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# The meaningful life in Japan and the United States: Levels and correlates of meaning in life

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### Abstract

Culture supplies people with the provisions to derive meaning from life. However, no research has examined cultural variation in the two principal dimensions of meaning in life, presence of meaning and search for meaning. The present investigation adapted theories of self-concept and cognitive styles to develop a dialectical model of meaning in life, which predicted cultural differences in the tendency to experience search for meaning as opposed to, or harmonious with, presence of meaning. Using data from American ( $N = 1183$ ) and Japanese ( $N = 982$ ) young adults, mean levels and correlates of presence of meaning and search for meaning were examined. As predicted, Americans reported greater presence of meaning; Japanese reported greater search for meaning. In accordance with the model, search for meaning was negatively related to presence of meaning and well-being in the United States (opposed) and positively related

to these variables in Japan (harmonious). Thus, the search for meaning appears to be influenced by culture, and search for meaning appears to moderate cultural influences on presence of meaning.



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## Keywords

Meaning in life; Cross-cultural; Dialectical model; Well-being; Search for meaning

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