The psychological approach to meaning often relies on the notion that meaning is a conscious and intentional construction. King will present an alternative approach inspired by William James “fringe of consciousness” notion, in which meaning emerges out of intuitive processes. Sense is not made but automatically sensed through meta-cognitive experience, heuristics, and affect. Research on magical thinking, pattern recognition, and semantic coherence judgments demonstrates the importance of individual differences in intuitive information processing and positive affect in the experience of meaning. Understanding the intuitive experience of meaning promises to illuminate the grand judgment of life’s meaningfulness, as well as domains of life in which we “just know” the validity of our feelings, including faith, morality, and sexuality.

Laura A. King, Frederick A. Middlebush Professor of Psychological Sciences at the University of Missouri, received her doctorate in personality psychology from the University of California, Davis in 1991. Author of more than 80 publications, King’s research focuses on psychological well being, meaning in life, intuition, motivation, narrative approaches, and folk theories of the “Good Life.” Her work has been funded by the National Institute on Mental Health and the Roger S. Williams Foundation. She won the Templeton Prize in 2001 for contributions to research on positive psychology and has been honored with numerous teaching awards as well. King currently serves as the editor of the Journal of Personality and Social Psychology: Personality Processes and Individual Differences.

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