionally, how do you plan to account for potential differences in meaning-making between adolescents who score above and below this threshold? A brief discussion on the potential implications of this criterion for the study's findings would be useful.

The exclusion of adolescents with clinical or personality disorders is a prudent decision; however, the diagnostic interviews conducted by the researcher could benefit from more description. What specific diagnostic tools or criteria were used to assess for such disorders? Providing more transparency on this process will help the reader better understand the potential influence of psychological factors on meaning formation.

The first stage, "creation of conflict," is well-supported by the literature, but the operationalization of "triggering events" and "problematic coping" could be further clarified. What specific types of events are considered "triggering" in the context of

adolescent meaning-making? Are these events predominantly external (e.g., loss, trauma) or do internal conflicts (e.g., identity confusion, self-esteem issues) also qualify as triggers? Expanding on this would provide more clarity and depth to the framework.

The second stage introduces the idea of emotional confusion, which is an important part of meaning-making. However, the concept of “protesting against meaning” requires further clarification. Does this refer to resistance to meaning-making altogether, or is it a form of cognitive dissonance in which adolescents struggle to reconcile their past beliefs with new, conflicting experiences? A more nuanced explanation would help strengthen the understanding of this stage.

The third stage highlights the development of self-awareness and acceptance, which is well-supported by the literature. However, the term "self-awareness" could be unpacked more thoroughly. Is this self-awareness related to personal identity, existential reflection, or both? Furthermore, the phrase "developing acceptance capacity" could benefit from a more precise definition. Is this process driven by cognitive, emotional, or social factors, and how does it unfold over time in the adolescent population?

Response: Revised and uploaded the manuscript.

## 2. Revised

Editor’s decision after revisions: Accepted.

Editor in Chief’s decision: Accepted.