

The effect of participation in the Meaning in Life Forum on participants' experiences of meaning in life

by

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To participants 1, 2, & 3

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Abstract

The Meaning in Life Forum consisted of several participants meeting for two hours each week for eight weeks to explore the nature of the experience of meaning in life. The purpose for organizing and evaluating this Forum was to attempt to develop meeting environments which assist participants in creating and maintaining valued life experience. In this paper, the theoretical basis for (1) the design of the Forum, (2) the hypotheses about the effect of the Forum, and (3) the methods used to evaluate the Forum's effectiveness is discussed. The effect of participation in the Forum is assessed on both (1) participants' experiences of meaning in life, as measured by the Life Regard Index (Battista & Almond, 1973), and (2) participants' subjective well-being, as measured by the Happiness Measures [HM] (Fordyce, 1988). In addition, an attempt to use a modification of the HM to evaluate individual Forum meetings is detailed. Only three of the original eight participants continued to attend until the end of the Forum. Of these three participants, only one performed as hypothesized. Significant findings include that those interested in participating in the Forum generally scored lower on the HM at time 1 than those not interested in participating. A new conceptualization of the experience of meaning in life based partly on the results of the Forum is presented, and improvements to the Forum and Forum evaluation are suggested.

Introduction

MEANING IN LIFE FORUM

Tuesday 7-9 p.m. 1/20/98 - 3/10/98

Questioning the nature of our existence is among life's most rewarding experiences. This Forum challenges you to develop a personal understanding of meaning in life. Prior to each session, you will think and write about a question. Sessions consist of discussions in which you communicate and refine your ideas and listen to others' perspectives. In the eighth week, you will present a paper detailing your current understanding of the question of meaning in life.

Max. Enrollment: 8

This paper is a write-up of the author's attempt to assess the effect of participation in the Meaning in Life Forum on participants' experiences of meaning in life. This paper is also part of a larger project: an ongoing exploration into the nature of experiences that people like to have and to have had, of environments that people like to live in, and of lives that people have liked to live. The overall goal of this exploration can be understood as "to create environments conducive to the development of lives people will like to live and to have lived." To provide a background for understanding the hypotheses and procedure of this research, the author's prior exploration of desirable environments and his reasons for creating the Meaning in Life Forum are described below.

Past researchers have approached the goal of creating desirable environments from many directions. Areas of research which address aspects of this goal include: quality of life (e.g., Clifton, Etcheverry, Hasinoff, & Roberts, 1996), subjective well-being (e.g., Diener, Suh, & Oishi, 1997), well-being (e.g., Ryff & Keyes, 1995), prosocial behavior (e.g., Eisenberg, 1982), identity development (e.g., Adamson & Lyxell, 1996), resilience/hardiness (e.g., Maddi & Khoshaba, 1994), purpose in life (e.g., Crumbaugh & Maholick, 1964), and the experience of meaning in life (e.g., Denne & Thompson, 1991).

After looking over all of these research areas, it appeared to the author that the last, the experience of meaning in life, approached most closely to core of the concept of the life and the experiences that will be most valued. The experience of meaning in life, while encompassing concepts such as life-satisfaction and subjective well-being, seemed to mean something more... In his paper, "The experience of meaning in life from a psychological perspective" (Leath, 1998c), the author reviews much of the available meaning in life-related research and presents his understanding of the distinctive aspects of life-experience that the concepts of meaning and meaning in life might be used to refer to. The author had begun his exploration into the area of valued experience earlier in "The aesthetic experience" (Leath, 1996).

The *being* group

About the time that he was working on "The aesthetic experience" (Leath, 1996), the author was lonely for people who were interested in the same kinds of questions he was interested in—questions about how life could best be lived. He also wanted relationships with other people who were interested in being with people for the sake of being with people rather than for any particular aim or purpose (other than, perhaps, appreciating the other person and one's own being). So, the author handed out leaflets and made announcements in his classes, and

posted flyers around campus with the goal of finding people interested in the same kinds of questions and experiences as himself. As part of his efforts to reach more people and to find a good place to meet, the author eventually created a registered student organization called *being*. Its purpose was listed as the following:

The purpose of this group is to discuss and create experience.

A secondary purpose of this group is to increase the amount of time people enjoy being alive. It is believed this can be accomplished by encouraging individuals to actively and openly question what is the best way to live.

The meetings of the *being* group were weekly, generally for two hours each time, and involved periods of working on questions, contemplating and listening to others, and relaxing. For a detailed history of the *being* group, refer to “being history, Colin Leath’s version” (Leath, 1998b).

For some time, the meetings drew no more than two to four people. However, the author wanted to meet more people in a *being*-type environment. The author’s problem was that (1) he did not like forever explaining the group to newcomers (who often did not keep coming), and (2) he only really liked talking to and being with one person at a time, not three or four. In the author’s opinion, there were few environments more responsive or potentially rewarding than a *being* meeting consisting of only one other person. Large group discussions are prone to domination by a particular person or idea and patient or quiet individuals have less control over the content and atmosphere of a large meeting than they do in a dyad. In an attempt to address these issues and also the discomfort of many visitors with the *being* meetings’ lack of structure and content, the author began planning the Meaning in Life Forum.

The Meaning in Life Forum

The Meaning in Life Forum was to be like the *being* group in that the participants would decide what to do and to discuss during meetings—there would be no particular course content determined beforehand. However, more structure was to be provided than in the *being* group:

- The Forum had a set start and end date.
- The general subject area (meaning in life) was established beforehand.
- The meeting itself was more structured in order to attempt to retain the person-to-person interaction of the *being* meetings while benefiting and encouraging the exchange of ideas among all participants (see pp. 40 - 42 for an overview of the structure of the meetings).
- Within the eight weeks of the Forum it was expected that each participant would complete a paper detailing her current understanding of the question of meaning in life.

The author decided to make completing a paper part of the Forum because he had found that preparing presentations and writing papers were an aspect of academic experience that he valued very much. Preparing a presentation or writing a paper required him to come to an understanding of a topic or question more than taking a test or reading a textbook ever did. The author hoped that working on a paper would provide an interesting challenge to Forum participants, and that the final meeting of the Forum, when participants would present their papers, would be especially meaningful and memorable.

The author planned to advertise the Meaning in Life Forum in the course listings of community centers and other community education or recreation organizations. In this way, a wide audience could be reached which would possibly attract a large number (six to eight) of participants, and a fee could be charged for renting a room to meet in.

Theoretical basis for the structure and evaluation of the Meaning in Life Forum

In addition to creating a meeting environment that he himself enjoyed, the author had the goal of developing a simple, widely applicable method of structuring a meeting environment that facilitated individuals' development and maintenance of valued lives. In order to determine whether he was progressing toward this goal, the author wanted to be able to quantitatively and qualitatively evaluate whether participation in such a meeting environment assisted participants in developing or maintaining valued life experience. For that purpose, the author believed that he needed a useful conceptualization of (1) the experience of meaning in life, and (2) how an individual's experience of meaning in life could change over time. The author also thought that an environment which encourages questioning about the nature of valued experience might facilitate the development of prosocial behavior. However, he could think of no reasonable way to operationalize prosocial behavior. What follows is an overview of the theoretical basis for (1) the structure of the Forum and (2) the methods for evaluating the Forum's effectiveness.

At the time he was planning the Meaning in Life Forum, the author believed that the experience of meaning in life developed in processes similar to Piaget's (1952) concepts of assimilation and accommodation. Specifically, when an individual is unhappy for a significant period of time, she is motivated to start looking for ways to improve her emotional experience. The positive outcome of this seeking process is that the individual develops an understanding of the particular problem that enables her to feel better. The author believed that this understanding became a part of a larger thought-based structure which the individual could recall, if asked, that would detail her approach to life. The author believed that the more adverse experience an individual went through and overcame, the more robust this cognitive structure would become, and the greater the individual's experience of meaning in life would be.

Furthermore, because humans live in and create for themselves a constantly changing environment, an individual must have the ability to successfully develop and test hypotheses about how the quality of her emotional experience can be maintained or improved. Otherwise, an individual's thoughts about how to live would gradually become irrelevant or even a hindrance to her pursuit of happiness, and she would lose faith in her ability to find life worthwhile.

This conceptualization of the experience of meaning in life is more fully detailed in "Draft one of The experience of meaning in life from a psychological perspective" (Leath, 1998a).

Based on those ideas, it is reasonable that the focus of the Meaning in Life Forum be the working through of questions about valued life experience. When a Forum participant asks for another participant's thoughts about and reactions to her hypotheses, she can gather additional information that she can use in the evaluation of her thoughts about living. Another advantage to emphasizing the questioning process is that an expert in the field of meaning in life is not needed to teach a Meaning in Life Forum. Regardless of the backgrounds of the participants, if they come together to actively and openly question the nature of the valued life, the author believed that they should benefit from hearing others' ideas about living and others' reactions to their own ideas. As long as an atmosphere is maintained of appreciation for (1) the different ideas about

living that different individuals might have, and (2) the unique ability of each individual to determine the way of living best adapted to her particular situation, then participants should find that the environment assists them in developing ideas about how to maintain or improve the quality of their emotional experience. Admittedly, however, it might take an expert of some kind to help a group maintain such an atmosphere.

The relationship between the conceptualization of the experience of meaning in life presented above and the structure/orientation of the Meaning in Life Forum is further illustrated below in Fig. 1.

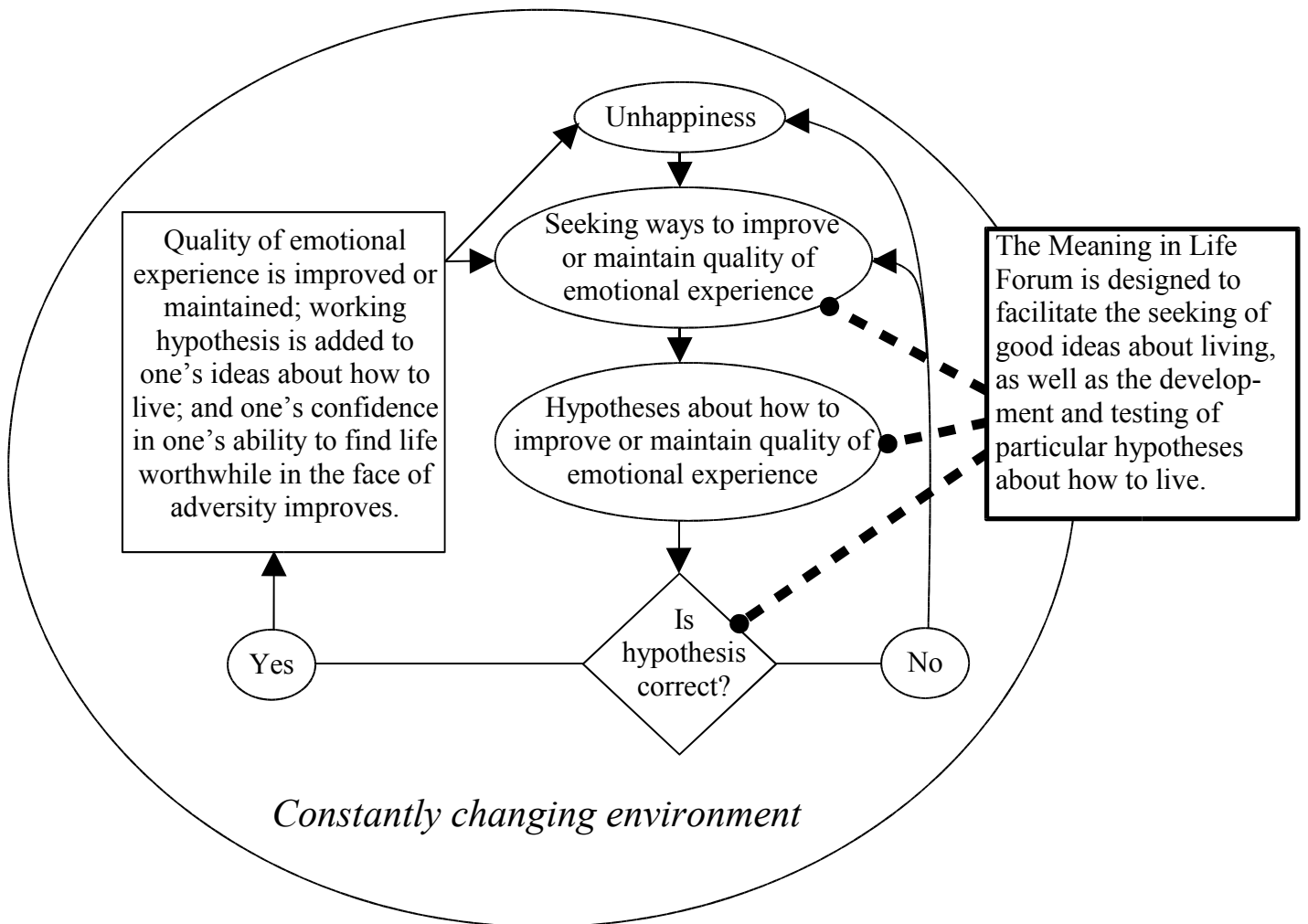


Figure 1: A diagram of the theoretical basis for the structure of the Meaning in Life Forum

To explicitly state the author's hypothesis about the effect of the Forum, the author believed that, if (a) the advertising for the Meaning in Life Forum was successful enough that there were a large number of people who wanted to participate in the Forum, but could not, due to the Forum size being limited to 8 participants, then (b) those who were able to participate in the Forum, given a long enough period time, would show a greater improvement in (or maintenance of) their experience of meaning in life over that period of time than those who wanted to participate in the Forum, but could not. The author believed the effect of the Forum would be due to the Forum attendees experiencing an environment that both ((1) encouraged

questioning about valued experience, and (2) challenged the individuals to come up with reasonable approaches to their questions) to a greater degree than the environment of the Forum waitlistees.

This hypotheses would be tested using the Life Regard Index [LRI] (Battista & Almond, 1973) because the LRI was the only meaning-in-life scale which measured, as a separate dimension, an individual's subjective assessment of her rational understanding of ((1) the meaning and purpose of her life, and (2) the proper approach to her life). Specifically, the *Framework* dimension of the LRI (p. 23) is supposed to assess this concept. In addition, the LRI has a *Fulfillment* dimension (p. 22) which is supposed to assess an individual's emotional satisfaction and enjoyment in living. The author hypothesized that over the course of the Forum, participants' scores on the Framework dimension would generally improve. However, improvements in the Fulfillment dimension of the LRI should take longer to show up because it takes more time to (1) put one's newfound understanding of the issues one faces into practice and (2) to evaluate and feel confident that the effects are lasting and good. In addition to the Fulfillment dimension of the LRI, the Happiness Measures (p. 21; Fordyce, 1988) were also to be used to evaluate the individual's enjoyment of living.

To reiterate, this conceptualization of the experience of meaning in life suggests that persons with the greatest meaning in life will be those who feel that they have the understanding of how to live in their environment, regardless of what might come up, in such a way that they will always be able to find value in living.

The author's present understanding of the nature of the experience of meaning in life will be detailed in the conclusion of this paper, because it was developed after and partly in reaction to the qualitative results of the Meaning in Life Forum. Improvements to the Forum based on the author's present understanding of the nature of meaning in life and his experience with the Forum will be discussed at that time.

Statement of research questions

In order to define the scope of this study and to summarize the paragraphs above, the general and specific hypotheses¹ this study was intended to address will be listed here. The general hypotheses are broad and overarching, and while they are not specifically addressed in the design of the study, they provide a context for the specific hypotheses. Specific hypotheses of both qualitative and quantitative nature are explicitly addressed in the design of the study.

General hypotheses

- (1) We can alter our environments so that it is easier for us to maintain or improve the quality of our emotional experience.
- (2) "The experience of meaning in life" relates closely to the concept of the life and the experiences that will be most valued by an individual.
- (3) Asking questions about the nature of valued experience and valued lives is a behavior that can facilitate one's efforts to improve or maintain the quality of one's emotional experience.

¹ The word "hypothesis" is used throughout this paper to mean any general description of a possible causal or correlative relationship between concepts. In some additional cases, this definition is ignored and "hypothesis" headings are found above text referring to exploratory data analyses. The author has decided not to correct this error, however.

Specific hypotheses

Qualitative hypotheses

(1) The active ingredient of the Forum is that it is an environment which encourages and challenges participants to develop their individual perspectives on the nature of valued experiences and a valued life. It is not important that the facilitator/organizer of the Forum present a particular theory or method about the nature of the experience of meaning in life in order for the Forum to be effective. It may, however, be important that the facilitator have experience in helping groups maintain an atmosphere that is supportive and encouraging to questioning and personal expression. Even so, it seems that any group of individuals who each have the goal of creating such an atmosphere for themselves should be successful without special training. In short, experts are not needed—any group of people can do what is necessary to create an environment conducive to the support and development of participants' experiences of meaning in life.

(2) In particular, one way for the Meaning in Life Forum to have a focus on questioning rather than on particular content is to (a) discourage participants from looking first to notable researchers, philosophers, religious leaders, etc., for answers to their questions, and (b) to encourage participants to first approach their questions based primarily on their own life experience and the experience of others with whom they might talk about their questions.

(3) The activities of writing papers and preparing for presentations are catalysts for increasing one's understanding of an issue, and are particularly appropriate to improving the thought-based component of one's experience of meaning in life (see #5 below).

(4) In addition to being free of a teacher-centered curriculum and encouraging a personal questioning process, the meeting itself should be as much as possible a desirable experience for the participants. There are few experiences more responsive and potentially rewarding than interaction with just one other person. Thus, in meetings with four or more participants the meeting should be structured so that participants spend a significant amount of time in person-to-person interaction. Provision should also be made for allowing each person to address and be responded to by the whole group. This will allow everyone to hear what each participant is working on, and should a participant desire, she can benefit from everyone's response to what she is working on. Such a meeting structure has the added benefits of reducing the adverse effect a particular individual could have upon the entire group, and of reducing the possibility that the meeting will be dominated by a few participants or a few perspectives or issues, while maximizing the opportunity for the exchange of the ideas participants believe are the most important to share.

The structure of the eight-week Meaning in Life Forum, as described on pages 40 - 42, is intended to embody the qualitative hypotheses above.

(5) The experience of meaning in life is basically a feeling that one understands what is necessary to achieve or maintain desirable emotional experience. An individual who is unhappy for long periods of time will be less secure in such understanding than an individual who has been happy for quite a long time. An individual's unhappiness may motivate her to begin to ask questions about how she can reduce her unhappiness. If the individual has a supportive, encouraging, challenging, and responsive environment in which to work on her questions, it will be easier for her to develop an understanding of what is necessary for her to improve or maintain the quality of her emotional experience. Only after she is able to implement her new understandings/hypotheses, and find them valid, or at least helpful to pointing her in the right

direction, will she begin to feel confident in her understanding and thus more lastingly and securely content.

Quantitative hypotheses 1 below is intended to address the qualitative hypothesis above.

Quantitative hypotheses

(1) Forum participants will be more likely than a control group (consisting of those who wanted to participate in the Forum but could not) to improve their perceived understanding of the nature of the experience of meaning in life, as measured by the Framework dimension of Battista & Almond's (1973) Life Regard Index [LRI] (p. 23). However, Forum participants will *not* be more likely than members of the control group to improve their fulfillment or enjoyment in life as measured by the *Fulfillment* dimension of the LRI (p. 22) or the Happiness Measures (p. 21). Improvement in the Fulfillment dimension should occur beyond the 8-week timeframe of this study, once participants have had a chance to live, work with, and modify their improved "framework" for a while.

(2) A Meaning in Life Forum meeting that the author experiences as exhilarating and successful should correspond to participants scoring significantly higher on a modification of the Happiness Measures scale (p. 54) [henceforth "modified HM"] at the end of the meeting than at the beginning of the meeting. Meetings that are tedious should correspond to participants scoring lower on the modified HM at the end of the meeting than at the beginning. The modified HM uses the first part of Fordyce's (1988) Happiness Measures (p. 21), but changes the point of reference from "on the average" to "at the moment." If this method can quantitatively distinguish between better and worse meetings it could possibly be used in future research to evaluate qualitative hypotheses 1 & 4, or any other hypotheses about good way of meeting.

(3) Strongly positive or negative events which occur in the lives of the members of the control group during an eight week period will account for some of the variation in these participants' Happiness Measures or LRI scores.

(4) No assumptions were made about the characteristics of those who would be attracted to participating in the Forum. One might assume that unhappier people would be attracted to the Forum, or those with lower scores on the Fulfillment or Framework dimensions of the LRI. However, it is hard to make a case for either of those situations. In any event, exploratory data analyses are done to see if there was any significant difference between those who were interested in the Forum and those who were not.

(5) Over the eight weeks of the Meaning in Life Forum all but 3 participants eventually stopped attending. Based on the author's observations that those who kept attending the Forum seemed to be happier people than those who left, the following hypothesis was developed: Participants who continued to attend until the end of the Forum scored, at the beginning of the Forum (time 1 questionnaire, p. 47), significantly higher on the Happiness Measures/Fulfillment dimension of the LRI than participants who left before the end.

The following hypotheses do not relate specifically to the general hypotheses of this study. These hypotheses are tested in order to confirm that the scales used in this study are behaving as would be expected (1) from the findings of other researchers and (2) due to the concepts the scales are designed to assess.

(6) Based on past research (e.g., Debats, van der Lubbe, & Wezeman, 1993; Diener, Suh, & Oishi, 1997), participants who say they have close relationships should score significantly higher on the Happiness Measures/LRI than those who say they do not have close relationships. Specifically, the question asked of participants was, "Do you have a close relationship with one or more people whom you see at least several times a week?"

(7) Based on past research (e.g., Debats et al. 1993; Diener et al., 1997), males should not score significantly higher or lower than females on the Happiness Measures/LRI.

(8) Is there a significant difference in scores on Happiness Measures/LRI among samples of participants who attend different colleges, or who have graduated? While not addressing the same question, past researchers (e.g., Debats et al., 1993; Diener et al., 1997) have found that scores on the LRI and subjective well-being measures do not correlate with educational level. Thus, it was expected that no significant difference would be found between participants at different educational levels/institutions.

(9) It is expected that the Happiness Measures will be more closely correlated with the Fulfillment dimension of the LRI than the Framework dimension, based on the similarity of the concepts these dimensions/scales are intended to measure.

Method

Instruments

A questionnaire containing the Life Regard Index [LRI] (pp. 22 - 23; Battista & Almond, 1973) and the Happiness Measures [HM] (p. 21; Fordyce, 1988) was given to both the experimental and control groups at the beginning and end of the study. The questionnaire also contained 4 questions designed to assess how much a participant looked forward to the future and 2 questions designed to measure participants' enjoyment of life, but data from these questions is not reported on in this paper. The participants in the control group used for the most part a web version of the questionnaire, while participants in the experimental group used only the paper version of the questionnaire. In an attempt to assess the quality of individual meetings, a modification of the Happiness Measures scale [modified HM] was given to Forum participants at the beginning and end of each meeting.

See the Appendices for the following:

<i>Appendix V: Paper questionnaire—questions identified, ordered by group.....</i>	<i>45</i>
<i>Appendix VI: Paper questionnaire—questions identified, random order.....</i>	<i>46</i>
<i>Appendix VII: Paper questionnaire—final version (used for both time 1 & time 2)</i>	<i>47</i>
<i>Appendix VIII: Web questionnaire time 1.....</i>	<i>49</i>
<i>Appendix IX: Web questionnaire time 2.....</i>	<i>53</i>
<i>Appendix X: Modified HM, based on Fordyce's (1998) Happiness Measures.....</i>	<i>54</i>

The t-test, Mann-Whitney rank sum test, Kruskal-Wallis test, and ANOVA were each used to analyze the data collected with these scales.

Participants

Participants in the experimental group self-selected themselves by signing up for the “Meaning in Life Forum,” which was offered through the Experimental College (<http://weber.u.washington.edu/~asuwxp1>). The Experimental College is an organization at the University of Washington [UW] which offers non-credit classes to both students and non-students. The text of the advertisement for the class was as follows:

MEANING OF LIFE FORUM	#3206
<i>Colin Leath</i>	
Sec. 1: Tue 7-9 p.m.	1/20 - 3/10
Questioning the nature of our existence is among life’s most rewarding experiences. This Forum challenges you to develop a personal understanding of meaning in life. Prior to each session, you will think and write about a question. Sessions consist of discussions in which you communicate and refine your ideas and listen to each other’s perspectives. In the eighth week, you will present a paper detailing your current understanding of the meaning of life.	
http://weber.u.washington.edu/~being	
Max. Enroll: 8	Course Fee: Gen. Pub.: \$18 UW Student: \$18

(Associated Students of the University of Washington Experimental College Catalog, Winter 1998, p. 17)

Please note that the word “of” in the title is an error (made by a well-intentioned editor, no doubt), as is “understanding of the meaning of life” in the last line. The title should read, “Meaning in Life Forum,” and the last line should read, “understanding of the question of meaning in life.” Also, “others” was used in the place of “each other’s” (second to last line) in the other instances that this short description was presented (c.f. pp. 44, 49).

In addition to the \$18 course fee, participants also had to pay a \$4 (UW students) or \$10 (general public) registration fee.

Only one of the persons who signed up for the Forum had visited the web page about the Forum (pp. 40 - 41).

Unfortunately, there was not a swelling waiting list of people who wanted to participate in the Forum (in fact there was not a waiting list at all), so, members of the control group were selected in one of two ways: (1) Announcements were made in several university classes about the Meaning in Life Forum. Text (p. 44) identical to that in the Experimental College catalog (aside from the exceptions mentioned above) was displayed on an overhead projector for the class. People in the class were asked if they would be interested in participating in such a Forum, and if so, would they also be able to fill out a questionnaire at that time and 8 weeks in the future. Only five participants were recruited this way; thus only five participants in the control group used the paper questionnaire. Everyone in the experimental group used the paper questionnaire. (2) In addition, a mass emailing (p. 56) was sent out asking people to fill out a web questionnaire identical to the paper questionnaire. The web questionnaire (p. 49) included a question asking if people would be interested in participating in the Meaning in Life Forum. The author harvested email addresses from all those emails he had sent or received in his two and one-half years at the University of Washington.

Data collected from different groups of participants were used to address different quantitative hypotheses as described below. Characteristics of the different groups of participants are also listed, including age, gender, and the following variables:

- **Close Relationship:** This variable was determined by participants' responses to the following question: "Do you have a close relationship with one or more people whom you see at least several times a week? y / n"
- **School:** Determined by looking at participants' email addresses. Admittedly some of those people with .edu email addresses could be staff or faculty. The tallies for each school include both undergraduate and graduate students. UW = University of Washington; HMS = Harvard Medical School (first year students); USCGA = U.S. Coast Guard Academy. Because the author knew the identities of some of the participants, he was able to tell if they had graduated or not. All participants had the option of remaining anonymous (pp. 47, 49), but many chose not to.
- **Forum:** Determined by participants' answers to the following question: "Does this Forum sound like something you might like to participate in? (yes/ no/ no answer)" Participants answered this question after reading the summary of the Forum (p. 49). Members of the control group who used paper questionnaires were asked to fill out the questionnaire only if, after reading an overhead (p. 44) with the summary of the Forum on it, they thought the Forum would be something they would want to participate in.
- **Reason:** Determined by participants' responses to the following request on the time 2 questionnaire: "Please mention any events in the past month that may have affected your answers to these questions:" If the author thought the event was sufficiently devastating (i.e. "Major long-term relationship is falling apart") he labeled it "Negative," if sufficiently uplifting (i.e. "I got a boyfriend"), he labeled it "Positive."
- **T1 date:** Date when participants completed the first questionnaire.
- **T2 date:** Date when participants completed the second questionnaire.
- **T2 - T1:** Time (in months and days) between participants completing the first questionnaire and completing the second questionnaire.

In addition, in each table describing a group of participants, two columns are used to indicate the number of participants for whom there was data that allowed the author to determine the values of the above-mentioned variables. These two columns have the following headers:

- **Valid:** Number of usable responses to the question corresponding to a particular variable.
- **Missing:** Number of participants in a group who chose not to answer the question, or whose response was not usable for some other reason.

Valid + Missing = the total number of participants in the group. Reasons there may have been missing data include problems with the CGI script which processed responses to the web questionnaire, as well as participants choosing not to answer a particular question or skipping a question inadvertently.

The groups of participants are as follows:

Experimental group: group Stay + group Quit:

Eight participants came to the first meeting of the Meaning in Life Forum. Of those, six returned the following Tuesday having filled out their questionnaires. Of those six, three had stopped attending the Forum by the halfway point (Table VII, p. 25), and five completed the

questionnaire again at time 2 (the two who did not attend the final Forum meetings filled out the web questionnaire).

The experimental group is divided into two categories:

- Participants who attended 5 or more of the meetings (experimental group Stay).
- Participants who attended 4 or less (experimental group Quit).

Questions asked of these groups:

(?) Was there a significant difference in scores on the Happiness Measures or the Fulfillment dimension of the LRI at time 1 between those who stayed and those who quit? (Quantitative hypothesis 5)

(?) Can a modification of Fordyce’s (1988) Happiness Measures (p. 54) be used to evaluate the success of Forum meetings? Specifically, will differences in participants’ scores on the modified HM from the beginning and end of Forum meetings correspond to the author’s feeling of whether the meeting was uplifting or tedious? (Quantitative hypothesis 2)

Table I: Description of the experimental group (group Stay + group Quit) with Age, Close relationship, School, and Gender variables.

	Valid	Missing	
Age	6	2	mean: 27.7; s.d. 9.61; range: 18-44
Close relationship	6	2	Yes: 5; No: 1
School	7	1	UW: 2; Graduated: 5
Gender	8	0	F: 6; M: 2

Group ALL: control group + experimental group

The data of all the participants in the experimental and control groups who filled out questionnaire at time 1 were used to address the following questions:

(?) Was there a significant difference in scores on the Happiness Measures/LRI:

- Between those who said they wanted to be in the Forum, and those who said they did not? (Quantitative hypothesis 4)
- Between those who said they had close relationships and those who said they did not? (Quantitative hypothesis 6)
- Between males and females? (Quantitative hypothesis 7)
- Among those attending different colleges and graduates? (Quantitative hypothesis 8)

(?) Were the Happiness Measures more closely correlated with the Fulfillment dimension of the LRI than the Framework dimension? (Quantitative hypothesis 9)

Table II: Description of all participants who filled out the time 1 questionnaire (group ALL) with Age, Close relationship, School, Gender, and Forum variables.

	Valid	Missing	
Age	64	6	mean: 24.72; s.d. 7.30; range: 18-51
Close relationship	69	1	Yes: 57; No: 12
School	65	5	UW: 38; HMS: 8; USCGA: 4; Other school: 6; Graduated: 9
Gender	69	1	F: 40; M: 29
Forum	53	17	Yes: 24; No: 29

Control group t1&t2+F

The data of participants in the control group who filled out the questionnaire at both times 1 and 2 and who said they might be interested in participating in the Meaning in Life Forum were used in comparison with the data of experimental group Stay to address the following question:

(?) Did those in experimental group Stay improve their scores on the LRI Framework dimension significantly more than the control group? Did those in experimental group Stay *not* improve their scores on the LRI *Fulfillment* dimension significantly more than the control group? (Quantitative hypothesis 1)

Table III: Description of participants in the control group who filled out the questionnaire at both times 1 and 2 and who were interested in participating in the Forum (control group t1&t2+F) with Age, Close relationship, School, Gender, Forum, and T1/T2 date variables.

	Valid	Missing	
Age	11	1	Mean: 21.18; s.d. 2.18; range: 19-26
Close relationship	12	0	Yes: 9; No: 3
School	12	0	UW: 9; HMS: 1; Other school: 2
Gender	12	0	F: 8; M: 4
Forum	12	0	Yes: 12
T1 date*	12	0	mean: 2/4; min: 1/23; max: 2/13
T2 date*	12	0	mean: 3/12; min: 3/10; max: 3/24
T2 - T1*	12	0	mean: 2/5; min: 1/27; max: 2/18

Control group t1&t2

The data of participants in the control group who filled out the questionnaire at both times 1 and 2 were used to address the following question:

(?) Did a positive or negative event during the interval between time 1 and time 2 have a significant effect on HM/LRI scores? (Quantitative hypothesis 3)

Table IV: Description of participants in the control group who filled out the questionnaire at both times 1 and 2 (control group t1&t2) with Age, Close relationship, School, Gender, Forum, Reason, and T1/T2 date variables.

	Valid	Missing	
Age	39	4	mean: 24.62; s.d. 7.34; range: 19-51
Close relationship	43	0	Yes: 38; No: 5
School	43	0	UW: 27; HMS: 6; USCGA: 3; Other school: 4; Grad: 3
Gender	42	1	F: 25; M: 17
Forum	43	0	Yes: 12; No 19; No answer: 12
T1 date*	43	0	mean: 2/9; min: 1/23; max: 2/20
T2 date*	43	0	mean: 3/13; min: 3/9; max: 4/3
T2 - T1*	43	0	mean: 2/1; min: 1/18; max: 2/24
Reason	43	0	Positive: 13; Negative: 8; None mentioned: 22

* Compare these values to those of the three participants in the experimental group (group Stay): T1 date: 1/23; T2 date: 3/10; T2-T1: 2/15 (A late start was made on collecting the majority of the control group data).

Procedure

Note: When referring to individual participants, the female pronoun is used even if the participant is male.

In November of 1997, the author applied to the Experimental College at the University of Washington for the opportunity to have the Experimental College advertise and support the Meaning in Life Forum. Earlier in 1997 the author had been able to offer a six-week Meaning in Life Forum through a community organization, the Phinney Neighborhood Center. However, not enough people signed up early enough for that Forum to proceed. A minimum of 6 participants would have been necessary, and the cost per participant would have been approximately \$40—almost twice what it would cost to offer an eight-week Forum through the Experimental College. Fortunately, the Experimental College agreed to carry the Forum. It should be noted that one of the participants in the Meaning in Life Forum originally found out about the Forum through the Phinney Neighborhood Center.

The author set the fee for the Forum, \$18/participant, to cover, approximately, the cost of renting a room for eight two-hour meetings, \$80, and the cost of having the Experimental College list the Forum in its catalogue, \$60. Experimental College instructors had to pay the \$60 course-listing fee whether or not anyone signed up for their class. When the Forum started, all but one of the Forum participants paid the \$18 fee, and no refunds were given to or asked for by the participants who left the Forum early, so the Forum cost the author \$16. Additionally, each participant had to pay a \$4 (UW students) or \$10 (others) course registration fee directly to the Experimental College when she registered for the Forum.

The author began to recruit control group members the Friday before the first Forum meeting by displaying an overhead (p. 44) in large classes (Introduction to Psychology/Philosophy/etc.) at the University of Washington. After a low response from this method, the author created a web questionnaire (p. 49) and sent out an email (p. 56) to a large number of people on February 9, 1998.

The first meeting of the Meaning in Life Forum was on Tuesday, January 20, 1998. At the beginning of the meeting, the author, who was the facilitator of the Forum, discussed his goal of being able to evaluate the Forum, and asked the participants if they would mind filling out some questionnaires in the course of the Forum. The participants thought that would be fine, and from then on, the modified HM (p. 54) was given to participants at the beginning and end of each Forum meeting. In addition, the paper questionnaire (p. 47) was given to participants to complete prior to the second meeting of the Forum.

The meetings took place in a carpeted, windowless room in the basement of the Social Work Building. The author had requested a carpeted room so that if he or the participants wanted to sit on the floor instead of in chairs, they might be more comfortable doing so. The author was the only one who did occasionally sit on the floor. The room was lit by overhead florescent lights, which the author finds unpleasant. So, after the first meeting, he brought two incandescent lights and a candle, and kept the overhead florescent lights off. This made the atmosphere, in the author's opinion, much nicer, and there were no complaints when the author asked for lighting feedback.

The format of the first Forum meeting was as described in the syllabus for the Forum (p. 42):

For the first 45 minutes or hour of the session, participants will talk with 1 or 2 other participants...

For the next 45 minutes, each participant will talk to the whole group about what she or he has been thinking about and working on during the meeting and in the previous week.

The meeting will conclude with a whole group discussion focused on synthesizing what has been presented and discussed during the meeting and defining new directions and questions to explore before the next meeting.

However, only six participants came to the second meeting, and when asked to evaluate the structure of the first meeting, the participants said they would rather have large group discussion for the whole meeting than both large group discussion and person-to-person conversation. From then on the meetings were primarily whole-group discussions.

The topics discussed at each of the meetings of the Forum ranged, but most related to what the participants found meaningful in life and why they might find those things meaningful. Strategies for maintaining and improving one's experience of meaning in life were discussed. In addition, participants also shared and discussed their views about *the meaning of life*.

At the end of each meeting the facilitator encouraged participants to think of a question related to "the question of meaning in life" to work on prior to the next meeting. For example, one question, which was suggested by a participant, that participants decided to work on was, "What are the most meaningful experiences you've had in your life? ...in the past year? ...the past month? ...the past week? ...today?" At the following meeting each participant took a turn sharing what she came up with.

As the Forum progressed from week to week, attendance dropped (Table VII, p. 25). By the end of the Forum only three of the original 8 participants continued to come. In general, reasons for their departure were not clear. One had moved and was not contactable after the first meeting. Another hung up on the author when he called to ask if she might be coming again. Three had schedule conflicts or sickness that came up and later felt uncomfortable about coming back after missing several meetings.

As is discussed in the syllabus for the Forum (p. 42), at the third meeting of the Forum each participant shared a list of books, music, experiences, art, etc., which she thought in some way related to the experience of meaning in life. Those works which could be referenced (it would have been hard to list of all the experiences mentioned that night) were compiled by the author and distributed to the participants at the following meeting (p. 55).

A significant departure from the original plan of the Forum which should be noted was the author/facilitator's involvement in the discussions and thus the content of the meeting. In the situation where eight participants attend the Forum meetings, the facilitator's role would be little more than to let the participants know when the meeting was halfway over and to facilitate other transitions of the meeting as described in the "Outline of proposed Forum" (p. 41). However, when the meeting size shrank and the meeting became primarily a long group discussion, the facilitator's non-participation content-wise became more conspicuous. When participants requested that the author participate in their discussions and share his perspectives, he felt that it would no longer be appropriate to do otherwise. Thus any improvement the participants might show in their Life Regard Index scores could be due to specific content provided by the author, not solely to the structure and atmosphere of the Forum.

Additionally, none of the participants produced a paper and presented it to the other members of the Forum. A few participants did spend time writing and thinking about their questions outside of the Forum and shared their writing with the Forum. One participant made a 90 minute tape of excerpts from songs that she felt represented aspects of meaning in life and

gave this tape to those present at the last meeting of the Forum. Another participant wrote a note to the author and to each participant who had attended most of the Forum meetings sharing “A few reasons why you are wonderful.” These two efforts were perhaps more true to the spirit of the Forum than written papers would have been.

The last meeting of the Forum was on March 10, 1998. At the end of this meeting, the remaining participants filled out the last questionnaire. On March 9, 1998, an email (p. 56) was sent out to those in the control group who had filled out the first online questionnaire to ask them to fill out another similar questionnaire (p. 53). Also, three of the Forum participants who had stopped attending the Forum early were contacted by email or phone to ask them to fill out the online questionnaire. Finally, those participants at the UW who were in the control group were notified of an opportunity to participate in something similar to the Meaning in Life Forum. This was something the author had said he would do for those who filled out the questionnaire (and anyone else he could interest in the Meaning in Life Forum, in fact). Thus, on April 8, 1998, a group which consisted of members of the control group, one member of the experimental group, and others who had found the brief description of the Meaning in Life Forum interesting, met to discuss arranging more *being*/Meaning in Life Forum-like meetings. Some of these individuals and others met a few times during spring quarter of 1998.

Calculations

Variables are designated by names with all capital letters, e.g., “HM,” that are preceded by a T1 if referring to data collected around the beginning of the Meaning in Life Forum or T2 if referring to data collected around the end of the Forum, e.g., “T1HM.” Difference scores are calculated by subtracting time 1 scores from time 2 scores and designated by a “DIF” suffix, e.g., HMDIF = T2HM - T1HM.

The four outcome variables which are used to compare samples in this study are HM, FUL, FRM, and LRI. The calculation of each of these variables is detailed below.

HM

Happiness Measures (Fordyce, 1988) scores [HM] are calculated in the following way:

Part III

DIRECTIONS: Use the list below to answer the following question: IN GENERAL, HOW HAPPY OR UNHAPPY DO YOU USUALLY FEEL? Choose the number of the *one* statement below that best describes your *average happiness*, and write it on this line: **H** ___

10. Extremely happy (feeling ecstatic, joyous, fantastic!)
9. Very happy (feeling really good, elated!)
8. Pretty happy (spirits high, feeling good.)
7. Mildly happy (feeling fairly good and somewhat cheerful.)
6. Slightly happy (just a bit above neutral.)
5. Neutral (not particularly happy or unhappy.)
4. Slightly unhappy (just a bit below neutral.)
3. Mildly unhappy (just a little low.)
2. Pretty unhappy (somewhat “blue,” spirits down.)
1. Very unhappy (depressed, spirits very low.)
0. Extremely unhappy (utterly depressed, completely down.)

Part IV

DIRECTIONS: Consider your emotions a moment further. *On the average*, what percent of the time do you feel happy? What percent of the time do you feel unhappy? What percent of the time do you feel neutral (neither happy nor unhappy)? Write down your best estimates, as well as you can, in the spaces below. Make sure the three figures add up to equal 100%.

ON THE AVERAGE:

The percent of the time I feel happy **HAP** %
 The percent of the time I feel unhappy _____ %
 The percent of the time I feel neutral _____ %
 TOTAL: 100 %

H is a measure of intensity of positive affect; **HAP** is a measure of frequency of positive affect.

$$HM = (H \times 10 + HAP) / 2$$

Thus, scores could range from 0 to 100.

FUL & FRM

The Fulfillment [FUL] and Framework [FRM] dimensions of the Life Regard Index [LRI] (Battista & Almond, 1973) are calculated as follows:

Part II:

Below are 34 statements that you may agree or disagree with. Using the 1 - 7 scale below indicate your agreement with each item by placing the appropriate number on the line preceding that item. Please be open and honest in your responding.

- * 7 - Strongly agree
- * 6 -
- * 5 -
- * 4 - neutral
- * 3 -
- * 2 -
- * 1 - Strongly disagree

Fulfillment +

fu_p1 _ I have real passion in my life.
fu_p2 _ I really feel good about my life.
fu_p3 _ Living is deeply fulfilling.
fu_p4 _ I feel that I am living fully.
fu_p5 _ I feel that I'm really going to attain what I want in life.
fu_p6 _ I get so excited by what I'm doing that I find new stores of energy I didn't know that I had.
fu_p7 _ When I look at my life I feel the satisfaction of really having worked to accomplish something.

Fulfillment-

fu_n1 _ I don't seem to be able to accomplish those things that are really important to me.
fu_n2 _ Other people seem to feel better about their lives than I do.
fu_n3 _ I have a lot of potential that I don't normally use.
fu_n4 _ I spend most of my time doing things that really aren't very important to me.
fu_n5 _ Something seems to stop me from doing what I really want to do.
fu_n6 _ Nothing very outstanding ever seems to happen to me.
fu_n7 _ I don't really value what I'm doing.

$FUL = fu_p1 + fu_p2 + fu_p3 + fu_p4 + fu_p5 + fu_p6 + fu_p7 + 49 - fu_n1 - fu_n2 - fu_n3 - fu_n4 - fu_n5 - fu_n6 - fu_n7$

Scores could range from 7 to 91 (possible scores for each questionnaire item range from 1 to 7)

Framework +

fr_p1 _ I feel like I have found a really significant meaning for leading my life.

fr_p2 _ I have really come to terms with what's important for me in my life.

fr_p3 _ I have a system or framework that allows me to truly understand my being alive.

fr_p4 _ I have a very clear idea of what I'd like to do with my life.

fr_p5 _ There are things that I devote all my life's energy to.

fr_p6 _ I have a philosophy of life that really gives my living significance.

fr_p7 _ I have some aims and goals that would personally give me a great deal of satisfaction if I could accomplish them.

Framework -

fr_n1 _ I just don't know what I really want to do with my life.

fr_n2 _ I really don't have much of a purpose for living, even for myself.

fr_n3 _ I need to find something that I can really be committed to.

fr_n4 _ I get completely confused when I try to understand my life.

fr_n5 _ There honestly isn't anything that I totally want to do.

fr_n6 _ I really don't believe in anything about my life very deeply.

fr_n7 _ Other people seem to have a much better idea of what they want to do with their lives than I do.

$$FRM = fr_p1 + fr_p2 + fr_p3 + fr_p4 + fr_p5 + fr_p6 + fr_p7 + 49 - fr_n1 - fr_n2 - fr_n3 - fr_n4 - fr_n5 - fr_n6 - fr_n7$$

Scores could range from 7 to 91 (possible scores for each questionnaire item range from 1 to 7)

LRI

$$LRI = FUL + FRM$$

Scores could range from 14 to 182

Software

Prophet 5.0 was used for most of the data analyses below. Prophet is "A national computing resource for life science research sponsored by the National Center for Research Resources of the National Institutes of Health" (About: Prophet). Prophet 5.0 can still be freely downloaded from the web at ftp://ftp.basic.nwu.edu/Prophet/ftp_this/. For more information, and to purchase the current version of Prophet, visit: <http://www.prophet.abtech.com/>

Results

The quantitative results of this study are as follows:

Note: all t-tests are two-tailed.

Quantitative hypothesis 1:

(?) Did those in experimental group Stay improve their scores on the LRI Framework dimension significantly more than the control group? Did those in experimental group Stay *not* improve their scores on the LRI *Fulfillment* dimension significantly more than the control group? (Control group t1&t2+F and experimental group Stay)

Table V: Comparison of control group t1&t2+F and experimental group Stay

	T1&T2-F*			(C)T1&T2+F			(E) Stay			U/t	p
	n	M	SD	n	M	SD	n	M	SD		
HMDIF	30	-2.12	9.92	12	5.21	14.52	2	7.50	3.54	†17.5	0.352
FULDIF	31	0.19	5.80	12	1.92	9.48	3	4.67	6.66	0.468 (13 df)	0.6476
FRMDIF	31	1.06	6.71	12	0.00	5.34	3	10	18.19	‡0.942 (2 df)	0.4457
LRIDIF	31	1.26	11.37	12	1.92	11.24	3	14.67	24.66	1.395 (13 df)	0.1865

* The Means and SDs for the control group that was not interested in the Forum, but did fill out the questionnaire at time 2 (control group T1&T2-F) are listed here. Only the portion of the control group that was interested in the Forum is used in the comparisons, however.

† The Mann-Whitney rank sum test is used here because the experimental group is so small (n = 2). While no means of comparison is entirely appropriate for such small *ns*, the t-test is used for the other 3 comparisons because the data for both groups for those variables are not significantly non-normally-distributed (Shapiro-Wilk test $p > 0.05$).

‡ Unequal-variances t-test (Welch-Satterthwaite approximation).

Table VI: Individual difference scores of experimental group Stay

Participant	HMDIF	FULDIF	FRMDIF	LRIDIF
1	10	-1	-1	-2
2	5	12	31	43
3		3	0	3

Quantitative hypothesis 2:

(?) Can a modification of Fordyce's (1988) Happiness Measures (p. 54) be used to evaluate the success of Forum meetings? Specifically, will differences in participants' scores on the modified HM from the beginning and end of Forum meetings correspond to the author's feeling of whether the meeting was uplifting or tedious? (Experimental group)

The author did not find any of the meetings to be exhilarating or tedious. Most meetings were generally good. Also, as can be seen in the table below, data collection efforts with respect to the modified HM were not stellar (oftentimes participants neglected to designate whether it was the beginning or end of the meeting, and this was not caught). Missing data is designated by blanks, and a number followed by a question mark indicates uncertainty about whether the score was recorded at the beginning or end of the meeting. This table is most useful as a record of attendance for each of the Forum meetings.

Table VII: Modified Happiness Measures scores by participant

Date:	1/20/98		1/27/98		2/3/98		2/10/98		2/17/98		2/24/98		3/3/98		3/10/98	
Participant:	(b)eginning	(e)nd	b	e	b	e	b	e	b	e	b	e	b	e	b	e
1	8	7	8	8	8?	9?			9	9	10	10	10	10		
2	9	8	8	8	8?	9?	8	9	9	9	8	8	8	8	8	8
3	8		8	8	8	8	8?	8.5	8?	8.5	8	8	9.5	9.5	9	9
4	6	7	8?	9?	8	8										
5	6	8	5	8			3	5								
6	8	8	8	8												
7	5	7														
8	8	7														

Quantitative hypothesis 3:

(?) Did a positive or negative event during the interval between time 1 and time 2 have a significant impact on HM/LRI scores? (Control group t1&t2)

Whether a participant had experienced a positive or negative event was determined by the author after reading participants' responses to the request on the questionnaire for time 2 (p. 53), "Please mention any events in the past month that may have affected your answers to these questions:" If the author thought the event was sufficiently devastating (i.e. "Major long-term relationship is falling apart") he labeled it "Negative," if sufficiently uplifting (i.e. "I got a boyfriend"), he labeled it "Positive."

Table VIII: ANOVA comparison of the effects of type of reason on HM/LRI scores*

	Positive			Negative			None mentioned			F	p
	n	M	SD	n	M	SD	n	M	SD		
HMDIF	13	2.35	13.74	8	-5.00	8.86	2	0.40	11.26	1.001	0.3766 df (2, 39)
FULDIF	13	2.23	7.17	8	-3.63	8.63	2	1.32	5.77	2.052	0.1418 df (2, 40)
FRMDIF	13	1.08	6.30	8	-0.63	5.80	2	1.09	6.71	0.23	0.7957 df (2, 40)
LRIDIF	13	3.31	11.68	8	-4.25	12.91	2	2.41	10.09	1.314	0.2800 df (2, 40)

* An ANOVA was used because both groups in each comparison were found to be normally distributed (Shapiro-Wilk test, $p > 0.05$)

Quantitative hypothesis 4:

(?) Was there a significant difference in scores on the Happiness Measures/LRI between those who said they wanted to be in the Forum, and those who said they did not? (Group ALL, time 1 data)

Many participants ($n = 17$) did not answer the question, "Does this Forum sound like something you might like to participate in?" on the time 1 web questionnaire (p. 49). Instead of simply throwing out the data from this "No answer" group, comparisons are made both between the "Yes" and "No" groups and between the "Yes" group and a "No + No answer" group so that the reader can decide whether to include the "No answer" group with the "No" group when evaluating quantitative hypothesis 4.

Table IX: Means and standard deviations for “Yes,” “No,” and “No answer” groups

	No			No answer			Yes		
	n	M	SD	n	M	SD	n	M	SD
T1HM	29	65.03	17.78	17	65.58	15.53	24	55.75	21.46
T1FUL	29	66.28	14.26	17	64.59	12.27	24	61.50	17.07
T1FRM	29	67.83	12.22	17	66.53	9.61	24	65.29	18.82
T1LRI	29	134.10	25.68	17	131.12	20.93	24	126.79	34.53

Table X: Comparison of “No” and “Yes” groups

	No			Yes			U/t	p
	n	M	SD	n	M	SD		
T1HM	29	65.03	17.78	24	55.75	21.46	*0.0909 (51 df)	0.0959
T1FUL	29	66.28	14.26	24	61.50	17.07	1.11 (51 df)	0.2721
T1FRM	29	67.83	12.22	24	65.29	18.82	†348.5	1
T1LRI	29	134.10	25.68	24	126.79	34.53	†373	0.661

* The t-test is used here although the “No” sample is not normally distributed because for $ns > 30$ the sampling distribution of the mean is approximately normally distributed even if the distribution of raw scores is not (Least mean square law); 29 is close to being greater than 30.

† The Mann-Whitney rank sum test was used here because the “Yes” sample is not normally distributed (Shapiro-Wilk test $p < 0.05$).

Table XI: Comparison of “No + No answer” and “Yes” groups

	No + No answer			Yes			t/U	p
	n	M	SD	n	M	SD		
T1HM	46	65.24	16.81	24	55.75	21.46	*2.036 (68 df)	0.0457
T1FUL	46	65.65	13.44	24	61.50	17.07	1.117 (68 df)	0.2681
T1FRM	46	67.35	11.23	24	65.29	18.82	†569	0.838
T1LRI	46	133.00	23.84	24	126.79	34.53	†578.5	0.748

* The t-test is used here although the “No + No answer” sample is not normally distributed because for $ns > 30$ the sampling distribution of the mean is approximately normally distributed even if the distribution of raw scores is not (Least mean square law).

† The Mann-Whitney rank sum test was used here because the “Yes” sample is not normally distributed (Shapiro-Wilk test $p < 0.05$).

Quantitative hypothesis 5:

(?) Was there a significant difference in scores on the Happiness Measures or the Fulfillment dimension of the LRI at time 1 between those who stayed and those who quit?

Table XII: Comparison of groups Stay & Quit

	Stay			Quit			U*	p
	n	M	SD	n	M	SD		
T1HM	2	80.00	0	3	55.00	8.66	6	0.2
T1FUL	3	75.00	13.89	3	58.30	6.66	8	0.2
T1FRM	3	73.67	17.93	3	58.00	11.79	7	0.4
T1LRI	3	148.67	31.82	3	116.33	15.14	7	0.4

* The Mann-Whitney rank sum test is used here because both samples are not normally distributed (Shapiro-Wilk test $p < 0.05$).

Table XIII: Individual scores of groups Stay & Quit

Participant	ATENDNCE	T1HM	T1FUL	T1FRM	T1LRI	HMDIF	FULDIF	FRMDIF	LRIDIF
1	2 (Stay)	80.00	82.00	83	165	10	-1	-1	-2
2	2	80.00	59.00	53	112	5	12	31	43
3	2		84.00	85	169		3	0	3
4	1 (Quit)	60.00	55.00	68	123				
5*	1	45.00	54.00	45	99	-17.5	-22	-8	-30
6†	1	60.00	66.00	61	127	5	-12	-13	-25

* This participant filled out the time 2 web questionnaire on 3/15/98.

† This participant filled out the time 2 web questionnaire on 4/02/98.

(Note that the large difference for both of these participants could be due to them filling out the *paper* questionnaire at time 1 and the *web* questionnaire at time 2.)

Quantitative hypothesis 6:

(?) Was there a significant difference in scores on the Happiness Measures/LRI between those who said they had a close relationship and those who said they did not? (Group ALL, time 1 data)

Table XIV: Comparison of those who said they had a close relationship with those who said they did not

	Yes			No			U†	p
	n	M	SD	n	M	SD		
T1HM	56	64.10	17.46	12	50.38	22.85	465.0	0.0384
T1FUL	57	65.91	14.44	12	55.92	14.82	485.0	0.0240
T1FRM	57	68.00	14.04	12	60.17	14.27	456.5	0.0710
T1LRI	57	138.00	27.24	12	112.00	28.42	481.5	0.0277

* Do you have a close relationship with one or more people whom you see at least several times a week? y / n

† The Mann-Whitney rank sum test is used here because for all variables but T1HM, it was found to be more powerful than the t-test. Additionally, for all variables but T1FUL, the Yes sample was not normally distributed.

Quantitative hypothesis 7:

(?) Was there a significant difference in scores on the Happiness Measures/LRI between females and males? (Group ALL, time 1 data)

Table XV: Comparison by gender

	Female			Male			t*	p
	n	M	SD	n	M	SD		
T1HM	40	63.93	17.12	29	60.50	20.60	0.753	0.4542
T1FUL	40	65.43	12.83	29	62.83	17.45	0.713	0.4782
T1FRM	40	68.70	12.86	29	64.14	15.81	1.320	0.1913
T1LRI	40	134.13	23.88	29	126.97	32.85	1.049	0.2979

* The t-test was used here because the least mean square law comes into effect when sample sizes are around 30, and because the t-test proved more powerful than the Mann-Whitney rank sum test in this case.

Quantitative hypothesis 8:

(?) Was there a significant difference in scores on the Happiness Measures/LRI among those attending different colleges and graduates? (Group ALL, time 1 data)

note: participants from other colleges or of unknown educational status are not included in this comparison.

Table XVI: Comparison by school*

	UW			HMS (first year)			USCGA			Graduates		
	n	M	SD	n	M	SD	n	M	SD	n	M	SD
T1HM	38	56.66	19.29	8	77.19	7.73	4	63.00	15.25	9	64.44	21.86
T1FUL	38	60.87	14.95	8	72.00	6.87	4	58.00	24.01	9	66.00	14.61
T1FRM	38	65.37	14.10	8	69.75	6.90	4	62.50	19.43	9	65.44	20.95
T1LRI	38	126.24	27.87	8	142.75	10.70	4	120.05	42.94	9	131.44	35.38

* A Kruskal-Wallis test was used to compare the means of these four samples because of small samples with non-normal distributions. Results are in Table XVII.

Table XVII: Kruskal-Wallis test for significant differences among participants grouped by school

	Kruskal-Wallis statistic	p	Suggested comparison
T1HM	10.112	0.0176	UW & HMS
T1FUL	5.847	0.1193	None
T1FRM	1.277	0.7345	None
T1LRI	3.245	0.3553	None

To explore the difference between the UW & HMS samples, they are compared on all variables:

Table XVIII: Comparison of participants at UW and HMS

	UW			HMS (first year)			t*	p
	n	M	SD	n	M	SD		
T1HM	38	56.66	19.29	8	77.19	7.73	†4.942 (28 df)	0.0001
T1FUL	38	60.87	14.95	8	72.00	6.87	†3.535 (24 df)	0.0017
T1FRM	38	65.37	14.10	8	69.75	6.90	0.852 (44 df)	0.3989
T1LRI	38	126.24	27.87	8	142.75	10.70	†2.801 (30 df)	0.0088

* The t-test was used here because both samples proved normally distributed for all variables (Shapiro-Wilk test, $p > 0.05$).

† Unequal-variances t-test (Welch-Satterthwaite approximation).

Normative means and standard deviations for the Happiness Measures

For comparison, Fordyce (1988) has compiled normative means and standard deviations for the Happiness Measures:

Table XIX: Normative means and standard deviations for the HM (Fordyce, 1988)*

n	mean age	Age range	%female/%male	HM mean	HM SD
3050	26.3	16 - 73	59/41	61.66	17.84

*Sample consisted of “adult community college students with varied educational, socio-economic, regional, ethnic, and occupational backgrounds” (Fordyce, 1988, p. 373).

Quantitative hypothesis 9:

(?) Were the Happiness Measures more closely correlated with the Fulfillment dimension of the LRI than the Framework dimension? (Group ALL, time 1 data)

Table XX: Correlations between LRI, LRI-FRM, LRI-FUL and HM scores

P: 0.0 for all N: 70 for all	T1HM	T1FUL	T1FRM
T1LRI	.726	.963	.96
T1HM		.746	.648
T1FUL			.849

Summary & Discussion of Results

Quantitative results

(1) Did Forum participants improve their scores on the *Framework* dimension of the LRI significantly more than the control group, *and* was there no significant difference between the Forum participants' and the control group's improvement on the *Fulfillment* dimension of the LRI?

No. Although one participant, participant 2 (Table VI, p. 24), did exhibit the pattern of responses and behavior that the author had expected participants might exhibit. The failure to support this hypothesis is due to the small size of the experimental group ($n = 3$) and the control group ($n = 12$). This finding could also be due to problems with the theory on which the hypothesis is based, as well as characteristics of the population which the Forum attracted. For example, participant 2 came to the Forum with a sincere interest in coming to some understanding about life questions, and she thought and wrote about her questions each week. Participants 1 & 3, however, appeared less driven to work on life questions, and appeared interested in the Forum more for the sake of the meetings. Either because they were more busy or felt less of a need, or both, participants 1 & 3 appeared to not spend as much time outside of the Forum meetings working on Forum-related questions. Also note (Table XIII, p. 27) that while participants 1, 2, & 3 were about equally happy, participant 2 scored much lower on the LRI; there was not much room for improvement for participants 1 & 3. It appears that one of the author's unwritten assumptions in formulating hypothesis 1 was that people attracted to the Forum would be those who were relatively unhappy and who scored relatively low on the LRI. At least for participants 1, 2, & 3, this was not true.

(2) Did exhilarating or tedious meetings correspond to differences in the expected direction between scores on the modified HM at the end and beginning of meetings?

Unfortunately there was not an opportunity to test this hypothesis as there was not a particularly exhilarating or tedious meeting. It is interesting, however, that there was for some participants on occasion a change in self-rating on the modified HM from the beginning to the end of the meeting (Table VII, p. 25). Given a larger sample, and a better questionnaire design (often participants did not circle whether it was the beginning or end of the meeting—see p. 54), it seems that the modified HM could be a useful tool in quantitatively evaluating the quality of a meeting. However, even if the modified HM is used to evaluate very small group meetings, the results could still flag meetings that were wonderful and clarify to what extent each participant shared in the experience.

An additional problem with the use of the modified HM in this study could be that participants' moods may begin to rise with the beginning of the meeting, assuming meetings are wonderful experiences. Having participants also rate what they believe their happiness to have been a half-hour before the meeting may allow for a better assessment of the emotional effect of the meeting.

(3) Did strongly positive or negative events affect scores on the Happiness Measures or LRI?

It appears that positive or negative events did not affect scores on the Happiness Measures/LRI. This may be because positive or negative events are not likely to affect a person's basic outlook on life—happy people may tend to stay happy even in the face of a tragic event,

and it could take more than one positive event to cause an unhappy person to start feeling more secure in her happiness. It should also be noted that while some participants who showed dramatic (20 or 30 point) changes in Happiness Measures scores did list reasons of the expected valence, others with such large changes did not list reasons, and others listed fairly dramatic reasons, but showed little change. Perhaps a rewording of the question from “Please mention any events in the past month that may have affected your answers to these questions:” to ask only, “Did you experience a positive or negative event that has significantly affected your answers? please check one: (+) (-) (none)” would encourage more participants to respond, and would eliminate the potential for error of the author’s attempt to evaluate participants’ reasons.

(4) Were there any differences in terms of scores on the Happiness Measures/LRI between those who were interested in participating in the Forum and those who were not?

Yes, tentatively. Participants who were interested in participating in the Forum appeared to score lower on the Happiness Measures than participants who were not interested in participating. However, only the fact that the two samples are different might be considered significant ($p = 0.10$ or 0.05 for a 2-tailed t-test; Table X & Table XI, p. 26), as opposed to one sample having lower scores than the other. It is also noted that the standard deviations for all measures for participants who were interested in participating in the Forum appear higher than for those who were not interested in participating (Table X & Table XI, p. 26). This and other results (see #5 below) suggest that while unhappy people were interested in participating in the Forum, some happy people were interested in participating as well.

Supporting this interpretation, in one of the exercises Forum participants undertook, listing experiences they found meaningful, the happiest people were those who found meaning in and were excited about an almost endless number of activities. Perhaps very happy people would be more likely than unhappy people to consider any activity fun, including the Meaning in Life Forum. In addition, contrary to the adage that working directly on being happy is fruitless, one of the seemingly happiest Forum participants said that she was interested in the Forum because she is always trying to improve the quality of her own experience, and she thought it would be helpful to hear what others found meaningful and how they worked on living meaningful lives. This participant said she made a list of what she really wanted to be doing with her life, and would often check it to make sure that she was doing what was possible to be spending time on what was most important to her. So, perhaps very happy people would be predisposed to participating in the Meaning in Life Forum if indeed happiness and meaning are topics they think about more frequently than other people think about happiness and meaning.

It is also notable that significant differences between those who wanted to participate in the Forum and those who did not were not found on the Fulfillment and Framework dimensions of the LRI. A possible reason for this finding could be that the Fulfillment and Framework dimensions are more muddled scales than the Happiness Measures and less likely to yield significant results. Additionally, assuming unhappiness is one factor causing people to be interested in the Meaning in Life Forum, happiness does not necessarily correspond to high scores on the LRI. Although it is unlikely that an unhappy person would score highly on the LRI, certainly a fairly happy person could score low on the Framework dimension of the LRI, if not the Fulfillment dimension as well. Consistent with qualitative hypothesis 5 (p. 10) the experience of meaning in life may be something that develops primarily with hardship and unhappiness, which may motivate people to try to rationally understand how to improve their situation. People who have been relatively content for quite a long time may not have much of a “framework” or a feeling of fulfilling a framework, nor much of a motivation to work on life questions.

(5) Were those who continued to attend the Forum significantly happier at time 1 than those who left before the end?

Yes, tentatively. While one of the Forum participants (participant 3) in group Stay did not fill in the Happiness Measures questionnaire at time 1, had this participant filled in her questionnaire as she did her modified HM questionnaire and later Happiness Measures, the groups would have been calculated to be significantly different (Table XII & Table XIII, p. 27). It should be noted however, that these results could be the effect of a flaw in the experimental design. Ideally Forum participants would have filled out the time 1 questionnaire before attending the first Forum meeting, or at least as soon as possible at the beginning of the first meeting. However, Forum participants were given the questionnaire to complete at home prior to the second meeting of the Forum. It is therefore possible that the first meeting could have influenced the participants who attended to the end of the Forum to fill out the questionnaire as if they were happy people, while causing those who eventually stopped attending the Forum to fill out the questionnaire as if they were unhappy people.

(6) Did participants who had close relationships score higher on the LRI/Happiness Measures than those who did not?

Yes. This is consistent with previous research with both the LRI (Debats et al., 1993) and subjective well-being measures (Diener, Suh, & Oishi, 1997).

(7) Did females and males not differ significantly in their scores on the LRI/Happiness Measures?

Yes. This is consistent with previous research with the LRI (Debats et al., 1993) and subjective well-being measures (Diener, Suh, & Oishi, 1997).

(8) Was there a significant difference in scores on the Happiness Measures/LRI among samples of participants at different colleges?

Yes. Students in the Harvard Medical School [HMS] sample (first-year medical students) scored significantly higher on the Happiness Measures and the Fulfillment dimension of the LRI than students at the University of Washington. There are many possible explanations for this finding, ranging from characteristics of the students in each of the samples to characteristics of the environments of the students in the samples.

(9) Were the Happiness Measures more closely correlated with the Fulfillment dimension of the LRI than the Framework dimension?

Yes, as would be expected from what each of the scales/dimensions attempts to assess. Specifically, the Fulfillment dimension of the LRI is designed to evaluate one's perception that one's experience lives up to one's concept of a valued life. The Framework dimension of the LRI is designed to assess the extent to which one believes one has a concept of what valued life experience might be. The Happiness Measures are designed to assess intensity and frequency of positive affect.

Qualitative results

(1) Could benefits be derived from working on the question of the nature of the experience of meaning in life in the absence of a pre-established curriculum?

This cannot be determined from this study. What can be said, at least for the three participants who continued to attend, is that the approach of not having a teacher lay out a curriculum was part of an experience that was emotionally rewarding enough that they continued

to attend. Additionally, one of the participants (participant 2) benefited from the Forum as the author had hypothesized. It also cannot be determined, based on just this study, whether any group of individuals who comes together to create an environment which encourages active and open questioning about the nature of valued experiences will arrive at the directions which are helpful to improving their experiences and best adapted to their particular situations. However, the author found the Forum to be helpful to improving his own understanding of the experience of meaning in life (see #5 below), as did participant 2. This outcome may have been due to the opportunity that could have been unique to this Forum to hear the perspectives of people who were quite happy and experienced a significant amount of meaning in life. At any rate, the effort to test the effect of a lack of pre-determined content on the outcome of the Forum was also confounded by the author's participation in the Forum.

The author's a priori desired level of participation in the Forum was that of a fly on the wall, except until the last meeting of the Forum, when he hoped to briefly present his paper on "The experience of meaning in life from a psychological perspective" along with the participants' presentations. However, as was noted in the Procedure, instead of only facilitating the Forum and remaining in the background, as attendance shrank, the author became more of an active participant in the meeting.

To evaluate the effect of this change of plans, the reader might consider Participant 2's opinion that the author's ideas about the nature of meaning in life and the meaning of life helped her to come to terms with her own. However, to the extent the content the author provided in the Forum was helpful, it was probably because he had given the questions a lot of thought and thus could present ideas that participants could react to and use to provoke further questions. Possibly, a similar result could be achieved by the facilitator of the Forum simply asking questions of the participants in a Socratic way without ever clearly describing her own ideas. However, in an environment designed to encourage the questioning process, if the participants ask the facilitator a question about her own questioning process or the results thereof, it would probably not be appropriate for the facilitator to withhold her response, although delaying it could facilitate the participants' questioning processes. In any event, it seemed to the author that by the end of the Forum, participant 2's approach to the questions of the meaning of life and her experience of meaning in life followed more directly from her own questioning and the influence of another Forum participant (participant 3), than from any ideas that the author expressed.

Clearly, in order to demonstrate the effectiveness and viability of a Meaning in Life Forum that is not centered on a particular curriculum, it will have to be tested and re-tested with diverse participants and facilitators. That will necessarily mean a diversity of content, though, it is hoped, a similarity of structure. Perhaps the Forum should also be compared not just to a non-participating control group but to an activity that does have a teacher and a curriculum and focuses on the same topic. The two programs could then be compared to see if one is more likely than the other to facilitate rewarding emotional experience in the short- and long-term.

(2) Having participants wait until halfway through the Forum to begin looking at and talking about the works of noted thinkers or artists appeared to be a beneficial part of the Forum experience. First, because this seemed to create a self-empowering atmosphere that the participants' own ideas and own ways of looking at things were worth talking about, exploring, and further developing. Second, the meeting when participants did share all the influences outside themselves that they had found helpful was an exciting meeting, both to attend and to anticipate, and provided a nicely-contrasting halfway point in an otherwise less programmed string of meetings. That meeting also brought a feeling of refreshment with the broadening of the

vista of ideas and experiences to talk about and to consider. However, this feature of the Forum is probably not essential.

(3) Were the activities of writing a paper and preparing a presentation an important part of participants improving their understanding of the experience of meaning in life?

With respect to each participant completing a paper and presentation expressing her current understanding of the question of meaning in life, largely this did not happen. However, given the author's revised hypothesis about the nature of meaning in life (#5 below) which does not emphasize rational understanding as strongly as his original hypothesis (#5, p. 10), a written paper is for most people less appropriate for expressing the nature of meaning in life than projects such as two of the participants undertook (Procedure, p. 19). Future Forums should probably emphasize that they will encourage "those who would like to be encouraged" to create and present papers or other artistic works related to the experience of meaning in life, rather than suggesting that everyone should write and present a paper. Future Forums should probably retain an emphasis on encouraging everyone to give some sort of presentation at the end of the Forum, however, because working on a presentation, giving it, and seeing others' presentations can be a lot of fun, and a very meaningful and memorable part of the experience. That being said, the author notes that he had intended to present a paper at the end of the Forum, but he did not have the time or motivation to do it. There will be those who have the inclination and the time to create and present something, and there will be those who don't.

(4) Did spending the first half of the meeting in dyads and then having each participant give short presentations create a good meeting experience?

That format seemed to work well from the author's perspective. However, the participants decided they would rather have large group discussion for the whole meeting than both large group discussion and person-to-person conversation. Admittedly this decision was not given serious or prolonged contemplation by the Forum participants, nor has it yet been followed up by asking the participants to re-evaluate the original proposal for the structure of the Meaning in Life Forum meetings. While what happened in fact in the Forum did not result in deadly dull meetings, neither did it result in powerfully moving meetings (Table VII, p. 25). Since the Forum, the author has written up a plan to test whether the proposed meeting format would work for a continuing general-interest meeting as opposed to the relatively short-term meaning in life-oriented Meaning in Life Forum. The detail of this plan can be found in "Meeting proposal" (Leath, 1998d). Only future meeting efforts can demonstrate whether the meeting structure the author proposed has any lasting merit.

(5) Does the experience of meaning in life appear to be a feeling that one understands what is necessary to achieve or maintain desirable emotional experience?

After working with especially happy people in the Meaning in Life Forum on the nature of the experience of meaning in life and considering his earlier ideas about the experience of meaning more carefully, the author has developed a different way of understanding the experience of meaning (Leath, 1998c). It seems to him that for most people, most of the time, the experience of meaning is as simple as having things to look forward to, whether years or minutes away. That kind of experience does not particularly involve a rational understanding of how one can manipulate one's environment to get the kind of experience one wants. It is more of a reflexive evaluation of one's imagined future emotional experience. The happiest people can think of many things to look forward to, while those experiencing the meaninglessness of life will not be able to think of anything. The question thus becomes not how we can develop the

most accurate understanding of how to achieve desirable emotional experience given the limits of our environment and the characteristics of our present situation, but how we can develop and avoid losing emotional attachment to living. These questions are not really different, but the second is clearer about the aim of the questioning activity.

Continuing this reasoning that emotional attachment is more central to the experience of meaning than rational understanding, the Life Regard Index is not the most appropriate scale for measuring an individual's experience of meaning in life. Both the Fulfillment and Framework dimensions over-emphasize the importance of a rational understanding of one's life and one's life-work, and the achievement of goals, attainment of desired objectives, and living up to valued expectations. In reality, it may be that rational thought processes such as these are much less a part of a person's day-to-day experience of meaning than Battista and Almond (1973) and other meaning-in-life theorists surmised. To begin to address this shortcoming of current meaning-in-life scales, a rough draft of a scale to measure an individual's "perception of opportunity for rewarding emotional experience" is presented in "The experience of meaning in life from a psychological perspective" (Leath, 1998c).

All this is not to say that rational thinking plays no role in an individual's experience of meaning in life. Certainly in transitioning from experiencing meaninglessness to experiencing meaning, one has to come to decisions about how to alter one's outlook, one's behavior, and one's environment. There is also a subset of the population that gets hopelessly hung up on questions about *the* meaning of life. Tolstoy (1882) is one who was unable to find any enjoyment in day-to-day life until he developed some sort of understanding of the meaning of his life. These are the people, somewhat like participant 2 (she was quite happy in her day-to-day life, but had long been wanting to work on life questions), who might find the Meaning in Life Forum to be most helpful. Existential issues are not common topics of conversation, and, when one once may have felt hopelessly alone facing unanswerable yet devastatingly important questions, it can be a relief to be with others who also want or need to question life. The motivation to question the meaning of one's life is discussed further in "The experience of meaning in life from a psychological perspective" (Leath, 1998c).

Returning to the transition from meaninglessness to meaning, given this different interpretation of the nature of the experience of meaning in life, does the Meaning in Life Forum appear to be something that could help people who are experiencing a lack of meaning in life? Would the hypotheses about the effects of the Forum still be the same?

First, it will be appropriate to have different hypotheses for different subsets of the population who might be interested in something like the Meaning in Life Forum. What follows is the author's attempt to characterize individuals' motivations for participating in the Forum as being roughly one of three types. People who are interested in participating in the Forum will have to judge for themselves how accurate the following characterizations might be.

(a) There are people who will come to the Forum who are doing well in all respects already (i.e. their scores on scales indicate strong well-being), and who think the Forum will help them continue to develop their understanding and their experience of the good life. The Forum should not have any measurable effect on these participants, although these participants should, one hopes, find each meeting to be enjoyable, and benefit from hearing the perspectives of others at the meeting. These people are one of the most valuable assets of the meeting, because they are examples from which the less happy, less secure people can benefit.

(b) A second group of people attracted to the meeting might be those who are primarily concerned with rational questions about *the* meaning of life and the meaning or purpose of their own life. For these participants, the Life Regard Index should perform as originally hypothesized in this study—participants should improve their scores on the rational Framework dimension, but

not necessarily on the Fulfillment dimension. These participants may resolve the question of the meaning of life by deferring it as something they don't need to rationally answer, or they may develop some sort of rational/emotional framework within which they can understand their being alive.

(c) A third group may be the unhappy, possibly lonely people who haven't thought particularly about working on the question of meaning in life, but who think such a focus and such a structure as the Forum meetings have might be something good. Of all participants, these are the ones that should score low on the Happiness Measures at first. These participants may not be as interested as the others in working out understandings about the experience of meaning in life. They will have their own needs which brought them to the meeting which they may or may not feel comfortable talking about, and they may decide that the Forum is not what they need.

In order to retain this group, probably the largest group of potential participants, it might help to openly suggest that (1) experiencing more meaning in life is about improving one's emotional experience, and (2) there will be people at these meetings with various qualities of emotional experience, and (3) everyone should feel comfortable in experimenting with the meeting in ways they think would be helpful to improving their own emotional experience. That is, within the goal of improving one's emotional experience people should feel all right talking about or doing things however off the topic of meaning in life they might seem, because they are on topic.

If the goal of retaining these participants can be met, it is not clear to the author whether any consistent quantitative outcomes may be realized within this subset of the population. One might hope that a Meaning in Life Forum would facilitate improvement on all of the scales used in the study. However, drawing from the author's re-conceptualization of the experience of meaning in life, the unhappier participants may not show as much improvement on either of the LRI dimensions as on a scale which measures "perception of opportunities for rewarding emotional experience" (Leath, 1998c). One would also hope that unhappier participants would find Forum meetings themselves to be happier times in their lives and something to look forward to. If so, and partly because of their lower baseline score on the Happiness Measures, the unhappier participants may be more likely than others to show significant improvement in mood at each Forum meeting as measured by the modified HM.

Another factor in the draw of unhappier participants to Forum meetings that was not mentioned earlier may be the emphasis of the Meaning in Life Forum, as it was originally planned, on person-to-person interaction. Since the presence of an intimate relationship is a significant factor in many individuals' experience of meaning in life, Forum meetings as they were originally planned might capture and benefit from some of what is good about close relationships. For example, while unhappy people may feel they do not have much to look forward to in life, in the face of intimate, meaningful interaction with another person, this hopelessness does not come to mind, or if it does it is only in contradistinction to the goodness of the unhappy person's present interaction. Everyone wants to love and be loved and look forward to loving and being loved, whether it is (by) other people, or one's work, or some other aspect of experience. While there are many thoughts about how people come to experience life as meaningless, they are all some variation of the individual being exposed lastingly to environments that offer no or very little likelihood of responding in ways the individual will experience as emotionally rewarding. There is no greater antithesis to an emotionally unresponsive environment than interacting with someone who loves you and whom you love, although what that actually might mean is not always clear. While the relationships fostered in a Meaning in Life Forum or similar activity will probably not be the be-all and end-all of

relationships, it is possible they will be better than many other relationships or the lack of relationships the less happy participants experience.

Attendance

Poor attendance is probably the greatest indicator that the Forum is not viable. While there are people who are interested in the idea of the Forum or the *being* group, less of these are interested in the reality of them. The continued existence of either group is dependent on people believing and feeling that they are good things to do, and worth the effort of organizing. Nonetheless, it is not the existence of these groups that is important, but the attitude toward life and toward relationships embodied by the groups. Some people express these attitudes in their lives and in their relationships without needing or wanting an organized group. There is nothing stopping anyone from asking another if she would like to meet in a way similar to a Forum or *being* meeting. “Would you like to meet sometime and just talk? Would you like to work with me on questions?”

Conclusion

The overwhelming shortcoming of the Forum was its failure to retain many of the participants who appeared to have the most to benefit from Forum participation, should Forum participation have the effect the author thought it might have. Presumably, however, the participants who stopped attending the Forum found ways of spending their time that were in fact more helpful to them than participating in the Forum. In spite of the Forum’s apparent lack of appeal to its target audience, this study does merit some appreciation for being one of the few attempts to develop an intervention that is effective in assisting people to improve their experiences of meaning in life. In particular, this study provides an example of (1) how an intervention like the Forum could be organized and evaluated, and (2) what pitfalls (e.g., declining attendance) to attempt to avoid when trying to organize something like the Forum.

The greatest contribution of this study is the modification it suggests to the author’s earlier conceptualization of the experience of meaning in life. As was mentioned in the discussion of qualitative hypothesis 5, the implication of this theoretical revision is that the orientation of the Forum and the methods used to evaluate the Forum may be a factor in the failure of this study to demonstrate a significant positive effect of Forum participation. But before continuing to attempt to think of clever ways that the Forum might be made to produce the significant findings desired, some trouble may be saved by considering why the Forum and this paper ever came to exist. If those forces cannot be maintained, then discussion about how to improve the Forum is academic.

The Meaning in Life Forum occurred because the author thought he might have a good time organizing and facilitating the Forum. The evaluation of the Forum and this write-up are a part of a grander scheme. If the author enjoyed organizing the Forum, it would be nice to be able to be paid to organize and facilitate Forum-like groups. If the Forum could be demonstrated to be a good thing, it would be easier to sell. If the author enjoyed doing quantitative research and produced a decent research paper, that would assist him in eventually establishing a research center dedicated to exploring the nature of environments conducive to valued life experience.

The result of this study with respect to the first hypothesis above is that the author found he was not too enthusiastic about organizing and attempting to evaluate things such as the Forum. He does enjoy meeting with people one at a time and talking about imaginative or emotionally involving things. However, when such an interaction becomes too contrived or complicated by other issues, e.g., money or meeting structure, his enjoyment of the experience

decreases. In short, the force which motivated the creation and evaluation of the Forum is no longer there.

Nonetheless, the author still feels that legitimate quantitative data can be produced which supports certain environments over others with respect to the environment's effect on individuals' experiences of meaning in life. In most cases, though, people are able to choose and to create good environments for themselves without the assistance of involved quantitative research techniques. One environment feels better than the other so they choose the one instead of the other. Conversely, there are an unfortunate few who have tried the one, and considered all the others, and chosen none, or at least there is nothing that might seem to offer them anything to look forward to. At the very least, such an individual can find consolation, if she scours the library, that she is not the only one who has known this experience, and that at least a few who have felt that way have in time developed an outlook on life that is less bleak. Perhaps the author is giving people more credit than they are due, but it seems possible that even when individuals choose paths for themselves that appear to the author to be self-defeating, they are still making the best choices for themselves.

To conclude, in spite of this study's shortcomings, the Forum did appeal to some people and certainly could appeal to more. Should anyone wish to try to create and perhaps even quantitatively evaluate something similar to the Forum, the author wishes that her efforts might provide experiences she will look forward to and enjoy remembering.

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Meaning in Life Forum

Summary

Questioning the nature of our existence is among life's most rewarding experiences. This forum challenges you to develop a personal understanding of meaning in life. Prior to each session, you will think and write about a question. Sessions consist of discussions in which you communicate and refine your ideas and listen to others' perspectives. In the eighth week, you will present a paper detailing your current understanding of the question of meaning in life.

Meaning in Life Forum

Tuesdays 7 - 9 p.m. January 20 - March 10 (8 meetings)

On the UW Campus

Call 685-3276 to register

Fee: \$22/ UW Student, \$28/ general public

Forum size is limited to 8 participants.

Forum organized by Colin Leath

Asking serious questions about the nature of our existence is one of life's most rewarding experiences. In this forum, you will work on your own and with others to develop a personal understanding of the question of meaning in life. Improving your understanding of meaning allows you to better direct your life to experience meaning, and helps you to make commitments you will find satisfying for your entire life.

Before each weekly meeting, you will spend time thinking and writing about a question you choose related to meaning, life, or the questioning process. At each meeting, you will be challenged to communicate your ideas to others, to refine your ideas, and to understand the perspectives of others.

Each meeting begins with the discussion of your ideas in small groups of just one or two other people. This is followed by an informal presentation period in which you share what you have been working on with the larger group. We will conclude with a whole group discussion about the ideas presented and then begin to consider what to think about for next week. The remaining meeting time is used for informal small group discussions.

For the first three weeks of the forum, you will work on your questions primarily from your own experiences, without consulting the works of philosophers, psychologists, and religious leaders. For the next four weeks, you will begin to consult the work of others who have been exploring the questions which interest you. By the eighth meeting of the forum, you will develop and present a paper—written to your specifications—detailing your current understanding of the question of meaning in life.

Pre-Forum Preparation: instructions for participants.

Prior to the first session, spend time writing and thinking about what you hope or want the experience of participating in the Forum to be. Begin to define the questions you would like to work on, and to consider what the questioning process may involve. Consider how working with others will help you to have the kind of experience you want. In the first session you can use these questions as a structure for your informal presentation, if you like.

[Formal Course Outline](#)

For more information email Colin:

Formal Course Outline

Note: This Forum can run six or eight weeks. I prefer eight weeks, if that is feasible.

Timeline

The format of the Forum varies depending on how many weeks the Forum runs.

For the first 3 weeks of the 8-week Forum, participants will work on the question of meaning in life using their past and present experience, without reading the work of philosophers, religious prophets, and psychologists. In the second 3 weeks, participants will begin to consult work of others. For the 7th week, participants will concentrate on refining the ideas they want to present in their papers, which they will present the following week.

The 6-week Forum follows the same format, except participants will begin to refine the ideas they want to present in their paper in the 5th week.

When it comes time to look at literature, An annotated bibliography of work which might be useful will be provided. Participants will also be encouraged to suggest helpful literature or art to each other.

Session Format

Every session but the last will follow the same format:

For the first 45 minutes or hour of the session, participants will talk with 1 or 2 other participants. Generally participants will talk with a different person each session, but this arrangement is flexible.

For the next 45 minutes, each participant will talk to the whole group about what she or he has been thinking about and working on during the meeting and in the previous week.

The meeting will conclude with a whole group discussion focused on synthesizing what has been presented and discussed during the meeting and defining new directions and questions to explore before the next meeting.

In the final session, participants will have 10-15 minutes to present their paper to the group and to answer questions. This will be followed by free conversation/ congratulations, and we will conclude with a group discussion.

Facilitator's role

The most basic role of the facilitator is to help ensure that the transitions through the stages of the meeting occur, i.e. the facilitator would let the group know that the small group discussion period was coming to and end.

In addition to this basic role, the facilitator could also facilitate the discussion and the questioning process, and other group processes, like decision-making or voting. The facilitator could also help participants on any part of the processes involved in the Forum, from developing a question to revising the paper.

Anyone can do this, in any way they can get it to work

Anyone with the motivation to find meeting space for and advertise for a discussion group like this could establish and facilitate such a group. Or, division of labor may be desirable: different people could advertise and arrange for the meetings, and another person could facilitate the meeting. Moreover, the group, or more likely the organizers, can determine what, if any, sort of structure they would like the meeting to have.

Meaning in Life Forum information

--organized by Colin Leath

Summary:

Asking serious questions about the nature of our existence is one of life's most rewarding experiences. In this forum, you will work on your own and with others to develop a personal understanding of the question of meaning in life. Improving your understanding of meaning allows you to better direct your life to experience meaning, and helps you to make commitments you will find satisfying for your entire life.

Before each weekly meeting, you will spend time thinking and writing about a question you choose related to meaning, life, or the questioning process. At each meeting, you will be challenged to communicate your ideas to others, to refine your ideas, and to understand the perspectives of others.

Each meeting begins with the discussion of your ideas in small groups of just one or two other people. This is followed by an informal presentation period in which you share what you have been working on with the larger group. We will conclude with a whole group discussion about the ideas presented and then begin to consider what to think about for next week. The remaining meeting time is used for informal small group discussions.

For the first three weeks of the forum, you will work on your questions primarily from your own experiences, without consulting the works of philosophers, psychologists, and religious leaders. For the next four weeks, you will begin to consult the work of others who have been exploring the questions which interest you. By the eighth meeting of the forum, you will develop and present a paper—written to your specifications—detailing your current understanding of the question of meaning in life.

Important dates:

February 3: Bring in suggestions of books, music, experiences, art, etc. which you have found relevant to improving your understanding of meaning in life. I will type all these suggestions up and combine them so that we have a recommended list of things to explore, which I'll hand out the following week.

March 10: You have between 10 to 12 minutes on this day to present your paper, or whatever you have been working on in the past 8 weeks.

Other:

If you think you would be interested in organizing forums like this one, let me know and I will talk to you about how I set up this one. I will be leaving Seattle after this quarter, so if you would like to continue or expand on this initial forum, I would especially like to help you do that. I think it would be fun to have a 'utopia' forum, and you can probably think of several other ideas...

Proposed Session Format:

Every session but the last will follow the same format:

For the first 45 minutes or hour of the session, participants will talk with 1 or 2 other participants. Generally participants will talk with a different person each session, but this arrangement is flexible.

Appendix III: Syllabus *continued*

For the next 45 minutes, each participant will talk to the whole group about what she or he has been thinking about and working on during the meeting and in the previous week.

The meeting will conclude with a whole group discussion focused on synthesizing what has been presented and discussed during the meeting and defining new directions and questions to explore before the next meeting.

In the final session, participants will have 10-15 minutes to present their paper to the group and to answer questions. This will be followed by free conversation/ congratulations, and we will conclude with a group discussion.

Question: how do we decide who talks to who for the first half? Same person or different person each time?

Data Collection:

If you don't mind, I hope to have you fill out some questionnaires. This will help me to evaluate the forum, and to get a 'B.S. with distinction' in Psychology instead of a B.A. I may even be able to publish the results of the forum so that more people might start doing this sort of thing. However, the questionnaires are optional, and I don't want to ruin the atmosphere of this forum, so we can scrap them if you would rather not do them (but I'm hoping we don't do that). I will mail or email all of you a copy of the report if we decide to go ahead with this.

If you have any questions, my phone # is (206) 522-9395, and my email is cleath@j9k.com

Food

Do you want to bring food to share the forum?

Dinner*

You are all welcome to come to the monthly pot-luck dinners I have at my house the first Saturday of each month, from 6-9 p.m.

Here are the directions/instructions:

It would help if most of you could bring your own silverware, bowls, plates, napkins, and cups (actually, when we have such small groups of people, you could probably use our eating implements, just wash them when you're done). Don't worry about cooking something fancy--bring your own dinner and drinks and share if you like, or just come and visit for a while. Bring others, if you like.

My address is 5230 21st Ave NE. To get there, head down 21st away from the University and go past 50th (52nd is stairs). Our house is a brown house on the right, where the hill starts to level out, a little past the fire hydrant. My phone # is 522-9395.

* None of the participants took the author up on this offer.

MEANING IN LIFE FORUM

Questioning the nature of our existence is among life's most rewarding experiences. This forum challenges you to develop a personal understanding of meaning in life. Prior to each session, you will think and write about a question. Sessions consist of discussions in which you communicate and refine your ideas and listen to others' perspectives. In the eighth week, you will present a paper detailing your current understanding of the question of meaning in life.

We meet for 8 weeks for two hours each time.

If this forum sounds like something you might consider participating in, *and* you would like to anonymously fill out the 'Meaning in Life Forum' questionnaire, please raise your hand, and I will give you a questionnaire. Thank you for helping me out with this research project! For more information, email Colin Leath, cleath@u

Appendix V: Paper questionnaire—questions identified, ordered by group

Below are 28 statements that you may agree or disagree with. Using the 1 - 7 scale below indicate your agreement with each item by placing the appropriate number on the line preceding that item. Please be open and honest in your responding.

* 7 - Strongly agree * 6 - Agree * 5 - Slightly agree * 4 - Neither agree nor disagree * 3 - Slightly disagree * 2 - Disagree * 1 - Strongly disagree

Framework +

- fr+1 ___ I feel like I have found a really significant meaning for leading my life.
fr+2 ___ I have really come to terms with what's important for me in my life.
fr+3 ___ I have a system or framework that allows me to truly understand my being alive.
fr+4 ___ I have a very clear idea of what I'd like to do with my life.
fr+5 ___ There are things that I devote all my life's energy to.
fr+6 ___ I have a philosophy of life that really gives my living significance.
fr+7 ___ I have some aims and goals that would personally give me a great deal of satisfaction if I could accomplish them.

Framework -

- fr-1 ___ I just don't know what I really want to do with my life.
fr-2 ___ I really don't have much of a purpose for living, even for myself.
fr-3 ___ I need to find something that I can really be committed to.
fr-4 ___ I get completely confused when I try to understand my life.
fr-5 ___ There honestly isn't anything that I totally want to do.
fr-6 ___ I really don't believe in anything about my life very deeply.
fr-7 ___ Other people seem to have a much better idea of what they want to do with their lives than I do.

Fulfillment +

- fu+1 ___ I have real passion in my life.
fu+2 ___ I really feel good about my life.
fu+3 ___ Living is deeply fulfilling.
fu+4 ___ I feel that I am living fully.
fu+5 ___ I feel that I'm really going to attain what I want in life.
fu+6 ___ I get so excited by what I'm doing that I find new stores of energy I didn't know that I had.
fu+7 ___ When I look at my life I feel the satisfaction of really having worked to accomplish something.

Fulfillment -

- fu-1 ___ I don't seem to be able to accomplish those things that are really important to me.
fu-2 ___ Other people seem to feel better about their lives than I do.
fu-3 ___ I have a lot of potential that I don't normally use.
fu-4 ___ I spend most of my time doing things that really aren't very important to me.
fu-5 ___ Something seems to stop me from doing what I really want to do.
fu-6 ___ Nothing very outstanding ever seems to happen to me.
fu-7 ___ I don't really value what I'm doing.

2 + fut, 2-fut

- fut+ ___ I generally am intensely excited about my future.
fut+ ___ I usually really look forward to the rest of my life.
fut - ___ Generally, I am absolutely hopeless about my future.
fut - ___ Most of the time, I get extremely depressed if I think about the rest of my life.

1+enj 1-enj

- enj- ___ I usually hate being alive.
enj+ ___ I generally really love living.

Appendix VI: Paper questionnaire—questions identified, random order

Below are 34 statements that you may agree or disagree with. Using the 1 - 7 scale below indicate your agreement with each item by placing the appropriate number on the line preceding that item. Please be open and honest in your responding.

- * 7 - Strongly agree * 6 - Agree * 5 - Slightly agree * 4 - Neither agree nor disagree * 3 - Slightly disagree * 2 - Disagree * 1 - Strongly disagree
- 1 fr-2 ___ I really don't have much of a purpose for living, even for myself.
 - 2 fu-6 ___ Nothing very outstanding ever seems to happen to me.
 - 3 fu+2 ___ I really feel good about my life.
 - 4 fu-3 ___ I have a lot of potential that I don't normally use.
 - 5 fr-4 ___ I get completely confused when I try to understand my life.
 - 6 enj- ___ I usually hate being alive.
 - 7 fr+3 ___ I have a system or framework that allows me to truly understand my being alive.
 - 8 fr-6 ___ I really don't believe in anything about my life very deeply.
 - 9 fut+ ___ I usually really look forward to the rest of my life.
 - 10 fu-1 ___ I don't seem to be able to accomplish those things that are really important to me.
 - 11 fr+7 ___ I have some aims and goals that would personally give me a great deal of satisfaction if I could accomplish them.
 - 12 fu-4 ___ I spend most of my time doing things that really aren't very important to me.
 - 13 fut - ___ Generally, I am absolutely hopeless about my future.
 - 14 fr+1 ___ I feel like I have found a really significant meaning for leading my life.
 - 15 fr-5 ___ There honestly isn't anything that I totally want to do.
 - 16 fu+5 ___ I feel that I'm really going to attain what I want in life.
 - 17 fu+1 ___ I have real passion in my life.
 - 18 fu-2 ___ Other people seem to feel better about their lives than I do.
 - 19 fu-7 ___ I don't really value what I'm doing.
 - 20 fu+7 ___ When I look at my life I feel the satisfaction of really having worked to accomplish something.
 - 21 fr-3 ___ I need to find something that I can really be committed to.
 - 22 fu+4 ___ I feel that I am living fully.
 - 23 fut+ ___ I generally am intensely excited about my future.
 - 24 fr+4 ___ I have a very clear idea of what I'd like to do with my life.
 - 25 fu-5 ___ Something seems to stop me from doing what I really want to do.
 - 26 fr-7 ___ Other people seem to have a much better idea of what they want to do with their lives than I do.
 - 27 fu+3 ___ Living is deeply fulfilling.
 - 28 fut - ___ Most of the time, I get extremely unhappy if I think about the rest of my life.
 - 29 fr-1 ___ I just don't know what I really want to do with my life.
 - 30 fu+6 ___ I get so excited by what I'm doing that I find new stores of energy I didn't know that I had.
 - 31 fr+2 ___ I have really come to terms with what's important for me in my life.
 - 32 fr+6 ___ I have a philosophy of life that really gives my living significance.
 - 33 enj+ ___ I generally really love living.
 - 34 fr+5 ___ There are things that I devote all my life's energy to.

Questionnaire for those interested in the ‘Meaning in Life’ Forum.

Please write on the following line either your mother’s maiden name and her first initial, or the last name and first initial of your best friend (or another person who is very familiar to you): _____ Please use this name and initial again on the questionnaire I give you in 8 weeks, so that I can match the two questionnaires.

Part I

What is your...

Gender: F / M

Age: _____

Ethnicity: _____

Do you have a close relationship with one or more people whom you see at least several times a week?

y / n

Part II:

Below are 34 statements that you may agree or disagree with. Using the 1 - 7 scale below indicate your agreement with each item by placing the appropriate number on the line preceding that item. Please be open and honest in your responding.

* 7 - Strongly agree

* 6 -

* 5 -

* 4 - neutral

* 3 -

* 2 -

* 1 - Strongly disagree

_____ I really don’t have much of a purpose for living, even for myself.

_____ Nothing very outstanding ever seems to happen to me.

_____ I really feel good about my life.

_____ I have a lot of potential that I don’t normally use.

_____ I get completely confused when I try to understand my life.

_____ I usually hate being alive.

_____ I have a system or framework that allows me to truly understand my being alive.

_____ I really don’t believe in anything about my life very deeply.

_____ I usually really look forward to the rest of my life.

_____ I don’t seem to be able to accomplish those things that are really important to me.

_____ I have some aims and goals that would personally give me a great deal of satisfaction if I could accomplish them.

_____ I spend most of my time doing things that really aren’t very important to me.

_____ Generally, I am hopeless about my future.

_____ I feel like I have found a really significant meaning for leading my life.

_____ There honestly isn’t anything that I totally want to do.

_____ I feel that I’m really going to attain what I want in life.

_____ I have real passion in my life.

_____ Other people seem to feel better about their lives than I do.

_____ I don’t really value what I’m doing.

_____ When I look at my life I feel the satisfaction of really having worked to accomplish something.

_____ I need to find something that I can really be committed to.

_____ I feel that I am living fully.

_____ I am usually very excited about my future.

_____ I have a very clear idea of what I’d like to do with my life.

_____ Something seems to stop me from doing what I really want to do.

_____ Other people seem to have a much better idea of what they want to do with their lives than I do.

_____ Living is deeply fulfilling.

_____ I usually get depressed if I think about the rest of my life.

_____ I just don’t know what I really want to do with my life.

_____ I get so excited by what I’m doing that I find new stores of energy I didn’t know that I had.

_____ I have really come to terms with what’s important for me in my life.

_____ I have a philosophy of life that really gives my living significance.

_____ I generally really love living.

_____ There are things that I devote all my life’s energy to.

Part III

DIRECTIONS: Use the list below to answer the following question: IN GENERAL, HOW HAPPY OR UNHAPPY DO YOU USUALLY FEEL?

Choose the number of the *one* statement below that best describes your *average happiness*, and write it on this line: _____

10. Extremely happy (feeling ecstatic, joyous, fantastic!)
9. Very happy (feeling really good, elated!)
8. Pretty happy (spirits high, feeling good.)
7. Mildly happy (feeling fairly good and somewhat cheerful.)
6. Slightly happy (just a bit above neutral.)
5. Neutral (not particularly happy or unhappy.)
4. Slightly unhappy (just a bit below neutral.)
3. Mildly unhappy (just a little low.)
2. Pretty unhappy (somewhat “blue,” spirits down.)
1. Very unhappy (depressed, spirits very low.)
0. Extremely unhappy (utterly depressed, completely down.)

Part IV

DIRECTIONS: Consider your emotions a moment further. *On the average*, what percent of the time do you feel happy? What percent of the time do you feel unhappy? What percent of the time do you feel neutral (neither happy nor unhappy)? Write down your best estimates, as well as you can, in the spaces below. Make sure the three figures add up to equal 100%.

ON THE AVERAGE:

The percent of the time I feel happy	_____ %
The percent of the time I feel unhappy	_____ %
The percent of the time I feel neutral	_____ %
TOTAL:	_____ %

Thank you!

I will ask you to fill out this questionnaire again on about March 10th, 1998.

Please fold this questionnaire in half and return it to Colin Leath (ph. 522-9395, email: cleath@u), or deliver it via campus mail or hand to the address below.

To receive a copy of the final research report via email, send an email message to cleath@u.washington.edu with ‘meaning’ as the subject and nothing else in the subject or body of the message. The report will probably not be ready until sometime in April.

being
SAO 32, HUB 207,
BOX 352238

[home](#)

Questionnaire

Top of Form 1

NOTE: You can move between many of the form fields using the [tab] key or [shift] + [tab] keys, and the arrow keys may come in handy as well.

Please fill out this form only if you will be willing and able to fill it out again on about March 10, 1998. Please enter your email address, or if you don't have an email address, your phone number, so that I can remind you to fill this form out again at that time:

However, if you would like to keep your contact information separate from your answers to these questions, leave the above space empty and enter in the following space either your mother's maiden name and her first initial, or the last name and first initial of your best friend (or someone else familiar to you): Please use this name and initial again when you fill out this form in March so that I can match your data for the two time points.

NOTE: if you do not enter your email address or phone number in the first blank, it is important that you send me an email or call me so that I can remind you to fill out this questionnaire again in March. You can send me email at cleath@j9k.com, and my phone number is (206) 522-9395. Please, please, remember to do this! Ideally, do it right now, if you can. If the above link does not allow you to send me email, try this [link](#).

Part I

Please read the following description of the 'Meaning in Life' Forum:

The Meaning in Life Forum

Questioning the nature of our existence is among life's most rewarding experiences. This forum challenges you to develop a personal understanding of meaning in life. Prior to each session, you will think and write about a question. Sessions consist of discussions in which you communicate and refine your ideas and listen to others' perspectives. In the eighth week, you will present a paper detailing your current understanding of the question of meaning in life. Forum size is limited to 8 participants. The Forum lasts for 8 weeks, with one 2 hour meeting each week.

Does this Forum sound like something you might like to participate in?

yes no no answer

If you would like to be notified about future 'Meaning in Life' Forums, send me an email and let me know.

Part II

What is your...

(optional) Gender: f m other no answer

(optional) Age:

(optional) Ethnicity:

Do you have a close relationship with one or more people whom you see at least several times a week?

yes no no answer

Part III

Below are 34 statements that you may agree or disagree with. Using the 1 - 7 scale below indicate your agreement with each item by placing the appropriate number on the line preceding that item. Please be open and honest in your responding.

* 7 - Strongly agree

* 6 -

* 5 -

* 4 - neutral

* 3 -

* 2 -

* 1 - Strongly disagree

I really don't have much of a purpose for living, even for myself.

Nothing very outstanding ever seems to happen to me.

I really feel good about my life.

I have a lot of potential that I don't normally use.

I get completely confused when I try to understand my life.

I usually hate being alive.

I have a system or framework that allows me to truly understand my being alive.

I really don't believe in anything about my life very deeply.

I usually really look forward to the rest of my life.

I don't seem to be able to accomplish those things that are really important to me.

I have some aims and goals that would personally give me a great deal of satisfaction if I could accomplish them.

Appendix VIII: Web questionnaire time 1 *continued*

I spend most of my time doing things that really aren't very important to me.

Generally, I am hopeless about my future.

I feel like I have found a really significant meaning for leading my life.

There honestly isn't anything that I totally want to do.

I feel that I'm really going to attain what I want in life.

I have real passion in my life.

Other people seem to feel better about their lives than I do.

I don't really value what I'm doing.

When I look at my life I feel the satisfaction of really having worked to accomplish something.

I need to find something that I can really be committed to.

I feel that I am living fully.

I am usually very excited about my future.

I have a very clear idea of what I'd like to do with my life.

Something seems to stop me from doing what I really want to do.

Other people seem to have a much better idea of what they want to do with their lives than I do.

Living is deeply fulfilling.

I usually get depressed if I think about the rest of my life.

I just don't know what I really want to do with my life.

I get so excited by what I'm doing that I find new stores of energy I didn't know that I had.

I have really come to terms with what's important for me in my life.

I have a philosophy of life that really gives my living significance.

I generally really love living.

There are things that I devote all my life's energy to.

Part IV

DIRECTIONS: Use the list below to answer the following question: IN GENERAL, HOW HAPPY OR UNHAPPY DO YOU USUALLY FEEL? Choose the one statement below that best describes your average happiness.

- 10. Extremely happy (feeling ecstatic, joyous, fantastic!)
- 9. Very happy (feeling really good, elated!)
- 8. Pretty happy (spirits high, feeling good.)
- 7. Mildly happy (feeling fairly good and somewhat cheerful.)
- 6. Slightly happy (just a bit above neutral.)
- 5. Neutral (not particularly happy or unhappy.)
- 4. Slightly unhappy (just a bit below neutral.)
- 3. Mildly unhappy (just a little low.)
- 2. Pretty unhappy (somewhat "blue," spirits down.)
- 1. Very unhappy (depressed, spirits very low.)
- 0. Extremely unhappy (utterly depressed, completely down.)
- no answer

Part V

DIRECTIONS: Consider your emotions a moment further. On the average, what percent of the time do you feel happy? What percent of the time do you feel unhappy? What percent of the time do you feel neutral (neither happy nor unhappy)? Write down your best estimates, as well as you can, in the spaces below. Make sure the three figures add up to equal 100%.

ON THE AVERAGE:

The percent of the time I feel happy %

The percent of the time I feel unhappy %

The percent of the time I feel neutral %

TOTAL: %

[home](#)

Questionnaire

Top of Form 1

NOTE: You can move between many of the form fields using the [tab] key or [shift] + [tab] keys, and the arrow keys may come in handy as well.

Please enter the **email address or code** you used when filling out the questionnaire before:

If you don't remember the code you used previously, it may have been your mother's maiden name and first initial, or the last name and first initial of a friend.

- Do you have a close relationship with one or more people whom you see at least several times a week? yes no

{Part I - Part III of this questionnaire correspond to Part III - Part V of Web questionnaire time 1}

Part IV

Please mention any events in the past month that may have affected your answers to these questions:

Bottom of Form 1

Modified Happiness Measures scale for the beginning of the first meeting:

Please write on the following line either your mother's maiden name and her first initial, or the last name and first initial of your best friend (or another person who is very familiar to you): _____

Please use this name and initial on all future questionnaires I give you, so that I can match questionnaires.

Directions: Use the list below to answer the following question: AT THE MOMENT, HOW HAPPY OR UNHAPPY DO YOU FEEL? Choose the number of the one statement below that best describes your *present happiness*, and write it on this line: _____

10. Extremely happy (feeling ecstatic, joyous, fantastic!)

9. Very happy (feeling really good, elated!)
8. Pretty happy (spirits high, feeling good.)
7. Mildly happy (feeling fairly good and somewhat cheerful.)
6. Slightly happy (just a bit above neutral.)
5. Neutral (not particularly happy or unhappy.)
4. Slightly unhappy (just a bit below neutral.)
3. Mildly unhappy (just a little low.)
2. Pretty unhappy (somewhat "blue," spirits down.)
1. Very unhappy (depressed, spirits very low.)
0. Extremely unhappy (utterly depressed, completely down.)

Modified Happiness Measures scale for the end of the first meeting and the beginning and end of all other meetings:

Date: _____ beginning or end of meeting? (circle one)

The name and initial you chose to use: _____

Directions: Use the list below to answer the following question: AT THE MOMENT, HOW HAPPY OR UNHAPPY DO YOU FEEL? Choose the number of the one statement below that best describes your *present happiness*, and write it on this line: _____

10. Extremely happy (feeling ecstatic, joyous, fantastic!)

9. Very happy (feeling really good, elated!)

8. Pretty happy (spirits high, feeling good.)

7. Mildly happy (feeling fairly good and somewhat cheerful.)

6. Slightly happy (just a bit above neutral.)

5. Neutral (not particularly happy or unhappy.)

4. Slightly unhappy (just a bit below neutral.)

3. Mildly unhappy (just a little low.)

2. Pretty unhappy (somewhat "blue," spirits down.)

1. Very unhappy (depressed, spirits very low.)

0. Extremely unhappy (utterly depressed, completely down.)

Some Meaning-in-Life-related References

(and the people who suggested them)

If you have references you would like to add, please send email to: cleath@j9k.com.

Jane

Myths to live by and Power of myth by Joseph Campbell
The road less traveled numbers 1, 2, & 3 by M. Scott Peck
Bus 9 to paradise by Leo Buscaglia
Prayer for Owen Meany by John Irving

Jean and/or John

Latchôdrom (movie)
Baraka (movie)

Colin

Walden by Henry David Thoreau
A pattern language by Christopher Alexander et al.
Zen and the art of motorcycle maintenance by Robert Pirsig
The bell jar by Sylvia Plath
One straw revolution: an introduction to natural farming by Masanobu Fukuoka. (This book is the best.)
Csikszentmihalyi, M. Flow. (and other works)
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Appendix XII: Email to control group, time 1 & 2

Email to control group, time 1

Date: Mon, 9 Feb 1998 17:16:19 -0800 (PST)
From: "C. Leath" <cleath@u.washington.edu>
To: Undisclosed recipients: ;
Subject: Meaning in Life Forum Questionnaire

Hello,

Would you please take a moment to fill out the questionnaire at:
<http://weber.u.washington.edu/~cleath/scale/scale.cgi>

I really need help bolstering the control group for my experiment!

I would like to return the favor by helping you set up an on-line questionnaire and automated data collection, if you like. I will also email a copy of the research report to those who would like one.

Please forward this message to others who might like to fill out the questionnaire.

thank you,
Colin Leath

cleath@j9k.com

Email to control group, time 2

Date: Mon, 9 Mar 1998 22:40:53 -0800 (PST)
From: "C. Leath" <cleath@u.washington.edu>
To: Undisclosed recipients: ;
Subject: Meaning in Life Forum Questionnaire

Hello,

Would you please visit:
<http://weber.u.washington.edu/~cleath/scale/scale.cgi>

One more time to fill out the questionnaire there?

It is shorter this time...

If you can try to do it sometime before next Tuesday that would be great- but I would rather you do it late than never.

Thank you very much!

Colin Leath
cleath@j9k.com

ps: If you told one of your friends at Dartmouth about the questionnaire, please forward this on to them because I lost their email address.