

Discovery of first genetic variants associated with finding meaning in life

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For the first time, locations on the human genome have been identified that can explain differences between individuals in finding meaning in life. This is the result of research conducted with over 220,000 individuals by Professor Meike Bartels and Ph.D. student Bart Baselmans from the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. The researchers identified two genetic variants for finding meaning in life and six genetic variants for happiness. The results were published this week in the scientific journal *Scientific Reports*.

The existence of genetic variants for finding a [meaning](#) in life indicates that [differences](#) between people in such complex cognitive processes are in part due to biological differences. VU professor Meike Bartels says, "We live in a society where everyone is expected to thrive, achieve the highest, and live a meaningful life. If we have a better idea of the causes of differences between people, we can use that information to help people who feel less happy or struggle with the meaning of life. We also find that there are environmental factors that are important for happiness, but not for meaning and vice versa. In the future, we would

like to identify which environmental factors are responsible for this discrepancy."

Previous research has shown that individual differences in happiness and well-being can partly be attributed to genetic differences between people. Furthermore, the first genetic variants for happiness were found a few years ago. Baselmans says, "These results show that [genetic differences](#) between people not only play a role in differences in happiness, but also in differences for in meaning in life. By a meaning in life, we mean the search for meaning or purpose of life."

All people who participated in the study are part of the UK Biobank and have donated a DNA sample and completed a questionnaire. Bartels says, "We then tested which genetic variants in the DNA lead to differences in meaning in life." The genetic variants are mainly expressed in the central nervous system, showing the involvement of different brain areas.

More information: B. M. L. Baselmans et al, A genetic perspective on the relationship between eudaimonic –and hedonic well-being, *Scientific Reports* (2018). [DOI: 10.1038/s41598-018-32638-1](https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-018-32638-1)

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