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Meaningful Life in Retirement

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Abstract

As life expectancy increases, pursuing a meaningful life becomes more crucial. Retirement, often a challenging transition marked by losing meaningful career roles, prompts individuals to reevaluate their purpose and explore various meaningful activities. The current chapter conceptualizes activities as energies resources that enable older adults to (re)establish a meaningful life in retirement. It aims to review and integrate existing management and organizational psychology research on achieving a meaningful life through engaging in paid and unpaid activities during retirement, presenting an integrative conceptual model of meaningful life and activities throughout the retirement process. It summarizes the broader literature on meaning in life and meaningful work, followed by research focusing on older adults, and reviews prior literature on activities engagement during retirement - distinguishing between planning and decision-making, transition experience, and retirement adjustment phases of retirement. Finally, the chapter concludes by discussing future research directions.

Keywords: meaning in life; meaningful work; activities; retirement process.

Meaningful Life in Retirement

For many, retirement is a challenging transition marked by losing meaningful career roles that prompts a reevaluation of purpose and identity. With increased life expectancy, the quest for a meaningful existence becomes increasingly critical for individuals. Careers theory emphasizes the importance of deriving meaning from diverse job roles and nonwork activities over time, thereby shaping a coherent and meaningful career path to craft one`s personal and professional identities (Savickas, 2012). The retirement process is defined by a gradual reduction and disengagement from work, both psychologically and behaviorally, comprising three sequential phases (i.e., retirement planning and decision-making, retirement transition experience, and retirement adjustment; Froidevaux, 2024a). This period offers specific opportunities to pursue personal and career growth through pursuing various meaningful activities. While research on activities engagement prior and during retirement is well established (see Dorfman, 2013 in the first edition of the current volume), the notion of a meaningful life in retirement is relatively novel, having emerged with the seminal work of Froidevaux and Hirschi (2015) on retirement framed as a transition from meaningful work to meaning in life.

Expanding these works, the current chapter aims to review and integrate existing research on how to achieve a meaningful life through paid and unpaid activities in the retirement process. By doing so, we update Dorfman's work (2013) and address the key question raised by Amabile (2019): "To what extent, and how, do retirement decisions and experiences involve questioning and reevaluating the meanings of one's own life?" (p. 210). To do so, in line with the conservation of resources theory (COR; Hobfoll et al., 2018), we conceptualize retirement activities as energies resources (i.e., personal and volatile; ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012) that allow retirees to retain current and gain additional resources within their specific

environments to attain their goals (Froidevaux et al., 2024). We suggest that these resources further enable them to establish a meaningful life in retirement, either by finding new sources of meaning or maintaining continuity with prior life phases.

To do so, this chapter first summarizes the broader literature on meaning in life and meaningful work before reviewing prior research on older adults regarding meaning in life and meaningful work. Second, we review prior literature on meaningful activities in the following three phases of retirement: planning and decision-making, retirement transition experience, and retirement adjustment. Based on our review, Figure 1 presents our conceptual model of meaningful life and activities over the retirement process. Finally, this chapter discusses fruitful avenues for future research, which is summarized in Table 1.

Meaning in Life

Current industrial-organizational psychology and management literature on meaning in life follows the lead of the pioneering work of Viktor Frankl (1946), who, after surviving the Holocaust, proposed that searching for meaning in life represents the key motivational factor explaining human behaviors. *Meaning in life* refers to the "sense made of, and significance felt regarding, the nature of one's being and existence" (Steger et al., 2006, p. 81). It is thus a highly subjective concept based on individuals' personal assessment, in contrast to the "meaning of life" as a more general construct referring to the meaning of humans' life that is mostly used in philosophy (Costin & Vignoles, 2020; King & Hicks, 2021).

Meaning in life encompasses three main dimensions: comprehension (or coherence), purpose, and existential mattering (King & Hicks, 2021). Comprehension refers to an individual's understanding of life as a coherent narrative in which the significant events and characters from the past, present, and imagined future are harmoniously integrated. This

dimension is measured by items like “I can make sense of the things that happen in my life” and “Looking at my life as a whole, things seem clear to me” (Costin & Vignoles, 2020). The second dimension is having a sense of *purpose* in one’s life, which usually reflects setting long-term and intrinsic goals. To identify such goals, individuals need to clarify their key values (e.g., altruism), enabling them to define what is desirable to achieve in life for them personally (Krause & Hayward, 2014). In addition to articulating such long-term goals, shorter-term goals are also necessary to provide a roadmap and allow the identification of critical milestones through which central values are translated into concrete actions (e.g., engaging in volunteering for the homeless population). Example items measuring this second dimension are “I have a good sense of what I am trying to accomplish in life” and “I have certain life goals that compel me to keep going” (Costin & Vignoles, 2020). Finally, the third dimension, *existential mattering*, is the belief that one’s life is important to others through a positive contribution to society. It involves feelings that others depend on us, that we are important to others, and that others are actively attentive to us (Flett & Heisel, 2021). This dimension is captured by items like “Whether my life ever existed matters even in the grand scheme of the universe” and “Even considering how big the universe is, I can say that my life matters” (Costin & Vignoles, 2020). A study by these authors comparing the respective importance of these three dimensions found that mattering is the strongest predictor of meaning in life.

Current literature further distinguishes between the presence of and the search for meaning in life. The *presence of meaning in life* refers to “our cognitive understanding of ourselves and our lives, our sense of purpose, and the feeling that our lives matter.” In contrast, the *search for meaning in life* relates to “the strength, intensity, and activity of people’s desire and efforts to establish and/or augment their understanding of the meaning, significance, and

purpose of their lives" (Morse et al., 2021, p. 34). Interestingly, presence and search for meaning are independent; one can search for meaning without lacking it (Steger & Dik, 2009). Indeed, there is evidence that most people experience the presence of meaning in their lives (King & Hicks, 2021). Finally, current scholarship agrees on a set of antecedents of the presence of meaning in life, including positive affects (e.g., joy), interpersonal relationships, religious or spiritual beliefs (especially those relating to life or the world), a strong perception of feeling connected to oneself, the ability to project oneself into the past and present vividly and intensely, and an awareness of one's mortality (Steger & Dik, 2009).

Meaning in Later Life

Research examining correlates of meaning in life in older adults shows positive associations between meaning in life and gratitude, social comparison with others, one's past self over time, humor (Derkx et al., 2020), religiosity, internal locus of control, generalized self-efficacy, and optimism, while loneliness and psychological distress are negatively associated with meaning in life for older adults (Greenblatt-Kimron et al., 2022). In addition, the distinction between having meaning and searching for meaning in life applies to older adults too (Hallford et al., 2018). The presence of meaning in life seems greater among older than younger adults (e.g., Steger, 2009).

Moreover, seeking meaning seems to impact those in their 80s less adversely than adults in their 60s. Specifically, Hallford et al. (2018) report that when pursuing meaning, adults in their early old age experience diminished self-esteem and well-being across various dimensions: their standard of living, health, achievements, relationships, safety, and future security. In contrast, individuals in their advanced years only reported their sense of achievement in life (i.e., one dimension) as diminishing.

Sources of meaning in life also seem to differ over the lifespan: adults aged 60-69 found it in health and altruism, and those over 70 found it in nature, animals, and spirituality. Conversely, people aged 30-39 valued work, those aged 20-29 prioritized romantic partners, and teenagers aged 16-19 focused on friendships (Fegg et al., 2007). More recently, Krause and Rainville (2020) found support for a nonlinear relationship between meaning in life and age, with a lower positive association earlier in the lifespan, followed by a progressively larger relationship in mid-life to its strongest in later ages. As further shown empirically by these authors, such findings can be explained by older adults' specific position at the end of the lifespan, as explained by Erikson's (1959) developmental theory and the socioemotional selectivity theory (SST; Carstensen, 2021; Carstensen et al., 1999), which both emphasize the centrality of emotionally close interpersonal relationships at older ages. Below, we detail these theories' emphasis on the three dimensions of a meaningful life in retirement.

Mattering. First, Erikson's (1959) developmental theory over the lifespan identifies life tasks that individuals at different life stages must resolve to attain meaning in life. At older ages, this theory sheds light on the need to achieve both generativity and integrity. *Generativity* (ages 45-70) is characterized by the willingness to support and contribute to the wellness of the younger generations and answers the question, "Have I created something meaningful in my life?" Hence it is directly related to the mattering dimension of meaning in life.

Prior work has emphasized the key role of mattering for late careers, as individuals disengage from work and face greater health problems and negative ageist stereotypes, especially in Western societies (Fazio, 2007). Mattering was found to be positively related to the cognitive dimension of well-being (i.e., life satisfaction) before retirement, while a positive association with its emotional dimension (i.e., positive affects) was observed after retirement (Froidevaux et

al., 2016). Contrary to these authors' expectations, however, mattering was unrelated with engagement in retirement planning, possibly due to the transcending nature of mattering across life contexts (i.e., future retirees would trust its transferability beyond retirement). Indeed, mattering was later found to have a protective effect from mental health problems among older adults, especially regarding loneliness and depression (Flett & Heisel, 2021).

Comprehension. Further, Erikson's (1959) developmental theory over the lifespan introduced the notion of *integrity* for those over 70 years old, which refers to accepting who one has become. This requires individuals to accept a less dominant role in society and reconcile themselves with their past including potential life regrets. Ware (2012) summarized the five most frequent end-of-life regrets as follows: 1) not living true to oneself ("I wish I'd had the courage to live a life true to myself, not the life others expected of me"); 2) working too much ("I wish I hadn't worked so hard"); 3) failing to express feelings ("I wish I'd had the courage to express my feelings"); 4) losing touch with friends ("I wish I had stayed in touch with my friends"); and 5) not allowing oneself to be happier ("I wish I had let myself be happier"). Dealing with life regrets also implies engaging in counterfactual thinking, a reflective practice on what might have been or how things could have been different (e.g., "could have been" and "what if I had done things/things had unfolded differently?"). Such reflection helps individuals to connect the dots between their life events and accept the way events actually unfolded in their life (Froidevaux & Hirschi, 2015; Hershfield et al., 2013). Integrity, thus, is about asking and answering the question "Have I lived a rich and full life?" and relates to the comprehension dimension of meaning in life.

Purpose. The second theoretical approach highlights the role of how older adults' awareness of their specific position at the end of their lifespan shapes their overall purpose in

life. *Socioemotional selectivity theory* (SST; Carstensen, 2021; Carstensen et al., 1999) posits that as people age, their time perspective evolves from seemingly endless to more limited time left. Aware of their limited time, older individuals prioritize socially and emotionally meaningful interactions, choosing them as their main goals rather than instrumental goals. In other words, they find purpose in dedicating their time to nurturing high-quality relationships with family and close friends that allow them to share positive emotions such as joy.

Meaningful Work

Positively associated with meaning in life (Steger, 2019; Steger & Dik, 2009), *meaningful work* is defined as "work that is personally significant and worthwhile" (Lysova et al., 2019, p. 375; Rosso et al., 2010). It comprises the three dimensions of positive meaning (i.e., having an outcome, a point), meaning-making through work (i.e., contributing to one's meaning in life), and the greater good motivation (i.e., doing good for something beyond one's self; Steger et al., 2012). Specifically, the greater good dimension of meaningful work includes serving (i.e., helping) others and kinship (i.e., bonding over work done together; Pratt et al., 2013) and is in line with the dimension of mattering of meaning in life.

Meaningful work's antecedents can be found at multiple levels (Bailey et al., 2019; Lysova et al., 2019): individual (e.g., extroversion, conscientiousness, work volitions, and work in line with one's identity are positively associated with meaningful work); job (e.g., job design characteristics such as skill variety, task significance, task identity, employment security, but also job crafting or white-collar jobs), organizational (e.g., transformational leadership, organizational climates such as spiritual or learning oriented, and positive workplace relationships) and societal (e.g., access to decent work, cultural norms that emphasize work as a pathway to individual fulfillment). In addition, meaningful work's outcomes include individual

(e.g., life satisfaction, work-life enrichment), work-related attitudinal and behavioral (e.g., positive relationships with intrinsic motivation, job satisfaction, organizational and career commitment, organizational identification), and performance (e.g., creativity, organizational citizenship behaviors) outcomes (Bailey et al., 2019).

Finally, four major pathways to meaningful work have been suggested based on a two-by-two matrix, referring to the two dimensions of agency-versus-communion (i.e., a drive to differentiate oneself vs. to connect) and of actions oriented towards self-versus-others. They include (Rosso et al., 2010, p. 115):

> *Individuation* (self-agency) reflects the meaningfulness of actions that define and distinguish the self as valuable and worthy. *Contribution* (other-agency) reflects the meaningfulness of actions perceived as significant and/or done in service of something greater than the self. *Self-Connection* (self-communion) reflects the meaningfulness of actions that bring individuals closer into alignment with the way they see themselves. And *Unification* (other-communion) reflects the meaningfulness of actions that bring individuals into harmony with other beings or principles.

Meaningful Work in Later Life

Meaningful work is especially important for late-career workers (Hirschi et al., 2018; Shacklock & Brunetto, 2011) in terms of aligning their expectations with work rewards and their identification with work compared to other life domains (Baltes et al., 2012). With the prospect of retirement, the anxiety of losing one's major work-related resources (e.g., interpersonal relationships) that sustain one's sense of self may arise. Indeed, according to *terror management theory* (Greenberg et al., 1986) work represents an adherence to cultural norms and values that serve as a defense mechanism against humans' existential fear of death, providing them with symbolic continuity of the self beyond death. Indeed, a positive association was found between subjective nearness-to-death and retirement anxiety, and this relationship was further strengthened by a strong identification with work (Froidevaux et al., 2022).

Additional research has explored how different age groups perceive meaningful work (Weeks & Schaffert, 2019): Individuals aged 17-35 associated meaningful work with nice colleagues, service to others, life improvement, and personal happiness. For those 36-54, it meant working with good people, having a work-life balance, and pursuing individual goals. Those aged 55-73 linked meaningful work to success, reaching personal goals, and helping others achieve goals. Finally, seniors aged 74-97 identified it with challenging work, self-satisfaction with work, helping others, and alignment of company values and own values. While specific elements varied by age group, a common thread was that meaningful work contributed to improving the self (i.e., personal growth and being true to oneself) and others' situations. Interestingly, despite such varied beliefs in the existence of age differences in meaningful work definitions, results revealed minimal differences among age groups, suggesting that these perceptions might be more stereotypical than factual.

Meaningful Activities over the Retirement Process

Retirement marks the start of a period for personal and career renewal, a late-career developmental stage (rather than a "conclusion") in which to explore new professional paths, to see one's professional identities and personal goals evolve, and to foster growth and societal contribution (Froidevaux, 2024a; Wang & Shi, 2014). Retirement offers the freedom to merge one's professional ambitions with the leisure activities that a retirement pension affords, encouraging part-time endeavors or volunteering that aligns with one's personal values. The existential framework on meaning and career decision-making (Miller & Rottinghaus, 2014) emphasizes that the need to build a sense of meaning in one's life shapes individuals' career decisions. Below, we review prior research on activities engagement in each of the three phases of the retirement process.

Retirement Planning and Decision-Making

Retirement planning is necessary at the financial and cognitive levels (Shultz & Wang, 2011; Wang & Shi, 2014). Specifically, financial planning requires a systematic approach to securing a post-work lifestyle, where personal savings play a pivotal role against the backdrop of changing economic conditions and standard income sources (Hershey et al., 2013). On the other hand, cognitive planning involves picturing the retired life, its activities, living arrangements, and maintaining an active social life (Adams & Rau, 2011). Retirement decision-making is the practical application of these plans, assessing the value of continued work against the appeal of leisure activities and setting into motion the steps toward realizing retirement (Feldman & Beehr, 2011). The nature and quality of individuals' engagement in work and non-work activities before retirement also significantly affect their expectations and decisions regarding retirement as they evaluate potential (career) paths based on the meaningfulness and authenticity these paths offer (Miller & Rottinghaus, 2014).

The Role of Meaningful Activities for Retirement Planning and Decisions

Search for *meaning in life* plays a critical role in retirement decision-making, as individuals align their career cessation with pursuits of significant activities (Smith et al., 2024). Specifically, these authors found that a greater search for meaning in life was positively associated with the worker identity and negatively associated with the retiree identity, while the presence of meaning was unrelated to both identities. Additionally, identifying as a worker was positively related to bridge employment but unrelated to volunteering; identifying as a retiree was negatively associated with bridge employment but positively with volunteering. Finally, Smith et al. (2024) observed that the search for meaning in life increased bridge employment through positively identifying with the worker and the retiree identities. This preliminary

evidence suggests that the search for meaning in life may be a stronger predictor of retirement activities than the presence of meaning in life.

More research has focused on *meaningful work*, indicating that older workers are likely to postpone retirement to remain in meaningful roles, preserving a sense of social contribution (Fisher et al., 2016; Froidevaux & Hirschi, 2015; Shacklock & Brunetto, 2011). This is especially true for those with a strong protean career orientation (i.e., who prefer self-directed, value-driven careers; Hall et al., 2013). Conversely, others may leave their current roles searching for new paid or unpaid roles that allow greater control over their time and more flexibility while providing a sense of meaning (Kojola & Moen, 2016).

Concretely, older workers' plans for retirement activities were found to typically focus on three categories: bridge employment (e.g., self-employment, occasional work for one's former organization), self-developmental leisure (e.g., resume hobbies, learning new skills), and social leisure (e.g., spending time with family, reconnecting with friends) – the latter two being the most frequent (Eismann et al., 2019). These plans depended on concrete bridge employment opportunities, spousal support for the activities, and workers' time perceptions. Interestingly, while social and self-developmental leisure planning is associated with future-orientations, bridge employment planning is positively related to perceived life expectancy (Eismann et al., 2019).

Further, van Solinge et al. (2021) highlighted that *adaptation* (adjusting to losing one's work role) and *exploration* (seeing retirement as a chance to pursue activities aligned with one's values) are crucial in understanding plans for post-retirement paid work and volunteering, but in distinct ways. Specifically, older workers anticipating missing latent work functions and valuing

personal growth were more likely to plan for post-retirement work. In contrast, those with a strong social orientation leaned towards volunteer work.

Additional factors, such as *gender,* may shape meaningful activity planning. Men, more than women, tend to plan for post-retirement paid work in anticipation of losing latent work functions (van Solinge et al., 2021). Nicolaisen et al. (2012) found that women involved in volunteering were more likely to postpone retirement, while men's preference for early retirement aligned with traditional masculine pursuits like outdoor activities. Further, Beier et al. (2018) examined participation in activities as the mechanism mediating the effect of personality and resources (e.g., health, financial stability, and intellectual capacity) to maintain one's engagement in activities on retirement expectations. They found that *activity variety* (i.e., engaging in different types of activities such as productive, physical, social, and leisure) directly affected workers' mental and physical well-being and their expectation of full-time work post-age 65. However, aside from education's partial mediation effect on retirement expectations, the influence of personality and resources on activity engagement and outcomes tended to be direct.

Retirement Transition Experience

With the cessation of formal employment, retirees enter a phase of self-reinvention and exploration. As individuals derive their sense of self from the activities they engage in (Ashforth, 2001), transitioning from a career-oriented self to a retirement lifestyle entails a change in one's daily activities and a profound shift in one's self-concept. Drawing upon social identity, self-categorization, and interpersonal perspectives, Froidevaux et al. (2018) posit that successful retirement adaptation depends on the identity transition negotiation process, that is, the resolution of the potential incongruence between one's past (work-related) and new (retiree) social identities. Such an identity transition negotiation process may take the form of a more intense

reflection upon one's life narrative (i.e., "where it has been, where it is, and in what direction it might be going"; Amabile, 2019, p. 209).

Building upon this work, Zhan et al. (2023) were the first to examine this retirement transition phase empirically, which they defined as the "time period immediately following workforce exit as people embark on retirement; [… a] critical time window […] when new retirees need to deploy resources to handle transition-related challenges" (pp. 871; 880). Relying on the three-phase temporal process model of retirement, they showed the positive effects of pre-retirement resources (e.g., mental health, financial security, and family support) on retirees' transition experience, which ultimately affected retirement adjustment. Furthermore, such a positive initial experience during the transition provides them with a positive outlook on their future potential and goal attainment, possibly further motivating them to engage actively in activities that bring about favorable life changes, hence facilitating post-retirement life satisfaction.

Compensation and Continuity in Activities when Transitioning to Retirement

Two main theories provide insight into the adaptive strategies employed by individuals as they transition into retirement and engage in activities, reflecting a balance between maintaining continuity and adapting to new life circumstances. First, *continuity theory* (Atchley, 1999) suggests that individuals strive to maintain their established life patterns and use their pre-retirement experiences, skills, and relationships to navigate the retirement transition smoothly. It distinguishes between "internal continuity" (in values and personality) and "external continuity" (in activities and lifestyle), both being vital for adaptive adult development. Second, the *Selective Optimization with Compensation theory* (SOC; Baltes & Carstensen, 1996; Baltes & Baltes, 1990) suggests that retirees focus on fewer but more meaningful activities, optimizing their

engagement in these activities and compensating for lost capacities due to aging by focusing on the less demanding ones. Relatedly, Jex and Grosch (2013) suggest a *compensation mechanism* in that transitioning to retirement represents, for many, an opportunity to partake in activities or new learning long deferred due to work commitments and time constraints. Froidevaux (2024b) framed retirement within the context of sustainable careers over the lifespan, suggesting that compensation mechanisms occur when a pre-retirement phase primarily focused on work is followed by a post-retirement phase mainly focused on leisure, possibly indicating a lack of career sustainability over the lifespan. In contrast, greater sustainability may be achieved by balancing effortful activities (like work) and relaxing activities over the lifespan, including the late career phase (Froidevaux, 2024b; Tadic et al., 2013). This is in line with "the whole-life perspective," characterized by a strong focus on both work and nonwork orientations towards family, community, and personal life (Hirschi, 2020) over the lifespan. Overall, empirical research supports the existence of both compensation (engaging in new activities to replace career roles after retirement) and continuity (maintaining pre-retirement activities and roles) perspectives. These are not mutually exclusive, as retirees may compensate by taking on new leisure activities while continuing existing roles and activities from their working years.

Reallocating the time previously devoted to work to other activities is a key challenge for retirees in the transition phase (Froidevaux et al., 2024). A qualitative study among recent retirees examined changes in meaning in life in the retirement transition (Halama et al., 2021), showing that recent retirees mostly maintained their established sources of meaning, including family, work, and health. About a quarter of the participants reported shifts in meaning before and after retirement. Notably, while hobbies emerged as providing meaning before retirement, a sense of freedom replaced this source after retirement. Then, older adults exchanged job

responsibilities for hobbies and household tasks, substituting the need for financial provision through work with nurturing family bonds and grandparenting. Key facilitators in this process of finding new meaning were positive outlooks and supportive social networks. Conversely, financial constraints, health issues of the retiree or someone close, and the death of a spouse posed significant challenges.

Another qualitative study (Froidevaux et al., 2024) emphasized activities as a specific type of resource (i.e., energies resource) needed to adjust to retirement successfully in the transition phase. Results highlighted recent retirees' engagement in formal activities such as volunteering and bridge employment, and informal ones such as leisure at home, housekeeping, informal care activities, exercise, traveling, or crafting activities. The study further identified two tensions faced by recent retirees regarding their activities' time management and time perceptions: the need to find a balance between enjoying a new sense of freedom and needing to maintain structure in one's life (e.g., creating morning rituals, waking up early), and the balance between perceptions of having more time but also of being extremely busy - if not busier than prior to retirement. As put by Amabile (2019), these tensions are related to the need for retirees to answer the question of "what makes for a suitable and viable life structure in retirement?" (p. 208).

Retirement Adjustment and Well-being

With increased life expectancy in good health, leisure activities have become increasingly crucial for retirees' well-being and sense of accomplishment (Dorfman, 2013). Successful retirement transition or retirement adjustment refers to individuals' ability to maintain or improve their well-being after redefining their life's meaning. Overall, older workers' well-being trajectories over the retirement process have shown different patterns characterized by stability, a

U-shaped curve, and improved well-being, respectively (Pinquart & Schindler, 2007; Wang, 2007). According to the resource-based dynamic model of retirement adjustment (Wang et al., 2011; Zhan et al., 2023), these patterns can be explained by stability and changes in retirees' resources (i.e., physical, cognitive, financial, social, emotional, and motivational), in addition to numerous micro-level variables (e.g., mental, physical, and cognitive health; financial and social resources; employment history and engagement in activities; Froidevaux, 2024a).

Meaningful Activities in Retirement that Sustain Identity and Well-being

Retirement leisure activities vary widely, including social leisure and community engagement, self-development leisure, and bridge employment (Eismann et al., 2019). During the adjustment phase, participating in valued activities that align with one's true values and interests (Pepin & Deutscher, 2011) and are meaningful and creative (Amabile, 2019) remains critical to replacing work's social structure with new networks (Dorfman, 2013). Even those with a stronger work-related social identity can transition smoothly into retirement by pursuing "engaging occupations" (Jonsson et al., 2001). According to these authors, to be meaningful and engaging, such activities should be characterized by a positive meaning (e.g., enjoyment) that goes beyond personal pleasure (i.e., a responsibility and commitment), an intensity (i.e., long-term and regular) similar to work (e.g., relying on transferable work-related skills), and representing a coherent set of activities in a community setting (e.g., joining a club based on a common hobby).

Motives. Engagement in post-retirement activities can be explained by several motives, broadly addressing individuals' adjustment to role loss and search for personal growth (van Solinge et al., 2021). Specifically, focusing on post-retirement decisions to continue working, retirees valuing social and personal aspects of work tend to continue working (Fasbender et al.,

2016; Hansson et al., 2023; Wöhrmann et al., 2016; Zhan et al., 2015). Such motives include the desire to help, pass on knowledge or remain active, develop personal contact with others, and gain appreciation and recognition (Maxin & Deller, 2010). Financial needs were positively related to bridge employment (Hansson et al., 2023; van Solinge et al., 2021). Status striving was negatively related to volunteering in retirement and unrelated to bridge employment (Zhan et al., 2015). Further, comparing pre- and post-retirement life values showed minor decreases in the importance of self-development, social status, societal contribution, and generativity for those fully retired compared to those engaged in continuous work (Fasbender et al., 2016). Finally, being tired of work was found to be negatively related to both volunteering and bridge employment in retirement (Griffin & Hesketh, 2008). These changes suggest a high level of continuity in the transition from work to retirement, with the reevaluation of life values after retirement being less marked than previously thought (Grünwald et al., 2022).

Changes in Activities. Past studies have also investigated the differences between engagement in pre- and post-retirement activities when adjustment is complete. First, regarding *social leisure*, Lim-Soh et al. (2023) explored social participation change patterns over the retirement process. They showed that while a minority of participants experienced decreasing social participation (6%–12%), the majority remained stable (79%–81%) and some increased (7%–8%). More specifically, Grünwald et al. (2021) observed that full retirement boosted the likelihood of volunteering and grandparenting but not caregiving. Those engaging in post-retirement work were more likely to care for grandchildren but not to volunteer or provide informal care. These results are in line with those of Tanskanen et al. (2021), who found that retirement generally increased grandchildren care among both maternal and paternal grandparents, especially among grandfathers. Second, regarding *self-developmental leisure*,

retirement has been associated with greater engagement in education activities (Ruhose et al., 2023), exercise, and leisure activities (Barnett et al., 2012). Such positive change in exercising can be attributed to greater availability of resources for physical activity, the restructuring of daily life post-retirement, increased opportunities for engaging in physical activities, and varying phases of activity transition following retirement (McDonald et al., 2015). Third, regarding *bridge employment*, past research has explored the differences between post-retirement bridge employment and pre-retirement career jobs (Pundt et al., 2016), highlighting perceived differences in three critical areas: the nature of the tasks and skills required (i.e., different functions and skills), the extent of time management flexibility and job practice autonomy (i.e., more flexibility and control over time), and the level of job responsibility and significance (i.e., less responsibility, stress, and work hours).

Boundary Conditions. Finally, prior work has identified several boundary conditions of these relationships. First, individuals with lower *socioeconomic status* (SES) show reduced physical activity, whereas those with higher SES exhibit an increase (Barnett et al., 2012). Second, research suggests that an individual's willingness to engage in leisure activities post-retirement depends on their perception of their *future self* and their preparedness for age-related changes. To capitalize on the time retirement affords, one must harbor positive views on aging and be well-prepared for the changes it brings (de Paula Couto et al., 2022). *Gender* also seemed to play a role. Lim-Soh and Lee (2023) observed that men (vs. women) faced a steeper gradual decline in the frequency of meeting friends and an abrupt decrease in the frequency of attending social gatherings compared to working peers. Regarding bridge employment, men were found to be more likely than women to plan for post-retirement paid work in anticipation of the loss of their work's latent (vs. manifest) functions with retirement (e.g., structuring one's time, daily

interpersonal relationships; van Solinge et al., 2021). Furthermore, Tunney et al. (2023) observed effects of both gender and *education* level: Women and highly educated individuals reported greater increases in self-development and social activities after retirement. Finally, engagement in post-retirement work activities was found to be affected by *flexible job design* and the freedom to make decisions. Hence, offering autonomy, a variety of skills, and significant tasks seems vital as organizations design post-retirement engagements (Maxin & Deller, 2010).

The Effect of Activities on Post-Retirement Well-being

Engagement in post-retirement activities has been shown to have a profound impact on well-being, as both maintaining one's former group membership and gaining new group memberships have been associated with health and well-being post-retirement (Haslam et al., 2023). Specifically, retirees involved in employment, volunteering, or informal helping reported lower depression rates (though caregiving was linked to increased depression risks; Choi et al., 2013). In their systematic review Akhter-Khan et al. (2023) further reported a positive association between loneliness and spousal caregiving, and a negative relationship between caregiving to grandchildren and volunteering.

Consistent with these findings, research suggests that retirees benefit from activities that afford them control over their time and contribute to additional well-being benefits and a reinvigorated sense of life's meaning (Robinson et al., 2011). Concretely, a qualitative study found that engaging in activities post-retirement allowed individuals to acquire more resources as they adjusted to retirement in terms of decentering themselves and opening to the world, and providing them with usefulness and feel-good perceptions, meaning in life, and increased physical wellness (Froidevaux et al., 2024). Regarding social activities more specifically, a qualitative study by Takashima et al. (2020) explored these activities' meanings among retired

men, emphasizing the meanings of "feeling I am still useful," "feeling that something is my responsibility," "feeling of time well spent," "health as a resource and reward for social activities," and "finding interest through interactions." Finally, addressing pathways for meaningful work and nonwork activities post-retirement, Pitt-Catsouphes et al. (2017) identified two productive activities significant for older adults—volunteering and self-employment. These activities provide personal fulfillment and potentially contribute to society (i.e., mattering). The benefits associated with these activities were positive well-being outcomes, evidenced by lower depression levels, higher life satisfaction, and reduced loneliness.

Finally, cultural context represents a boundary condition of the impact of retirement activities on well-being. While retirees are generally satisfied with their activities, significant differences have been reported between countries (e.g., Northern Europeans generally report higher satisfaction than those in Central and Southern Europe; Bonsang & Van Soest, 2015). Such disparity partly stems from health conditions and engagement in other non-professional pursuits and activities (e.g., caring for grandchildren has a positive effect). Hence, health, not age, primarily affects this satisfaction (Bonsang & Van Soest, 2015).

Discussion

This chapter explored how older adults experience a meaningful life throughout their retirement, examining the journey of engaging in activities over the retirement process, from the planning and decision-making phase to transitioning and adjusting. As summarized in Figure 1, to live a meaningful life during retirement involves meaningful work (including positive meaning, meaning-making, and greater good) and/or search and presence of meaning in life (characterized by comprehension, purpose, and existential mattering). In particular, the three dimensions of meaning in life – comprehension, purpose, and mattering, vary among older

adults, reflecting developmental aging theories (Carstensen et al., 1999; Erikson, 1959). Comprehension is about achieving a sense of integrity among different life phases; purpose is shaped by a more limited future time perspective and characterized by emotional goals focusing on high-quality relationships; and mattering involves generativity, especially towards one's legacy to the younger generations.

Our conceptual model of meaningful life and activities over the retirement process further highlighted several individual antecedents of a meaningful life that have been identified as applicable to all ages (e.g., positive affect, interpersonal relationships, feeling connected to oneself, time perspective, and awareness of one's finitude), and other more critical antecedents for older adults' meaning in life specifically (i.e., optimism, internal locus of control, generalized self-efficacy, religious or spiritual beliefs, and health). In contrast, the multilevel antecedents of meaningful work (i.e., at the individual, job, organizational, and societal levels) have all been studied regardless of age. Further, while meaningful life outcomes have been suggested to include individual, work-related attitudinal and behavioral, and performance outcomes (Bailey et al., 2019), they take specific shapes for older adults: Key individual-level outcomes include well-being and loneliness, self-development or growth, as well as a coherent sense of self, and cognitive, physical, and mental health; the motivation to continue working represents a key work-related attitudinal outcome; and relational outcomes in terms of positive relationships to others represent an additional outcome specifically for older adults.

Our model further emphasized the different mechanisms driving the relationships between older adults' engagement in activities and their experience of meaningful work and meaning in life, respectively, over the retirement process. First, meaning in life and meaningful work affect older adults' engagement in activities through adaptation versus exploration and

compensation versus (internal or external) continuity. Gender and activity variety also play a role. Second, engagement in activities reciprocally shapes meaning in life and meaningful work. Specifically, while scholars have identified that activities contribute to individuals' meaningful work through the four pathways of individuality, contribution, self-connection, and unification regardless of their age (Rosso et al., 2010), specific mechanisms for older adults allowing work activities to contribute to their sense of meaningful work include perceived success and job satisfaction, identification with work, and helping others at work. In addition, engagement in work and nonwork activities fosters meaning in life for older adults through improving their health, allowing them to demonstrate altruism, engaging in hobbies (pre-retirement) and experiencing a sense of freedom (postretirement), and enjoying time in nature and with animals. Finally, gender, socioeconomic status, education, flexible job design, and projection into a future self have been identified as potential boundary conditions in the relationship between engagement in activities in the retirement process and the specific, meaningful life outcome of the motivation to continue working.

Future Research Directions

While the number of literature reviews on meaningful work (Bailey et al., 2019; Blustein et al., 2023; Lysova et al., 2019) and meaning in life (King & Hicks, 2021) has increased over the past decade, reviews specifically focusing on older adults are scarce - as shown by the greater interdisciplinary work on meaning in life for older adults (for a review, see Hupkens et al., 2018) compared to the limited focus on meaningful work and meaningful life in late careers and retirement (Froidevaux & Hirschi, 2015). Thus, older adulthood represents an overlooked but interesting life phase to study for meaning in life and meaningful work scholars. We propose several research directions, outlined in Table 1.

Testing the Conceptual Model of Meaningful Life and Activities over the Retirement Process

Our conceptual model of meaningful life and activities over retirement (see Figure 1) suggests several directions for studying life's meaning throughout retirement. Future research may empirically test how the dimensions of meaning—comprehension, purpose, and mattering—change with aging based on aging theories (see Table 1, 1.1). Other models of meaning in life also warrant attention, with the need to clarify their role as dimensions of meaning or potential mechanisms connecting meaning in life to (retirement) outcomes. For instance, preliminary work suggests the need to explore the role of the sense of older individuals' self-worth and efficacy and perceived excitement or wonder in terms of (keeping or regaining one's) curiosity in life (Derkx et al., 2020; Hupkens et al., 2018). Relatedly, research should differentiate how meaningful work dimensions—positive meaning, meaning-making, and the greater good—differ in late careers and to what extent they relate to meaning in life's dimensions. Further, we found only one quantitative but correlational study exploring the potential antecedents of meaning in life for older adults (Greenblatt-Kimron et al., 2022), and none examining meaningful work's antecedents or outcomes among older adults specifically - the closest attempt being Weeks and Schaffert's (2019) study on age group differences in meaning in work. Future research thus needs to explore meaning in life and meaningful work's antecedents (especially those at the organizational level; Blustein et al., 2023) and outcomes, as suggested by our model (Figure 1), considering the extent to which several sources may accumulate over the lifespan and lead to stronger perceptions of meaningful work and/or meaning in life.

Expanding Steger's (2019) attempt to identify shared themes between meaning in life and meaningful work (e.g., self-knowledge, authenticity, self-transcendence and connection), future research should explore these relationships (King & Hicks, 2021) especially among older adults

(see Table 1, 1.2). Notably, it is possible that later life's emphasis on integrity (Erikson, 1959) may shape both comprehension (meaning in life) and positive meaning (meaningful work); aging's more limited future time perspective and focus on emotional goals with high-quality relationships (Carstensen, 2021) may shape purpose (meaning in life) and meaning-making (meaningful work); and aging's emphasis on generativity (Erikson, 1959) may shape both mattering (meaning in life) and the greater good motivation (meaningful work). For instance, future research may examine the key role of knowledge transfer and intergenerational contact (e.g., Fasbender & Gerpott, 2022) for older workers' meaningful work through its dimension of the greater good.

Finally, while scholarship on activities during the retirement process is expanding (e.g., Grünwald et al., 2021; Lim-Soh et al., 2023), no research has explicitly linked engagement in such activities with meaning in life or meaningful work yet (with the exception of Weeks & Schaffert, 2019 for work activities) (see Table 1, 1.3). Our conceptual model can thus be used for future research elaboration, notably to empirically test our proposed mechanisms (see the wide arrows in Figure 1). First, future work should examine the suggested mechanisms explaining how older adults' engagement in activities may affect their meaning in life (i.e., hobbies, a perceived sense of freedom, health, altruism, nature, and animals). Second, future research may examine the processes through which older adults' engagement in activities may affect their meaningful work (i.e., success and job satisfaction, identification with work, and helping others). Finally, future studies should explore the reciprocal arrow between meaning in life and activities pursuit.

As further emphasized by our review, an overlooked area deserving further examination is the transition experience phase of the retirement process (see Table 1, 1.3.2). Building on Zhan

et al.'s work (2023), future longitudinal research should explore how resource gains and losses may concretely affect retirees' engagement in various activities during the transition phase. Specific research questions in this area include the role of activities' type (i.e., self-developmental leisure, social leisure, and bridge employment), the comparison between the pre- and post-levels of engagement (e.g., new vs. continuity activity; activity continuity at the same energy or time level or not, etc.), and the role of associated resources or resource caravans (e.g., e.g., some activities may require more physical or emotional resources, others may be social in nature or allow for a combination of exercise shared with one's partner or friends; Froidevaux et al., 2024; Zhan et al., 2023). Indeed, more fine-graded examinations are needed to distinguish between different types of caregiving activities (e.g., towards grandchildren, a spouse, or an older parent) and volunteering (Akhter-Khan et al., 2023). Additionally, qualitative research may help decipher the personal meaning of these retirement activities (Dorfman, 2013). In addition, future qualitative work should further examine new retirees' experience of time management tensions and the pressure to keep busy to answer the social pressures associated with retirement when one is paradoxically in good health but relies on society's pension for financial support (i.e., the busy ethics; Froidevaux et al., 2024). It should also adopt a lifespan perspective and explore the relationship between (un)balanced working and relaxing efforts over the lifespan and the compensation and continuity mechanisms in retirement activities, respectively (Froidevaux, 2024b).

Further empirical validation is also needed regarding our proposed boundary conditions of the relationship between engagement in activities and meaning in life (i.e., gender, socioeconomic status, education, activity variety, job design, or future self-projection) (see Table

1, 1.3.3). In this line, future research on meaningful work for older workers should explore the role of specific organizational contexts as boundary conditions.

Beyond Presence of Meaning: Meaninglessness and Search for Meaning

The meaning in life and meaningful work scholarships, with their roots in positive psychology, have predominantly focused on the presence of meaning (King & Hicks, 2021). Search for meaning has been established as a distinct and independent dimension (Steger et al., 2006), and prior work has identified the general pattern of positive associations between the presence of meaning in life and health and well-being, and negative associations for the search for meaning. Interestingly, however, preliminary aging research has shown a less detrimental impact of searching for meaning in later adulthood (i.e., for those in their 80s vs. those in their 60s; Hallford et al., 2018). This suggests further examination of the differences and relationship between the presence and search for meaning in life and meaningful work over the lifespan (see Table 1, 2.1). Expanding the notion that meaning in life may differ at the very end of the lifespan, the recent framework of meaning in life at the (very) end of life suggests that the psychological challenges of searching for meaning in life may be the same for palliative care patients regardless of their chronological age, as for older adults at the end of the lifespan (Froidevaux-Rosselet & Rosselet, 2023). This proposition remains to be empirically tested.

An additional interesting future research direction stems from the observation that meaning in life may not necessarily be associated with positive emotions (Derkx et al., 2020). Rather, such a sense of excitement may stem from more negative emotions or conflicts, which may trigger active change or reappraisal of what is really important for oneself (Bailey et al., 2019) - ultimately leading to increased presence of meaning in life. Relatedly, less is known about the darker side or double-edged sword nature of meaningful work (Blustein et al., 2023),

as increasing search for meaningfulness may create cognitive dissonance between one's current meaningless state and the desired state of meaningful work. For instance, individuals may look for meaningfulness outside of their work to compensate for a lack of meaningful work, raising the issue of whether meaningful work is uniformly desirable (Bailey et al., 2019).

In addition, Derkx et al. (2020) argue that excitement in its positive form may occur less actively, such as wonder or awe (i.e., "a positive emotion elicited when in the presence of vast things not immediately understood" by one's "small self"; Sturm et al., 2022, p. 1044) when walking in nature. This reveals a need for future research examining the differences between more active (e.g., proactive changes) and receptive (e.g., wonder, awe) dimensions of meaning in life and meaningful work (see Table 1, 2.2). Relatedly, we advocate for more research on silence and contemplation (Hupkens et al., 2018) as a source of presence and search for meaning. As put by these authors, individuals need to be not only active seekers, but also open receivers of life's meaning, which may be done more easily with silence or solitude - especially later in life. Similarly, we echo Hupkens et al.'s (2018) call for more research on the role of daily meaning for older adults, who may become more attentive to the smallest sources of meaning in their daily life such as music, thinking of their loved ones, walking, or the sunshine.

Future research may draw interesting connections with the spirituality literature (see Table 1, 2.3), especially as positive associations have been reported between spirituality and meaning in life (Greenblatt-Kimron et al., 2022). Spirituality is what "gives expression to one's existence, deals with feelings, the power within, knowledge of one's deepest selves, and that which one holds sacred" (Sturz & Zografos, 2014, p. 238). Future research is thus needed to explore the relationships between meaningful work and spirituality in the workplace (i.e., "employees who seek an understanding about themselves as spiritual beings, and whose souls

need nourishment at work"; Sturz & Zografos, 2014, p. 238). In this vein, it has been suggested that spirituality in the form of wholeness may allow individuals to transcend their existential concerns for meaning in life through feelings of sacredness, that is, of "being one" with a higher power or the Universe (Froidevaux, 2024b). This author further proposed that such wholeness may promote sustainable careers as workers translate their relationship with a higher power into tangible forms at work, ultimately contributing to successful aging at work over the lifespan. These ideas also necessitate further empirical exploration.

Meaningful Life for Specific Groups of Retirees

Retirees with Less Socioeconomic Privilege and in Low-Skilled Jobs. Meaningful work is an aspiration that is concretely possible for individuals with personal autonomy in their career decisions. However, many do not have much latitude due to significant contextual constraints. Indeed, while desire for meaningful work was found to be similar across upper versus middle/lower social statuses groups, the experience of meaningful work was positively related to social status (Autin & Allan, 2020). This emphasizes the need for future research not to consider meaning in life and meaningful work only as a subjective individual experience, but rather to ask the following question: "Are there objective cues to the meaningful life?" (King & Hicks, 2021, p. 577) (see Table 1, 3.1.1). Such cues could be political, institutional, and societal. Another important question is, "can jobs that lack objective meaningfulness be perceived as meaningful by the individual?" (Bailey et al., 2019, p. 102). As argued by these authors, to answer such questions, more research is needed on the relationship between a meaningful life and power, diversity, and inclusion. To pursue such research, more macro definitions of meaningful work that represents a "complex system of interactions between psychological processes,

institutionalized meanings, embodied practices, and normative judgment" are needed (Laaser & Bolton, 2022, p. 380).

As suggested by Blustein et al. (2023), individuals belonging to less privileged groups may still benefit from decent, if not meaningful, work. Decent work includes receiving appropriate and fair compensation, a safe and healthy work environment, time for rest, and access to healthcare. For work to evolve from decent to meaningful, these authors suggest that it must not only meet these working conditions but also satisfy individuals' basic needs of self-determination (i.e., competence, autonomy, and relatedness) and allow for contribution to society. As further argued by Laaser and Bolton (2022), low-skilled work can be meaningful when it enables workers to display core autonomy (i.e., not necessarily formal autonomy but self-commend in a relational understanding of one's and others' work interconnections), respectful recognition (i.e., both conditional – based on one's achievements – and unconditional, relating to being esteemed as a person and respected by customers, coworkers, and management), and derived dignity (i.e., responsibility and care for oneself and others). Expanding preliminary findings that individuals with a desire for meaningful work are more likely to actually experience it when their basic survival and self-determination needs are met (Autin & Allan, 2020), and that positive changes in decent work are positively associated with positive changes in meaningful work (Allan et al., 2020), future studies need to empirically test the mechanisms of decent and meaningful work among older and retired workers in low-skilled jobs (see Table 1, 3.1.2), and identify retirees' profiles of engagement in either, or both, decent and meaningful work (Froidevaux, 2024a). Such future research would be especially important in marginalized and/or invisible dirty work occupations, in which others' respect may be lacking (Laaser & Bolton, 2022). Relatedly, there is a need for more diverse culture-representative

(Blustein et al., 2023) and cross-national (Bailey et al., 2019) research on a meaningful life in retirement (see Table 1, 3.1.3).

Retirees in Highly Demanding and High Identification Occupations. The retirement process of individuals from highly demanding roles such as the military, firefighting, and elite sports requires scholars' attention due to some unique challenges: These careers require intense commitment and create strong emotional bonds, embedding these workers' occupational identity deeply within their individual sense of self (Kintzle & Castro, 2018). Based on the premises of the Social Identity Model of Identity Change (SIMIC; Haslam et al., 2021), a recent qualitative study (McNamara et al., 2021) suggested that retirees from these occupations may be at greater risk of losing their life's meaning when retiring due to the intense demands and emotional ties of these types of jobs that are perceived as integral to their personal identities. For many, their career is more than a job; it is a critical part of their self-identity. Retirement, therefore, significantly disrupts their self-concept and greatly diminishes their sense of purpose. Hence, future studies should use longitudinal designs to explore the specific retirement challenges faced by first responders or military personnel and how they may find new meaning and purpose after retirement (see Table 1, 3.2.1). Interesting research questions arise regarding the potential impact of greater identity transition incongruence (Froidevaux et al., 2018) on planning meaningful activities in the transition and post-retirement phases and the role of identity transition negotiation (Froidevaux et al., 2018) as a buffer for these detrimental relationships. Further, as Smith et al. (2024) offered first evidence of the relationships between meaning in life and social identities in shaping retirement decisions, we reiterate these authors' call for future qualitative research examining the meaning-in-life-identity dynamics and quantitative studies exploring the relationships of meaning in life and meaning in work with distinct retirement decisions (e.g.,

leisure activities) and bridge employment types (e.g., in a similar versus different organization or field) (see Table 1, 3.2.2). Finally, expanding preliminary findings that belonging to multiple groups fosters health and well-being in retirement (Haslam et al., 2021; Haslam et al., 2023), future work should examine the evolution of SIMIC's two social identity pathways of continuity (of prior social identities) and gain (of new social identities) as individuals engage in the retirement process; researchers should also account for the impact of compatibility between these identities on meaning in life and meaningful work.

Conclusion

With increasing life expectancy, pursuing a meaningful life has become even more crucial. Retirement prompts individuals to reevaluate their purpose and to explore various meaningful work and nonwork activities that represent energies resources. The integrative conceptual model of meaningful life and activities throughout the retirement process presented in this chapter provides important future research directions (i.e., meaning in life and meaningful work's dimensions and their interrelationships, antecedents and outcomes, and relationships with engagement in activities over the retirement process). There is also a need for more research going beyond the meaning literature's roots in positive psychology, to address meaninglessness and the darker sides of the search for meaning, its active versus receptive dimensions, and its relationships with spirituality at work. Finally, two specific groups of retirees necessitate particular research attention: those with less socioeconomic privileges and in low-skills jobs, and those in highly demanding jobs and with a high identification.

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Table 1

Future Research Directions

Research area	Potential research questions
1. Test and expand our conceptual model of meaningful life and activities over the retirement process	1.1.1 How do the three dimensions of meaning in life (i.e., comprehension relates to integrity, purpose to a more limited future time perspective, and mattering to generativity) differ in older age?
1.1 MIL and MW's dimensions and their interrelationships	• What about other dimensions such as a sense of self-worth and efficacy, and a sense of excitement and wonder?
	1.1.2 How do the three dimensions of meaningful work (i.e., positive meaning, meaning making, greater good) differ in older age?
	1.1.3 What are the connections between meaning in life and meaningful work's three dimensions?
	• E.g., does comprehension relate to meaning making, purpose to positive meaning, and mattering to greater good? • E.g., does knowledge sharing and intergenerational contact shape older workers' meaningful work through its dimension of greater good?
1.2 MIL and MW's antecedents and outcomes	1.2.1 What are meaning in life's antecedents and outcomes for older adults?
	1.2.2 What are meaningful work's antecedents and outcomes for older adults?
	1.2.3 What is the role of social identity pathways and compatibility as potential mediators?
1.3 MIL and MW's relationships with engagement in activities	1.3.1 How does engagement in work and nonwork activities in late careers affect meaning in life and meaningful work?
	• What about the role of hobbies, a perceived sense of freedom, health, altruism, nature, and animals for meaning in life?

- What about the role of success and job satisfaction, identification with work, and helping others for meaningful work?

1.3.2 What is the specific role of the transition experience phase of the retirement process in activities change and development?

- What is the role of activities type, level of engagement compared to pre-retirement, and associated resource?
- How do retirees learn to manage their time without work? How do they face the social pressure to keep busy?
- To what extent do unbalanced working and relaxing efforts over the lifespan (i.e., unsustainable careers) may lead to compensation in retirement, while balanced efforts (i.e., sustainable careers) may relate to continuity in retirement?

1.3.3 What are the boundary conditions of the relationship between engagement in activities and meaning in life?

- What about the role of gender, socioeconomic status and education, activity variety and job design, and future self-projection?
- What about specific organizational contexts such as the military or first responders?

2. Beyond presence of meaning: Meaninglessness and search for meaning

2.1 Presence versus search for meaning

2.1.1 What are the relationships between presence and search of meaning in life over the lifespan? How does it evolve in older ages?

- What are the relationships of presence and search of meaning in life with their respective outcomes over the lifespan? And how do these relationships evolve in older ages?
- Do individuals at the very end of their life (e.g., palliative care patients, older older adults) face similar challenges regarding the search for meaning in life?

2.1.2 What is the role of negative emotions or life events for presence of meaning in life? Does search for meaning preclude presence of meaning?

2.1.3 Is there also a distinction between search and presence of meaningful work?

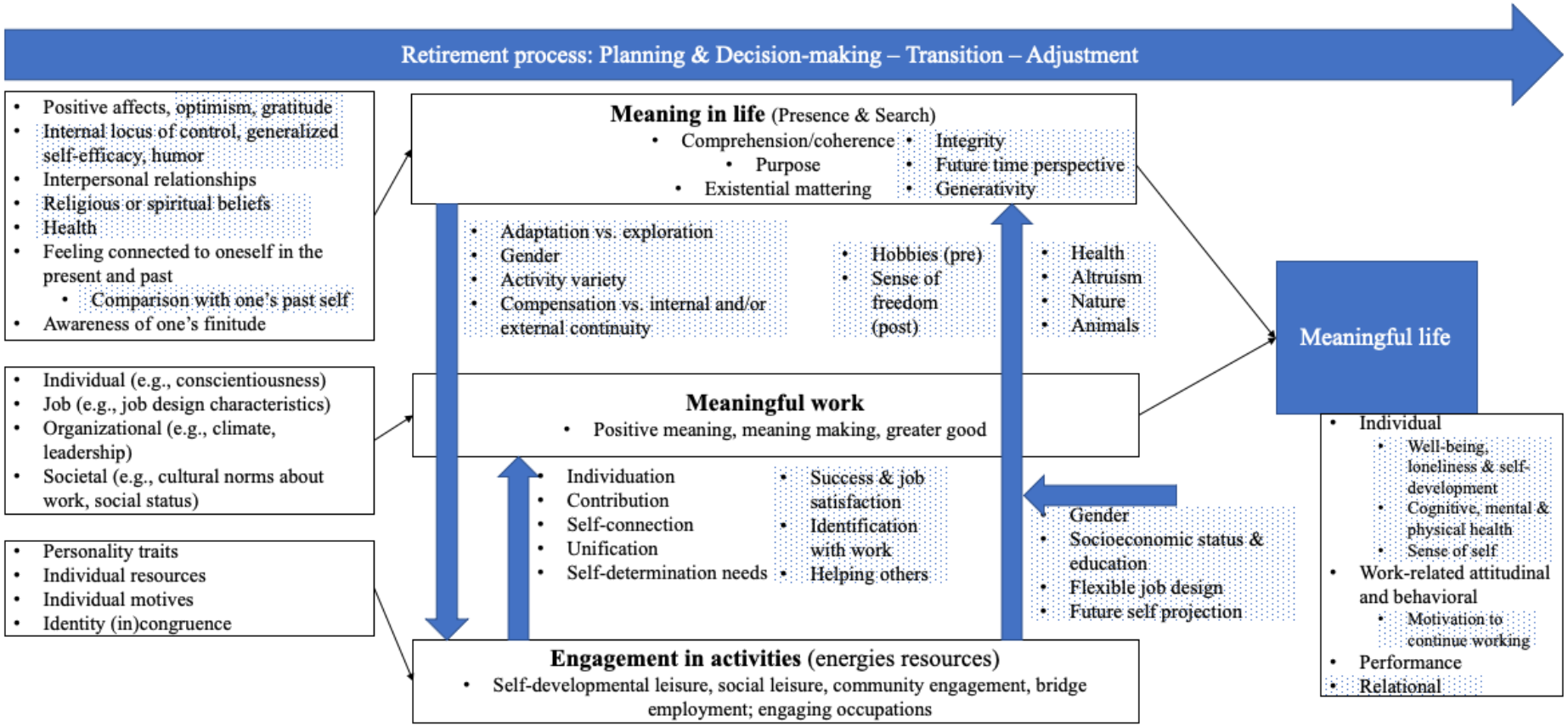
	2.1.4 What about the dark side of search for meaning, in terms of detrimental outcomes?
2.2 Active versus receptive dimensions of meaning	2.2.1 What are the differences between more active (e.g., proactive changes) and receptive (e.g., wonder, awe) dimensions of meaning in life and meaningful work? And how do they contribute to search versus presence of meaning in life, respectively?
	2.2.2 What is the role of silence and contemplation, and of daily "small" meaning, as sources of presence and search for meaning in life and meaningful work?
2.3 Spirituality (at work) and MIL and MW	2.3.1 What are the relationships between spirituality and meaning in life?
	2.3.2 What are the relationships between spirituality in the workplace and meaningful work?
	2.3.3 How do meaningful work and meaning in life contribute to sustainable careers and successful aging at work? • What is the role of the wholeness dimension of spirituality in these relationships?
3. Meaningful life for specific groups of retirees	3.1.1 Are there objective cues to the meaningful life?
3.1 Retirees with less socioeconomic privilege and in low-skilled jobs	• Can jobs that lack objective meaningfulness be perceived as meaningful by the individual? • What is the relationship of a meaningful life with power, diversity, and inclusion?
	3.1.2 What is the role of self-determination needs (i.e., competence, autonomy, and relatedness; core autonomy, respectful recognition, and derived dignity) in experiencing decent and meaningful work in late careers?
	• What about retiring from dirty work occupations? • Are there retirees' profiles of engagement in either, or both, decent and meaningful work?

	3.1.3 What about cross-national differences in the experience of meaningful work and meaning in life over the retirement process?
3.2 Retirees in highly demanding with high identification occupations	3.2.1 What are the specific challenges that workers in highly demanding and high identification occupations (e.g., military, first responders) face in establishing a meaningful life in retirement? • What is the impact of greater identity transition incongruence on planning meaningful activities in the transition phase and post-retirement? Can identity transition negotiation act as a buffer of these detrimental relationships? 3.2.2 How do identity transition, meaning in life, and meaningful work affect each other during the retirement process? • What is the role of the two social identity pathways of continuity (of prior social identities) and gain (of new social identities) as individuals engage in the retirement process? • What are the relationships of meaning in life and meaning in work with distinct retirement decisions (e.g., leisure activities) and bridge employment types (e.g., in a similar versus different organization or field)?

Note. MIL = meaning in life; MW = meaningful work.

Figure 1

A Conceptual Model of Meaningful Life and Activities over the Retirement Process



Note. Greyed zones indicate findings from the aging literature applying to older workers and retirees specifically.